

WINTERSEMESTER 2025/26

SEMINAR

MASTER

EINFÜHRUNG UND ERSTE SITZUNG
17. OKTOBER 2025

11:00—17:00

24. OKTOBER
07. NOVEMBER
21. NOVEMBER
05. DEZEMBER

11:00—17:00

SEMINARRAUM
(L3|01 110)

OPPRESSED FANTASIES LIBERATORY CONSTRUCTIONS ANNA KOSTREVA

This block seminar will investigate architecture and artworks for their potentials to comment, critique and enact alternative worlds. To what extent can architecture support struggles for emancipation and human rights? We will discuss architects, writers, activists, and mythical characters such as Eileen Gray, Lebbeus Woods, Ursula K. Le Guin, Henri Lefebvre, Audre Lordé, Rosa Luxemburg, and Pandora. Students will participate in a collaborative world-building project that ties critical thinking and literary development into architectural drawings. The course is organised as a series of full day workshops, in which there will be time for collective study and production. These exercises, experiments and collective methods for textural and visual material will serve as tools for praxis that integrates theory and technical expertise in architecture.

Dieses Blockseminar untersucht Architektur und Kunstwerke im Hinblick auf ihr Potenzial, alternative Welten zu kommentieren, zu hinterfragen und erfahrbar zu machen. In welchem Maße kann Architektur emanzipatorische Prozesse und Menschenrechtsbewegungen unterstützen? Wir beschäftigen uns mit Architekt:innen, Autor:innen, Aktivist:innen und mythischen Figuren wie Eileen Gray, Lebbeus Woods, Ursula K. Le Guin, Henri Lefebvre, Audre Lorde, Rosa Luxemburg und Pandora. Die Teilnehmer:innen erarbeiten einem kollaborativen Worldbuilding-Projekt, in der kritisches Denken und literarische Entwicklung in architektonische Zeichnungen übersetzt werden. Das Seminar ist als Reihe ganztägiger Workshops organisiert, die Raum für gemeinsames Studium und gestalterische Produktion bieten. Die Übungen, Experimente und kollektiven Methoden zum Umgang mit textlichem und visuellem Material dienen als Werkzeuge für eine Praxis, die Theorie und architektonisch-technisches Wissen miteinander verknüpft.

Oppressed Fantasies Liberatory Constructions

This text contextualises and reflects on the student work from the Masters of Architecture Theory Seminar *Oppressed Fantasies, Liberatory Constructions* led by Anna Kostreva. It took place at TU-Darmstadt in the department of Architectural Theory and Science (Architekturtheorie und -wissenschaft / ATW) during the Winter Semester of 2025. The student projects can be found as annotations to citations from the course collection on <https://womenwritingarchitecture.org>.

The seminar investigated architecture and artworks for their potentials to comment, critique and enact alternative worlds. To what extent can architecture support struggles for emancipation and human rights? We discussed architects, writers, activists, and mythical characters such as Eileen Gray, Lebbeus Woods, Phyllis Birkby, Ursula K. Le Guin, Henri Lefebvre, Audre Lorde, Rosa Luxemburg, and Pandora. Students participated in a collaborative world-building project that tied critical thinking and literary development into architectural drawings. The course was organised as a series of full day workshops, in which there was time for collective study and production. The exercises, experiments and collective methods for textural and visual material served as tools for a praxis that integrates theory and technical expertise in architecture.

Course Reflection

for <https://womenwritingarchitecture.org>

by Seminar Lecturer, Anna Kostreva

My personal architectural and artistic practice has led me to question what role architecture can play today in the face of accelerating social, environmental, and technological crises. As we see the split in wealth inequality grow more and more out of proportion, dreams of self-determination and collective self-governance also get further and further away for most people. As we see the rate of material and human extraction grow for the purpose of speculating on the built environment, the architectural practice becomes more and more harmful.

For the seminar, I was motivated to work with the masters of architecture students to collectively question how architecture might still be a tool for liberatory or emancipatory struggles. During the workshops, I did my best to give lectures sharing potentially liberatory political and architectural discourse, over which we could reflect and discuss. See the bibliography at the end of the booklet for some indication of the sources.

