

Front to Rear: Architecture and Planning during World War II

Conference co-organized by the Institute of Fine Arts, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal, and Princeton University's School of Architecture

Saturday, March 7 and Sunday, March 8, 2009

Institute of Fine Arts, New York University
1 East 78th Street, NYC

Ioanna Theocharopoulou, Adjunct Professor, GSAPP, Columbia University

Constantinos A. Doxiadis: The War and the Archive

Architect and planner Constantinos A. Doxiadis's entire professional life involved collecting and classifying information in exhaustive detail. His process of working was archival: we sense that he was personally far more interested in gathering, enumerating, and organizing a multitude of facts--*analysis, research*, were some of his favorite terms--than the *synthesis* of these facts into a project. Doxiadis's commitment to the archive, both literally, as evidenced by his own extensive personal and office archives, and figuratively--his diligence in gathering a mass of details on what some saw as increasingly unrelated topics--rendered his work difficult for many of his contemporaries. This paper will explore how Doxiadis's tendency to collect, organize and manage facts that grew increasingly sophisticated throughout his life, was particularly colored by his experience during the war.

During the war, Doxiadis (1913-1975) turned his official post as Chief Town Planner into a way of gathering information for the Greek Resistance. He founded and maintained a veritable "architects' underground", that became the "*scientific*" staff of the resistance movement, deploying hundreds of architects and engineers throughout Greece who often risked their lives to collect data and intelligence. It is less well-known that during this time Doxiadis also led a series of clandestine meetings in Athens, the "*Circle of Scientists*", who discussed "*technical topics*". The *Circle* was comprised of a group of architects and other intellectuals mostly drawn from Doxiadis's close associates. Their project was to compile and exchange more data primarily about architecture and experiments in housing from Northern Europe and Russia but also casting a broad look at topics ranging from vernacular art and building to aerial photography, the language question and the baking of bread in urban centers. The transcripts of the *Circle of Scientists* meetings were recorded in a journal, *Chorotaxia* (from *choros* = space and *taxi* = order), a single copy of which exists in the Doxiadis Archive in Athens, dating from 1942. The work of the "*scientific*" resistance movement was elaborated into a recently re-discovered, large-format catalogue, *Sacrifices of Greece During the Second World War*, published immediately after the end of the war. Transcribing war-time losses, *Sacrifices of Greece* gave further incentive to classify and enumerate: no longer just about cultural artifacts but also about olives, wheat, goats, donkeys, mules and starving children, this time the numbers and data also turned into sophisticated visual information.

Doxiadis's life-long mission of preserving and classifying facts, developed during a period of wartime resistance, endowed his work with a special urgency. As a high-ranking government employee during the decade of the 1940s, we sense that he felt personally responsible to protect and organize the totality of knowledge about his country. Compounded by the lack of access to the war-time material until very recently, and by the political and personal

antagonism felt towards Doxiadis, accentuated during the Civil War (1946-49) and again during the early 1970s, this early period of intense and prolific architectural activity has been largely misunderstood and all but forgotten.

Ioanna Theocharopoulou holds degrees in Architecture from the Architectural Association in London (AA Dipl.), and from Columbia University (MSc AAD). She received her Ph.D. degree in 2007 from Columbia University. Her dissertation, "Urbanization and the Emergence of the *Polykatoikia*. Habitat and Identity, Athens 1830-1974" explored the historical proliferation of informal urban development. Her publications include contributions to *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, edited by Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar, (Routledge, 2005), and to *Landscapes of Development: The Impact of Modernization on the Physical Environment of the Eastern Mediterranean*, edited by Pani Pyla and Hashim Sarkis, (Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 2009). She teaches at Columbia University, where In October 2008 she co-curated *ECOGRAM: The Sustainability Question* conference with Mitchell Joachim, Ph.D.

Archived September 2011