

*When Architecture Disappears:
Challenges in Methods and Media*



Workshop Programme
19 January 2024
Nicosia, Cyprus

Cover image: Fire in the ‘Small Palace’ in Nicosia.
The building used to be a theatre, but it has been later demolished.
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When Architecture Disappears: Challenges in Methods and Media

Workshop Organisers

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Programme Overview

9:00

Welcome Note and Introduction

9:15-10:00

Session 1: Reflecting on the Instrumentalization of Absence

10:15-11:00

Session 2: Reflecting on What Remains

11:15-12:00

Reflecting on Colonial Representations

12:15-13:00

Final Discussion and Recap

Lunch Break

14:00-14:30

Project Presentation: VeNiss

14:30-17:00

Workshop: A collective reflection when architecture disappears

17:15-18:00

Closing Presentation: Industrial Architecture in the Shadow of Ixtaccihuatl

Dinner

Session 1

Reflecting on the Instrumentalization of Absence

9:15-10:00

Vasileios Chanis

The Linz Café and the concept of "wholeness." Reclaiming the historical feeling of a long-gone building

Fabio Gigone

Twin-pyramids: Interrupted totems in Seicento Rome

Christos-Georgios Kritikos

Memorial services for 19th century Athens; of martyrs and their imagery

Session 1

Reflecting on the Instrumentalization of Absence

Abstracts

Vasileios Chanis

The Linz Café and the concept of "wholeness." Reclaiming the historical feeling of a long-gone building

The purpose of the paper is to discuss "The Linz Café," a building that ceased to exist in 1980. This project was conceived and constructed by Christopher Alexander for the summer exposition "Forum Design" in Linz, Austria. Despite its short-lived existence (only during the summer of 1980) and its rapid conception and implementation (completed in just three months), the building was deemed "a complete working alternative to our present ideas about architecture," in the words of its architect, Christopher Alexander himself. Alexander expounded on the ambitious intentions of the project in a book bearing the same title, published after the exposition. In this book, he meticulously documented the entire conceptualization process and the final result. From an architectural historical perspective, "The Linz Café" stands as a unique entity. It marked Alexander's maiden-built project in Europe and was celebrated as the first tangible application of the theory he and his collaborators elaborated in their seminal works, "The Pattern Language" and "The Timeless Way of Building." In its time, "The Linz Café" epitomized the concept of "wholeness," a central element in Alexander's impassioned call for a paradigm shift in architecture.

The vanished building and the printed book raise a fundamental question: Can a detailed publication effectively convey the essence of a project that asserts its fundamental quality is rooted entirely in the lived experience? To address this question, this contribution adopts a twofold method. Firstly, it examines Alexander's own account of the process and the project to shed light on his awareness of this inherent contradiction. Secondly, the paper refrains from a monographic analysis of "The Linz Café" by situating it within the context of Alexander's other built works. Instead, it aspires to pursue a phenomenological interpretation of the built process and to delve into its connection with references from traditional architecture.

Session 1

Reflecting on the Instrumentalization of Absence

Abstracts

Fabio Gigone

Twin-pyramids: Interrupted totems in Seicento Rome

Between 1663 and 1668, the use of architecture for political propaganda purposes in Rome was focused on two architectural exceptions, namely, two pyramids. The first one had its origins in ancient Rome, while the other symbolised French political claims over the papal city. In the second half of the Seicento, Rome was a politically contested city. The Pope, along with the major European Christian powers, used the city as a stage for the representation of their authority, and architecture was one of the most prominent means for achieving this.

