

# Nocturnal History Of Architecture

Interior Architecture Conference

Monday-Tuesday 6th-7th December 2021

HEAD-Genève, Auditorium, Bd James-Fazy 15, 1201 Genève



**FNSNF**

FONDS NATIONAL SUISSE  
DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE

**Hes·so** GENÈVE  
Haute Ecole Spécialisée  
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— HEAD  
Genève

## **NOCTURNAL HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE :**

For centuries, architectural theory, discourse and agency have been based on day and solar paradigms. References to night in Vitruvius' *De architectura*, largely considered the founding text of western architectural theory, are residual and the same absence can be identified in the Renaissance treatises by Leon Battista Alberti or Andrea Palladio. It was not until the 19th and 20th centuries that the successive invention and institutionalization of artificial light in private and public spaces gradually transformed the agency of night in the architectural discipline. Never mind that leisure is mostly associated with night or that work activities increasingly occur in night shifts. Today we sleep one hour less than one hundred years ago. We keep working at night, socializing at night, living at night: time has become elastic. Since the invention of artificial light, the urban environment has seen human activity expand and intensify, forever transforming the means of material and cultural production. From casinos to nightclubs, movie theaters to corner shops, the identity of contemporary human beings and their domestic, professional and cultural spaces are inseparable from night.

By analyzing and studying "night scenes", *Nocturnal History of Architecture* hopes to show how night is not only an area of precarity and insecurity (haunted), but also a laboratory for the development of new forms of living. The colloquium organized by the new Master in Interior Architecture at HEAD-Genève proposes to use the lens of different environments and typologies that, throughout history, have shaped our notions of architecture, space and life. The seminar traces a path from ancient to early modern times, and from modernity to present time, using the nocturnal spaces that have determined current notions of architecture to question those same concepts. Over the course of four sessions, the colloquium will generate productive frictions and offer opportunities to expand our understanding of what architecture at night was and can be.

Roberto Zancan, Javier F. Contreras, Youri Kravtchenko,  
Vera Sacchetti. Scènes de Nuit, [www.scenesdenuit.ch](http://www.scenesdenuit.ch)  
Scientific Deputies of the conference

## Monday 6 Of December 2021

### 10:30 am – 10:45 am

Javier Fernandez Contreras, Head of Interior Architecture Department  
HEAD – Genève, Switzerland

Welcome address and conference kick-off

### 10:45 am – 11:00 am

Vera Sacchetti, Youri Kravtchenko, Roberto Zancan, Professors,  
HEAD – Genève, Switzerland

Theoretical overview

### Section 1

Chairman : Vera Sacchetti, Professor, HEAD – Genève, Switzerland

### 11:00 am – 11:45 am

Efrosyni Boutsikas, Co-Director,  
University of Kent Interdisciplinary Centre for Spatial Studies

Through the gates of darkness: Discovering the nocturnal power of ancient Greek religious architecture.

### 11:45 am – 12:30 pm

Alexandra Sumorok, Professor, Akademia Sztuk Pięknych Łódź, Poland  
Toward happiness and emotions: The role of light in Socialist Realist interiors in Poland (1949–1956).

### Break 12:30 pm - 02:00 pm

### Section 2

Chairman : Roberto Zancan, Professor, HEAD – Genève, Switzerland

### 02:00 pm - 02:45 pm

Maarten Delbeke, Professor, ETH Zürich

Chasing darkness: Night and shadow in the ephemeral apparati of baroque Rome (online lecture).

### 02:45 - 03:30 pm

Hilary Orange, Professor, Swansea University, Great Britain

Using artificial light to shape industrial landscape: A nocturnal view of the Ruhrgebiet.

### 03:30 pm - 04:15 pm

Léa-Catherine Szacka, Professor, University of Manchester, Great Britain

The space of MTV: From inner-city clubbing to basement suburbia.

### 04:15 pm - 05:30 pm

Javier Fernandez Contreras, Youri Kravtchenko, Manon Portera, Professors,  
HEAD – Genève, Switzerland

Presentation of the research project and book Scènes de nuit.

## Tuesday 7 Of December 2021

### Section 3

Chairman : Javier Fernandez Contreras, Head of Interior Architecture Department  
HEAD – Genève, Switzerland

### 10:30 am – 11:15 am

Lucía Jalón Oyarzun, École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne - Lausanne

Our encryption is the real world: Clandestinity as a form of minor architecture.

### 11:15 – 12:00 am

Sébastien Grosset, Professor, HEAD – Genève, Switzerland

L'origine obscure : Esquisse d'une histoire de l'habitat à l'ombre de l'architecture (lecture in French).

### 12:00 – 12:45 pm

Muriel Hladik, Professor, RWTH-Aachen University, Germany

A fascination for the moon in Japanese aesthetics and architecture.