However, I was most curious to propose new ways of thinking and creating collectively that acted as a liberatory architectural practice itself. For this, we did real-time collaborative exercises, but I also devised a series of assignments that required limited but attentive collaboration. These assignments asked the students to first choose a revolutionary female protagonist and parallel text on which to base their work over the semester. Then, as the first assignment, they were asked to find a contemporary urban fragment that resonated with their protagonist, to draw the fragment, and to write a text alongside (but not describing) the fragment. After each assignment, the students met as the group studying the shared protagonist. From there, they could decide if they would like to reference fellow student projects, actually swap drawings and texts, or to keep their own work and develop it for the next steps. The second assignment was to develop an interior space and a text about mental interiority for the protagonist. The third assignment was to develop an exterior space and a text about mental exteriority. Architectural drawings, like scaled plans and sections, were encouraged. The fourth assignment was to take any set of the previous three assignments and to resolve them into a short story, with an expected number of four texts and four drawings, but which could vary as they saw fit. Although a format was set for the size of the presentation material, the assignments were otherwise done without guidance or feedback from the lecturer. The students were encouraged to use the language they preferred and to research, draw, or write however they saw fit.

The revolutionary female protagonists included: Inanna, Pandora, Hildegard von Bingen, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Luxemburg, Audre Lorde, and Greta Thunberg. My hypothesis was that setting these characters (with initial discussions in the first session), would give a liberatory and meaningful weight to the projects and provoke a meaningful architecture.

Pandora (ca. 500 BCE) is commonly known through the story of "Pandora's Box," but this – ironically – requires some unpacking. It is known that before this version, written by the poet Hesiod, Pandora was worshipped as a goddess of the earth. We speculate that her teachings were revelations that challenged the power of the emerging patriarchal order around the mythology of Zeus and his pantheon. Perhaps Pandora and her followers were more like Greta Thunberg or Rosa Luxemburg than we know, and the story of Pandora's Box is the trace we have of their political defamation.

Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) may be the most accepted revolutionary among the figures we researched and thought with. She led her life publicly defending her political beliefs, fighting for fellow workers and against the oppression of war and imperialism. She was murdered for her work and it is through the passionate efforts of many that her heroism and values are not erased today.

Harriet Tubman (1822-1913) fought against the oppression of slavery on the plantations of the United States. She escaped and then freed many others through the underground railroad, bringing them to the north and even as far as Canada.

Audre Lorde (1934-1992) was a self described "Black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, mother, warrior, poet" working to liberate marginalised voices from systemic power structures in the US as well as Germany.

Lastly, Inanna (ca. 4000 BCE) is an ancient Mesopotamian goddess. Primarily known as the Queen of Heaven, at times she was the most sacred of all deities with associations engulfing other gods and goddesses across divine law, war, political power, love, fertility and death. Inanna is a revolutionary female character whose power comes from below; she is a goddess that rises from the help of overlooked things, flies, friends, and the everyday people who believe in her. Each of these figures may be thought of as a revolutionary force, whose practices are available for any of us to connect with over space and time. Each of the protagonists offers up a perspective on how oppression can be understood and overcome – but what does that look like in architecture?

The student projects are presented on <https://womenwritingarchitecture.org> as annotations to the texts discussed about the female revolutionary characters. They offer up varied poetic, textual and drawn responses to what liberation can mean. Their depth is astounding. Collectively, I believe there is much to be drawn from careful analysis of the projects. For me it has been particularly helpful to find out what Liberatory Constructions must both offer and create space for.

In response to Greta Thunberg:

Ranim Arzinjani works through liberation through spirit and creativity. She envisions learning to build liberation out of the material of the self.

Hadeel is interested in recognising collective strength, both socially as well as in built structures. She sees squatted buildings and war ruins specifically as testaments of history that provide voices of liberation and resistance. With this knowledge, physical destruction is never an end, but part of the ongoing struggles for emancipation.

Van Anh Kasem represents activism as a tightrope through space. She sees societal manipulation and visibility as challenges to effective activism, but also connects liberation to being in the moment. Through a presence in breath, grounded in the warmth of organic life, activists can thus effectively grab hold of time and space.

M.T. took the embodied knowledge of group liberation through the shared space and breath in protest actions, but then demanded that her own liberation required a liminal space between interiority and exteriority; a tender space for decision making and the freedom to be, without dissolving into the crowd or into pure thought.

