

Programme SOFT SOIL II/III

Beyond Emergency Unsettling spaces

Friday, 14 August 2020, 19:00

Welcome followed by two short lectures & discussion

SOFT SOIL's second block opens with short lectures from Vanessa E. Thompson and Orhan Esen introducing two strands of the event series that respond to recent and enduring emergencies. An analysis of the origins of racial profiling and questions relating to access to urban spaces are contextualised in their historic dimension as well as in post-socialist shifts after 1990, as modernist ›ideals‹ of the urban are inched towards increasingly nationalist and neoliberal urban forms.

»Policing of Black lives and the conditions of abolitionist resistances« by Vanessa E. Thompson (de*)

Current transnational struggles for black lives point to the historical, social and subjective dimensions of ›policing‹ as the practice of making it impossible to breathe. This contribution discusses different forms of ›policing‹, especially of black lives, from the perspectives of the black radical tradition and intersectionality. The discussion will close with questions about public space and the possibilities afforded by abolitionism.

»Function Follows Form: When the dream of equality is dreamt out« by Orhan Esen (de*)

During the Cold War, there was a competition of political systems: real existing state socialism versus the social market economy, counteracted by the so-called ›third way‹ – the movement of non-aligned states. All three were legitimised by the modern ideal of equality, which subsequently shaped the architectural language in large cities such as Berlin, Skopje and Istanbul – even if the methods, the approach to it and, above all, the prospects of its realisation diverged. After the fall of the Wall, the pursuit of equality was set aside in realpolitik and replaced by unhampered capitalist accumulation. This lecture deals with the ideological origins and consequences of the erasure of modernist architectural heritage, from the demolition of the Berlin Palace of the Republic and the Istanbul Palace of Culture, to the foreclosure of the post-earthquake master plan in Skopje. These were all replaced by ›neo-neobaroque‹ facades that harbour a nostalgic or phantasmagoric fantasy of imperialism.

Saturday, 15 August 2020, 11:00–13:00

Meeting point: Kartoffelpufferstand, corner Hasenheide & Hermannplatz, 10967 Berlin

»Right to the City – Space for All« (de*) with Initiative Hermannplatz (local grassroots organisation)

The Hermannplatz Initiative opposes both the demolition of the Karstadt building on Hermannplatz and the displacement of small businesses and tenants from Kreuzberg and Neukölln. The real estate company Signa's planned prestige project would accelerate ongoing displacement and, in all likelihood, destroy the migrant character of the Kiez (neighbourhood). Despite the project's official rejection by the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district government, Signa's large-scale campaign suggests it will indeed be realised. The campaign plucks cultural, ecological and social buzzwords and weaves them into a commercial, homogenous narrative. But the stories of neighbourhood residents, small business owners and civil society are polyphonic, non-linear, diverse and also contradictory – the makeup of urban and social quality. Whereas Signa pushes Kiez-washing, green-washing and art-washing and stages an alleged proximity to citizens, this workshop explores the idea of the ›right to the city‹ and asks the question: How can the diverse voices of the neighbourhood be brought to bear? How can the narratives, identities and plurality of this place become visible and audible? How can it remain a place for all?

14:00–14:45

nGbK, Oranienstraße 25, 10999 Berlin

(NEW:) Input »Take it down and turn it inside out!« (en) with Coalition of Cultural Workers against the Humboldt Forum

While monuments of racist colonial history and violence are being taken down in many places around the world, Berlin disgraces itself by doing the exact opposite. The already-problematic reconstruction of the Berlin Palace has now been crowned with the *globus cruciger* (a golden cross-bearing orb), a symbol of imperial power and Christian global domination. It is accompanied by its historical inscription, demanding of the living and the dead to kneel unconditionally and humbly before Jesus. This pompous assertion will roof over the Ethnological Museum's collection mainly acquired during German colonialism; a blatant perpetuation of colonial violence. The revival and reconstruction of these adornments, with their call for submission and sense of superiority, further exposes the Humboldt Forum as an antidemocratic and regressive project. We are most alarmed that an architectural reimagining of Prussian monarchy, Christian dominance and colonial entitlement, makes legitimate space for revisionist and right-wing nationalist ideologies in the city of Berlin.

