

Architectural Association (AA), 30 November 2023

<https://www.aaschool.ac.uk/publicprogramme/whatson/non-normative-worlds>

Non-Normative Worlds

Organised by Madeleine Griffiths and Doreen Bernath

“You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.”

- Angela Davis, 2014.

Our current society is failing us. Spatial design is infused with bias. How can we abolish the cis-heteronormative system that continues to subjugate anyone who is queer, woman, non-white, or Other?

‘Non-Normative Worlds’ sees “queering” as an approach that unifies once marginalised peoples. Through a practice of queering, we challenge the systems that we once took for granted – our societal norms. The event brings together spatial practices that intentionally critique, dismantle, and disrupt these norms to build new worlds. These worlds are not merely speculative, they exist in the present as dreams of a new, collective future.

Taking a deliberately radical stance, the intention of the ‘Non-Normative Worlds’ collaborative event is to explore alternative forms of spatial practice. This event takes on an experimental format of seminar-workshop where presentations are spontaneously opened up to responses and improvised co-creation. It is a brave space to become inventive. We can share in our familiar strangeness and build a dialogue that is accessible and inclusive for everyone.

“We must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds... Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality for another world .”

- José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press, 2009, 1.

Participants

Lina Ashour is a PhD candidate at SOAS University of London. Her research focuses on the politics of knowledge production and decolonial feminist theory. She holds an MA in Gender Studies, an MA in Journalism and Mass Communication, and a BA in Political Science. Lina is also a feminist speaker, writer, community organiser and an HTS Tutor at the AA teaching 'Introduction to Queer, Decolonial, Feminist Theory'.

Doreen Bernath is an architect and a theorist trained at the University of Cambridge and the AA. She is currently Executive Editor of *The Journal of Architecture*, Head of AAVS 'Urbanity from the Ocean', AA Dip 22 'Draw with Me' Unit Master, Trustee of the Society of Architectural Historians Great Britain, and Co-founder of research collectives *ThisThingCalledTheory* and *Translocality*. She has published widely and teaches, in parallel to different institutions, in the AA PhD and postgraduate programmes.

Kiara (KiKi) Gilbert is a poet who grapples often with the afterlives of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Alongside poetry, she is an active scholar-activist, having published with Oxford University Press and having attended Princeton University, the University of Cambridge, and the London School of Economics. She's always eager to participate in collaborative projects that merge her passions for archival research, poetry, and social justice.

Maddie Griffiths is a designer, queer storyteller, and researcher who completed the AA Diploma course and presently works at Forensic Architecture. Her design thesis centred queer identities and their relationships to belonging, blending interview testimonies and fictional narratives to construct a speculative fabulation in film. She developed a queer methodology to create opportunities for the redefinition of familiar surroundings, building found families within a society that could embrace contradiction and ambiguity.

Manijeh Verghese is the Head of Public Engagement at the AA, where she also teaches Diploma Unit 12. Additionally, she is the Director of Sphere Spaces where she works on independent curatorial projects including the new South Asia Gallery for the Manchester Museum in partnership with the British Museum. She was the co-curator of the 2021 British Pavilion at the 17th International Venice Architecture Biennale and is currently one of the Mayor of London's Design Advocates.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman is a Jarman Award-winning artist, filmmaker and cultural activist whose multi-layered practice calls for a profound re-imagining of the relationship between people, place and ecology. Andrea's films screen at festivals such as Berlin, Istanbul, Locarno and Oberhausen, as well as at Tate Modern, Lincoln Center and on MUBI. Exhibitions include the London Open (Whitechapel Gallery), Spike Island (Bristol) and Spring Sessions (Jordan), and numerous screenings globally in activist spaces, community centres and cinemas.

Recorded Presentation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7CC2Nmb-UI>