

Unmoored Cities
Radical Urban Futures and Climate Catastrophes

25 May 2018
10.00 — 18.00

UCL Urban Laboratory
at The Bartlett
22 Gordon Street
London WC1H 0QB



Tsunehisa Kimura, *Visual Scandals by Photomontage* (1979)

As countless studies have demonstrated, cities are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Indeed, many of the world's cities are at risk of becoming 'unmoored', whether literally sunk beneath rising sea waters or tidal rivers or forced to relocate entirely. Such possible urban futures challenge our imaginations to think through the physical, social and cultural consequences of climate change; yet, on the whole, the current literature on climate change and cities focuses on the mitigation of rather than adaptation to those consequences.

This symposium will redress this by exploring imaginative modes of thinking in relation to future cities and climate change, asking how we might think through radical and utopian possibilities for unmoored cities. How will cities continue to thrive if they are submerged; will they float or even lift off into the air; and what might it mean to move a city? Drawing together speakers from a wide range of disciplines — anthropology, architecture, art, fiction, and geography — this symposium explores multiple urban imaginaries that engage with future cities and climate change. The result will be to challenge and expand the narrow range of possibilities that currently characterise approaches to the subject.

Unmoored Cities is organised by Paul Dobraszczyk and UCL Urban Laboratory, with Ben Campkin, Barbara Penner, Robin Wilson, and financial support from the Architecture Projects Fund of The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL.

#UnmooredCities @UCLurbanlab

Programme

10.00–10.10 *Introduction by Paul Dobraszczyk*

10.10–11.05 *Opening lecture*
CJ Lim, 'Science fiction or urban future?'
Chair: Paul Dobraszczyk

'Science fiction or urban future?' explores the potential of climate change-related multi-use infrastructures that address the threats and the opportunities, and the fundamental human requirements to protect, to provide and to participate. The stimulus for the research derives from postulated scenarios and processes gleaned from science fiction and futurology as well as current body of scientific knowledge regarding changing environmental impacts on cities. Science fiction is interdisciplinary by nature, aggregates the past and present, and evaluates both lay opinions and professional strategies in an attempt to develop foresight and to map possible futures.

CJ Lim

CJ Lim is the Professor of Architecture and Urbanism at The Bartlett, UCL and the founder of Studio 8 Architects. His teaching and designs focus on multi-disciplinary innovative interpretations of social, political, and environmental sustainability programs. He is the recipient

of the Royal Academy of Arts London 'Grand Architecture Prize'. He has authored 12 books including *Virtually Venice* (2006), *Smartcities + Eco-warriors* (2010), *Short Stories: London in two-and-a-half dimensions* (2011), *Food City* (2014), and *Inhabitable Infrastructures: Science fiction or urban future?* (2017).

11.05–11.15 *Break*

11.15–12.45 *SUNKEN CITIES*

Maggie Gee 'Bursting the City Walls: Bombs and Beasts'

As they were rowed through the drowned kingdom, they saw the beauty and the havoc. The river stretched out like a golden flood-plain...' What can novelists contribute to the debate about the future of cities? I have been writing parables about climate change since 1990 (*Where are the Snows*, new edn. Telegram) and mentioning it in my work since 1985 (*Light Years*, new edn. Telegram). Writers are lucky to live partly in imaginary spaces where we can unmoor ourselves from the everyday pressures that turn city life into a myopic survival exercise. My apocalyptic novel *The Flood* (Telegram, 2004) imagines the submergence of an imaginary city a little like London by months of rain. Its inhabitants are lulled into complacent passivity by the slow pace of change; in the end disaster comes more suddenly than anyone had guessed. By telling stories about how civilisations destroy themselves, perhaps writers can help give more urgency to thoughts about different human futures; and *The Flood* slips in some utopian thoughts at the end.

Maggie Gee

Maggie Gee has been writing about climate change since her novel *Light Years* (1985); other novels focused on climate change are *Where Are the Snows*, *The Ice People*, and *The Flood*. She has also written a collection of short stories, *The Blue*, and a writer's memoir, *My Animal Life* (2010). She was the first woman to chair the Council of the Royal Society of Literature. Her most recent novel

is *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* (2014) and her novel-in-progress features Neanderthals forced down into Gibraltar by a cooling world. Maggie has judged many prizes including the Booker and has been shortlisted for the Orange Prize and the International IMPAC award. Her books have been translated into 14 languages; in 2012 an international conference about her writing was held at St Andrews, and in the same year she was awarded the OBE.