The neo-Prussian fantasy of omnipotence is shared by actors in the private sector who, through donations, enabled the covert self-coronation on May 30th. For the sum of 1 million euro, Maren Otto was allowed to inscribe a dedication for her husband, the late entrepreneur Werner Otto, directly onto the orb. In this way, the Otto Group and its subsidiary company, ECE Project Management, who have already devastated many inner cities with their dismal shopping malls, are permitting themselves the rhetoric of imperial divine right.

This dubious public-private pact becomes even clearer when we discover that Hohenzollern's (former Prussian aristocratic family) domed cross was not a part of the Bundestag resolution to reconstruct this Prussian palace on the site of the Palast der Republik and therefore, was not decided on in a democratic forum.

An online dossier from the Humboldt Forum describes the golden ensemble of cherubs, 'exotic' palm leaves, and *globus cruciger* as a "symbol of charity, freedom, cosmopolitanism and tolerance." But sorry, dear Monika Grütters, this is an insult to all of the above.

As for the Hohenzollerns: they are not benevolent, culturally-inclined patrons, rather a Prussian "family clan" that waged wars and spread catastrophe for over a thousand years. Even now, they are making headlines with absurd claims for financial compensation.

While elsewhere space is being created for a decolonized world that fights racism and Eurocentric ignorance, in Berlin the imperial undead are being exhumed from the crypts of history. These revenants are being enthroned above the city. Meanwhile, below, basements are filled with stolen artifacts and human remains from those very societies the Hohenzollern family forced to their knees under the sign of the cross. In the exhibition rooms of the Humboldt Forum, the "Kulturation" Germany fulfills its longstanding dream "to be able to be someone again" on the world stage, aspiring to "critical" and "cosmopolitan" gestures. We are stunned and outraged at such insidious historical revisionism. In line with the current UN Decade for People of African Descent, it is immediately clear that the cross must come down! Afterwards, and only afterwards, can a sensible repurposing of these Baroque ruins be considered. Today we begin with the rehearsal to topple this undead and blood-soaked structure and sink it in the River Spree.

Black Lives Matter must also apply to museums. So that there may be a change of perspective in the white culture of remembrance.

Tear it down and turn it upside down!

- The Coalition of Cultural Workers Against the Humboldt Forum

15:00–15:45

nGbK, Oranienstraße 25, 10999 Berlin

Input »Ban Racial Profiling!« (de*/fr) with KOP Berlin

KOP – Campaign for Victims of Racist Police Violence – aims to confront institutional racism at various levels and break the racist norm. In police practice, institutionalised racism is strongly expressed in racial profiling, a core theme of KOP's work. The activists tackle the documentation and investigation of racist police attacks and assaults. Victims receive support and counselling, and, from KOP, potential witnesses learn about concrete possibilities for action.

19:30

Autoscooter, Haus der Statistik, Karl-Marx-Allee 1, 10178 Berlin

Video Program »Space Ideologies« with D'EST (Ulrike Gerhardt & Daria Iuriichuk)

Followed by a discussion with A.S.S. Collective (Mizu Sugai and Jonathan Jung) (de*)

»Who owns the city?« and »Who is allowed to live and who has to die?« (Achille Mbembe 2019): these existential, spatial-ideological questions reverberate in urban infrastructures, architectures and not least in citizens' and non-citizens' bodies. »Space Ideologies« is a one-night screening program that investigates processes of privatisation and economisation in post-socialist cities such as Almaty, Belgrade, Berlin, Moscow, and Tallinn. From ruined investment properties and anonymous dancers in Tallinn's port area (**Flo Kasearu**), to ghostly urban landscapes reflecting the social exclusion and disconnection of trans*women in Almaty (**Ruthia Jenrbekova & Morris Getman**), to near-deadly labour conditions and structural racism experienced by migrants working under vigilant algorithmic tracking at the Russian courier and taxi service-platform Yandex (**Anna Engelhardt**), it becomes evident that since the 1990s, precarious bodies have been exploited to create neoliberal infrastructures. The final videos may symbolise »flashes of awakening«, ruptures in the tissue of neoliberal space ideologies: an engaging documentary about cultural activists who occupied a cinema in Belgrade, creating a temporary micro economy (**Senka Domanović**), and a filmically compressed, 24-hour performance project in front of Berlin's contested Ernst-Thälmann monument touching on the political leader's legacy (**A.S.S. Collective**). In response to the program, artists Mizu Sugai and Jonathan Jung of A.S.S. Collective, who work at the intersection of social, political and artistic practices, will discuss their work and introduce their new fields of research.

