

Re-imagining Rurality

Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment
University of Westminster, London, UK

27th + 28th February 2015

Call for papers + exhibition pieces.



(London 2012 opening ceremony detail- image source: gorgeoux)

A R E N A

**UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER**



Image: Stutio Associato Bernado Secchi Paola Vigano: Le Grand Paris, programmatic sections.

Contents:

Page 3	Outline / Key dates
Page 4 + 5	Conference themes and questions
Page 5	Conference format
Page 6	Abstract submission / costs
Page 7	Organisers / Scientific committee
Page 8	Contacts / links

OUTLINE

In 2013 the inaugural Rurality Network conference¹ succeeded in bringing academics and practitioners from architecture and the built environment into contact with the work of internationally respected agronomers, environmentalists and geographers researching rural environments and their particular kinds of social occupation. The emphasis of this second rurality conference is upon the representations and designs of rural space and culture and how they relate to rural experiences.

Our interest is not only in places and cultures outside the city; the location and meaning of rurality is not clear cut. After all many contemporary spatial types with rural traits transgress perceived urban-rural divisions, such as urban gypsy settlements, city farms, nature parks and so on. Similarly many countryside landscapes and villages are occupied as extensions to urban lifestyles. And in any case, as Marc Mormont surmised, the rural '...is a category of thought'² or as Simon Schama put it 'Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood, water and rock'.³

Re-imagining Rurality invites spatial practitioners, writers, artists and others whose work relates to the built / cultivated environment to re-consider ideas of rurality by interrogating the representations, designs and cultural values of new and traditional rural landscapes and settlement forms. It asks what the role of creative practice should be in constructing, de-constructing, or maintaining rurality.

¹ held at the Western Switzerland University of Applied Sciences, Fribourg college of architecture, spring 2013

² Marc Mormont *Who is Rural? or, How to be Rural: Towards a Sociology of the Rural*, in Marsden, Lowe and Whatmore (eds) *Rural Restructuring* (London: David Fulton Publishers 1990) pp.21-44

³ Simon Schama *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Harper Collins 1995) p.61

KEY DATES:

Submission of abstracts	JULY 20 2014
Notification of acceptance	SEPTEMBER 15 2014
Registration opens	SEPTEMBER 2014
Conference	27 + 28 FEBRUARY 2015



Drawing from Maurice Sendak's 'Where the Wild Things Are'.

This conference is supported by ARENA (architectural research network), the Rurality network and the Expanded Territories Research group at the University of Westminster.

CONFERENCE THEMES AND QUESTIONS



(Image: MST Landless Workers Movement. Photo by Sebastiao Selgado)

Villagers, farmers, wanderers, wild things.

Rurality now signifies social and environmental change as much as tradition and stability. About 5 years ago, according to UN statistics, the world's urban population surpassed its rural population for the first time. By 2050, they say that 7 out of 10 people in the world will live in cities. What values and ideals are being lost and gained through rurality's transformations? What roles do designers and artists have in representing and shaping contemporary rural experiences?

What is actually meant by rurality today? Academics and practitioners argue that new terms, beyond urban-rural dichotomies, are needed to describe rurality's shifting and highly contested meanings. Outmoded too, it seems, is the city's colonising gaze with respect to its hinterlands; a nearby farm is as likely to be feeding a faraway country as the nearest city. This conference aims to explore the contemporary rural condition, and how it is represented, designed and perceived within current spatial and creative practices. It also aims to gain new insights into previous dialogues with rurality within modern arts and spatial practices.

The conference will take place in London, a city whose pre-occupation with concepts of rurality is evident in its picturesque squares, parks and suburban gardens. Its protected green belt, a milestone of planning history, is threatened by new exploitations, such as shale gas fracking and housing development. To what extent should a city like London re-think its relationship with rurality? What and who is the countryside for?

A familiar design strategy for architects, urbanists and other spatial practitioners now, is an urban-rural conflation or collision, wherein aspects of rurality are absorbed by the city or vice versa, for example in designs that re-programme urban spaces to grow food and offer wildlife habitats or in landscape urbanism projects that mingle, fragment or diffuse city forms and spaces with rural ones, occasionally replacing picturesque ideals with those of production, community, process and seasonality.

