

Workshop

Urban Crisis-Scapes: On Walks and Ruins

May 15-17, 2019

Evening film program: May 15, 2019

Workshop: May 16-17, 2019

Locations

Film program: Overtoom 301, 1054 HW, Amsterdam

Workshop: University of Amsterdam Library (UB), Singel 425, 1012 WP

Supported by

NICA (Netherlands Institute for Cultural Analysis)

ASCA (Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis)

LAPS (Research Institute for Art and Public Space), Gerrit Rietveld Academy

Organized by

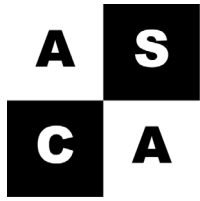
Maria Boletsi (University of Amsterdam / Leiden University) &

Eva Fotiadi (Avans University of Applied Sciences)

In collaboration with Ipek Celik-Rappas (Koç University) & the ASCA research group

[“Crisis, Critique and Futurity”](#)

Evening film program curated by Geli Mademli



*Netherlands Institute
for Cultural Analysis*

LAPS

Theme

The workshop will focus on city-scapes that have recently been radically reconfigured through pervasive frameworks of crisis – financial, political, humanitarian etc. We want to explore alternative experiences of urban space, new artistic imaginaries, and innovative cultural initiatives emerging from such urban crisis-scapes by centering on two distinct but interrelated thematic lines:

Ruins (May 16)

Recent crisis-frameworks have produced new material ruins and transformed the functions of past ruins. The workshop will explore the new meanings and the sociopolitical and affective functions of ruins in crisis-scapes, as well as figurations of such ruins in cinema and art: ruins that range from monuments or antiquities to vestiges of disaffected zones such as derelict factories, deserted buildings, and abandoned construction sites. Images of ruins often exemplify the material consequences of crisis. But ruins are not only markers of decay and desolation. They often become the ‘canvas’ for creative projects and artistic interventions (e.g., through street art) that mobilize ruins to articulate alternative modes of being in a present of crisis and of envisioning the future. Ruins may thus be involved in subaltern narratives, suppressed histories or radical imaginaries that challenge crisis as “judgment of failure.” But they can also become commercialized and fetishized (e.g., in crisis-tourism or ‘ruin porn’) or revamped as fashionable objects. In cities with a dominant presence of ancient and historical ruins – such as Athens or Istanbul – new ruins interact with ruins of the past, reconfiguring the traditional functions of the latter. New artistic and cinematic languages seek innovative ways to explore the relation of material ruins and precarious subjects afflicted by crisis. What new meanings and operations do ancient and modern ruins assume against the backdrop of pervasive crises? Can ruins and their cinematic, literary or artistic figurations contribute to alternative narratives of modernity, the nation, crisis and futurity?

Walks (May 17)

Initiatives that use walking as a medium – springing from art projects to architectural research and crisis-tourism – have become increasingly popular. Some walks aim to observe and reflect upon the transformed urban space: vacant housing and commercial spaces, the new homeless, waves of migrants and refugees or the graffiti on derelict buildings. Others show interest in forgotten layers of a city’s turbulent history, which re-emerge through such initiatives and assume new meanings and affective functions in a turbulent present. In other cases – as for example in Athens – guided tours are organized by homeless people or by theatre makers, who set up performative walks aiming to reconcile citizens with the new poor and with districts considered dangerous or ‘migrant ghettos.’ Many of these walks and tours could be considered as crisis voyeurism or as unsolicited quasi-anthropological inquiries that produce (new) social and cultural alterities. However, some of them can also be seen as attempts by locals to make sense of their own situation beyond dominant and

over-mediatized crisis narratives. When artists adapt ethnographic methodologies in such initiatives, are they inescapably trapped in a “realist assumption” about the “Other” or in their own “presumptions of ethnographic authority” (Hal Foster)? Can such initiatives contribute to opening up alternative futures for cities in crisis and their inhabitants?