On one hand, Pope Alexander VII aimed to assert his political authority through the commemoration of the victory over the plague of 1656-57. For this purpose, he began the unearthing of the Pyramid of Cestius in 1663 and planned its conversion into a cenotaph for the Christians who had died during the epidemic. On the other hand, Louis XIV erected a brand-new pyramid in 1664 as a compensatory monument for the lese majesty's right caused in August 1662 by the papal guards. The monument was constructed outside the French quarter, expressing Louis's claims to extraterritoriality in the apostolic city. Both projects were abruptly halted. Alessandro did not proceed with his project due to economic reasons, while Louis ordered its demolition in 1668. However, both pyramids continued to fuel the long-term political ambitions of their respective promoters, similar in their purpose of reclaiming Roman territory but distinct in their narratives and strategies. What were the goals achieved with the project or construction of the pyramids, and what objectives were pursued through their narratives? This paper intends to examine how the brief history of these two pyramids impacted Alexander VII's and Louis XIV's propaganda, and seeks to explore how the pyramid, as a totemic monument, aimed to cast a sense of stigma towards a rival that was actively opposed.

Session 1

Reflecting on the Instrumentalization of Absence

Abstracts

Christos-Georgios Kritikos

Memorial services for 19th century Athens; of martyrs and their imagery

During the Reconstruction Era in Greece (roughly between 1949 – 1974), the building sector supported the postwar economy on macro- and micro-economic levels. Unable to provide adequate social housing, subsequent governments promoted replacing existing old structures with contemporary mid-rise apartment buildings through legal incentives, instigating small-scale investments through the much-discussed Antiparochi system.

Nineteenth-century architecture was considered undesirable by upper class proprietors, who replaced neoclassical mansions with modern buildings. Athens' building stock was transforming, quasi-monumental buildings would vanish unopposed, while research confirms that preservation efforts or the creation of historic urban centers were almost non-existent. Relevant discourse emerged only after the European Architectural Year 1975, after the end of the 7-year right-wing dictatorship in 1974, and after the 1973 oil crisis halted the reconstruction process. The discourse demanding the cease of the destruction of urban heritage featured certain characteristics of 'alarmism', represented through both words and images. This paper analyses how the 'death' of 19th century architecture in Athens was instrumentalised to promote its remnants, through texts evident of cultural entitlement, elitism, 'moral' critiques, blaming the waves of internal migration for their contribution in Athens' reconstruction. The absent buildings were victimised and made martyrs to criticise a supposed irreverent and materialistic society. The iconography of such discourses features images of "vanished" buildings or abandoned and decaying ones, promoting the same alarmist approach while arguably aestheticising the ruinous condition of the urban remnants. Through various publications, architectural magazine and newspaper articles, short films, a certain kind of *architectural necrophilia* and *ruinophilia* is observed and analysed as part of the then-emerging Athenian urban heritage movement, ultimately affecting the way Athens' architectural history was written, partially to commemorate a city that was no more.

Session 2
Reflecting on What Remains
10:15-11:00

Alena Beth Rieger
Starts and Stops

Lingzheng Zhu
Tissue Necrosis: A Fable of Social Space in the Late-19th Century
Drawings of the Jiangnan Examination Hall

Danai Zacharia
From demolition to conservation: Unveiling the life and legacy of
Limassol's Theodosiou Warehouses in the face of coastal transformation

Session 2

Reflecting on What Remains

Abstracts

Alena Beth Rieger

Starts and Stops

The citation of a building, like naming a person, is typically followed by the bracketed years of its construction. When the building no longer exists, these years span its birth to death or beginning to end. Buildings such as Victor Horta's Maison du Peuple, which could be dated as (1896–1899) (1899–1965) (1899–1965, 2000–) or simply (1899–), complicate this convention. Detecting the exact start or end of Maison du Peuple, a reasonably simple question for which to seek an answer, remains difficult. Maison du Peuple was demolished in 1965—save the main banquet hall, the cafe, and a staircase which were marked, disassembled, and stored until plans for their use could be finalized. Most of these plans never materialized. Instead, pieces of Maison du Peuple, totalling 130 tonnes of material, disappeared to disparate locations. 70 tons of building elements were sold to a scrap dealer. Twelve truckloads were distributed to a museum and two municipalities. A number of stone and iron pieces simply sunk into the swamp-like field where they were stored and countless elements were looted from open storage in vacant lots. Remnants of Horta's masterpiece currently lay dormant in the cellar of the Saint-Gilles town hall, the backyard of the Horta Museum, a cafe in the centre of Antwerp, the Brussels Comic Strip Centre, and in an underground tram station at the corner of Chaussée de Waterloo and Rue du Lycée, Brussels. Since 2000, parts of the pre-fabricated structure have been reconstituted into a cafe and event venue. This paper traces the post-demolition appropriations of Maison du Peuple which extend the building's ending far beyond its demolition.