Rachel Armstrong 'Living Infrastructure'

Our present built environment is a legacy of the fossil fuel industry. It provides inappropriate contexts for buildings of the future, since its existing systems are neither fit for purpose, nor consistent with, a long-term vision of a complete transition from an industrial to an ecological era. This does not mean we need to submit to its dominance, wallpaper over its noxious effects, or accept accelerationist collapse. Instead, we can fundamentally change the paradigm for human development. This radical shift in our present dependency on 'dead' fossil fuels can be achieved by replacing combustion engines with 'living' metabolisms. Using rich complex chemistries, these processes produce energy without being consumed by the process. A qualitative shift away from the toxic side effects of fossil fuel combustion is possible by replacing the combustion engine with metabolic machines that marks, and goes beyond the 'clean' energy provision of renewables like wind and solar energy. Underpinning this anticipated urban transformation is a radical scientific move away from the central dogma of gene-centric thinking in biotechnological innovation, which heralds a shift in thinking towards the realm of metabolism as the fundamental units for engineering and design, with critical implications for the way we inhabit and make our living spaces. Metabolisms bring a whole new dimension to the necessary toolsets for the design and construction of spaces. They are inherently coupled to material transformation, so in producing energy, they also convert substances from one state to another. We can strategically interact with their portfolio of processes through advanced biotechnological interfaces and make use of their by-products by 'programming' metabolic networks, using metabolic apps that interact with genes, rather than being 'dominated' by them. Indeed, they seek allegiances with alternative toolsets that are embedded in a highly contingent material process, which view decision-making as a set of linked material events that can be engaged and altered through understanding the world (including our cities) as a living body. This suggests, in turn, that we will develop other ways of inhabiting our cities in future; to inhabit an environment that might be described as performative, for example, we might appropriately draw on the insights of the performing arts. Impacts of this process can be interrogated with the advent of 'living bricks' which are being developed as part of the Living Architecture FET Open H2020 project.

Rachel Armstrong

Rachel Armstrong is Professor of Experimental Architecture at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University. She is a Rising Waters II Fellow with the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation (April-May 2016), TWOTY futurist 2015, Fellow of the British

Interplanetary Society and a 2010 Senior TED Fellow. She takes an alternative approach to environmental design that couples the computational properties of the natural world with the productivity of soils. She calls the synthesis that occurs between these systems and their inhabitants "living" architecture.

Viktoria Walldin 'How to move a city ... and more: An anthropologist among architects'

Viktoria has been involved in one of the world's most complex and fascinating architectural assignments: the urban transformation of Kiruna. From the cavernous jaws of the nearby mine, slowly devouring the surrounding land area, the project requires moving the entirety of Sweden's northernmost city, and all its 20,000 inhabitants. As a partner at White Arkitekter, Viktoria holds a unique position as a social anthropologist among architects. The experience of growing up in a Million Program housing project in Stockholm has specifically engaged her in questions of social aspects of architecture and urban planning.

Viktoria Walldin

Viktoria Walldin is a social anthropologist, an expert on social sustainability and partner at one of Scandinavia's leading architect firms White Arkitekter. Performing interviews with residents, collecting and analysing data on experiences, values and behaviours, Viktoria widens the

understanding of social aspects of urban development. Working closely with architects, the understanding informs and has measurable impact on the development process.

Dean Sully *Sunken Cities Chair*

Dean Sully

Dr Dean Sully is Senior Lecturer in Conservation at UCL's Institute of Archaeology where he co-ordinates the MSc in Conservation for Archaeology and Museums, as well as co-coordinator for the Curating the City research cluster within the Centre for Critical Heritage Studies (CCHS). He studied conservation and gained his PhD at UCL and has worked as a practicing conservator for the National Heritage Board (Singapore), the Museum of London, The British Museum, and Monmouthshire District Council Museum's Service. Since 2001, he has been the National Trust's Conservation Advisor for Archaeological Artefacts.

His research examines conservation as critical heritage practice. This advocates for a shift in conservation practice from a specialist technical service aimed at preserving heritage, to an innovative process in the creation of the world. This enables heritage conservation to address the social issues of the present in making a humane future, rather than merely seeking to fix the past. This investigates new understandings of conservation practice, by prioritising the relationships between people, places, and objects as the primary responsibility of conserving heritage.