According to Castells, the aftermath of the banking crisis of 2007-8 intensified interest in alternative economics and politics, particularly amongst those hit hard by austerity measures. In these circumstances alternative farming and marketing initiatives, especially those on the margins or beyond the usual economic systems, seem to have gathered some momentum. And a heightened rural-urban antithesis seems implicit in the aesthetics of contemporary protests such as the Occupy movement's camps in city centres or anti-fracking protests in the countryside.

On the other hand, images of rurality are also being utilised in the architecture of the corporate giants of the digital age; new architectural designs for the headquarters of Facebook, Apple, Amazon and Google all very prominently feature idealised naturalistic landscapes in hi-tech bubbles, courtyards and roofscapes. We are accustomed to neo vernacular out of town supermarkets, but how much more could architecture and corporate culture learn from a deeper engagement with the realities of rural societies, ideals and processes?

A growing reciprocity between local communities and numerous arts and spatial practitioners reflects desires on the part of the latter to be part of collective movements that are larger than isolated individual practices. The frequently interdisciplinary nature of such interactions indicates an agency beyond disciplinary boundaries. But how much are new co-operative practitioners learning from established, time worn rural cultures and communities?

What can spatial practitioners learn from rural mobilities? From pilgrimages, from migrant rural workers or gypsies, or from the walks of artists and writers? In her discussion of historic battles between English ramblers and land owners, Rebecca Solnit said that walking '...sews together the land that ownership tears apart...'. Can rural mobilities suggest new ways of conceptualising of territories and terrains?

How deeply do representations of rurality in popular culture shape our experiences of it? How much are we affected, for example, by the stories read to us by our parents that were set in rural locations? Stories like 'Where the Wild Things Are', which transformed suburban bedrooms into wild jungles, or for that matter, by recent rural horror films?

Cedric Price's 'boiled, fried and scrambled' egg/city diagram neatly suggested that most cities no longer conform to the traditional hierarchy that places agriculture beyond the city walls and wilderness beyond that. Real and conceptual boundaries have been re-arranged, fragmented or blurred through processes such as the globalisation of food chains, new forms of urban agriculture and resurgences of old ones (such as allotment gardens). Cities may see more wilderness up close too, if 're-wilding' advocates like George Monbiot are successful.

Modern architecture has had a diverse and continual dialogue with rurality; obvious examples include Wright's Broadacre City, Branzi's Farmscape, Le Corbusier's 'Radiant Farm' and the experimental landscapes of Woodstock inspired radicals like Archigram. How much can this diverse history inform contemporary spatial practices?

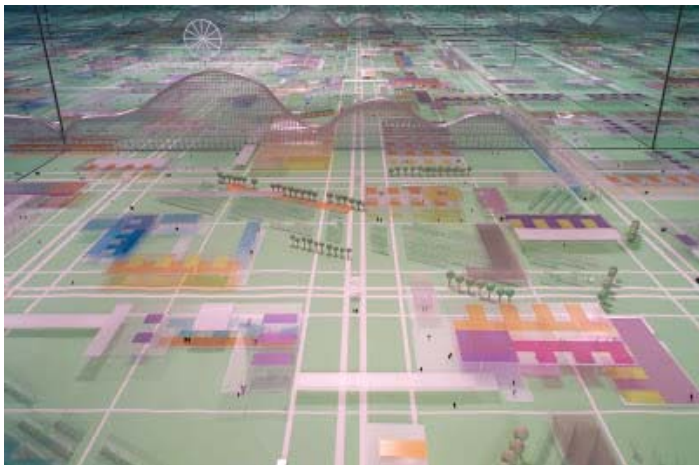


Image: [Lapo Lani](#), [Andrea Branzi](#), [Ernesto Bartolini](#), Masterplan Strijp Philipps in Eindhoven © Lapo Lani, All Rights Reserved).