### Break 12:45 pm - 02:15 pm

### Section 4

Chairman : Youri Kravtchenko, Professor, HEAD – Genève, Switzerland

### 02:15 pm – 03:00 pm

Carlotta Darò, Yan Rocher, Professor,  
Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture – Malaquais, Paris

“Illusion is the thing”: Simulating night at the atmospheric cinema.

### 03:00 pm - 03:45 pm

Nick Dunn, Executive Director of Imagination, research lab, Lancaster University,  
United Kingdom

Nocturnal spaces: Rediscovering an architecture of darkness.

### 03:45 pm - 04:30 pm

Group discussion between guest speakers and young researchers

## Abstracts

**Efrosyni Boutsikas**

**Co-Director, University of Kent Interdisciplinary Centre for Spatial Studies**

**Through the gates of darkness: Discovering the nocturnal power of ancient Greek religious architecture.**

Although most ancient Greek temples were not intended for congregation, their architectural form had to be suited to the needs of the specific cult. In this lecture, we investigate the cognitive importance of darkness and shadows in ancient religious experience of the divine, as shaped by monumental architecture.

**Alexandra Sumorok**

**Professor, Akademia Sztuk Pięknych Łódź, Poland**

**Toward happiness and emotions: The role of light in Socialist Realist interiors in Poland (1949–1956).**

To a large extent, the problematics of Socialist Realist art (architecture) became that of its perception and influence. The interior of a building was to be carefully staged, arranged and furnished. Behind the slogan ‘engineering of souls’ was an expanded definition of architecture and interiors relating to sociology and psychology. The emphasis was open to the fact that architecture is not (only) a spatial form but a determinant of human behaviour that shapes behaviour and well-being and meets (or not) psychosocial needs. Interiors have a broad capacity to regulate and stimulate behaviour, providing stimuli and generating emotions (pleasure, arousal, domination). Both daylight and artificial light are assigned a huge role in interiors. One of Socialist Realism’s basic doctrinal postulates was the necessity of creating bright interiors (it also applied to colours). Light was one of the most important ideological dogmas ‘made present’ in the interior. Notions of the alchemy of light, mysticism and ‘luminous metaphors’ were used. In practice, light was supposed to bring out the details and create the right mood/ambience, usually optimism. It created a microcosm, which rendered the interior ‘unreal’. Artificial lighting was especially skilfully designed, ensuring the desired contrasts (e.g. upper and lower zones), or introducing light gradation, helping to achieve diverse moods, from pathos to intimacy.

**Maarten Delbeke**

**Professor, ETH Zürich**

**Chasing darkness: Night and shadow in the ephemeral apparati of baroque Rome (online lecture).**

By looking at descriptions of ephemeral installations built on occasions such as the quarant’hore or esequie in 17th-century Rome, this presentation will seek to explore how, on such occasions, darkness and night become performative. Starting from a manuscript collection of descriptions produced in the 1630s, it will be shown how metaphorical associations of night and darkness, such as error, blindness, heresy and sinfulness, are activated by means of scenography, movement and sound.

**Hilary Orange**

**Professor, Swansea University, Great Britain**

**Using artificial light to shape industrial landscape: A nocturnal view of the Ruhrgebiet.**

From 1989–1999, in West Germany, light designers and architects set to work in the spaces formerly occupied by miners and steelworkers. In looking at the nocturnal qualities of the Internationale Bauausstellung Emscher Park Project, an urban redevelopment programme led by the federal state of Nordrhein-Westfalen, the Ruhrgebiet’s own lighting history is illuminated. Simultaneously, the Park provides a regional study of the shaping of space and urban futures through light and light art—one that usefully moves discussion of postindustrial landscape beyond day-centrism.

**Léa-Catherine Szacka**

**Professor, University of Manchester, United Kingdom**

**The space of MTV: From inner-city clubbing to basement suburbia.**

The space of MTV: From inner-city clubbing to basement suburbia  
In 1981, Warner Communication and American Express launched the 24-hour, non-stop commercial cable network Music Television (MTV). Directed at a demographically defined audience aged between 12 and 34 years old, the new TV channel had to construct its audience by cultivating the need for a format—the music video—that did not previously exist. In parallel with the institutionalisation of new forms of domestic entertainment, MTV also operated a territorial shift, introducing young American suburb dwellers to the culture of urban city centres. Unlike rave parties and other inner-city phenomena proliferating in the 1980s, MTV brought music and club culture directly into the suburban home, colonising

domestic spaces such as basement living rooms and teenage bedrooms. Offering viewers a room of their own, MTV partook, through the screen, in a new type of spatial and temporal construction: a perfect embodiment of the 24/7 ethos, or what art historian and media theorist Jonathan Crary has termed “late capitalism and the ends of sleep”, marketing a global infrastructure of continuous work and consumption, in which any persisting notions of sleep as somehow natural were rendered unacceptable. Bridging architectural, design and media studies with American social and cultural history, this paper explores how MTV effected a shift in terms of territorial and domestic spaces in the 1980s in ways that history has not yet sufficiently recognised.