By thinking walks and ruins together, the workshop will address the following topics, among others:

- Walking as methodology in artistic, architectural, urbanist and other research
- Revisiting “the artist as ethnographer” discourse
- Tours around ancient, modern and contemporary historic sites and ruins and spaces of daily life; graffiti tours; “torture and freedom tours” (Documenta14 in collaboration with ASKI, Athens)
- New significations and functions of ancient and modern ruins against the backdrop of crises
- Literary, photographic, cinematic and other representations of ruins and narratives of walking within crisis-scapes
- Alternative uses of ruined, derelict, empty spaces and their relation to subjects who squat, reside and interact with such spaces.
- New collectivities and social practices emerging from walking and engaging with ruins
- The role of ruins in shaping alternative narratives of modernity, the nation, crisis and futurity.
- The (ir)relevance of established theoretical approaches to walking as a cultural practice, from Benjamin’s flâneur to Michel de Certeau’s tactical consumer

PROGRAM

May 15 (Wednesday)

(location: [OT301](#), Overtoom 301)

19:30 - 21:00 **Film Program**

A compilation of shorts from the recent Greek film production reveals the agency of urban landscapes and human geographies that resist the obvious taxonomies of crisis, and invites the viewers to wander through newly established archaeological sites, preserving alternative narratives for future presents.

Entrance: free

May 16 (Thursday) - Ruins

(locations: Panels I & II: Belle van Zuylenzaal / Panel III: De Doelenzaal; both venues in the University Library)

10:00-10:15 **Introduction and welcome**

10:15 – 12:15 **Panel I (Belle van Zuylenzaal, UB)**

- Dimitris Plantzos, *Ruin-Scapes: Rebranding the Classical Present in Post-crisis Athens*
- Sadia Abbas, *“Transcreation:” Quratulain Hyder’s English Rewritings of Her Urdu Novels, the Discourse of Ruins and Colonial Taxonomy*

12:15 – 13:15 **Lunch**

13:15 – 15:15 **Panel II (Belle van Zuylenzaal, UB)**

- László Munteán, *Ruin, Rubble, Wreckage: The Afterlife of the Ruins of the World Trade Center*
- Dimitris Papanikolaou, *Dancing on the Ruins of Modernism*

15:15 – 15:45 **Coffee break**

15:45 – 17:45 **Panel III (De Doelenzaal, UB)**

- Ipek Celik-Rappas, *Shooting in the Ruins: Producing Space and Value on Screen*
- Daan Wesselman, *Aesthetic battlegrounds in Amsterdam Nieuw-West*

17:45 – 19:00 **Borrel**

May 17 (Friday) - Walks

(location: Belle van Zuylenzaal, University Library)

10:00-10:15

Introduction

10:15 – 12:15

Panel I

- Angeliki Avgitidou, *Walking Art Methodologies and the Public Space*
- Asli Ozgen-Tuncer, *Walking as Cinematographic Labour: The Aesthetics and Politics of the Embodied Long-take*

12:15 – 13:15

Lunch

13:15 – 15:15

Panel II

- Sigrid Merx, *From Actual Walking to Imaginary Walks: Between Realities #Athens*
- Efi Giannetopoulou & Thomais Dermati, *Athens Calling: The Commodification of a Landscape in Crisis*

15:15 – 15:45

Coffee break

15:45 – 17:00

Panel III

Kathrin Wildner, *Walking Spaces – A research Tool in Urban Ethnography*

17:00 – 17:40

Final discussion & closing remarks

ABSTRACTS

[Sadia Abbas \(Rutgers University\)](#)

“Transcreation:” Quratulain Hyder’s English Rewritings of Her Urdu Novels, the Discourse of Ruins and Colonial Taxonomy

In 1998, the Urdu novelist, Quratulain Hyder, published an English version of her Urdu novel, *Ag ka Darya* which had come out 40 years before in 1959. She called this English version, a “transcreation,” a term she took from P. Lal, the writer and translator of *Mahabharata* and *Shakuntala*, among other texts. Its title *River of Fire* was a literal rendering into English of the Urdu title, although she had not used the term “transcreation” to describe it.

