

# Content as Signature?

Speculations on contemporary roles and models in and of spatial practice

Mini-symposium hosted by Markus Miessen, *Architecture & Critical Spatial Practice, SAC*

[www.criticalspatialpractice.org](http://www.criticalspatialpractice.org)

April 4, 2013 — 17.00 h  
at Städelschule (Aula)

## Schedule:

- 17.00 h Introduction  
Markus Miessen  
*Crossbench Praxis*
- 17.15 h Erhan Öze  
*Extraterritorial Electromagnetic Interventions*
- 18.00 h Matthias Görlich  
*White Spots Black Holes*
- 18.45 h Kai Vöckler  
*Prishtina is Everywhere*
- 19.30 h Open discussion

"To professionalize is to impose structure."  
John O'Brian

"The MFA is the new MBA."  
Harvard Business Review

## Introduction

This seminar and symposium explores the relationship between architecture as a professional practice and the potential alternative roles and (institutional) avenues that such practice may explore. It presents the practice of architecture as one, which is part and parcel of a larger set of critical spatial practices that explore, develop, and exploit the symbiotic nature of contemporary culture and space. Leading up to the event, the seminar by Markus Miessen will present and explore the notion of the *Crossbench Practitioner* as a case study that investigates the possibility of a practice without mandate: how to become pro-actively involved in the (spatial) world that surrounds us, how to imagine a contemporary (professional) role outside the constraints of the traditional architecture office, how to imagine alternative career paths. Arguably, content has become a personal signature that sends messages far beyond the remit and often-hermetic nature of formal design discourses.

Markus Miessen is an architect, researcher, and writer. The initiator of the *Participation tetralogy* (MIT and Sternberg Press), his work revolves around questions of critical spatial practice, institution building, and spatial politics. Together with N. Hirsch, he is the editor of the book series *Critical Spatial Practice*. His work has been published and exhibited widely, including at the Lyon, Venice, Performa, Manifesta, Gwangju, and Shenzhen Biennials. Miessen is currently undertaking his most complex project to date: a masterplan and Kunsthalle building for a former NATO military site. As a consultant, Miessen has advised, amongst others, the government of Slovenia. In 2008, he founded the *Winter School Middle East* (now Kuwait). Academic positions include the *AA*, *Berlage Institute*, and *HfG Karlsruhe*. He has been a Harvard GSD Fellow in 2010. Miessen is currently a visiting professor for Critical Spatial Practice at the *Städelschule* in Frankfurt and guest professor at *USC Los Angeles*.

<http://www.studiomiessen.com>  
<http://criticalspatialpractice.org>  
<http://www.winterschoolmiddleeast.org>

## Extraterritorial Electromagnetic Interventions

This work is concerned with the relationship between legal and illegal forms of power as exerted through particular electromagnetic interferences within and around Cyprus. It is an attempt to explain the current condition of an interrupted divorce of antagonist forces that are stuck in the framework of international politics. While the roots of this conflict are found in the counter discourses generated through nationalist ideologies, this inquiry does not deal with nationalism itself, but rather with the tools used for the propagation of nationalism and the assertions that they result in, with regard to the understanding of sovereignty in a disputed territory. It is a description of the ways in which power is distributed strategically across different focal points of society where these, and not the state, form a kind of resistance against a particular enemy. In this respect, the ways in which powers organize laws in order to regulate space for their citizens under the pretext of civil needs as spatial weapons constitutes the main entry point to this work. This work will try to explain these distinct and diverse power structures through the context of a new playground of war, that of electromagnetic spectra. More specifically, it will examine the new phase of war in Cyprus that is operating through militarized civil and state needs such as Radar. It will then attempt to describe this invisible electronic war by selecting specific affected frequencies, and thus argue that human rights needs are used to cover up military acts where new ways of war are emerging. Therefore, the focal point of this work is the relationship between a state of unrecognized bodies (the *TRNC*, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) and a recognized state (the *RoC*, Republic of Cyprus), where this relationship centers on claims of sovereignty and frequency-related disputes.

Erhan Öze is building his career on theorizing spatial politics along his architectural and artistic interventions. His research focuses on theory of spatial politics of the conflict zones as well as the politics of spatial practices in general, where the notion of sovereign power is being called into question. Currently, Öze pursues his PhD at Lancaster University, Department of Sociology.

## White Spots Black Holes

For planners and architects, mapping has always been a tool to claim land, to mark property and to develop and communicate strategies for transforming space (with respect to the powerful actors involved in this process). These processes of transformation and their visual representation – the plan – often deny the fact that they are dealing with existing structures of communication, personal relationships, history as well as future, actors and non-actors et cetera. Hence, within this understanding, mapping can be discussed highly controversially. “White Spots Black Holes” is concerned with the role of representational tools (mapping) in the communication (creation) of spatial (architectural) issues (change); their political relevance (Middle East) and urban consequences (Delhi/Mumbai) will be analysed and confronted with relevant references (historic) and compared to case-studies (present).

Matthias Görlich is a Darmstadt-based communication designer, teacher, and researcher. He worked on numerous international projects and consultancies including a commission by the United Nations to accompany a research and planning project for the improvement of living conditions in Palestinian refugee camps. He was part of the research project ‘Spaces of Production’ and he initiated ‘White Spots Black Holes’ a research-project on the role of mapping in political contexts. He is the editor of the ‘Civic City Cahiers’ on the role of design in a social city (with Jesko Fezer) and he co-edits the ‘Studienhefte Problemorientiertes Design’ (also with Fezer and O. Gemballa). With his studio he focuses on the design of exhibitions (eg. for Städelmuseum, Deutsches Architekturmuseum Berlin, Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin a.o.), on mappings and diagrams (eg. with Estudio Teddy Cruz, Habitat Unit, Berlin and Cohabitation Strategies, NY) and on the design of books (eg. with the German University in Cairo).

<http://www.mgoerlich.com>  
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## Prishtina is Everywhere – An Urban Intervention

The situation in Prishtina is typical of cities that find themselves in a period of upheaval after a conflict. Most of the time, there is a complete lack of public bodies with the capacity and jurisdiction to enforce laws. In addition, a lack of social self-regulation leaves the field wide open for uncontrolled forces that cause lasting damage to a city’s urban fabric. Moreover, there is always a profound crisis of confidence in the public dimension of urban life. The lecture analyzes the situation in Prishtina after 1999, presents problem-solving strategies, and discusses the significance of this kind of urban development for the way urban life evolves in crisis zones. The title hints at two phenomena: firstly, urban development of this type is typical for many post-conflict situations, and secondly, most of the construction in Prishtina has been financed by remittances from family members working abroad (one-third of Kosovo’s entire population lives abroad, specifically in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria). The lecturer and three Kosovar architects co-founded a local NGO (Archis Interventions/Prishtina), which successfully intervened.

Kai Vöckler is an urbanist and publicist, founding member of Archis Interventions, and program director of the South Eastern Europe (SEE) Network. He has conducted numerous urban development projects in South Eastern Europe as well as urban research projects in Europe and Asia. Author, editor, curator and lecturer on art and urbanism themes, Vöckler holds a PhD in Art History on urban spatial images. His professional expertise is concerned with landscape, architectural and artistic competitions and design projects, both solo and in teams of architects. Lectureships at various European cultural institutions and art academies. Currently Endowed Professor for Creativity in Urban Contexts at the Offenbach University of Art and Design, Germany.

<http://www.kai.voeckler.de>