12.45–13.45

Lunch Lunch will not be provided, but there are a wide range of cafés and restaurants located close to the conference venue.

13.45–15.00 *AIRBORNE CITIES*

Thandi Loewenson 'Digging down and dreaming up: stories from cities on the fringe'

This paper considers two cities - Mailo and Melencolia - built on unstable fringe terrains and shifting between reality and fiction. Instability is a key dimension of both cities; manifesting as a geological and climatic condition, through the architectural and urban scale responses of their citizens and as a design methodology in their creation. In both cities, what constitutes the ground and the grounded is up for debate. Unpredictable terrains of indeterminate porosity have provoked architectures and instruments of excavation and flight, integral to understanding the success of life in each. In digging down and dreaming up, the cities' residents have devised ways of generating energy, resources and means of collective organisation to meet the challenges of their precarious environments.

Using field notes developed in the pursuit of Mailo and Melencolia, I consider how these fictional landscapes and their architectures trigger new ways of thinking about present urban conditions. A third city - Lusaka - situated on the speculative periphery of a global financial market that capitalizes on the country's mineral wealth, is the site of a series of designed interactions between the realms of the fictional and the real. Using drawings, performance and artefact to stage sites, scenes and characters from Mailo in Lusaka, I explore how the instability of the fictional offers potential to reimagine more secure, equitable futures in the real.

Thandi Loewenson

Thandi is an architectural designer/researcher who operates through design, fiction and performance to interrogate our perceived and lived realms and to speculate on the possible worlds in our midst. Using storytelling as a design tactic, she engages in projects which provoke questions whilst working with communities and policy makers towards acting on those provocations. Thandi is currently a PhD candidate at The Bartlett, where

she is developing these ideas through practice-led research, exploring the extractive agendas driving the urban development of Lusaka. Central to her research is a live project, investigating how insertions of the other worldly and the downright weird can support a community of waste pickers to produce a speculative tender recognizing them as partners of the state, offering a counter to extractive urban agendas and influencing the future of the city dump.

Rob La Frenais 'Bicycling on Mars—Thoughts on the Future of Transportation'

Future of Transportation is a project that concerns bottom-up, playful approaches, by artists, designers and inventors to the issues of getting around the planet, or the immediate locality. It has operated as an Interim project at Srishti, Bangalore, for 2 years and is active as a Facebook

group with nearly a thousand members, with posts on everything from self-driving cars to cycle activism, from hyperloop systems to coracles. This paper addresses the resurgent and the impossible. It is of course impossible for individuals to directly address the planet-wide problems of unsustainable growth, traffic congestion, and massive gaps between logical city planning and the reality of over-production of private vehicles and the dominance of the airline. We instead look at subversive, playful solutions, such as the French group HeHe's site-specific artists' rail vehicles, Bangalore artist Suresh Samuha's faux transportation department, and Mexican artist Tania Candiani's impossible flying vehicles. We concentrate on what seems impossible – dealing with the power of myth, narrative and the folklore of technology – rather than mega-solutions. We conclude with a case study of inventor Naveen Rabelli's project to drive a solar-powered auto-rickshaw overland from Bangalore to London and focus on the power of hope and belief.

Rob La Frenais

Dr Rob La Frenais is an independent contemporary art curator, working internationally and creatively with artists entirely on original commissions. His recent exhibitions as an independent curator (2014-16) include: *Aerosolar/Space Without Rockets* and *'Aerocene'* by Tomas Saraceno at the Rubin Center, University of Texas at El Paso and *White Sands Desert, New Mexico, When the Future was About Fracking*, Centrespace at Dundee Contemporary

Arts, and Exoplanet Lot, Maison Des Arts Georges Pompidou, France and sites throughout the Lot Valley, SW France. He is a visiting fellow of Bournemouth University, visiting curator at the Maison Des Arts Georges Pompidou, Cajarc, France and visiting curator at FACT Liverpool. He runs the 3-year Future of Transportation project at Srishti Institute, Bangalore. He is a regular writer for *Art Monthly*, UK.

