Socialist Eco-Aesthetics (Dresden, 4-6 Jun 25)

Technische Universität Dresden, Jun 4–06, 2025
Deadline: Mar 2, 2025

Marie Meyerding

Socialist Eco-Aesthetics: Networks of Art and Ecology in the ‘Eastern Bloc’.

Artists from the diverse socialist states—often grouped together as the ‘Eastern Bloc’—addressed the increasingly urgent ecological issues of their time. Just as environmental problems cross borders, artists were connected not only across the firm boundaries of the socialist countries, but also across the so-called Iron Curtain. At a time when the planetary dimensions of the environmental crisis were being recognised for the first time, artists joined forces to engage with their natural environment in new and critical ways.

This workshop examines the systems in which artists, activists, governments and agents in the political and cultural sphere addressed ecological issues through art under socialism. Which artistic media have been used to convey ecological critique of state-planned economic activity including extractivism, nuclear power and agricultural industries? In what ways have artists networked to inform, express and promote ecological issues? Which state-sanctioned campaigns, exhibitions or programmes in the ‘Eastern Bloc’ have focused on environmental problems? What focal points existed in national ecology debates and the resulting artistic engagements, such as forest dieback in the GDR? Furthermore, what might be learned from the way in which governments and individuals have dealt with art on local and global environmental issues for dealing with today’s climate crisis?

Proposals are invited for 20-minute papers that engage with topics within and beyond the realms of transnational art history and eco-critical art theory. In addition to early career to senior academics, artists are also invited to present their research-based practice. Submissions should seek to advance interdisciplinary discussions on the intersections of art and ecology under socialism. Cross-border perspectives are particularly encouraged, especially those that illuminate the interactions and negotiations between individuals and institutions on art and ecology across state socialisms in Central and Eastern Europe, East Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Potential topics may include, but are not limited to:
- Environmental histories of the ‘Eastern Bloc’ and its artistic production, distribution and reception practices.
- Art theoretical approaches to eco-socialism.
- The dissemination of ecological information and criticism through artistic and activist networks under socialism.
- Art practices in global socialisms through the lens of eco-feminisms and queer ecologies.

- Histories of censorship, surveillance and state interference in art and environmental movements during Cold War politics.

This workshop is designed as a writing seminar. Over three days, there will be guided writing and exchange formats lasting several hours, in which the researchers will continue to work on their papers, which will be presented and discussed together. A confirmed keynote lecture by Maja and Reuben Fowkes is planned for the first evening, followed by joint visits to the OSTRALE Biennale and the university's art collection on the second and third day. By the end of the workshop, further developed papers should be available, which will be revised in the following months and then jointly published as a special issue in a peer-reviewed journal.

Please send a 250-word abstract and a short biography in one PDF to:
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Deadline for submissions: Sunday 2 March 2025.

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