Current change: In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the production of »Movements of Algorithmic Labour« has been delayed. Instead, the video work »Colonial Sediments« (2020) by Anna Engelhardt und Sasha Shestakova's Distributed Cognition Cooperative (DCC) will be screened. The video work investigates the infrastructure of intermodal terminals of the Russian port city Nachodka as a site of colonial acts of violence, but also of decolonial resistance.

Video details: »Colonial Sediments« (2020), Distributed Cognition Cooperative (Anna Engelhardt, Sasha Shestakova)

Video works/film excerpts (in order of screening):

- »Client's Day« (2020), Flo Kasearu (Estonian, English subtitles)
- Excerpts from »Nobody with a Movie Camera« (2011-16), Ruthia Jenrbekova & Morris Getman (Russian, English subtitles)
- »Movements of Algorithmic Labour« (2020), Anna Engelhardt (Russian, English subtitles)
- Excerpts from »Occupied Cinema« (2018), Senka Domanović (Serbian, English subtitles)
- »Dawn of the Red – A Rupture in the Deep-Sleep of Capitalism« (2018), A.S.S. Collective (Mizu Sugai and Jonathan Jung) (English, German subtitles)

Sunday, 16 August 2020, 14:00–17:00

Meeting point: in front of Kisch & Co, Oranienstraße 25, 10999 Berlin

Kieztour »Oh-Straße!: How To Sell Your City: A Guided Tour« (de*)

with Anonyme Anwohnende

Kreuzberg's Oranienstraße and surrounds are coming under increased pressure. Displacement is becoming common, even in this resistant neighbourhood. Pressure is being exerted from Hermannplatz via plans for a reconstruction of the Karstadt building, from Moritzplatz where an upscale commercial complex is being built, and from the banks of the Spree, whose redevelopment offers no solution for small businesses to continue living and working in Kreuzberg. But the people are fighting back and working together, whether – as in the case of Oranienstraße 25 – by researching exactly who is displacing them through demonstrations and public relations work, e.g. for Späti owners and clothing store owners under threat of eviction, or by providing support at the unfortunate, bitter end. Solidarity is strong, but is it enough in the face of capital? After displacement, vacancy often lasts for years; people and livelihoods may have vanished, but there is profit to be made.

This walk around the neighbourhood will visit sites of ongoing displacement along Oranienstraße, starting at number 25 and focusing on the bookstore Kisch and Co. The walk will end at Moritzplatz, where Pandion – one of the largest real estate companies in Germany – is currently having the commercial buildings »TheShelf« and »TheGrid« constructed. The initiative Anonymous Anwohnende takes participants on an astonishing tour of the superclass: clever business ideas, neoliberal fantasy worlds, gaping legal loopholes and the last Kreuzberg shops on Oh-Straße!

With and by, among others:

Anonymous Anwohnende (Anonymous Residents) have no fixed address and can be found everywhere. They are the ancillary costs that nobody expected. They practise self-help, performance and tomato throwing. Shimmying between art and activism. Wherever they turn up, profits turn down.

The **Bündnis Zwangsräumung verhindern** (Alliance to Prevent Forced Eviction) is made up of people who are unwilling to accept rent increases, displacement and forced evictions. They stand in solidarity with those affected and are committed to the abolition of forced evictions both universally and in individual cases. They meet weekly to consider joint actions.

The bookshop **Kisch und Co.** has been an integral part of Oranienstraße for 23 years. It offers a wide range of fiction, children's and non-fiction books and contributes to the stability and attractiveness of the entire neighbourhood with regular cultural events.

Ora nostra is an alliance of small businesses in Kreuzberg that carries out active support work for commercial spaces that are threatened with eviction. It also networks commercial renters in order to bring them into exchange so that they might build their own initiatives, or join pre-existing ones, building publicity and public pressure to prevent displacement.