Session 2

Reflecting on What Remains

Abstracts

Lingzheng Zhu

Tissue Necrosis: A Fable of Social Space in the Late-19th Century Drawings of the Jiangnan Examination Hall

The history of the now-demolished Jiangnan Examination Hall, the largest facility specialised for the civil-service examination system, offers a glimpse into the societal malfunction in late Imperial China when traditional rites and laws failed as governing systems. Viewing architectural history as a lens for socio-cultural change, this paper posits that the Examination Hall serves as a tissue sample for observing spatial practices of social monitoring in pre-modern China – the monitoring system entails a hierarchical structure of power that fails periodically because of the inherent conflicts in its design. The contrasting appearances of the remaining plans of the Hall – one from 1864 using amorphic representation, and the other from 1873 employing scientific mapping technology introduced by Christian missionaries – implicate a somewhat reluctant transition to modernity. Through a space syntax analysis of the 1873 plan, supplemented by historical literature and visual materials, this paper aims to reconstruct the historical scenes of examinations in the Hall during this transition, seeking to unveil the logic behind the spatial practices in these settings. Specifically, the study focuses on three spatial narratives: the rituals performed before examinees enter their individual testing rooms, the hierarchical spatial monitoring during the examination process, and the operation of spatial power in specialised assessment areas. The paper reveals how the meanings of these spatial practices, along with the relevant social structures, dissolve in the advent of modernity. It examines the metaphorical ‘tissue necrosis’ within the temporal social organism formed during the Examination in the Hall, paralleling the decline of the examination system as a tissue of traditional society. Though the Examination Hall collapsed before China's complete transition to modernity, this fable of social space retains historical value. It provides a cultural perspective for reflecting on social surveillance measures implemented in China during the pandemic, even for future scenarios.

Session 2

Reflecting on What Remains

Abstracts

Danae Zacharia

From demolition to conservation: Unveiling the life and legacy of Limassol's Theodosiou Warehouses in the face of coastal transformation

In high-profile demolitions, the 'death' of a building often overshadows its 'life,' presenting a challenge in reconstructing the history of buildings that no longer exist. This paper tackles this challenge in exploring a significant, yet understudied case of industrial architecture erased from Limassol's seafront at the end of the 20th century.

The Theodosiou Warehouses were built at the start of the century when Cyprus was under British Rule. At the time of their demolition in 1995, they not only stood as the last privately owned establishment on Limassol's waterfront but were also the final remnant of the area's industrial past. Their demise was the most controversial of a series of demolitions along the coast aimed at clearing Limassol's waterfront; a plan conceived by the municipality as early as the 50s and instrumentalized by the tourism agenda after Cyprus gained independence in 1960. From its expropriation in 1973 until its eventual demolition, the decades-long dispute between the owners of the Theodosiou Warehouses and the Limassol municipality garnered intense media coverage and local activism that fought for its adaptive reuse.

Reflecting on the impact of local activism on the treatment of architectural heritage in Limassol in subsequent years, this paper illuminates the enduring significance of the Theodosiou Warehouses. By exploring the prevailing narrative surrounding their demolition, as mirrored in archival content and collective memory, this paper highlights the legacy of the Theodosiou Warehouses as a local conservation symbol aligned with a trend identified by Daniel Abramson as the 'reversal' of architectural obsolescence.

