

## **BRUT EUROPE PRESENTER BIOS AND TALK DESCRIPTIONS**

### **OWEN HATHERLEY (UK)**

It's just like Eastern Europe! - a short history of an architectural misunderstanding

Lecture video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtKlAlTYgTU>

This talk, drawing on the work's splicing of propaganda films on modern development in Vilnius and Glasgow, was on the vexed question of the alleged similarities between the architecture of the Soviet Union and its satellites, and that of the 1960s in Britain. It argued that despite the apparent similarities between demolished estates like Red Road or Sighthill and the suburbs of any Soviet city, there are equally significant differences. One of modern architecture's birthplaces was the early Soviet Union, when Britain was a backwater. But by the 60s the USSR had undergone a 30 year experiment in architectural populism, a kitsch neo-baroque based on 'giving people what they want', before modern architecture returned as a means of solving a housing crisis through mass production. Britain, meanwhile, belatedly became an important centre of modern design after 1945. But by the end of the 60s, these two totally different histories seem to have converged, with remarkably similar blocks and spaces appearing on either side of the Iron Curtain. Were the underlying ideas and practices really as similar as they look, or were different philosophies and systems really at work here?

Owen Hatherley writes regularly on aesthetics and politics for, among others, the Architectural Review, The Calvert Journal, Dezeen, the Guardian, Jacobin, the London Review of Books and New Humanist. He is the author of several books, most recently Landscapes of Communism (Penguin 2015), The Ministry of Nostalgia (Verso, 2016) and The Chaplin Machine (Pluto, 2016), the last of which is based on a PhD thesis accepted by Birkbeck College in 2011. His new book on European cities, Trans-Europe Express, will be published by Penguin in June 2018.

### **PABLO ARBOLEDA (ES)**

Unfinished ruins in Italy: From waste to cultural resources

Lecture video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3direDiBu8w>

Since the end of the 1950s, Italy has focused part of its modernization on the erection of public works. Due to corruption, mafia, and further malpractice, this form of development has occasionally failed, producing a high number of constructions that have remained unfinished for decades. In 2007, the group of artists Alterazioni Video documented around 400 unfinished public works in Italy, from which a

third are located in Sicily alone. Yet Alterazioni Video coined the term 'Incompiuto Siciliano' ('Sicilian Incompletion') to refer to unfinished public works as a formal architectural style – a re-interpretation that conveys the recovered dignity of these ruins. This presentation embraced the artists' argument to develop a complete study of the present case, embedding it within the main debates on modern ruins at present. The object was to contribute to the revalorization and eventual recommissioning of unfinished sites by validating Incompiuto Siciliano in the realm of artistic, cultural and aesthetic practices.

Pablo Arboleda is a Spanish architect who graduated from the School of Architecture of Granada. He studied a Master Degree in World Heritage Studies from Brandenburg University of Technology (Germany), where he graduated with a thesis on abandoned buildings in Berlin and the subculture of urban exploration. He obtained a Ph.D. from Bauhaus University Weimar (Germany), where he investigated the phenomenon of unfinished public works in Italy from different angles, involving cultural geography, contemporary archaeology, and artistic approaches. Currently, he is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences (University of Glasgow), where he examines what happens when modern ruins are reoccupied creatively and collaboratively.

### **HUSSEIN MITHA (UK)**

Walter Benjamin: architecture, destructiveness

Lecture video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAh0utuyF2Q>

In a 1933 essay, 'Experience and Poverty', Walter Benjamin argues for a "positive concept of barbarism" based on eliminating the past (because it has been erased anyway), starting afresh. The new barbarian is oriented away from the grip of nostalgia, towards the dream-like possibilities of the near future, like Mickey Mouse, whose movements Benjamin describes as quasi-miraculous, involving a merging of nature and technology, primitiveness and comfort. This new-found freedom, stemming from privation, stands in direct opposition to the bourgeois interior, whose possessive tracings confer a system of habits on its inhabitants. This talk explored both the emancipatory potential, and the potentially pernicious aspects of elements of Benjamin's writings about architecture.

Hussein Mitha studied at the University of Manchester and the Universitat Autònoma in Barcelona. He did a Masters in Comparative Literary Studies at Goldsmiths College. He is currently researching Walter Benjamin, Djuna Barnes and psychoanalysis at the University of Glasgow. His research interests include glass architecture, fiction and colour theory. He helps to run Rattle Library, a resource for radical literature at Glasgow Autonomous Space.

## **EDWARD HOLLIS (UK)**

Living in Ruins

Lecture video link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEWdmMg0CMk>

Buildings come, and buildings go. Or, at least, it would be neat if they did – in actual fact, nothing is quite that simple. When they built the new housing estates in the 60s and 70's, a stone stump or two of the city that had been there before usually protruded somewhere, stubbornly, through the concrete; and now it's the same. Some concrete blocks get blown up – but just as many remain, half inhabited. What is it like to live in ruins? In this talk, Ed Hollis challenged the idea that the past just disappears, telling concrete stories about concrete places, to help us reimagine how, rather than trying to demolish the past, we can learn to live with it.

Edward Hollis studied Architecture at Cambridge and Edinburgh Universities, and practiced as an Architect in Sri Lanka and Edinburgh. In 1999, Hollis began lecturing in Interior Architecture at Napier University, Edinburgh. In 2004, he moved to Edinburgh College of Art, where he is now Director of Research and Professor of Interior Design. His research focuses on the junction of building re-use, narrative, and time. He is currently working with plans for the reoccupation of the ruins of Peter's Seminary, at Kilmahew. His first book, 'The Secret Lives of Buildings': was published in 2009, his second, 'The Memory Palace: A Book of Lost Interiors' in 2013, his third 'How to Make a Home' in 2016.

## **EVELINA SIMKUTE & EGIDIJUS BAGDONAS** (Šilainiai Project) (LT)

Communicating place

Lecture video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EvzpcG1nPs>

Communities redefining their own identities through creative action in Kaunas city and region. Evelina (and Egidijus) talked about the project 'Fluxus Labas', which aims to inspire people to have a fresh look at the place where they live.

Evelina Šimkutė is an artist and curator based in Kaunas, Lithuania. She has been running several site-specific, community engaged projects in a place where she grew up (Šilainiai Project, Šilainiai Photo). Currently Evelina is a curator of 'Fluxus Labas' community laboratories project at Kaunas, European Capital of Culture 2022.

Egidijus Bagdonas is a philosopher and project coordinator of 'Fluxus Labas' community laboratories at Kaunas, European Capital of Culture 2022.

**CHRIS LESLIE (UK)**

Disappearing Glasgow

Lecture video link: <https://youtu.be/IqhswDPX2uQ>

The skyline of Glasgow has been radically transformed as high rise tower blocks have been blown down and bulldozed. Does this Disappearing Glasgow herald a renaissance in the city? Photographer and filmmaker Chris Leslie is widely acknowledged as the most consistent chronicler of the city's recent history. His exhibition and accompanying book, Disappearing Glasgow, documents an era of spectacular change in film and still photography.

Chris Leslie is a BAFTA Scotland New Talent Award winning filmmaker and photographer. He has documented stories across Eastern Europe, The Balkans, Africa and Asia as well as in his home city of Glasgow. His project and best seller photo book – Disappearing Glasgow documents the changing face of Glasgow has seen him acknowledged as the most consistent chronicler of the city's recent history. His website, [www.chrisleslie.com](http://www.chrisleslie.com) serves a platform for documenting his projects.