

Call for Papers:

States of Emergency: Architecture and Urbanism during the First World War

Erin Sassin, Assistant Professor of History of Art & Architecture, Middlebury College and Sophie Hochhäusl, Assistant Professor for Architectural History & Theory, University of Pennsylvania

Abstract

“Far greater than the infamy of war is that of men who want to forget that it ever took place, although they exulted in it at the time,” wrote the Austrian journalist Karl Kraus in 1918 in *The Last Days of Mankind*, revealing humanity’s abyss on the eve of World War One. Histories of architecture and design have long emphasized the wartime advances in mechanization and standardization that opened new fields of inquiry in the aftermath of World War One. They often foreground how conflict created the technological frameworks for the emergence of interwar modern architecture with its widespread use of material developments in concrete, steel, and communication infrastructures. However, in-depth studies of the architecture and urbanism of the First World War itself are still rare, and even more so are civilian responses to the state of emergency. Indeed, the first industrialized global war of trenches, tanks, and submarines was also one of food banks, bread lines, and ration cards.

At the centennial of the conclusion of the First World War, the anticipated collection of essays reassesses what this cataclysmic global conflict meant for architecture and urbanism from a human, social, economic, and cultural perspective. It probes how underdevelopment and economic collapse manifested spatially, how military technologies were repurposed by civilians, and how cultures of education, care, and memory emerged from battle. The projected volume places an emphasis on the everyday tragedy of war as experienced by combatants and civilians across five continents—from refugee camps to military installations, and villages to capital cities.

Call for Papers

The demands of World War I necessitated the rapid development of military-architectural knowledge that impacted all fronts and populations—eastern- and western-, battle- and home-fronts, military and civilian populations alike—often at great economic and human cost. While increasingly sophisticated systems and technologies were developed to allocate and distribute much-needed resources, mobile kitchens, field railways, and do-it-yourself objects designed by the military industrial complex for the state of emergency were often adapted by the civilian population. On multiple home fronts women, children, and institutions demanded the creation of food banks, victory gardens, and collective kitchens. Often technological systems were deployed under extreme pressure to extract last reserves of natural resources and people, particularly in European colonies, were subjected to horrific labor conditions. As mechanized trench warfare came to the brink of collapse, hyper-development was accompanied by the re-emergence of systems of underdevelopment in the form of barter and subsistence economies. Aside from the quotidian experiences of citizens (and subjects) with wartime architecture and urbanism, World War I reshaped the realm within which architects and designers worked, blurring the meaning of what constituted “architecture.”

The projected volume contributes to the evolving, but still limited, discourse on what the First World War meant for architecture and urbanism writ large—pushing against and broadening what has traditionally been a narrow focus on individual biography, modular construction, prefabrication, and material technology. The edition highlights what it meant to practice or produce architecture within the state of emergency and which forms of association, production, and urbanism these circumstances created. In particular, we are interested in what types of architecture and urbanism emerged from or were transformed by the war and which role the makeshift and the ephemeral played in this effort. This includes, but is not limited to, the role of women in the creation of alternative architectures, and how architectural agents mitigated, exacerbated, or actively resisted complicity in this human calamity. Questions we hope this collection will probe are; how did the war recast architectural tropes as they moved from the realm of high art into the everyday, and vice-versa; what were the capacities and limitations of this work as propaganda; and how did economic theories of the war and underdevelopment give rise to later political projects of socialization and cooperation?

By asking these questions, we seek to both push against and imbed our work within established narratives of interwar architectural networks and institutions. In order to deeply interrogate the often violent relationship between front and home front, we propose a broader history of architectural production—one spearheaded by governments, institutions, power-brokers, and, most importantly, everyday citizens and/or subjects. Histories of World War I have too long been colored by military romance or heroic tales of individuals fighting on the Western Front—from soldier-architects like Walter Gropius and Erich Mendelsohn to literary figures like Siegfried Sassoon, Erich Maria Remarque, and Ernst Jünger. Instead, our proposed volume seeks to shift the focus from well-known individuals, architectural oeuvres, imperial buildings, and monuments to the architecture of the everyday—including material and spatial developments between front and the home front, the creation of wartime state of emergency institutions, and how civilians (often women and children) forged wartime and postwar cultures of education, care, and memory from conditions of conflict.

Only very recently have historians (but not architectural historians) begun to consider the gendered dimensions of conflict (*Home Fires Burning*, UNC, 2000), the experiences of colonial subjects, including the millions of Indians and Africans who served in a variety of capacities, and the relationship of the war to Empire building (*Empires and World War I*, I.B. Tauris, 2014). In fact, a recent work such as the “*The Head and the Load*” (2018), a collaborative production between composers Thuthuka Sibisi and Philip Miller, performers Ann Masina, Nhlanhla Mahlangu, N'Faly Kouyaté, and artist William Kentridge, is a compelling reminder of how much remains to be done in excavating the relationship between colonialism and imperialist warfare. The production’s title refers to a Ghanaian aphorism describing “the troubles of the neck” and speaks to the nearly two million African porters used by British, French, and German colonial powers, men who bore the brunt of casualties during the First World War. In a review of the performance Josephine Livingston writes “We hear snippets of military drills, Morse code, dogs barking, and Frantz Fanon translated into siSwati. We hear the famous letter from the Reverend John Chilembwe, who wrote a stinging open letter against the recruitment of Nyasa men into World War I, asking, ‘Will there be any good prospects for the natives after [...] the war?’”

Building on such work in art and popular culture, our volume focuses on how architecture and urbanism were complicit in both mitigating and exacerbating human tragedy during the first global war and immediately after the cessation of hostilities. We thus seek non-heroic narratives emphasizing themes of collective memory, mourning, and rebuilding. We hope to uncover links between the ephemeral and the formation of long lasting over-regional institutions such as the DIN

and the League of Nations. We are interested how military-technological tactics deployed in the war were repurposed and adapted. We are particularly interested in papers engaging the intersecting histories of trauma, education, and institutionalized care, as well as other medical and educational initiatives. Papers to be included should explicate how the wartime state of emergency led to the creation of new institutions and how citizens were forced to contend with everyday scarcity on the ground, illustrating how both civilians and service members dealt with tragedy of war individually and collectively and how they sought to build new lives, institutions, and cities out of varied states of emergency. Importantly, while many histories of World War I focus on individual countries, our collection considers it in the global context. We therefore actively encourage papers that address theatres of war beyond Western Europe, and in particular, scholarly essays incorporating insights from colonial and postcolonial historiographies.

Information on Submission

500 word abstracts (for preliminary inclusion) due by 1 July 2019.

7000 word articles due by 15 September 2019.

Please include approximately five illustrations with captions suggestive of your work in the abstract.

Please contact Sophie Hochhäusl (hochhaus@upenn.edu) and Erin Sassin (esassin@middlebury.edu) with any questions.