POST- AND DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE PLATFORMED CITY

OMNI-ACCESS

Symposium with

VYJAYANTHI RAO, SANDRO MEZZADRA, OFRI CNAANI, RAVI SUNDARAM, TEDDY CRUZ & FONNA FORMAN, PETER MÖRTENBÖCK & HELGE MOOSHAMMER

Thu, 16 January 2025

5pm–7pm: Panel discussion with all speakers
Ian Gulland Lecture Theatre, Whitehead Bldg

Fri, 17 January 2025

10.30am–7pm: Presentations by all speakers
LG01, Professor Stuart Hall Building

Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London SE14 6NW
For programme details, see gold.ac.uk/visual-cultures/events - all welcome

INSTITUTE OF VISUAL CULTURE
Art & Design TU Wien

FWF Österreichischer Wissenschaftsfonds

Goldsmiths
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Post- and decolonial perspectives on the platformed city

SYNOPSIS

The current wave of platform capitalism – enlisting everyone and everything in automated processes of self-exploitation – is ushering in a new era of glorious discovery, entrepreneurialism and recklessness. This relentless evocation of the frontier spirit testifies to the continuing prevalence and dominance of colonial mindsets shaped by centuries of an ever closer entanglement of colonialism and capitalism. The underlying paradigms of expansion, extraction and abstraction are not just continuing to govern global power relations but have begun to encroach on 'other' spheres everywhere, on every scale and in every realm – from resource flows to political struggles, from cultural movements to urban communities, and from social relations to self-care.

Situated at the intersection of technology, race, capitalism and the urban, this two-day symposium seeks to address the complex challenges we face when trying to engage with these dynamics: are there ways to decolonise the multiple manifestations of platform capitalism? What are the conceptual challenges we face when dealing with a phenomenon that appears to be operating outside of colonial parameters and involve not only human actors as it seamlessly straddles analogue and virtual theatres? How can we move forward when the framework of decolonisation has itself become a target of exploitative and discriminatory appropriation?

Bringing together speakers from around the world, the symposium will respond to these urgencies through the lens of platform urbanism, which has emerged as one of the most 'pioneering' and contested sites of transformation. Key questions discussed will range from how platform urbanism not only perpetuates historical trajectories of colonialism but itself functions as a colonising device to how it creates new colonial frontiers and patterns, as for instance in the manipulation, denial and instrumentalisation of access, and to how alternative, self-initiated platforms might pave the way to more equitable futures.

PROGRAMME

17.00-19.00   **WELCOME**
by LYNN TURNER and ASTRID SCHMETTERLING (Co-Heads of Department)
and SCOTT WARK (public programme lead)

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Panel discussion with VYJAYANTHI RAO, SANDRO MEZZADRA, OFRI CNAANI,
RAVI SUNDARAM, TEDDY CRUZ, and FONNA FORMAN
chaired by PETER MÖRTENBÖCK and HELGE MOOSHAMMER

FRI 17 JAN 2025

10.30   *Doors open*

10.45   **INTRODUCTION** by PETER MÖRTENBÖCK and HELGE MOOSHAMMER

11.20   VYJAYANTHI RAO, Yale University
DECOLONIZATION BY DESIGN:
SHAPING THE NON-COLONIAL SELF ON A PLATFORM
chaired by HELGE MOOSHAMMER

12.10   SANDRO MEZZADRA, University of Bologna
LOGISTICS OF EXTRACTION:
OPERATIONS OF CAPITAL IN THE PLATFORMED CITY
chaired by LOUIS MORENO

13.00   *Lunch*

14.30   OFRI CNAANI, TU Wien
THE CONTACTLESS CONDITION:
SOMATIC KNOWLEDGE AND COLONIAL TECHNOLOGIES OF REACH
chaired by EMILY ROSAMUND