At stake in Hyder’s use of transcreation to describe *River of Fire* were notions and deployments of *ekphrasis*, the verbal description of visual art, issues of novelistic, philosophical and historical form, the competing and frequently intersecting metaphysics of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism in India, and the political instantiations of colonial taxonomy and epistemology, the most tragic manifestations of which were the Partition of 1947, a civil war woven into the very inception of Independence, and the bloody and genocidal civil war of 1971 in Pakistan, which led to the creation of Bangladesh.

Her interest in art and architectural history and the career of archaeology in India were fundamental to her transcreations, which, in turn, reveal the imbrications of the Greek and Indian archaeological situation, the entwinement of Orientalism and Philhellenism and the emergence of varieties of nationalism in South Asia and Greece and Asia Minor.

This paper will explore some of these connections, Hyder’s notion of transcreation, and the way she deployed it to examine and critique the colonial discourse of ruins and the nationalisms that engaged this discourse.

[Angeliki Avgitidou \(University of Western Macedonia\)](#)

Walking Art Methodologies and the Public Space

Artists such as Vito Acconci, Sophie Calle, Francis Alÿs and Thanasis and Alexandra Katsiani have activated walks in public space through performances, actions and interventions. These works have in the past been commented upon by making use of the concept of the flâneur as well as the work of the Situationists. Expanding the field of artistic intervention and research, groups such as *Wrights and Sites* have proposed walking as a way of experiencing the city anew and *Deriva Musol* has activated walking as a method incorporated in art research. By examining these and other examples I am interested in exploring the ways that new tools and methodologies for and about art may be developed through walking art projects. Taking into consideration that such projects focus on process over final product, how are we to document/gather data and represent such practices while not betraying their openness and their experimental character? What alternative theoretical tools may prove useful in this exploration? Case studies will include works by Andrea Haenggi and Anna Tzakou.

[Ipek Celik-Rappas \(Koç University\)](#)

Shooting in the Ruins: Producing Space and Value on Screen

Ruin is a concept that is ambiguous in its value. It may connote a priceless location (ancient ruins) or a de-valued space with the potential of re-acquiring value (industrial ruins turning into art spaces). This ambiguity shows how spatial value may be established, erased and re-generated over time. In

Rubbish Theory (1979) Michael Thompson associates elites with the ability to preserve and generate value (of buildings, spaces or objects), be they real estate agents, art critics or museums. This paper explores the ways that screen production and representation generate value in minority and working class neighbourhoods in Europe. It argues that, even when screen images are negative (showing stereotypically crime-infested neighbourhoods in urban blight), they and their making show an investment potential, a space open to speculation with low use value (sentimental value/ usefulness) and increasing exchange value (speculative value). This research inquires into how race, ethnicity and class come into the picture (literally) as screen productions define and alter the value of ruins and “rubbish.”

Efi Giannetopoulou (University of Amsterdam) & Thomais Dermati (University of Newcastle)

Athens Calling: The Commodification of a Landscape in Crisis

Athens is a constantly transforming landscape where representations of the past are embedded, intensively, in the realm of the city. Greece has been using archaeology both for the building of a national identity and as a tool for the economic development of the country. Acropolis, as the symbolic landmark of the city of Athens, has been widely exploited by the tourism industry, promoted as a symbol of a glorious past.

While archaeology is an evident layer in the urban area of Athens, the economic crisis and urban growth have managed to foster the rise of new forms of archaeologies in the city, such as graffiti and street art. Graffiti is becoming a new archaeology in the cityscape, enhancing the museumification of Athens. This extra layer, part of a “street” culture which took rebellious characteristics during the crisis, is developing into a new form of tourist attraction that affects in multiple ways the city and its locals. A walk in Athens becomes a diving into the aesthetics of crisis, poverty and resistance.

