

Specters of Architecture (Paris 20–21 May 26)

Paris, May 20–21, 2026

Deadline: Dec 15, 2025

Can Onaner

Specters of Architecture: The Negative Voices of the Project.

The International Study Days “Specters of Architecture: The Negative Voices of the Project”, organized by LIAT and EVCAU, will take place on May 20 and 21, 2026, at ENSA Paris-Val de Seine, Université Paris Cité, and ENSA Paris-Malaquais - PSL.

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Responses to the call for contributions may come from various disciplines and should position themselves primarily within one of the four research avenues outlined below. Submissions should present potential case studies and clearly state the stakes of the proposed intervention.

Proposals may be written in French or English. Submissions must include:

- Title (max. 100 characters)
- Subtitle (max. 150 characters)
- Author information (Full name, university affiliation, email address)
- Short biography (max. 150 words)
- Abstract text (max. 1,000 words)
- Keywords (max. 3)
- Bibliographic references (max. 3)
- Submissions should be sent to spectres.architecture@gmail.com by December 15, 2025.

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Architecture and infrastructures are inhabited by specters, which are traces of what has been, but also of what could have been, or what may one day come to be. We propose to read them through the lens of these specters, by paying as much attention to absences as to presences. This symptomatic approach encourages a focus on manifestations of projects, narratives, buildings, and infrastructures that have been imperfectly forgotten.

Today we think about repair before construction. Our attention is directed toward what is vulnerable, to care for wounds—those of the living as well as those of buildings. We accept the negativity of destruction and abandonment before envisioning the positive act of the project. The principle of obsolescence is now integrated; our sensitivity to traces is sharper than ever. The risk of this reparative gaze lies in healing wounds without questioning them, covering traces without understanding them. Beyond visible traces and wounds, there exist negative, invisible, and spectral architectures and infrastructures: a disappeared building that leaves no trace but whose ghostly image persists; a building that contains the specters of other vanished buildings and lives; architecture whose construction never took place except in the imagination of architects and their

discipline.

How can we designate these negative architectures and infrastructures when they are not visible or expressed as clearly as a destroyed object? How can we heal or repair where symptoms have not been diagnosed, where they have been suppressed or forgotten? How can we act when our attention to the vulnerability of buildings and their inhabitants provides no clear signs, but manifests in ambiguous, sometimes contradictory, ways?

One can say that an architecture is spectral under certain conditions. These conditions imply different definitions of the notion of a specter in relation to architecture. We have chosen to distinguish four, which we propose as research avenues for these study days:

1. Hauntology: the aesthetic register and mediums of haunting

Here architecture is the support of a collective imagination haunted by specters, ghosts, and other revenants. It constitutes an aesthetic register comparable to other arts such as literature, cinema, or music, and serves as a spectral technical and cultural device that reveals or records different forms of revenance, akin to spirit photography or, more recently, to liminal spaces on the internet. Our aim here is to constitute a corpus of projects, architectures, infrastructures, or more broadly, places responding to the aesthetic and technical dimensions of hauntology, in connection with other fields of artistic production.

2. Haunted Places: Architecture and Infrastructure as Symptom

Here architecture and infrastructure, as material edifices, contain the specters of events (often traumatic) of which they were the framework, sometimes the instrument, and thus may become the support of testimonies. The corpus here would comprise places where events have left marks on individual and collective memories— spaces where traces of the event are barely visible, where monuments have not intervened to identify the history to be remembered, and where troubling symptoms have not been entirely erased nor covered by reassuring symbols.

3. Mourning: Inheriting without Heritage

Here inherited architecture and infrastructure are no longer solely patrimonialized but call for a process of mourning and acceptance of specters, opening the way to a new relationship to heritage understood, notably, as negative commons. The corpus we wish to assemble would consist of remnants engaging narratives and relations to ordinary things (architectures, infrastructures, territories) that disappear or persist despite of our refusal to inherit them. The invoked narratives will allow sharing of practices (ritual, funerary) that accompany the becoming-specter of things.

4. Reflexive Nostalgias: The Specter as Project

Here, as a profession and discipline with a charged history, architecture is haunted by its own past—including the persistent history of modernity and its multiple nostalgic returns—and yet continues to seek to make projects from its specters. Between historical analysis, aesthetic reading, and psychological decryption of the creative process, this section's corpus allows questioning the possibility for the architect to make projects with their specters, whether drawn from architectural history, broader cultural history, or the biography of the authors.

The Curation committee

Gilles Delalex, Professor (ENSAPM – LIAT)

Bérénice Gaussuin, Associate Professor (ENSAPM – LIAT)

ArtHist.net

Can Onaner, Professor (ENSAPVS – EVCAU)

Reference:

CFP: Specters of Architecture (Paris 20-21 May 26). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 23, 2025 (accessed Apr 4, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/51200>>.