

Citizenship, the Nation State and Universal Basic Income: Scenarios in Art, Architecture, Anthropology and Sociology

**A symposium with Annika Kuhlmann,
Christopher Kulendran Thomas, James Holston,
Jennifer Mack and Roland Paulsen
Moderated by Maria Lind**

Wednesday 15 November 2017

14.00—21.00 Tensta Konsthall

**Researching
Architecture**

Introduction

HOW COULD CITIZENSHIP be reconceived in an age of globally accelerated dislocation but also in localized insurgence in the context of global urbanization? Given diminishing public confidence in many existing political institutions, what is the role of technology enabling alternative forms of societal organization to develop beyond national borders? How do notions of work and the phenomenon of universal basic income play into this?

Artist **Christopher Kulendran Thomas** and curator **Annika Kuhlmann** will discuss their current exhibition at Tensta Konsthall, based on New Eelam, a real estate technology company emerging from the art field to develop a new form of housing for global living. Based on collective access rather than individual ownership, the post-capitalist startup plans to rewire property relations through the luxury of communalism rather than of private property. Given diminishing public confidence in many existing political institutions, they question if technology enable alternative forms of societal organization to develop beyond national borders.

Political anthropologist **James Holston** considers in his presentation if the Internet could make direct democracy at a large scale possible and if it might reconfigure citizenship into a much more deliberative membership. He asks what it would take to leverage the Internet to reach massive

numbers of people with the means not merely to vote but, more significantly, to co-develop proposals, deliberate on alternatives, and make binding decisions, thereby creating real possibilities for overcoming supposed constraints on the exercise of direct democracy in mass society?

Researcher in architecture and anthropology **Jennifer Mack** presents her newly published book. The study traces the transformation of a Swedish city by an active and engaged Syriac Orthodox Christian community. Combining architectural, urban, and ethnographic tools, Mack provides a unique take on urban development, social change, and the immigrant experience in Europe over a fifty-year period.

Sociologist **Roland Paulsen** gives a lecture on basic income and different paths towards a reduction of enforced labour. He argues that human labour is quickly streamlined with new technological achievements and asks what the productivity gains in capitalism are, and how efficiency could be the foundation of another society.

The symposium *Citizenship, the Nation State and Universal Basic Income: Scenarios in Art, Architecture, Anthropology and Sociology* is developed and produced as a collaboration between Tensta Konsthall and KTH School of Architecture as part of the exhibition *New Eelam: Tensta* and the public event series *Researching Architecture*.

Program

- 14.00 Introduction**
- 14.15 “New Eelam”**
presentation by **Annika Kuhlmann and Christopher Kulendran Thomas**
- 15.00 “Scaling Direct Democracy”**
lecture by **James Holston**
- 15.45 Break**
- 16.00 “The Construction of Equality”**
presentation by **Jennifer Mack**
- 16.45 Panel discussion**
- 18.00 Break**
- 19.00 “The Productivity Growth and Possibilities for a Universal Basic Income”**
lecture by **Roland Paulsen**
- 19.50 Q&A**
- 21.00 Drinks**

New Eelam

**Annika Kuhlmann and
Christopher Kulendran Thomas**

HOW COULD CITIZENSHIP be reconceived in an age of globally accelerated dislocation? Given diminishing public confidence in many existing political institutions, could technology enable alternative forms of societal organization to develop beyond national borders? Artist Christopher Kulendran Thomas and curator Annika Kuhlmann will discuss their current exhibition at Tensta Konsthall, based on New Eelam, a real estate technology company emerging from the art field to develop a new form of housing for global living.

New Eelam engages with the issue of citizenship whereby, all

around the world, the right to belong somewhere is bound to specific nations. In Kulendran Thomas's case, this is understood through the lens of the unsuccessful Tamil struggle for independence from what is now Sri Lanka. After fighting for self-determination when Ceylon gained independence from Britain in 1948, the self-proclaimed Tamil homeland of "Eelam" was self-governed for three decades before the brutal end of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009. But rather than attempting self-governance by force, what would happen if technology instead enabled a more liquid form of citizenship beyond borders?