Session 3
Reflecting on Colonial Representations
11:15-12:00

Lauren Koetz (Virtual)

Lost in 1889 World's Fair: The palm trees of the Tunisia's Forest Pavilion

Ann-Marie Akehurst

Cutting through philanthropic rhetoric: prosopography, London's great hospitals, and the transatlantic slave trade

Session 3

Reflecting on Colonial Representations

Abstracts

Lauren Koetz (Virtual)

Lost in 1889 World's Fair: The palm trees of the Tunisia's Forest Pavilion

The 1889 World's Fair in Paris was the subject of numerous publications. Although most of the buildings that housed the event were destroyed, it is still possible to get a fairly accurate idea of them thanks to the drawings and photographs published. However, some buildings did not enjoy the privilege of attracting attention. This is particularly true of the Pavillon des forêts de la Tunisie (Tunisia's Forest Pavilion), which is very poorly documented. Today, it is known mainly through photographs by Hippolyte Blancard, anonymous photographs in the Musée Carnavalet and a few short descriptions. Yet the building is a real eye-catcher. A simple box made from raw palm tree trunks, it contrasts with the Moorish architecture of its neighbors and seems a little lost in this surroundings.

How then, despite the lack of information, can we grasp the significance of this edifice? In this paper, I'd like to develop an analysis based on available photographs. Although limited, this documentation nonetheless offers valuable insights. These images show that the construction system used highlights the palm tree, in particular as an economic resource. Putting the study of this object in the context of colonial policies could then help to clarify its interpretation. As the analysis of Richard H. Grove, Gregory A. Barton or of Diana K. Davis have shown, timber harvesting in the colonies was often justified by the environmental argument of reforestation. The primitive nature of the pavilion should then be questioned: isn't this a way of masking the reality of exploitation, both in terms of land grabbing and the use of advanced technologies needed to irrigate oases? Although it has left few traces, Tunisia's Forest Pavilion is certainly an example of architecture based on image that raises many questions.

Session 3

Reflecting on Colonial Representations

Abstracts

Ann-Marie Akehurst

Cutting through philanthropic rhetoric: prosopography, London's great hospitals, and the transatlantic slave trade

London's ancient St Bartholomew's Hospital (Bart's) was modernised by James Gibbs. While researching his design influences, I encountered its vanished 'cutting ward' (1691), England's first surgical building. The building was funded by 'noble benefactor' William Prichard as part of his modernisation campaign. Its potential designer, form, and location, during its century-long existence, have been salvaged through hospital accounts and plans. Prosopography (Stone, 1971), using biographies to recover networks surrounding charitable institutions, exposes activities of the powerful Corporation of the City of London. Prichard's career was congruent with contemporaries like John Moore and Robert Clayton who sponsored Christ's Hospital Writing and Mathematical Schools (Wren and Hawksmoor - vanished); St Thomas' Hospital rebuilding (Cartwright - demolished) and numerous provincial charities. All three Lord Mayors were also Directors of the Royal African Company (RAC) whose investors comprised noblemen, courtiers, politicians, gentlemen, and elite City merchants. RAC exports were exchanged for captured Africans who were shipped to the Caribbean to be sold. Between 1672 and 1731, the RAC was the single largest contributor to the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans, transporting around 160,000 souls in inhumane conditions. Prichard's generation established fundamentals of civil society, yet despite their lives of public service, they were deeply implicated in the slave trade. Bart's improvements conducted under Prichard's aegis are gone, yet huge benefaction registers still adorn its Great Hall. This paper argues that prosopography, related here to vanished charity buildings, complicates hagiographical narratives. It stimulates timely debates about our evaluation of historical actions, like whether the source of philanthropic donations should colour our judgement of benefactors, while reinforcing the imperative to extend the historical narratives we relate.