15.20   RAVI SUNDARAM, CSDS Delhi
NETWORK AESTHETICS AND POPULIST URBAN CIRCULATIONS
chaired by PETER MÖRTENBÖCK

16.10   *Coffee*

16.30   TEDDY CRUZ and FONNA FORMAN, UC San Diego
ECOSOCIAL PLATFORMS FOR SANCTUARY
chaired by EYAL WEIZMAN

17.30   **CLOSING PANEL**
with all PARTICIPANTS

16-17 JANUARY 2025   VISUAL CULTURES, GOLDSMITHS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

VYJAYANTHI RAO, Yale University

DECOLONIZATION BY DESIGN: SHAPING THE NON-COLONIAL SELF ON A PLATFORM

In this presentation, I explore the dynamics of colonial capitalism and its intimate relationship to infrastructure building and territorial expansion through enclosure. Design has been hand-in-glove with these practices and the habits of mind that they engender, including the division of the world into 'formal' and 'informal' environments. If decolonization involves, as Achille Mbembe has recently suggested, "disenclosure," what forms would that take? And what roles will platforms and connectivity - the incessant knitting together of forms into consumable and monetizable assets – play in the decolonization of infrastructure itself?

VYJAYANTHI V. RAO is an anthropologist, writer and curator, teaching at the Yale School of Architecture. Focusing on memory, heritage and the built environment, her work explores the intersections of violence, uncertainty and speculation through scholarly writing and fieldwork in India and the United States. In addition to fieldwork, her research draws on sound, image, mapping and collaborations with visual artists. She has published extensively on these subjects, co-curated major exhibitions for the Lisbon Architecture Triennale (2022) and the Center for Architecture in New York (2023) and participated as an artist in the Kochi Biennale (2016) and the Chicago Architecture Biennale (2023). She is also one of the Editors in Chief of the journal Public Culture (Duke University Press).

SANDRO MEZZADRA, University of Bologna

LOGISTICS OF EXTRACTION: OPERATIONS OF CAPITAL IN THE PLATFORMED CITY

The presentation will tackle the topic of the symposium by discussing continuities and discontinuities between data extractivism and colonial histories of extraction. A focus on platform capitalism and the logistical infrastructures that enable its operations will introduce an analysis of the main stakes and conflicts surrounding today's platformed city.

Sandro Mezzadra teaches political theory at the University of Bologna. He is adjunct Professor at the Institute for Culture and Society of the Western Sydney University and at the Center for Cultural Research and Development, Lingnan University, Hong Kong. With Brett Neilson he is the author of *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (2013), of *The Politics of Operations. Excavating Contemporary Capitalism* (2019), and of *The West and the Rest. Capital and Power in a Multipolar World* (2024).

OFRI CNAANI, TU Wien

THE CONTACTLESS CONDITION: SOMATIC KNOWLEDGE AND COLONIAL TECHNOLOGIES OF REACH

Contactless technologies have proliferated in urban environments, from the financial terrain of contactless payments to wearable computing devices, medical measuring tools, and travel cards. The talk will explore aspects of somatic knowledge in the age of expanding network spatiality through the framework of contactlessness—not merely as a technological solution but as an emerging living condition rooted in colonial ideology and adapted to align with the current techno-political environment.

OFRI CNAANI is an artist and researcher who works across performance and media. She is a visiting scholar at the Institute of Visual Culture, TU Wien, Austria and a research fellow at the international Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) at the University of Amsterdam. Her work has appeared at Tate Britain, UK; Venice Architecture Biennale; Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC; PS1/MoMA, NYC; Inhotim Institute, Brazil; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (MAC), Chile; Kiasma Museum, Helsinki; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna. In 2022 she completed a video with the International Space Station (ISS). Since 2021, Cnaani has co-organised Choreographic Devices, a three-day choreographic symposium at ICA, London.