Conference format

Papers, posters and exhibits are invited on any aspect of the conference themes. These will, very loosely, be gathered under the headings of 'villagers', 'farmers', 'wanderers' and 'wild things'. Topics may include but are not limited to the following:

('Villagers')

- New rural settlement formations
- The role of design and art (including representations in popular culture) in forming, transforming or preserving rural communities.
- Rural vernacular culture and design (contemporary and traditional)

('Farmers')

- Global food economics and local rural transformations.
- New forms of agricultural practice and creative practice.
- Rural vernacular cultivation (contemporary and traditional).

('Wanderers')

- Rural mobilities and migrations.
- Walking and the arts, philosophy and politics.
- Rurality and interdisciplinary practice.

('Wild things')

- Rurality and cultural experimentation and resistance.
- Rurality and DIY culture.
- New forms of human co-existence with 'wild' nature.

The two main conference days (27 + 28 Feb) will each have at least 2 parallel panels consisting primarily of 20 minute presentations of accepted papers. These will be grouped into sessions that relate to the topic headings and numbers indicated above. In addition there will be talks from invited speakers, plenary discussions and possibly presentations and workshops related to exhibition works. At the end of each of these 2 days there will be a keynote lecture.

We are also exploring the possibility of lectures, workshops and / or guided walks preceding and following the conference. More detailed information will be made available at a later date. We invite informal proposals and ideas for workshops and plenary sessions which could be part of this conference or linked to it.

Abstract submissions

Conference papers:

Please send a 300 word (maximum) abstract, plus, on a separate sheet, your name, position and institutional affiliation to:

re-imaginingrurality@westminster.ac.uk

Abstracts and proposals will be double-blind peer reviewed by our international scientific committee.

Exhibits/posters:

A modest Re-imagining Rurality exhibition is planned to coincide with the conference. Artists, architects, visual and spatial practitioners of all kinds are invited to present work relating to the themes of the conference. The exhibition will be mostly be hung/projected on a limited amount of white wall space, so it is envisaged primarily, but not exclusively, as an exhibition of photographs, design projects and art in all forms of two dimensional media. However the conference organisers also welcome submissions for proposals in other formats such as short films. Abstracts should be accompanied by short film clips or images which demonstrate the visual/spatial content of the proposal. As a rough guide we envisage a maximum of about 1.5 width and 2.5m height of wall space to be available to each exhibitor. We hope to display approximately 12-15 exhibits along 1 wall and 24 framed A1 posters on the opposite.

An A1 poster within the exhibition may be an illustrated summary of a project or a body of work or research that works within the themes of the conference. Proposals for posters may be submitted as independent works or to complement a paper presentation in the conference, and may also be submitted by those unable to attend the conference in person.

Conference Publications

Our aim will be to publish a refereed book of a selection of papers and exhibits and/or to provide material for an issue of a refereed journal.



Anti fracking protester's caravan. Image source: Matthew Wilkinson

Conference costs:

Full conference:

Early bird: £180 (until January 16 2015)

Late booking £200 (after January 16 2015)

One day only:

Early bird: £90 per day (until January 16 2015)

Late booking £100 per day (after January 16 2015)

Independent artists and students:

£100 (full conference)

£50 (one day only)

Organisers:

Ben Stringer, Senior Lecturer, Dept of Architecture, Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment (FABE), University of Westminster (UoW). Email: b.stringer@westminster.ac.uk

