

Grand Gestures Part 3

Lecture Series
February 21 – May 18, 2017

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Image: Busludscha-Denkmal (1981), Chadschi Dimitar, Bulgarien
<https://noflytripping.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/dsc03348.jpg>

Grand Gestures:
Planning, Contingency and the Image of the Modern City, Part 3
Lecture Series, February 21 – May 18, 2017

Hayden White’s 1973 book *Metahistory* argued that the writing of history is a generic activity, and that histories are—formally speaking—divisible into romances, satires, tragedies and comedies. Whereas a romantic conception of history is defined by redemption through progress, the “realists” of historiography (amongst whom he includes Jacob Burckhardt and Alexis de Tocqueville), White notes, write satires, in which every attempt to achieve mastery over the world reveals that we are captives of it. For the satirists, history is not so much characterised by progress, as by irony. Irony is, as it were, not merely the inevitable outcome of any grand historical gesture, but acts as a strange attractor, seemingly guiding events to maximise the resulting anti-climax. The fascination of such narratives is not merely that they draw attention to the size of the discrepancy between ideals and realities, but reveal the agency of that gap. Modernity is characterised by such grand gestures—attempts to reshape the iconography, the ideology and the economics of urban environments through symbolically overlaid interventions.

In previous semesters, we have heard of proposals presented to the US congress to relocate an idealised white suburbia into geostationary orbit (Felicity D. Scott), of the exhaustion of the Nile Valley in the name of its perpetual fertility (Charlotte

Malterre-Barthes), and of the intimate relationship between cataclysmic fires and urban planning tradition in the city of Tokyo (Liam Ross). This semester, we will address the corporate architecture of Silicon Valley, study the arrival of socialist modernism in Ghana, and learn of the secret laughter of Mies van der Rohe.

As Toynbee wrote in *Cities on the Move*, cities have always been the privileged stage on which political identity is acted out. The city is not only the setting for political gestures, it can act as dramatis persona in its own right. *Grand Gestures* is a series about the city as a protagonist in history, about the inadequacy of planning, and the vicissitudes of ambition. *Grand Gestures* seeks out resonant images, not only in order to question historiography, or critique the inadequacy of political intentionality, but also to reimagine the projects of modernity, with all their hope and hubris.

Concept: Stefan Neuner, Adam Jasper, Pathmini Ukwattage and Hannah Baader

In cooperation with the Urban Studies, University of Basel and the Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin

Location:
eikones NCCR Iconic Criticism, Rheinsprung 11, CH-4051 Basel
www.eikones.ch

Tuesday, February 21, 7.15 pm

Filip de Boeck

Ways to rethink the Urban Archive: Cases from the Congo

Thursday, March 2, 7.15 pm

Daniel Jütte

Die steinerne Grenze: Mauern, Tore und die Vorgeschichte der ‚offenen Stadt‘

Thursday, March 30, 7.15 pm

Nicholas de Monchaux

Apple X Star Wars: Architecture, Technology, and Power at Bay

Thursday, April 6, 7.15 pm

Lutz Robbers

Mies’ Laughter: Semblance and Dissensus in the Architecture of Mies van der Rohe

Thursday, April 20, 7.15 pm

Lukasz Stanek

Made in Ghana: Architecture and Socialist Modernisation

Thursday, May 4, 7.15 pm

Mark Wasiuta

Information Fall-Out: Buckminster Fuller World’s Game

Thursday, May 11, 7.15 pm

Alla Vronskaya

Digging Canals, Building Civilizations: Architecture and Development between Mars and Earth.

Thursday, May 18, 7.15 pm

Fahim Amir

Pigeon Visions: Resisting Posthumanism