RAVI SUNDARAM, CSDS Delhi

NETWORK AESTHETICS AND POPULIST URBAN CIRCULATIONS

By cannily deploying network aesthetics, right-wing populism in contemporary India synthesises two seemingly contradictory projects. If campaigns against Muslim urban spaces deploy the language of decolonisation, welfare delivery now works through state digital platforms and recursive loops of participation.

RAVI SUNDARAM is a Professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. He founded the well-known Sarai programme at the CSDS along with Ravi Vasudevan and the Raqs Media Collective. Sarai is one of India's best-known experimental and critical research sites. Sundaram is the author of *Pirate Modernity: Media Urbanism in Delhi* (2010) and edited *No Limits: Media Studies from India* (2015). He is a co-author of *Techno-Pharmacology* (2022). His current book project examines collective mobilisations and populist aesthetics in the 21st century.

TEDDY CRUZ & **FONNA FORMAN**, UCSD

ECOSOCIAL PLATFORMS FOR SANCTUARY

In this presentation we will talk about the network of sanctuary spaces for nature and people we have built with communities across the US-Mexico border over the years.

TEDDY CRUZ (MDes Harvard University) is a Professor of Public Culture and Urbanization in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD).

FONNA FORMAN (PhD University of Chicago) is a Professor of Political Theory at the University of California, San Diego and Founding Director of the UCSD Center on Global Justice.

Together they lead Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman, a research-based urban and architectural design practice at the University of California, San Diego, investigating borders and migration, informal urbanization, emergency housing, bioregional climate resilience, civic infrastructure and public culture.

CONVENORS

PETER MÖRTENBÖCK & **HELGE MOOSHAMMER**, Goldsmiths, University of London / TU Wien

PETER MÖRTENBÖCK is Professor of Visual Culture at the TU Wien, founding Co-Director of the Centre for Global Architecture, and Research Fellow at Goldsmiths College, University of London. His current research is focused on the architecture of the political community and the economisation of the city, as well as the global use of raw materials, urban infrastructures and new data publics.

HELGE MOOSHAMMER is an architect, author and curator. He conducts urban and cultural research in the Department of Visual Culture at the TU Wien, is founding Co-Director of the Centre for Global Architecture, and Research Fellow at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He has initiated and directed numerous international research projects focusing on issues relating to (post)capitalist urban economics and urban informality.

Together, they curated the Austrian Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2021. Their most recent book publications include *Data Publics: Public Plurality in an Era of Data Determinacy* (2020), *Platform Urbanism and Its Discontents* (2021) and *In/formal Marketplaces: Experiments with Urban Reconfiguration* (2023). They are currently working on the forthcoming monograph *Building Capital: Urban Speculation and the Architecture of Finance*.

This symposium is part of the research project **PLATFORMED CITY: A PATTERN LANGUAGE OF PLATFPORM URBANISM** (2022-2026) funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF): AR 633.

Data technologies and platform services have massively changed the way we live in cities today. Participation in fundamental aspects of urban life is increasingly becoming contingent on access to digital platforms. We are now seeing a small number of platform companies monopolizing the benefits of digital connectivity and wielding unprecedented control over people's lives. The project contrasts this development with the thesis that the rise of platform industries not only affects the organization of urban life, i.e. changes the "software" of cities, but also has far-reaching effects on the material design of urban spaces, i.e. on the "hardware" of cities. If data collection and pattern recognition are at the center of these processes, could not a visual language based on spatial patterns be a means of public discussion of these new urban morphologies?

On the basis of extensive case studies from around the world, the project develops a multiscalar language of typological form. In this way, the project aims to critically expand the existing understanding of the effects of digital technologies on our societies today. Beyond the immediate scope of digital technologies and our interaction with them, it focuses on the emergence of new spatial typologies that are used to set up and enable platform-controlled environments. The multiscalar pattern language developed in the project is intended to provide citizens with an innovative and accessible visual vocabulary to challenge the exclusionary effects of platform urbanism and bring out the strengths of civic engagement in urban design.

For further details, please see
global-architecture.org

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