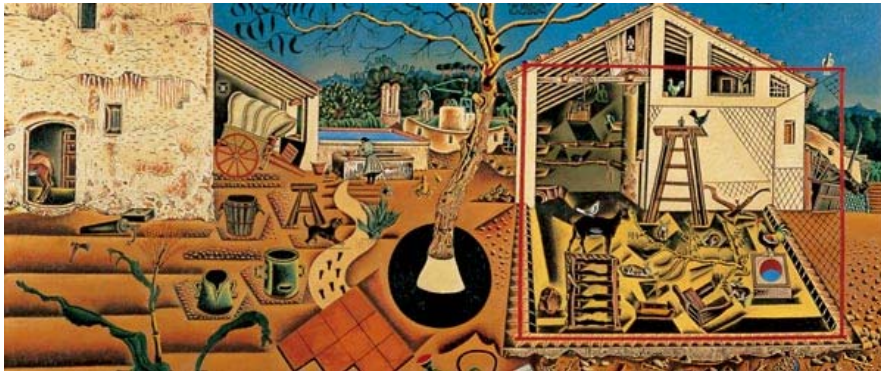
Dr. Krystallia Kamvasinou, Leverhulme Research Fellow, FABE, UoW. Email: kamvask@westminster.ac.uk

Dr. Gwyn Lloyd Jones, Architect and recently graduated UoW Ph.D student. Email: gwyn.lloyd.jones@my.westminster.ac.uk

Sarah Milne, Researcher and Ph.D student at FABE, UoW. Email sarah.milne@my.westminster.ac.uk

Colette Davis, Senior School Administrator, FABE, UoW, Email: C.Davis@westminster.ac.uk

Andy Colley, UoW (FABE) Faculty Events Coordinator. Email: A.Colley@westminster.ac.uk



Joan Miro 'The Farm'

Scientific Committee:

Prof. Lindsay Bremner, University of Westminster

Dr. Helen Farrell, University of Westminster

Dr. Davide Deriu, University of Westminster

Prof. Kate Heron, University of Westminster

Prof. Kerstin Mey, University of Westminster

Prof. Murray Fraser, University College London

Jane McAllister, London Metropolitan University

Sophia Meeres, University College Dublin

Prof. Malcolm Miles, Plymouth University

Prof. Kelly Shannon, AHO Oslo and Leuven University

Dr. Eugenie Shinkle, University of Westminster

Dominic Stevens, University College Dublin

Prof. Pieter Versteegh, Ecole d'ingénieurs et d'architectes de Fribourg

Dr. Marcel Vellinga, Oxford Brookes University

Prof. Paola Viganò, IUAV Venice

Dr Ronald Wall, Erasmus University

Dr. Robin Wilson, University College London

Dr. Chris Younes, ENSACF Clermont-Ferrand

Others to be confirmed.

Speakers

Kathrin Böhm

Kathrin Böhm is an artist and founding member of the London based art and architecture collective [public works](#) and the pan-european artist initiative [myvillages.org](#)

Professor George McKay

George McKay is Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Salford, director of the Communication, Cultural and Media Studies Research Centre (CCM) and Connected Communities Leadership Fellow for the AHRC. He is also a musician and writer. His publications include the books 'Senseless Acts of Beauty' and 'Radical Gardening'.

Rural Urban Framework

RUF are a team of Hong Kong University based architects and academics working within Chinese village contexts. They are headed by Joshua Bolchover and John Lin who are also the authors of 'Rural Urban Framework: Transforming the Chinese Countryside'.

Dr Marcel Vellinga

Marcel Vellinga is Reader in Anthropology of Architecture at Oxford Brookes University. His publications include the Atlas of Vernacular Architecture of the World *and* Consuming Architecture: On the Occupation, Appropriation and Interpretation of Buildings.

Prof. Paola Viganò, *Architect and Urban Planner, Professor in Urbanism at IUAV Venice. Her many published texts include 'La Ville Poreuse', co-authored with Bernado Secchi, with whom she also founded the Milan based practice Studio.*

Professor Michael Woods

Michael Woods is a Professor of Human Geography at Aberystwyth University, his publications include 'Rural' and 'Rural Geography: Processes, Responses and Experiences in Rural Restructuring'. He is also editor of the Journal of Rural Studies.

Others to be confirmed

Contacts

If you have any queries please email the organisers at: re-imaginingrurality@westminster.ac.uk

External links

Arena (Architecture Research Network)
www.arena-architecture.eu

Rurality Network www.eaae.be/web

Expanded Territories at University of Westminster
<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/expanded-territories>



Thanet Earth, the UK's biggest greenhouse, photo: Giles Price/Telegraph

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