**Javier Fernandez Contreras, Youri Kravtchenko, Manon Portera**  
**Professors, HEAD – Genève, Switzerland**  
**Presentation of the research project and book *Scènes de nuit*.**

SCÈNES DE NUIT is a research project that explores the role of night in the construction of contemporary cities and societies, illustrating how, still today, architectural theory and critique are associated with sunlight and diurnal paradigms. It is structured around the hypothesis that, since the 19th century, night has transformed not only night-time but most importantly daytime activities and architecture forever.

The project addresses the technologies, networks and forms of design deployed in nocturnal architectural spaces and their associated communities, engaging with both local and global audiences through a broad network of practitioners and theoreticians in architectural and night design, as well as experts from different fields, such as sociology, economics, philosophy and media studies, that are relevant to understanding the intersections between space, night and society at large.

**Lucía Jalón Oyarzun**  
**École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne - Lausanne**  
**Our encryption is the real world: Clandestinity as a form of minor architecture.**

As the realm of darkness and confused perception, night has historically been the optimal space for clandestine practices. Furthermore, underground activities occurring during the day have always had to produce darkness around them, muzzling the power of sight as tool of control. We will discuss radical clandestinity practices as minor spatial practices based on the articulation of invisibility, secrecy and encryption.

**Sébastien Grosset**  
**Professor, HEAD – Genève, Switzerland**  
**L'origine obscure : Esquisse d'une histoire de l'habitat à l'ombre de l'architecture (lecture in French).**

If we substitute the archetype of the primitive hut for that of the prehistoric cave to tell the origin story of architecture, it is no longer the construction but the planning that becomes the founding act. This act is no longer performed under the sun but in the darkness underground. The myth of the cave immediately associates interior with darkness, and it places both at the beginning of another history of architecture and human habitat—not a counter-history, but an alternative history, perhaps sweeter than that of the monuments that stand in broad daylight. A history of housing in the shadow of architecture.

**Muriel Hladik**  
**Professor, RWTH-Aachen University, Germany**  
**A fascination for the moon in Japanese aesthetics and architecture.**

A fascination for the moon in Japanese aesthetics and architecture  
In this paper we will explore how Japanese architecture is dedicated to the darkness of the night and to the beauty of ‘moon-viewing’ (tsukimi 月見). Very different from our Western appreciation for the luminosity of the sun, the contemplation of the moon has been celebrated by architects and poets alike. Tanizaki Junichirō, in his masterful essay “In Praise of Shadows” (Inei raisan 陰翳礼讃 1933) made us aware of the beauty of darkness and the importance of shadows in the traditional Japanese house. Already the poet Urabe Kenkō (1283? -1350?) evoked the beauty of the full moon, even masked or veiled by the passage of clouds. ‘Moon-viewing’, an activity appreciated by poets and painters, led to special architectural devices such as round windows or platforms for nocturnal moon observation, the most famous example being the ‘moon-viewing terrace’ (Tsukimidai 月見台) at the Villa Katsura.

**Carlotta Darò, Yan Rocher**  
**Professor, Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture – Malaquais, Paris**  
**“Illusion is the thing”: Simulating night at the atmospheric cinema.**

In a form of continuity with the Palladian theatrical tradition that already simulated the opening of the sky on the ceiling of a closed cap, evocation in reality of the Greek open-air theatre with its classical scenes, it is in the 1920s that this theatrical typology asserts itself in the sector of cinematographic production through the

emergence of the so-called atmospheric cinemas.

In this way, the atmospheric theatre assumes to make the room a spectacle in its own right, a space that modernity and generic cinemas will soon neutralise: the public discovers this interiorised cityscape through a magical ritual of fictitious nightfall and cinematographic daybreak.

**Nick Dunn**

**Executive Director of Imagination, research lab, Lancaster University, United Kingdom**

**Nocturnal spaces: Rediscovering an architecture of darkness.**

The interplay of light and dark shapes our relationship with place. At night, artificial illumination can have profound effects upon our experience of architecture, both as interior space and urban realm. This talk examines the city of Manchester in the United Kingdom, its pioneering industrialisation and subsequent legacy of an 'architecture of darkness'. It then explores recent developments to ask how we might develop nocturnal spaces that are convivial, inclusive and ecologically sustainable. In doing so, it aims to demonstrate how such an understanding can enable us to rediscover an architecture of darkness as integral to shaping the future of urban nights.

## **NOCTURNAL HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE :**

**A conference organised by HEAD – Genève  
Interior Architecture Department  
06-07.12.2021**

**Scientific deputy: Roberto Zancan**

**Organisation: Javier Fernandez Contreras, Valentina De Luigi, Valentin Dubois, Inès Salih.**

**With the participation of Anthony Masure, Research Institute for Art and Design (IRAD), HEAD – Genève**

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