

TAHL KAMINER (ESALA, Edinburgh)

Back to Pessac: Mass-Housing, Participation, and Personalisation

October 30 (Thursday), 18.00

Faculty of Architecture, Estonian Academy of Arts

Pikk 20, 3rd floor (main lecture hall)



The lecture will argue that participatory design, when implemented in architectural rather than urban scale, is not about democratisation. Instead, participation in mass-housing projects offers a solution to the alleged dehumanisation caused by the standardised, abstracted and generic figure of the 'typical user'. Participation, though, is anchored in a problematic humanist understanding: it presumes the participating individual subjects are autonomous, and wilfully ignores their heteronomy, the manner in which their own ideals, beliefs, and desires are constructed by society. The paper suggests solving the aporia of humanism-posthumanism indirectly, by circumventing participation via personalisation. It returns to the discussions in the late 1960s and 1970s around Pessac and Levittown, and to the recasting, within the debate surrounding personalisation, of the modernist notion of neutral architecture as a stage for self-realisation. What emerges is not only an alternative solution to the problem of the generic user, but also an indictment of participatory design.

Tahl Kaminer is Lecturer in Architectural Design and Theory at the University of Edinburgh. He co-founded and edited the journal *Footprint*. His publications include the monograph *Architecture, Crisis and Resuscitation* (Routledge, 2011) and the anthologies *Houses in Transformation* (NAi, 2008), *Urban Asymmetries* (O10, 2011) and *Critical Tools* (Lettre Voilee, 2012).