Scaling Direct Democracy

James Holston

COULD THE INTERNET make direct democracy at a large scale possible? Might it reconfigure citizenship into a much more deliberative membership?

Since antiquity, the received wisdom of political theory has linked definitions of citizenship and democracy to conditions of scale and membership. Most

theorists consider that the Athenian model of direct, deliberative, horizontal citizenship is no longer possible given new scales of empire and nation. The problem is not only one of numbers but also of representativity, of ensuring that deliberation is not overwhelmed by self-selected groups. Thus, it is persistently argued that the most direct methods of democratic engagement—face-to-face interaction, direct speech, word of mouth, and interpersonal relations—cannot sustain a political body larger than a village or a neighbourhood considering more than a few issues. At a large scale, representative democracy works by replacing these direct methods with its modern technologies, such as elections, the press, and biometrics.

In this presentation, Holston will consider whether the new communication technologies of the Internet could foster the development of deliberative democratic argument at the scale of multitudes. Current information and communications technologies have proven remarkably capable of aggregating hordes of people but have failed thus far to develop them into the sort of informed political bodies capable of the deliberative decision-making

and sustained membership that would define direct democratic assemblies.

The question is, could they? What would it take to leverage the Internet to reach massive numbers of people with the means not merely to vote—which is perhaps necessary but surely insufficient—but, more significantly, to co-develop proposals, deliberate on alternatives, and make binding decisions, thereby creating real possibilities for overcoming supposed constraints on the exercise of direct democracy in mass society? To address these questions, Holston will suggest what kinds of political forms information and communications technologies have thus far produced, assess their problems and deficiencies as forms of democratic politics, identify a set of features that the Internet must meet to enable large-scale direct democracy, and consider possibilities that favour them. Each must be investigated through a combination of critical case study and experimentation. Holston will conclude by showing a couple of experiments of his own that he has designed and co-produced as a means to common the city and produce an urban citizenship among residents through direct deliberative assemblies.

The Construction of Equality

Jennifer Mack

AN INDUSTRIAL CITY on the outskirts of Stockholm, Södertälje is the global capital of the Syriac Orthodox Christian diaspora, an ethnic and religious minority group fleeing persecution and discrimination in the Middle East. Since the 1960s, this Syriac community has transformed the standardized welfare state spaces of the city's neighbourhoods into its own "Mesopotälje", defined by houses with Mediterranean and other international influences, a major soccer stadium, and massive churches and social clubs. Such projects have challenged principles of Swedish utopian architecture and planning that explicitly emphasized the erasure of difference. In her forthcoming book, *The Construction of Equality*, Jennifer Mack shows how Syriac-instigated architectural projects and spatial practices have altered the city's built environment "from below", offering a fresh perspective on segregation in the European modernist suburbs.

Combining architectural, urban, and ethnographic tools

through archival research, site work, participant observation (among residents, designers and planners), and interviews, Mack provides a unique take on urban development, social change, and the immigrant experience in Europe over a fifty-year period. Her book shows how the transformation of space at the urban scale—the creation and evolution of commercial and social districts, for example—operates through the slow accumulation of architectural projects. As Mack demonstrates, these developments are not merely the result of the grassroots social practices usually attributed to immigrants but instead are officially approved through dialogues between residents and design professionals: accredited architects, urban planners and civic bureaucrats. Mack attends to the tensions between the "enclavization" practices of a historically persecuted minority group, the integration policies of the Swedish welfare state and its planners, and European nativism.

The Productivity Growth and Possibilities For a Universal Basic Income

Roland Paulsen

IN WORK SOCIETY, the general degree of productivity achieved through technological development has no, or very little effect on how much work is required of the individual. In work society, it is essential that those who cannot or do not want to work, suffer—not only economically, but also socially. In work society, work is no longer a means of producing wealth; it is first and foremost a means of distributing wealth.