Crisis along with global political strategies have altered the urban Athenian landscape through gentrification and have promoted low-cost mass tourism that transformed neighbourhoods, such as Koukaki, into Airbnb shelters. The dominance of “short-term” rentals has created a housing crisis which is now threatening entire communities in the city.

As a result, prices increased, people got displaced and areas have turned into tourist ghettos. Tourism is exploiting every aspect of the Athenian landscape by trying to sell the representation of the “ugly” present of an abused reality. The city branding of a poor yet lively city is being enforced by the graffiti culture. Are we witnessing the transition of graffiti from a notorious and unconventional form of art to a heavy “weapon” and an ally of the tourist industry? And in the end how does a tourist perceive and “reads” the city through the local’s eyes while walking through it?

Sigrid Merx (Utrecht University)

From Actual Walking to Imaginary Walks: Between Realities #Athens

This presentation discusses *Between Realities #Athens*, a 5-day live action research event that took place in 2016, in which a group of local participants explored and mapped public spaces in Athens from the point of view of ‘stages of crisis’ and created a series of alternative city maps. It will focus on how ‘the walk’ functioned both as an actual method of collaboration (working together in this project to a large extent also meant walking together) and a conceptual dramaturgical strategy (the alternative city maps were meant to invite audiences to walk the city in a different manner). Speaking from the position of the curator attention will be paid to the success and the failure of the project in an attempt to map the conditions that are needed to make ‘walking’ truly productive in an artistic context.

László Munteán (Radboud University Nijmegen)

Ruin, Rubble, Wreckage: The Afterlife of the Ruins of the World Trade Center

In the wake of 9/11, the remains of the World Trade Center made the separation of corporeal remains and architectural debris, victims and terrorists, an insurmountable task. The hasty removal of the ruins from Ground Zero is indicative of the abject quality of this material – an uncanny refuse of the catastrophe that yielded no bodies to bury and yet bespoke the haunting presence of the terrorist “other.” This presentation addresses the theoretical and terminological problems relating to the materiality of the towers’ remains by way of locating them within the domains of ruin, rubble, and wreckage. Using this conceptual triad as a platform, the presentation will then examine what happened to the towers’ remains after their removal from Ground Zero. This will be done in an unorthodox way, by focusing on three ships, each of which exemplifies a discourse related to the towers’ remains.

Asli Ozgen-Tuncer (University of Amsterdam)

Walking As Cinematographic Labour: The Aesthetics and Politics of the Embodied Long-take

Current visual media culture, which has great potential to film individualised experiences of mobility via mobile devices like smartphones and wearable cameras, and a broad platform to distribute them via sharing platforms like Instagram, snapchat and other short video-clip sharing media, is particularly suited to an analysis of the aesthetic interrelationship between walking and filming. Filming or photographing while walking has never been this easy, accessible, and shareable. In my talk, I will bring up some classical film theoretical perspectives on walking as a tool for filmmaking, and investigate their relevance to the prevalence of embodied long-takes in the current media landscape. With this aim in mind, I will particularly analyse Italian neorealist filmmakers’ vision to go out with a camera and film the everyday life amidst the ruins of war. These wanderings articulated an ethical duty of the artist-intellectual to explore and reflect social reality, and thereby forged a unique cinematic trope: an embodied travelling shot, or an eye-level, on-the-move long take that gave the impression of embodied tailing or following a character, who is similarly usually walking, wandering or rambling. Taking Cesare Zavattini’s theory of *pedinamento* as a starting point, my talk will offer a close reading of walking-shots from Rossellini’s *Germania Anno Zero* (1947), probing into some theoretical underpinnings they offer to examine the pedestrian filming acts in the digital media culture.