In response to Audre Lorde:

Luis Falconi observed the importance of what it means to do consciousness raising and political education in order to build voices of resistance. Yet, to get there he resolved that liberation first of all required the processing of fear, safely with others. This process can happen in the private spaces of homes, such as in working class living rooms. However, most of all, spaces are required that nurture listening, care, and courage.

Amelie Czarnetzki saw liberation as bringing interior worlds together and making interior worlds available to others. The question is, who will start talking in an atmosphere of fear or repression. Thus, the political is done at every scale: on the bench, in the living room, on the stage... using one's own diverse and embodied story.

Vanessa Diehl collapsed the political and the spatial. Her project proposes that the space in which one is validated is a form of liberation, as it enables those involved to show up in the world as themselves.

In response to Rosa Luxemburg:

The group of L.H., Ruben, and Jana C. worked collectively, tackling liberation as a contradiction of reality and desire. The drawn spaces repeatedly suggest paradoxes: urban / private, interior / exterior, known shared space / uninhabitable outer space, organic freedom/ human-built boundaries. The insight may be that liberation for all is never a full transition, but the willingness to dialog and transform with ... that which we are afraid of, noise, community, the unknown beyond, the taboo, and—most of all—each other.

Additionally, the urban fragment of the bollard was seen as a metaphor for the stubborn and determined ways of Rosa's political struggle. This fragment proved a provocative paradox: it functioned not just as a blocking mechanism, but something that could inspire, provide, and open up new possibilities.

Further, liberation takes the determination and the desire to make space for the next generation—to prepare both the built and the natural world for the future—even when one starts from feelings of being trapped by the reality of a situation.

In response to Harriet Tubman:

Beatriz Geovanini proposes that a shared life of conviviality, and that the act of believing in this shared life, liberates and pushes off destructive forces. Her project reveals how intention forms the backbone of any revolutionary work.

Jessica Joia recognizes that there are two spaces of liberation: one is the place of liberation, where one is free, and the other is the passage to liberation, where one is on the way there. The passage is a real place, and it requires a guide and generous people with good intentions for the long journey. The place of liberation, is both physical and a state of mind. As she says, "freedom is not a secret, it is a story that must be told." Thus, the places where one is able to listen and tell the stories of freedom struggles become fundamental.

Paulo Victor França is interested in the pain of liberation. He necessarily turns towards these aspects. One conclusion is that liberation has a cost. At the very least, it takes the

loss of habitual comfort to achieve a transformation. Another conclusion is that this transformative process can be unrecognizable, even repulsive, before it is new and beautiful. A third is that there must be places for people to establish themselves and multiply their ideas and experiences in these processes of unlearning comfort and beauty.

In response to Pandora:

moe rist and Nour Hadaya describe how in the aftermath of Pandora's story there is a clay vessel that contains hope. Evil's are unleashed, Pandora's reputation as a goddess of the earth is forgotten, but hope, the vessel, and her story remain. Is it a static story: is hope forever trapped in the vessel? Is Pandora to forever be the carrier of humanity's punishment? moe and Nour insist that the vessel can also unleash hope—the essential force to triumph over adversity.

In the second project, the two students understood that the "release of the evils" may be the killjoy statements of speaking truth to power, and that "trapped hope" is likely to be the silenced messenger of such truths. Today, this messenger may be the figure of a woman toiling at home, a political activist trapped in prison, or a student self-censoring at their university. Nour contends that the cage, however, is partially self-constructed and thus a door can be opened to speak one's truth freely.

In response to Inanna:

Xiangyue Lu finds that the theatre acts as a place, more powerful than the temple or the museum, to tell stories of both divinity and personal fracture. This is liberatory in that forgotten stories can be recovered and revealed as relevant for current struggles. However, the theater does not need to be the traditional one with a frontal stage: the drawings reveal how a diversity of environments enable self-realization.

The student projects can be found as annotations to citations from the course collection on <https://womenwritingarchitecture.org>.

With this, I would like to thank Professor Dr. Sandra Meireis for inviting me to teach the course as well as all the students in the class for their authentic and heartfelt work. I am grateful to reap the benefits and appreciate the important personal conclusions of this collaborative architectural research.

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