Sasha Engelmann 'Elemental Experiments in the Aerocene'

Aerocene is an open artistic project initiated by artist Tomas Saraceno that inspires novel collective investments in atmosphere and environment. It does so through a growing and international community of participants who fabricate, fly and experiment with Aerocene Explorer sculptures — or, lighter-than-air, balloon-like entities that become buoyant using only the energy of the Sun and the wind. In this paper-presentation I will tell stories of Aerocene flights and experiments in which I have engaged through a long-term collaboration with Tomas Saraceno and his Berlin-based studio team. In telling these stories of practical achievements in solar flight, I will point towards an ethics of elemental experiments that begins with active participation in the collective elemental conditions in which life on Earth takes place.

Sasha Engelmann

Dr Sasha Engelmann is Lecturer in GeoHumanities at Royal Holloway, University in London. She collaborates with contemporary artists to explore questions of atmospheric sensing and politics. Since 2014 she has collaborated with Studio Tomás Saraceno on a number of projects including *Aerocene*; together with Tomás Saraceno, Jol Thomson, Nadja Miodragovic, Ivana Franke and Alan Prohm, she

also designed and delivered a new curriculum on art in the Anthropocene at the school of architecture, Technical University of Braunschweig. Her current writing and teaching projects elaborate the notion of 'aërography' via artistic interventions in atmospheric space. She holds a doctoral degree in Geography and the Environment from the University of Oxford, and has recently become a licensed radio amateur.

Jonathan Hill Airborne Cities Chair

An architect and architectural historian, Jonathan Hill is Professor of Architecture and Visual Theory at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, where he directs the MPhil/PhD Architectural Design programme. Jonathan is the author of *The Illegal Architect* (1998), *Actions of Architecture* (2003), *Immaterial*

Architecture (2006), *Weather Architecture* (2012) and *A Landscape of Architecture, History and Fiction* (2016); editor of *Occupying Architecture* (1998) and *Architecture—the Subject is Matter* (2001); and co-editor of *Critical Architecture* (2007).

15.00–15.15

Break

Shaun Murray *Surrealist Thames-side Piers: Tellurian Relics'*

The *Tellurian Relics* project (2018) begins with the provisional premise that our environments are composed of a multiplicity of grounds, but are generally unforeseen since they arise with the emergence of the species that forms them. Ground and species are one. Through an understanding that objects cannot be fully explained in terms of their material constituents and the energy within them, 'objects' seem to be something over and above the material components that make them up, but at the same time this can be expressed only through the organization of matter and energy. We can also distinguish that different participants have different *Umwelten* (the environmental factors, collectively, that are capable of affecting the behaviour of an ENIAtype architecture), even though they share the same environment. This paradox enables architecture practices to go beyond shaping geometry, to shaping the internal structure of material. Two abandoned piers, in the River Thames in London, are used as the context for this investigation. This enquiry considers the jetties as a harbinger for a more meaningful ecology of telluric (of the earth) dynamics, whereby the relationship of the multiple *Umwelten* can be tuned into through participants. Through this approach to design in architecture, the architects would become the editors of the environment, with this project exploring the tribological advances, friction and lubrication and wear, of ground in relative motion – of different registers and layers of information and their codification. The Unmoored Cities become dispersed, spontaneously obscurely interconnected- a new layered totality of the desired city yet to come.

Shaun Murray

Shaun Murray is a qualified architect and the director of ENIAtype, a transdisciplinary architecture practice founded in 2011. He gained his doctorate in architecture at the Planetary Collegium, Plymouth University. He is a Unit Master at the Architectural Association and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Architecture and Landscape, University of Greenwich and a Masters Thesis Tutor at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. He is the author of *Disturbing Territories* (Springer, 2006) and his pioneering

work in architectural drawing has been published widely. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the international peer-reviewed design journal *Design Ecologies*, that was set up as a platform for the state-of-the-art experiments that link architecture, technology and philosophy, and is published biannually through Intellect Books. Current work on *Tellurian Relics* is published in *Architectural Design*, *Celebrating the Marvellous: Surrealism in Architecture*, in March 2018.

Matthew Butcher *'Postcards from the Edge: An architecture of Estuarial Mudflats'*

This paper will discuss and present a series of speculative design works that explore new typologies of architecture sited in a future flooded Thames Estuary. Existing as a series of drawings, models and built structures, these speculative works seek to respond to, firstly, the UK Environment Agency's plans to start to enhance its flood defence strategy of "coastal realignment". Seen as a natural infrastructure, "coastal realignment" proposes that sea walls in areas at risk of flooding are breached and flood water allowed to enter the land. And, secondly, the question of how architecture can create reciprocity with the environments where it is sited while being considered performative – where the material state of the building changes, or is perceived to change, in relation to environmental conditions or through the actions of the people who inhabit them.

