

# M e t r o m i l i e u x

(alter)Rurality as a relational gap between inhabiting scales

# SYMPOSIUM

organised by the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Architecture and the ARENA alterRurality Network

Belgrade, May 23 – 26, 2019

[...] Rurality is a territory of narratives, of story-telling, of the transmission of collective and individual volatile nomadic memories. It is a territory of forests, clearings, fields, rocks, hills, lakes, rivers, streets, villages, hamlets, and small towns. It is a territory of different names, besides official ones. It is a territory where past generations are kept alive in wordings. Rurality is a continuous re-creation of identities rooted in manifold and surreal interweaving mental pasts, in the interweaving of memories, in the interweaving of opportunities, desparateness and hopes, legends and dreams. It is a territory of invention of the future through memory [...]

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE  
FACULTY OF  
ARCHITECTURE



ARENA



## Symposium, May 23 – 26, 2019

- The University of Belgrade – Faculty of Architecture
- ARENA, Architectural Research European Network Association, alterRurality network.

### Key-words

- (alter)Rurality, post-urban, human habitat, resilience, innovation, architecture, territorial planning, human geography, economy, cognitive psychology, digital arts and media.

### Full information:

- <https://alterruralityarena2019belgrade.wordpress.com>

### Venue

- The University of Belgrade – Faculty of Architecture
- Bulevar kralja Aleksandra 73/II Belgrade, Serbia

### Organizing committee

- Anđelka Brin-Brinski
- Ksenija Pantović
- Ana Raković

### Key-note guests

- Pieter Versteegh  
Architecture and rural planning
- Michael Woods  
Human geography (sub-theme 1)
- Vasilije Gvozdenović  
Cognitive psychology (sub-theme 2)
- Nataša Teofilović  
Digital and hybrid art (sub-theme 3)
- to be announced  
Economics (sub-theme 4)

### Scientific committee

- Vladan Đokić, University of Belgrade
- Pieter Versteegh, ARENA / Psyché, Fribourg
- Chris Younès, GERPHAU, ESA Paris, ARENA
- Zoran Lazović, University of Belgrade
- Ana Nikezić, University of Belgrade
- Sophia Meeres, UCD Dublin, ARENA
- Dominic Stevens, DIT Dublin, ARENA
- Ben Stringer, Westminster University, ARENA
- Michael Woods, Aberystwyth University
- Nataša Teofilović, Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University, Belgrade
- Vasilije Gvozdenović, University of Belgrade
- Đorđe Stojanović, University of Belgrade
- Anđelka Brin-Brinski, University of Belgrade, GERPHAU, ARENA

### Abstract submission

The call for participants is open to students, researchers and practitioners of any discipline feeling related to the theme of the event. Participation proposals (abstracts) should state a research intention or subject and should explicitly develop how/why they respond to the main theme and one of the sub-themes.

Submissions should comply to the following:

- abstract maximum 3'000 characters;
- mention of the chosen sub-theme, name of the author, short bio-note (max 800 characters) institution or organisation, contact information;
- up to 3 images are welcome (300 Dpi Jpeg);
- Word format, Arial 10, flush left,
- deadline for submission: March 29th, 2019.
- submission: [a.cirovic@arh.bg.ac.rs](mailto:a.cirovic@arh.bg.ac.rs)

Organisers reserve the right to alter sub-themes or sub-theme distribution of if needed for logistic reasons.

### Calendar

- submission of proposals: March 29th, 2019
- notification of acceptance : April 12th, 2019
- event registration (early birds): April 17th, 2019
- event registration closure: May 3rd, 2019

### participation fee

- 30€ early-bird, national
- 150€ early-bird, international
- 50€ full registration, national
- 200€ full registration, international

payment information available on the event website

# Metro-milieu

## (alter)Rurality as a relational gap between inhabiting scales.

The contemporary notion of rurality is tensioned between intelligences of autonomy and networking. Rural space is disposing stability in terms of specific economical units – from household to local community, closely networked in the nexus of rural environment. On the other hand, rural space is connected to numerous economical, socio-political and cultural relations to urban conditions, both considered necessary and more and more endured as constraints. This tension is ambiguous – simultaneously problematic and nourishing for rural life modalities. It results in peculiar mechanisms and procedures inherent to situations of in-betweens – often of largely understated importance, such as that of food economy systems entirely disconnected from local stakes.