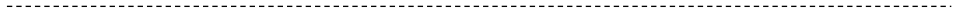
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Project Presentation

14:00-14:30

Ludovica Galeazzo

VeNiss: Venice's Nissology Reframing the Lagoon City as an Archipelago



Project Presentation

Abstract

Ludovica Galeazzo

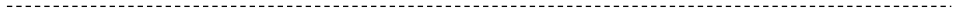
VeNiss: Venice's Nissology Reframing the Lagoon City as an Archipelago

In the historical tradition, Venice is a city without walls and gates, and hence lacking suburbs. VeNiss reverses this trope by examining the urban, political, and cultural patterns connecting the capital with the chain of over sixty islands forming its granular hinterland. From the 16th century, lagoon sites were systematically included in the network of capillary infrastructures for the city's supply, defence, healthcare, and civic rituals. Cultural entanglements sometimes bypassed the city, as novel lagoon artistic and architectural solutions permeated the Italian Peninsula through the agency of religious communities. Atlases and books of islands published on and in Venice helped consolidate the city's archipelagic thinking into a coherent framework. VeNiss sheds light on this physical and theoretical construct – abruptly interrupted by the fall of the Republic (1797) – through a holistic project which combines social history, architecture, art and literary studies with advanced digital technologies. Coupling close archival readings with modelling systems, it develops the first online geospatial and time-based infrastructure to reconstruct the islands' transformations alongside their entwined interactions. Reframing Venice within its archipelago, VeNiss explores the impact of urban edges on city planning, economic dependence, social responsiveness, and artistic production. It constitutes a crucial contribution to Venetian history while providing a powerful prototype for other urban studies to reset the hierarchical dichotomy of centre-periphery.

Workshop

14:30-17:00

Workshop: A collective reflection when architecture disappears



Workshop

Overview

During the afternoon we will organise a series of discussion sections to form a reflection on

- how we study architecture that has been vanished;
- how we write about architecture when it disappears; and
- what are the implications of vanished architecture in historiography?

The purpose of this workshop is to bring together a collective reflection on the theme, with the ultimate goal to submit a book proposal for an edited volume.

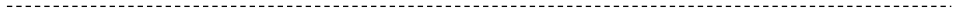
More information will be provided on the day.

Closing Presentation

17:15-18:00

Ivan Gort-Cabeza de Vaca and Claire Zimmerman

Industrial Architecture in the Shadow of Iztaccibuatl



Closing Presentation

Abstract

Ivan Gort-Cabeza de Vaca and Claire Zimmerman

Industrial Architecture in the Shadow of Iztaccíhuatl

Between 1930 and 1932, agents of the Ford Motor Company constructed an automobile assembly plant in Aragón La Villa, Mexico City. Cleared in the 1990s after decades as an assembly facility, the site now houses the Plaza Tepeyac shopping mall; only FMC's water tank still looms. This paper explores traces of Ford La Villa, its construction after the 1929 depression and the Mexican revolution, and its obsolescence. The economic goals of La Villa resemble other Ford plants throughout Latin America: first, create supply and demand for automobiles; and second, exploit cheap labor from major urban centers. Ford's low-cost automobile was predicated on ubiquity – the car should be not a luxury, but for the “everyman.” Like others worldwide, this plant's working life was measured in decades. A new plant in neighboring Cuautitlán replaced the interactive urbanity of streetside La Villa with a private campus impervious to urban life. Both index the history of twentieth-century capitalism, as commodities moved through the market with slowly accelerating efficiency.

Buildings of the second industrial revolution survive today in inverse proportion to their impact on global life. We intervene by considering impacts of this building on the city, the country, and its people. Furthermore, industrial architecture arguably also reifies architecture per se. Industrial architectural history is therefore critical—virtually all humanmade buildings follow the laws of the market, so clearly materialized in La Villa, even if these laws fail to present themselves elsewhere. In this regard architecture constructs ideological facades which obscure the material impact of productive forces. Ford La Villa witnessed the latent power of industrial capitalism as it shaped the lives of Mexicans. Yet as the gospel of consumption advanced in 1930s Mexico, it followed in the wake of the radical 1917 Constitution, the first in the world to enshrine labor rights in law.

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19 January 2024
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