


The Images of Postmodernism as Symbolic Capital: L'Esprit du Temps or Un Projet Inachevé?

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The Images of Postmodernism as Symbolic Capital: *L'Esprit du Temps* or *Un Projet Inachevé*?

The article examines the impact of the exhibitions “La Presenza del passato”, curated by Paolo Portoghesi for the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 1980, and “Architectures en France: Modernité, post-modernité”, curated by Chantal Béret and held at the Centre Pompidou and the Institut français d’architecture in Paris in 1981 on two exhibitions centred on the concept of modernity and held in Paris in 1982: “La Modernité ou l’esprit du temps” (fig. 1), curated by Jean Nouvel, Patrice Goulet and François Barré and organised in the framework of the architectural section of the XIIe Biennale of Paris, and “La Modernité, un projet inachevé” (fig. 2), curated by Paul Chemetov and Jean-Claude Garcias and held at the École des beaux-arts in Paris. Through a comparison of these two exhibitions, it presents the divergences and affinities between the attitudes of Nouvel and Chemetov regarding the commoditization and aestheticization of the image and their perception of the architectural signs. It departs from the controversy between Jürgen Habermas’s approach, in “La Modernité, un projet inachevé”, where he claims that modernity is an unfinished project, and Jean François Lyotard’s approach, in *La condition postmoderne*, where he considers modernity as an outdated project, in order to interpret the conflict between the aforementioned exhibitions. The debate between Habermas and Lyotard is related to the crisis of the idea that the architectural language must symbolize and embody the essence of the time, the *Zeitgeist*. This debate between Habermas and Lyotard is related to the question about the end or the continuation of modernity. According to Habermas, the project for the emancipation of modernity should not be abandoned. Habermas’ critiques of postmodernity are associated with his disapproval of Lyotard’s stance towards aesthetic modernity. Habermas criticised Lyotard for abandoning the idea that modernity can still bring about changes in the lived world and everyday life.

The debate that the aforementioned exhibitions represent is linked to the emergence of two trends in relation to the reinvention of modernity. Following Pierre Bourdieu’s approach, we could claim that the tension between the ways in which each of these exhibitions treats the role of the image within architectural design and the role of architecture for the construction of a vision regarding progress is the expression of two divergent positions in social space. The tension between the approaches of the two exhibitions is related to how their curators interpret Team Ten’s approach. Jean Nouvel claims that being “Modern today is not holding the torch of the modern movement, Team Ten or ‘ordinary ugliness’”, while Paul Chemetov is positive towards the ideas of Team Ten and the intention of its members to understand habitat as a place for social interaction. The article compares the approaches of the Atelier d’urbanisme et d’architecture (AUA) and Team 10, interpreting their differences as part of a generational conflict through the elaboration of concepts first developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Karl Mannheim. It also explains why the discourse of Team 10 is less critical vis-à-vis the generation of modernism than that of the AUA. The article examines whether the break with the founding myths of modernity is rather a generational rupture than a conceptual one, questioning whether the demystification of modernism is a generational or a conceptual stance.

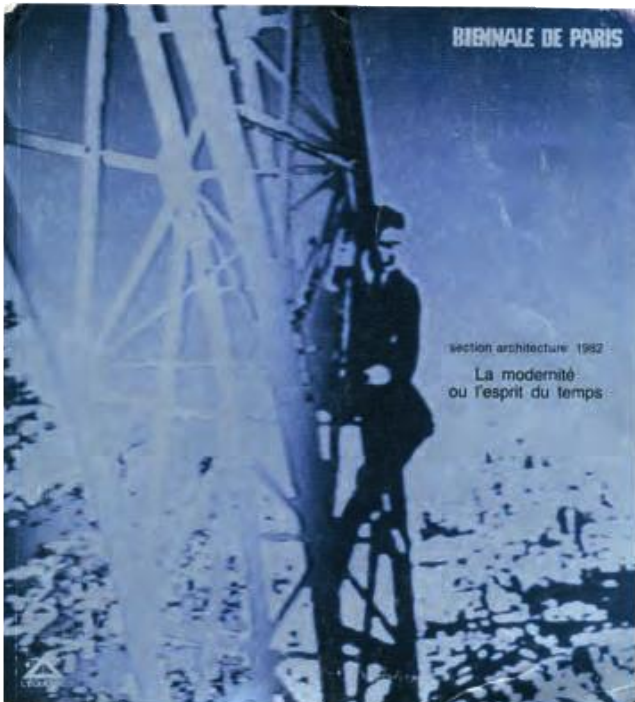


Figure 1. Front cover of the exhibition catalogue *La Modernité ou l'esprit du temps* (Paris: l'Équerre, 1982).



Figure 2. Front cover of *La Modernité, un projet inachevé: 40 architectes* (Paris: Éditions du Moniteur, 1982).