We are here emphasizing the aspect of economic reasoning on the fringe of two distant scales of inhabited environment – connected to the urban in the sense of a metropolitan inscription in global economy and local with the connotation of ambiental rooting. The metropolis, etymologically a mother-city, is one of problematic contemporary connotations: of size, of polarity, of exemplarity, single unit of global financial economic and political power. The metropolis of today tends to substitute itself to the welfare-state in an unprecedented neo-liberal growth race. It has annexed, absorbed rural space, nature, and the entire biosphere as its economic, political and socio-cultural sub-system. Rural space has become a resource landscape for urban use within metropolitan/global economical growth purposes: a space providing production of consumables and energy, housing, leisure and holiday resort, depository of pollution, waste and rejections (Guillot/Versteegh).

Rather than opposing two scales (in their geographic meaning of qualities) of inhabited environments in a binary lock-in inevitably returning to this predominant figure of rural resource landscape, we introduce the notion of metromilieu, let us say metro-environment in English. The stronger French term metromilieu, by its pleonastic character, emphasizes its etymological meaning of a motherly, uterine space or environment. It opposes the predatory polarity of the metropole competing for global productive power and suggests a smoother continuity of connectedness – always umbilically related to earth as a complex finite motherly state of precarious nature sustained by collaboration

and surrounded by care. A metromilieu is an environment that houses scales of locally rooted, bottom-up phenomena of resilience, giving them meaning within a new global economic construct - searching global compatibility without giving away to global neoliberal growth economy.

Through the notion of Metromilieu or Metroenvironment we want to invest the current relational gap between inhabiting scales while giving it a globally compatible and holistically constructed identity. Within a school of architecture, this means that the ancient paradigm of the house on a site, of the city in a landscape needs to be deconstructed, that a new paradigm needs to be constructed from a holistic, that is a broad interdisciplinary field.

Four sub-themes will be developed by guest keynote workshop and/or round table leaders:

- Assembling Rurality in the Metro-Milieu (Professor Michael Woods, Human Geography)
- Architecture, Design and Cognition (Professor Vasilije Gvozdenović, Cognitive psychology)
- Alter-digital – presence and the role of digital art in rural environment (Professor Nataša Teofilović, Digital and hybrid art)
- Commons and care (to be announced, economics)

### **Event research concept: results through reversed interdisciplinary praxis**

This event seeks to invent new forms of collaboration connecting research, teaching and practice, locally and internationally, engaging 2nd and 3rd cycle studies. Whereas in architecture the contributions of “other” disciplines are often viewed as peri-disciplinary services, we will explore a reversed interdisciplinary approach where the “other” discipline takes a central position.

- new or reversed interdisciplinarity: work as architects under leadership of a different discipline, from a different disciplinary angle, along specific sub-themes;
- working on a rooted site in multi-scale specific (alter)rural settings;
- key-note conferences, workshops, round tables, exhibition, walks, debates;
- a publication is intended to follow.

## Sub-theme 1: Assembling Rurality in the Metro-Milieu

*Professor Michael Woods*

This sub-theme introduces the framework of assemblage thinking as an approach to understanding rural places, their territorial relationality, and their position in the global matrix of social, economic, cultural, political and environmental relations. The assemblage framework draws on ideas derived from the work of social theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), developed by Manuel DeLanda (DeLanda 2005, 2016), and refined in a rural context in the European Research Council GLOBAL-RURAL project. The framework holds that social organisms of various types are 'assemblages' of heterogeneous components held together in temporary stability, thus emphasizing emergency, multiplicity and indeterminacy (Anderson and McFarlane 2011). As such, society itself is "an assemblage of assemblages" (DeLanda 2016), including places. DeLanda outlines a series of attributes of assemblages that can be examined to analyse and understand places-as-assemblages, including that assemblages are comprised by human and non-human components, with material and expressive roles; that assemblages are dynamic and constantly changing as they interact with other assemblages; that assemblages are held together by territorialization, and made less coherent by deterritorialization; that assemblages are given meaning by coding; and that each time the composition of an assemblage changes there are multiple possible future trajectories that could take, and that all the possible forms of an assemblage, past, present and future constitute a 'multiplicity'.

The workshop will outline the practical application of the assemblage framework for the analysis of rural places by elaborating a series of steps focusing on these attributes:

- Composition: What are the human and non-human components that make up a particular rural place-assemblage? What material roles are performed by different components? What expressive components are present, and what messages do they communicate?
  - Interactions: How does the place-assemblage interact with other assemblages, including neighbouring place-assemblages and various translocal assemblages? What components does it share with other assemblages? What components are added, removed and exchanged with other assemblages?
- Is the place-assemblage a component in one or more larger-scale assemblages?
- Territorialization: What holds the place-assemblage together? How homogeneous is the place assemblage as a community, a landscape, an economy? What forces of deterritorialization (might) weaken the homogeneity or coherence of the place-assemblage?
  - Coding: How is the place-assemblage coded as 'rural'? How is this recorded or expressed, e.g. in plans, maps, statistics, regulations, language, performative acts etc? Is the coding contested or open to different interpretation?
  - Multiplicity: What other possible forms of the place-assemblage (could) exist? What are the possible futures that might arise from current or anticipated pressures or changes in the place-assemblage? What alternative possible histories might have followed from key moments in the past? Do these possible histories (and alternative possible presents) have a legacy or influence in the place-assemblage today?
  - Managing Change: How can different possible futures be known and anticipated? Can local actors affect the trajectories followed? How much change can be accommodated without significantly changing the essence of the place-assemblage? What are the critical thresholds beyond which the place-assemblage would become qualitatively different? What 'lines of flight' have or could emerge from the place-assemblage as movements of dissent or innovation? Where might these lines of flight lead?

Through the mobilization of this framework, it is intended that new insights can be generated into the character and essence of rural places, their relationality and their responsiveness to change, as well as into the role of architecture, planning and design in shaping rural places and managing their futures.

## Sub-theme 2: Cognition, experience and the built / natural environment

Professor Vasilije Gvozdenović

One of the ways that environmental psychology could be described is the relation between cognition and experience and the built and natural environment. The basic question under this topic is how humans or human cognitive apparatus are affected by various environmental concepts producing different environmental experiences.

Is there a clear scientific potential of psychology (cognition) to improve the process by which architects and designers gather information, make decisions and design or materialize choices? Also, if we have some data already gathered from behavioural science, how can it be applied?

In this interdisciplinary setting the aim of the workshop will be to explore how to combine scientific, empirical facts and procedures with common-sense knowledge and so-called everyday recommendations in a rural setting.

Some of the relevant directions in shaping this complex issue considered from different junctures of view could be the following topics:

Physical environment

- Architectural determinism
- Environmental possibilism
- Environmental probabilism

The Designer's perspective:

- Commodity
- Firmness
- Delight

The Process of Design:

- History, Culture and Design Procedures
- The Design Process Itself
- Design, Communication and Research

Perception and Cognition

- Aesthetics
- Colour
- Perceptual Construction-Gestalt
- Illumination
- Semantics of Objects
- Windows
- Furniture
- Privacy



Stéphanie Maherzi, Collage, ESA-Paris 2015

### Sub-theme 3: Alter-digital - the role of digital art in rural environment

Professor Nataša Teofilović

Digital art as technology art is wide field of heterogeneous poetics and diverse technologies. Our focus, however, will be one particular line, containing a contradiction: the relationship between hi-technology art and natural phenomena, rural environment, small local societies and ecology. This relationship lies in a common attitude: not to use technology as a (artistic) tool but as a vehicle of critical approach, questioning the new technologies and digital art itself relative to humanity. From the very beginning, in 1979, Ars Electronica, a worldwide relevant digital art festival, uses as main slogan: Art, Science and Society – hence placing the accent on the influence of rapid technology developments on 'real' human beings, on "real" human presence.

*«Thus, working in media art with its conceptual innovations also always entails research into the current state of our high-tech society and scrutiny of the mechanisms at work in it. Because ultimately, the point is not merely to provide explanations of these techno-cultural transformation processes, but rather to create the requisite images, narratives and symbols we need to be able to culturally and socially comprehend, adapt to and (co)determine the thoroughly dramatic changes being engendered by the so-called Digital Revolution.»*

As Gerfried Stocker, artistic director of Ars Electronica pointed out, digital art could help us to feel as a human being again. From this point of view, the purpose of art is not to depict, to illustrate an occurrence but to use analogy and metaphor in order to inspect certain postulates. The digital artist becomes a mediator, a catalyst, making visible the human condition in different ways – through a different experience: a different interpretation of reality than the one offered by thi-technology industry.

The aim of the workshop is to analyse and to experience art workflow and different methods of artistic research, while assuming 'rural' as a metaphor a 'own', 'micro', 'sustainable', 'off-grid' way of creation: a process of creation that is opposed (or parallel) to predominant politically supported organisms like the 'metropolis'.

