Ecologies of decay (London, 16-17 Jun 22)

School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL, London, Jun 16–17, 2022
Deadline: May 7, 2022

Dimitra Gkitsa

Ecologies of decay: Modern ruination in the global (post)socialist peripheries

The post-socialist reality in East Europe profoundly changed the rural and urban settlements. Abandoned factories, vacant villages, unfinished housing projects, decline and abandonment are some common threads that appear in post-socialist rural and urban landscapes. De-industrialisation and the post-1990s capitalist rules left small towns and villages empty and decayed. In the former socialist countries of Africa, Latin America, and south-east Asia rural and urban decline has also been linked with the history of colonial expansion, the destruction of nature, and racial violence. While some communities have embraced spatial regeneration trends, others remain ruined, marginalised, and declined. This project takes ruination both as a metaphor and as an actual reality to theorise the social and political transformations that have occurred in the global peripheries at the aftermath of socialist modernity. The visual and material state of ruination reflects both the end of the socialist modernity and the failed promises for prosperity which never came with the transition to global capitalism.

Ruins are concrete spaces of abandonment, forgotten material remnants, decayed sites and objects from another past. Here, abandonment is clearly not something momentary that occurred in a specific temporal framework but rather a continuing process – a ruin always in the making which can offer a framework to understand the very process of decay. Ruins can also be a critical position and standpoint to capture the functioning and withering of discourses and experiences located on the margins and the back alleys of mainstream modernity. This research symposium aims to open a critical discussion on the entanglements of decay, bringing in closer proximity the local and the global post-socialist peripheries.

How was the socialist modernity and its ideology materialised in the global rural and urban territories? What are the social and political transformations that have occurred in the post-socialist villages and towns after socialist projects? In what ways can the material and visual ruination of rural spaces capture the collective memories of local communities?

Reflecting on the above question the conference will bring together practitioners, activists, artists, architects, community organisers, and researchers from all disciplines who work with any aspects of modern ruination and rural/urban decline. Themes and topics of discussion during the conference include, but are not limited to, the following:

- rural and/or urban decline
- visual art practices and rural/urban decline

- visual and material cultures of modern ruins
- socialism and post-socialism in global peripheries
- transformations of rural architecture and landscape
- collective memory
- post-industrialism and de-industrialisation
- progress, utopias, modernity and its aftermath
- aspects of labour
- decolonisation

If you are interested in submitting a paper, please send a 250-word abstract and a short biographical note to Dimitra Gkitsa at d.gkitsa@ucl.ac.uk by 7 May 2022. Decisions on the papers will be announced on the 13 May 2022.

The conference will take place in person at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London. There is no registration fee. The conference does not cover travel or accommodation expenses.

Confirmed keynote contributions:
Dace Dzenovska, Associate Professor in the Anthropology of Migration, School of Anthropology and Museum, University of Oxford
Deana Jovanović, Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Utrecht University
Larisa Kurtović, Associate Professor of Anthropology, School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies, University of Ottawa

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