6th Rencontres de l'EDAR
post-modern?

3 june 2022   room SG AAC 231   zoom ID 669 3419 5973

EPFL

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ARCHITECTURE AND SCIENCES OF THE CITY

post-modern?

8:40 Introduction 1

Welcome and Morning Introduction by Elena Cogato Lanza, EDAR Program Director, and Nicola Braghieri (Lapis EPFL)

9:00 Natural/Sustainable

Giuseppe Galbiati (Tsam EPFL), *Architecture in tension: between aesthetics and data (or art and science)*
Vasileios Chanis (Lapis EPFL), *From "Eternality" to "Sustainability": Revisiting the notion of Time in "Non-Pedigreed" Architecture*
Marine Villaret (Lab-U EPFL), *Vers une convergence du projet territorial de biodiversité et des continuités écologiques*

Debate with:
Javier Contreras (HEAD HES-SO Genève) and Florence Graezer Bideau (CDH EPFL)

10h30 Coffee break

11:00 Model/Language

Sıla Karataş (Lab-U EPFL), *Houses take on housing blocks. Marshall Plan's cooperative housing for 'free labor'*
Shyam Sunder Sirimalla (Lab-U EPFL), *Theorizing the Socio-spatial paradigm and its relations with Mobility, Ecology and Digital technologies*
Tanguy Auffret Postel (Texas, EPFL), *Beyond the modern and postmodern envelope*

Debate with:
Corentin Fivet (Sxl EPFL) and Paolo Tombesi (Far EPFL)

12h30 Lunch

13:30 Introduction 2

Elena Cogato Lanza (Lab-U EPFL) and Nicola Braghieri (Lapis EPFL)

13:45 Structure/Fragments

Phi Nguyen (Lab-U EPFL-HEAD), *Impromptu Conservation. Inhabiting Huế: dwelling and preserving*
Célia Kupfer (SXL EPFL), *Obsolete? The reuse of discarded modern-architecture concrete in new projects*
Anna Karla de Almeida (Lab-U EPFL), *One hundred years of Company Town: the case of Dalmine, Italy*

Debate with:
Sarah Nichols (Thema EPFL) and Franz Graf (Tsam EPFL)

15:15 Break

15:30 Simulation/Design

Anne-Marlène Ruede (eSpace EPFL), *Simulacr(e)ating the Natural World*
Thomas Paturet (Lapis EPFL), *Après l'Histoire : simuler le passé*
Vitor Pessoa (Ceat EPFL), *Postmodern condition of design process(es): on collaborative design*
Marie Trossat (Lasur EPFL), *Quantity vs. quality: why we need to reconsider the social ambition of the modern movement*

Debate with:
Paolo Tombesi (Far EPFL) and Alfredo Thiermann (IA EPFL)

17:00 Coffee break

17:15 Lecture

Giovanni Galli (University of Genova), *... Post-Modern?*

18:15 Conclusion

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6th Rencontres de l'EDAR 2022 – Interdisciplinary doctoral seminar

How does phd research at EDAR resonate, directly or indirectly, with the debate on the different status of knowledge according to the notions of modernity, postmodernity, and transition? How does it bear witness to the decline of grand narratives as well as their resurgence? The problematization of modernity, its legacies, and its overcoming will be tackled from the perspective of study subjects, methods, and results of ongoing doctoral research.

The postmodern condition as a diagnosis.

In 1979, in *The Postmodern Condition: A report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard exposed the changing status of knowledge with regard to society. "It is reasonable to suppose that the proliferation of information-processing machines is having, and will continue to have, as much of an effect on the circulation of learning as did advancements in human circulation (transportation systems) and later, in the circulation of sounds and visual images (the media)" (Lyotard 1984 [1979], p. 4). The relationships of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use – considered as a "informational commodity" (Ibid. p. 5) – "will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume – that is, the form of value" (Ibid. p. 4).

Thus described, the post-modern condition seals the decline of modernity. With it, comes the end of representing society as a functional whole assimilated to a self-regulating system or a machine (Ibid. p. 11), as well as the primary role of knowledge "as an indispensable element in the functioning of society […] [and] its performance maximisation" (Ibid. p. 13). Lyotard concludes that "the project of the system-subject is a failure, the goal of emancipation has nothing to do with science", whereas "the diminished tasks of research have become compartmentalized and no one can master them all" (Ibid. p. 41). The end of the grand Narratives – the emancipation of the individuals, the realisation of the Spirit in History, or the classless society – is declared.