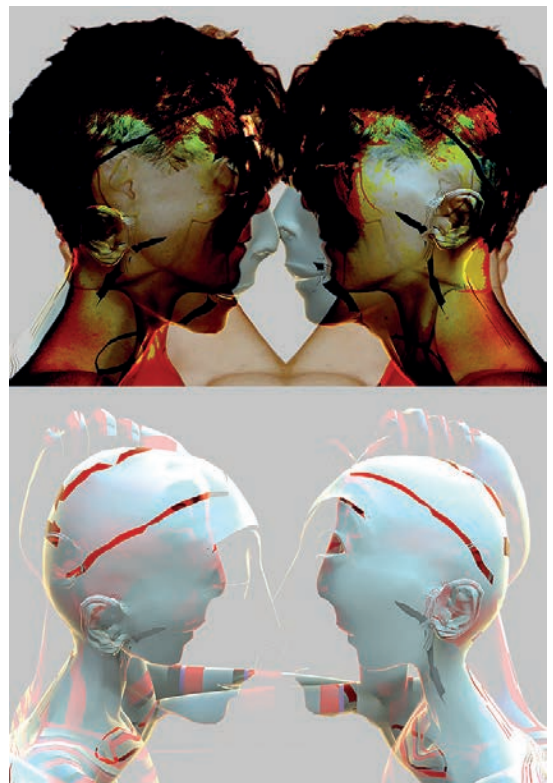
We will focus on the field of digital art known as 'hybrid art', where specialists from various disciplines and sciences are involved in the artwork creation. Very often, scientists call their work art and show it in digital art festivals.

We will analyse:

- digital art tools applied in agriculture
- digital art tools as ecology tool
- bio-materials
- biomimetic artworks

Walking through a rural environment we will collect 'material' for a possible artwork. We will rely on our own presence and real nature, not on generative AI algorithms. Using free and open-source software, we will create images, narratives and symbols that affirm natural, ecological, human-side, human-aware art.

As a final result of the workshop, participants will be asked to give a brief concept presentation of the further research or work, using text, visual essays, video or other technical or art means.



she & s.h.e.: Nataša Teofilović

## Sub-theme 4: Commons and care

*(to be confirmed)*

A metro-milieu or metro-environment is necessarily one where commons are central. Commons are assets that do not exist without care : their value depends upon the extend to which communities of beings care about them – or to which they can generate caring communities.

In rural space such commons emerge : cultural, ecological, economical, social commons are shared by different communities. They are sometimes locally rooted; sometimes trans-local: connected to similar places, to towns, cities or metropolis; sometimes lead by urban dwellers leaving their habitat seeking other values. Rural entrepreneurship is highly various and innovative in kind: organic agriculture, educational initiatives, music festivals, recycling businesses, social integration initiatives and many others, including and not to forget high-tech production.

Often the fruit of voluntary work, competence and knowledge sharing and barter systems, such entrepreneurships have something else in common: they mostly struggle to exist, seeking to find different ways of connecting to tough economic realities: product monopolies, lack of financial means, marginal to critical mass, but also top-down regulations, lobbies and beliefs rooted in urban culture.

Carried by forces of resilience, such entrepreneurships are inventive and innovative. Cutting out logistics, administrative and management cost, connecting to local values and competences, they are often bottum-up organisations engaging in territorial networks at different scales. They tacitly acknowledge the essence of local rooting and care.

The architectural paradigm of producing high quality and high tech buildings hardly has a role in these emerging ways of inhabiting rural space. Architecture, in this world of innovation, cannot stick to its traditional role of service provider for the production of built space. Many rural initiatives have already produced their specific ways of inhabiting before the question of the traditional architectural mandate arises. And worse: traditional architectural approaches may endanger them, inscribing the production of space within urban, economic, and other prerogatives hardly leaving any room for this kind of innovation.

Other ways of producing habitat are needed, and they arise from different questions:

- About the link between entrepreneurship and communities: what kind of entrepreneurships can one enhance in rural settings? How are they rooted? Which territorial scales do they engage in? Who are involved in them? Which (local) competences and (low-) techs are required, where can we find them, how can we combine them? What kind of communities do they forge?
- About commons. Entrepreneurships are opportunities to create local value, new locally rooted habitats: how do these habitats manage their ecological balance? How can we prevent them from becoming urban – that is inducing throughput and growth? How can they create and enhance local commons?
- About economy: what kind of economy do they generate or need? Which new paradigms emerge? In which ways can common values and care be acknowledged in terms of added value?
- About method: what can the role of the architect be in such settings?

Architecture's strength is to be able to invent future ways of living – not to build buildings. What kind of scenarios can we work on? In this workshop we will explore how social initiatives and local entrepreneurship engaging commons and care can help us invent a new architectural practice.



Stéphanie Maherzi, Collage, ESA-Paris 2015



# Metro-milieu

**(alter)Rurality as a relational gap between inhabiting scales.**

**Symposium, May 23 – 26, 2019.**

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<https://alterruralityarena2019belgrade.wordpress> (full information)

<http://www.arena-architecture.eu>

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rurality meeting Belgrade

