

Athens, Radical Futures?

Thursday 20 November

Symposium: 1PM, Common Room, Minto House, Chambers St

Book Launch (with editors): 4.30PM, Matthew Gallery, Minto House, Chambers St

Both symposium and book launch are free, but the symposium is ticketed.

Symposium speakers:

Lila Leontidou (Geography and European Culture, Hellenic Open University)

Stavros Stavridis (School of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens)

Maria Theodorou (School of Architecture, University of Leeds)

Book Launch event:

Launch of M. Tsilimpoundi & A. Walsh (eds) *Remapping 'Crisis': A Guide to Athens* (Winchester; Washington: Zero Books, 2014).

Symposium organisers: Penny Travlou and Tahl Kaminer

Book launch organiser: Kostas Avramidis

13.00 Introduction: Penny and Tahl

13.10 Lila Leontidou

13.50 Stavros Stavrides

14.30 coffee break

15.00 Maria Theodorou

15.40 break

15.50 Discussion

16.20 Closing comments: Penny and Tahl

A one day symposium studying the structural crises riveting through Athenian society and affecting the urban space, its organisation, and its appropriation. The economic meltdown of Greece has brought about high unemployment, political instability and violence, a rise in racism, closure of shops and businesses, an increasing number of abandoned homes and much more. Whereas the Troika has used the crisis as an impetus for radical deregulation and liberalisation via imposing draconian austerity measures, the crisis, as a moment of restructuring, also opens opportunities for an alternative vision of city and society. As Athens itself has become a contested space, with diverse interests and ideologies battling for political supremacy by determining the city's spatial order, the symposium suggests taking a closer look at the diverse opportunities and threats at hand.

The symposium is situated within the debate on (global) urban justice, in which issues regarding politics, economics, and spatial organisation are understood via the specifics of the urban condition. In this sense, many of the issues facing Athens today are not just a narrow Athenian concern, but have profound impact on the form and structure of the emergent European post-crisis city. Whether it is necessarily a more *just* or *unjust* city, whether a sustainable alternative can emerge, depends not least on the manner in which alternatives can be delineated and politically framed.

The unfinished modernity of Athens: Meltdown, alternatives and prospects during the debt crisis

Lila Leontidou

This keynote lecture focuses on Athens, in which democracy was born and has been in transformation until today in the context of modernity, which always escapes completion and remains unfinished. The argument proceeds in three steps. First we contextualize the urban condition at present as an outcome of several sediments of urban development in the broader region. Mediterranean urban idiosyncrasies are presented, as a product of juxtapositions and interactions of shades of modernity and postmodernism. The second step in our analysis is to see these idiosyncrasies in transition in the case of Greece, after EU accession and until the crisis. And the third step is to paint the crisis in black and white, following the interplay of pessimism and optimism, dystopia and eutopia, in Athens today. Urban meltdown due to accumulation by dispossession and EU and governmental quasi-Orientalist discourses are presented in the 3rd part. The 4th part expands on the positive force of spontaneous urban anti-austerity movements, and when these are suppressed, the flickering of grassroots creativity in digital societies. Finally, policy options of incubation and solidarity are suggested, in order to valorize grassroots creativity and social movements which are still quite vulnerable.

Professor Lila Leontidou is Professor of Geography and European Culture at the Hellenic Open University (EAI) since 2002, Senior Fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE, Hellenic Observatory of the European Institute) since 2012 and at the Johns Hopkins University (Center for Metropolitan Planning and Research, now Institute for Policy Studies) since 1986.

Struggles in and for common space in crisis-ridden Athens

Stavros Stavrides

What this presentation will attempt to show is that in Athens not only can we trace the devastating effects the crisis of economy has on processes of urban and social reproduction but also the emergence of collective practices that transform public space and reclaim the city. By closely observing practices of urban commoning in contemporary Athens we can discover possibilities of transcending the dominant experiences of a crisis-ridden city in which fear and individualization are major shaping factors. People actively redefine the limits, the uses and the symbolized values of public space through practices of commoning. Common spaces emerge either as a direct result of struggles to re-appropriate city-space or as the necessary medium through which anti-austerity demands are being expressed and try to mobilize people. And it is through the corresponding practice-embedded spatial experiences that interesting processes of political subjectivation take shape.

Dr. Stavros Stavrides is associate professor at the School of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens Greece, where he teaches a graduate course on social housing, as well as a postgraduate course on the meaning of metropolitan experience.

Architectural ‘education’ in a crisis ridden city: The SARCHA stasis in Athens

Maria Theodorou

The aim of the paper is twofold; on the one hand it will discuss the re-shaping of architectural education in the current condition of crisis by focusing on the historical link of education/equality and the current re-emergence of ‘Radical Pedagogies’ and independent schools and initiatives. On the other, the paper will advocate for the potential of shedding standard urban concepts so that 'education' in detecting and understanding the urban effects (and side effects) of the crisis becomes possible. The discussion would be both theoretical and empirical since the conceptual framework of the work of the School of Architecture for All (SARCHA) in Athens will be presented through a number of Research programmes and projects.

Dr Maria Theodorou, PhD(AA): Senior Lecturer, H&T co-ordinator (Leeds School of Architecture), director and founding member of the independent School of Architecture for All (SARCHA). Maria, a Fulbright visiting fellow at Princeton (2005) is in charge of SARCHA's research programme since 2006 and has directed the 'CCR Athens Gerani' pilot project, shortlisted at the RSA international competition (London 2011) and the 'Polypolis' social game, presented at the Cultural Olympiad (London 2012) www.polypolis.sarcha.gr Her current research, publications and teaching focus on 'architecture and the political'. Latest project: 'Demos' by SARCHA, presented at the London 2013 Festival of Architecture upon invitation by the British Council www.demos.sarcha.gr

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