Dimitris Papanikolaou (Oxford University)

Dancing on the Ruins of Modernism

Taking its cue from two central scenes in the films *Attenberg* (2010) and *Xenia* (2014), as well as the recent medium length *Third Kind* (2018), the paper will rethink the status of modernist architecture in Greece today, and the symbolic position that specific architectural sites, “in ruins” or not, take in today’s cultural poetics. Instances of what I have elsewhere described as Archive Trouble, these cases of revisiting modernism’s iconicity in Greece cannot be understood outside the biopolitical critique that these cultural texts also mount.

[Dimitris Plantzos \(National and Kapodistrian University of Athens\)](#)

Ruin-Scapes: Rebranding the Classical Present in Post-crisis Athens

Even before Athens was hit by the ten-year long recession of 2009, Greek authorities had been working towards a re-affirmation of the country's traditional (as well as stereotypical) commitment to ruins. Perceived as the most significant part of the nation's cultural capital, as well as the main reason for the country's appeal to foreigners, ruins were dutifully revered by both the state and its subjects as stand-alone, quasi-totemic entities of self-evident significance. Owing to the international shifts in economy, however, Greece's view of ruins as state treasures has been challenged; globalized tourism (from the massification of the cruise to Airbnb's establishment in the hospitality market), in conjunction with recent trends in the leisure industry, seem to be demanding a new approach to tangible cultural heritage, including sites and museums. As Athens has been trying, quite successfully, to establish itself as an international tourist destination, its rather old-style treatment of its classical heritage seems to be questioned. A number of recent case-studies illustrating the ways classical ruins are treated as both tangible and intangible heritage in contemporary Athens will be examined in an effort to investigate these shifting trends and their cultural impact.

[Daan Wesselman \(University of Amsterdam\)](#)

Aesthetic Battlegrounds in Amsterdam Nieuw-West

This paper explores the juncture between aesthetics, the right to the city and gentrification, looking at examples from the Amsterdam Nieuw-West neighborhood of Bos en Lommer, which until recently was listed as among the worst neighborhoods in the country. In addition to familiar ones like graffiti and litter, this particular area of Amsterdam has a further emblem for being a bad neighborhood: the satellite dish attached to the outside of social housing. Unlike many other cultures where the satellite dish is regarded positively as a sign of affluence, in Amsterdam it has long been reviled. Typically owned by residents of Turkish or Moroccan origin, these dishes metonymically signify otherness. I focus on the discourse with which these dishes are opposed, e.g. in the media and in legal proceedings, which crucially and persistently involve the notion of "defacement" ("ontsieren" in Dutch) – the idea that the presence of these objects is an ugly imposition. Effectively, the argument of "defacement" is a marker for decay, aesthetic on the surface but with moral and social overtones.

There is therefore a clash between the public, institutional and legal opposition to these dishes on the one hand, and on the other hand the practices of residents for whom these are simply objects in their everyday lives. What is at stake is the right of the city – the question of who gets to shape the urban environment as a meaningful space of everyday urban life – and the domain for this clash is prominently aesthetic. This is reinforced in the steady gentrification of this neighborhood, which finds aesthetic strategies to counter the aesthetics of decay – chiefly through either inserting "creative hubs" and art projects, predicated on aesthetic difference to the surroundings, or through preservation of architectural heritage, predicated on a focus on an original state before decay.

[Kathrin Wildner \(HafenCity University Hamburg\)](#)

Walking Spaces – A Research Tool in Urban Ethnography

Being an urban ethnographer, walking is one of the central methodological instruments of my urban explorations. Following on from moments of promenadology and derivé, I understand walking as an

everyday activity, an instrument of knowledge production as well as a resistant practice. Walking, however, in this case is not only directed by the gaze, but as well by the body and the senses, in order to track down materialities and conditions of the urban space beyond the familiar views. For the workshop I will prepare a walking instruction as a guideline for a try out in Amsterdam. The exercise will be framed by an introduction on walking as an instrument for ethnographic research and a collective reflection on the walking experiences.