In addition, the paper will address how these architectures might be seen to reflect the physiological states of those that might choose to live in landscapes which, if sea levels continue to rise, would be continually at threat from flooding. This discussion will contain an exploration of how the characteristics of any building might embody emotions of fear and anxiety induced by conditions of global warming.

Finally, the paper will seek to present how these new architectures resonate with certain avant-garde architects from the 1960s and 1970s, and the utopian agendas of these works.

Matthew Butcher

Matthew Butcher is an academic, writer and designer. His work has been exhibited at the V&A Museum,

London; Storefront for Art and Architecture, New York; The Architecture Foundation, London and the Prague Quadrennial, Prague. Recent projects and exhibitions

include '2EmmaToc/Writtle Calling' a temporary radio station in Essex, 'Flood House' a floating architecture developed for Southend and 'The Mansio', a retreat for writers and poets, nominated for the Architects Journal Small Projects Prize, 2017. Matthew is also the editor and founder of the architectural newspaper P.E.A.R.: Paper for Emerging Architectural Research and Senior Lecturer in Architecture at

the Bartlett School of Architecture where he is also Director of the Undergraduate Architecture Programme. He has contributed articles and papers for journals including Conditions, Architecture Research Quarterly (ARQ), the RIBA Journal and Architecture Today. He is also Guest Editor, along with Luke Pearson, of the upcoming special issue of AD titled Re-Imagining the Avant-Garde: revisiting the architecture of the 1960s and 1970s.

Robin Wilson 'Figures of the Débâcle: The Utopics of Whistler's Wapping'

This is one of three papers / practices in the symposium session 'Floating' which address sites on the river Thames. It is 'situated' in the docklands in a painting of the 19th century, and offers a utopian reading of the painting's urban portrait. I address James Whistler's *Wapping* (1860-4) in the figural and architectonic framing of its vision of the riverine city. Historically, it is an image of the Thames at the height of its pollution, produced a decade before the completion of the Metropolitan Board of Works sewerage system. As a work of signs / in the layering and interconnection of semiotic substances, it is a complex and ambiguous portrait of desire, centred and foregrounded by the human, but projective toward the urban: an urban body of desire; a desirous urban body. Within reference to the utopian theory of Louis Marin and its application within visual art, I explore Whistler's image as a utopic portrait of the fluvial city; as an immersive response to the shifting technologies and toxicities of the Victorian world system.

Robin Wilson

Dr Robin Wilson is a lecturer in history and theory at the Bartlett School of Architecture teaching across postgraduate and PhD programmes. He is author of Image, Text, Architecture: The Utopics of the Architectural Media (Routledge, 2015) His work has also appeared as chapters

in books such as Critical Architecture (2007), The Political Unconscious of Architecture (2011) and Camera Constructs (2012) and has published widely as a critic on art and architecture within the architectural press. He is also co founder of the collaborative art practice Photolanguage (Nigel Green & Robin Wilson).

Penelope Haralambidou Floating Cities Chair

Penelope Haralambidou

Dr Penelope Haralambidou is a Senior Lecturer at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. Her research, which lies between architectural design and theory, with a focus on drawing and the relationship between architecture and film, has been published and exhibited internationally. Using an innovative pedagogical method that combines design with digital film, she coordinates MArch Unit 24 at the Bartlett. In 2016 she organised the

symposium Arch|Film|Fest and in 2017 she was a judge for the inaugural Architecture Film Festival in London. She is the author of Marcel Duchamp and the Architecture of Desire (Routledge, 2013) and 'Architectural Essay Film' Architectural Research Quarterly 03, 19 (September 2015), 234 – 248, and has contributed writing on themes such as allegory, figural theory, stereoscopy and film in architecture to a wide range of publications.

16.45–17.00

Response by Jennifer Gabrys

Jennifer Gabrys

Jennifer Gabrys is Professor in Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London, and Principal Investigator on the European Research Council funded project, Citizen Sense. She is the author of Digital Rubbish: A Natural History of Electronics (University of Michigan Press, 2011), and

Program Earth: Environmental Sensing Technology and the Making of a Computational Planet (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), and co-editor of v (Routledge, 2013). Her work can be found at citizensense.net and jennifergabrys.net.

17.00–18.00

Drinks reception