The critique of work has a long tradition and is becoming increasingly relevant as productivity grows and the eulogized ideal of "full employment" appears more and more remote. In most of its variations, it represents one of the darker streams in social

theory. In it, you find the most depressing accounts of social life including advanced explanations of why work society survives its own technology and why it is so hard to break the symbolic spell of work.

But there the critique also opens up for ideas of organizing society and distributing wealth. One such idea is the notion of a universal basic income, an unconditional income distributed to each and every member of a society regardless of whether they work or not. What are the prospects for realizing a basic income in the near future? What would it mean to society at large, and would it imply the end of capitalism? These are some of the questions on which this lecture will elaborate.

Annika Kuhlmann is a curator who works predominantly through long term collaborations. As Artistic Director at New Eelam, she has been collaborating with artist Christopher Kulendran Thomas on exhibitions for the 9th Berlin Biennale, the 11th Gwangju Biennale and Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart. Together with curator Anna Frost she established the curatorial project *planes.sx*; and as an artist and founder of Brace Brace she has exhibited at MoMA Warsaw, Auto Italia in London, KM Temporär and for DIS magazine. She is currently working with Tino Sehgal on an upcoming exhibition as part of the “Immersion” programme at Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin.

Christopher Kulendran Thomas is an artist whose work manipulates the processes of circulation and distribution by which art produces reality. Thomas's work has been included in the

11th Gwangju Biennale (2016), the 9th Berlin Biennale (2016), *Moving Is in Every Direction*, Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2017), *Bread and Roses*, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (2016), *Co-Workers: Network as Artist*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2015) and *Art Turning Left: How Values Changed Making*, Tate Liverpool (2013).

James Holston is professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, where he is also founding director of the Social Apps Lab at CITRIS and former co-director of Global Metropolitan Studies. He is a political anthropologist whose work focuses on the city as a strategic site for the emergence of new citizenships. At the Social Apps Lab, he studies and designs software platforms for mobile and web-based applications that address social issues through democratic assembly and deliberation, citizen participation, and crowdsourcing initiatives.

His software projects include AppCivist.org and DengueChat.org, both of which are widely deployed. His published books include *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasília, Cities and Citizenship* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), and *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Modernity and Citizenship in Brazil* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

Jennifer Mack is a researcher at KTH School of Architecture and a postdoctoral fellow at Uppsala University's Institute for Housing and Urban Research. She completed her PhD at Harvard University in Architecture, Urbanism, and Anthropology in 2012. She also holds Master of Architecture and Master in City Planning degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a Bachelor of Arts from Wesleyan University. Drawing on her experience as an architectural and

urban designer, her research combines ethnography, history, and formal analysis to study the relationship between social change and the built environment. She has published *The Construction of Equality: Syriac Immigration and the Swedish City* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

Roland Paulsen is assistant professor at the Department of Business Administration, Lund University. He received his PhD in Sociology at Uppsala University and his main fields are sociology of work and critical theory. He is the author of *Return to Meaning: A Social Science with Something to Say* (Cambridge University Press, 2017, with Mats Alvesson and Yiannis Gabriel), *Arbetsamhället: Hur arbetet överlevde teknologin* (Atlas, 2017), *Empty Labor: Idleness and Workplace Resistance* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), and *Vi bara lyder: En berättelse om Arbetsförmedlingen* (Atlas, 2015).

RESEARCHING ARCHITECTURE is a public program of events highlighting and discussing the role of research and its relation to architecture practice and society. The program is organised around KTH School of Architecture's five research areas: Architectural Technology, Architectural Design, History and Theory of Architecture, Critical Studies in Architecture and Urban Design. Through various forms of dialogue the program aims at presenting ongoing research and connecting academia and architecture practice as well as other fields, issues and contexts. Researching Architecture is developed and compiled by Helena Mattsson and Magnus Ericson and presented as part of the KTH School of Architecture Events Series 2017.