A new horizon of possibility.

Lyotard's reflection on the decline of modernity is part of a debate that has been going on in philosophy since the conservative critique of positivism – in particular since Oswald Spengler's theories on the *Decline of the West* (1918) – and which culminates in Karl Popper's theses set out in his *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945). In the field of architecture, the end of modernity – or rather, its overcoming – has been the subject of debate since the 1960s, in reaction to the stylistic dogmatism of the Modern Movement doctrine and the technocratic hegemony of the International Style.

According to Lyotard, the postmodern condition opens up a new horizon of possibility for all fields of knowledge, considered as 'languages'. The relationship of knowledge to society will henceforth be functional to the establishment of *local consensus*: "the temporary contract is in practice supplanting permanent institutions in the professional, emotional, sexual, cultural, family, and international domains, as well as in political affairs. […] We should be happy that the tendency toward the temporary contract is ambiguous" (Ibid. p. 66). "This sketches the outline of politics that would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown" (Ibid. p. 67).

In architecture and urbanism, social, political and geographical relativism find its counterpart in forms liberated from modern dogmatism, especially in an exasperated linguistic eclecticism. The profaning irony towards history and technology that characterizes post-modern arts, is combined with a "weak design" approach in order to drastically break with the positivist narrative that had fuelled modernity from its roots.

The end of the postmodern condition?

In reading Lyotard's seminal text, which has a global impact, today we pay attention to nuances that have been ignored. In particular, when Lyotard states that "the scenario of the computerization of the most highly developed societies" and the consequent status of knowledge will come to pass "barring economic stagnation or a general recession (resulting, for example, from a continued failure to solve the world's energy problems)" (Ibid p. 7). Such an eventuality echoes the most burning news, as well as the centrality of the concept of *Transition* in current scientific and political discourse.

Although Lyotard declared the end of the grand narratives in 1979, has the climate and ecological crisis now become the new grand narrative? The void left by the

"rational grand narratives" is now being filled by other ethical narratives on which contemporary scientific culture is rebuilding its legitimacy. Is the way open for the return of society as a system? Is the way open towards a necessary moralization of scientific knowledge? If Lyotard has always asked scientists or intellectuals to relativise (or minimise) their power, today, such humility is considered irresponsible. The prescriptive purpose of research, if not its activist or even militant objective, appears – again – legitimate. Where then, is there space for "the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown"?

This tension, barely sketched here, between the first reception of Lyotard's *Report on Knowledge* and its contemporary re-reading in light of the repositioning of scientific knowledge according to new cultural parameters, also resonates with our experience of the "postmodern condition". The evolution of the postmodern informational society continues to be supported by the territorial infrastructures of modernity (roads, architectures, technical networks, energy and transportation network, productive landscapes, etc.) as well as by the system of their correlated objects, in a concrete coexistence of heterogeneous socio-technical systems, material or immaterial, that no theoretical discourse could fully apprehend.

Modern/Post-modern in EDAR.

The *6th Rencontres de l'EDAR* invite all EDAR doctoral students to contribute to the questions raised here, thanks to their current research. With reference to the fields of architecture and urban sciences, and with a view to objectives that are quite specific to them, their research questions the legacy of modernity and the Modern Movement - whether its concepts, models or material legacies – while exploring alternatives and potentials, or renewing its critical understanding. The critique of velocity as a value; the search for an alternative to the consideration of agricultural space as only productive; the search for an architectural language appropriate to bio-sourced materials or to the new criteria of health and well-being with low energy consumption; the implications of Artificial Intelligence in spatial design processes, etc.: these are all research themes that question the boundaries between modern, postmodern and transition, testing the relevance and paradoxes of these categories.

The mission of the *Rencontres de l'EDAR* is to provide a 'snapshot' of current doctoral research. The 2022 edition is a continuation of the *Contemporary Modernity* doctoral seminar (spring 2022). It will bring to light the problematic of modernity, its legacies and its overcoming, based on the subjects, methods and scientific results of EDAR research.

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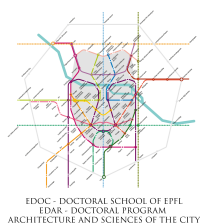
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