
CALL FOR PAPERS SYMPOSIUM

Architecture and Catastrophe Places and rituals of utopia and dystopia

One symposium, two events

École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Versailles (France), June 8 and 9, 2018

Faculté de l'aménagement, École d'architecture, Université de Montréal (Canada), October 22 and 23, 2018

CALL FOR PAPERS

Developed jointly and internationally between two research laboratories of architecture schools in France and Canada, the question central these events explores is the spatial and aesthetic response given to problems posed by situations of emergency, impermanence, mobility, and insecurity from the past and present. When catastrophic phenomena (according to René Thom's definition) occur, one can observe, through the history of human creations, the setting up of systems of resilience and resistance that go beyond technical efficiency and whose symbolic dimension and impact on the collective imagination can be explored.

The reaction to chaotic situations has led to very different kinds of responses. On the one hand, when faced with situations of political disorder, civilization has responded to each particular situation by creating new spatial and temporal orders that function as mental and visual structures acting like antidotes. We could refer to the political conditions in which Thomas More's Utopia emerged – a time during which Henry VIII was demolishing monasteries – or to the emergence of monastic orders that structured time in a territory threatened, in the fifth and sixth centuries, by uncertainty as political and administrative Roman institutions were disintegrating.

Similarly, the rational space of the Renaissance that emerges during wars between city-states fighting for power in the fifteenth century constitutes the embryo of the modern city. More recently, futurist aesthetic attempted to deconstruct the traditional city and to attack bourgeois taste by relying on a disruptive aesthetic made of noise and mechanics. And what can we make of Le Corbusier aspiring to tear Paris down after World War I with his "Plan Voisin" by making it as geometrical as possible, an idea which will resurface with Italian rationalist architects, before and after World War II, with the use of the architectural grid? Or finally, of architecture's overuse of geometry in the 1950s which will crumble in the 1960s and 1970s, with utopian experiences aiming to create protective environments (tied to the myth of disconnecting, returning to the countryside to experience space amniotically) in a society of transparency, of the spectacle (Guy Debord)?

But we could also evoke the late-1960s creation of communities congregating in the New Mexico desert to inaugurate the first conscious application of the program outlined in *In the Outlaw Area* (this is the period during which a movement of urban flight occurred in the United States as young people repeated a transcendental tradition by moving to underpopulated, wild areas). Or also the contemporary application of this existential posture, now centered around events such as "Burning Man," which transforms the void, the desert, paragon of the idea of *tabula rasa*, into a happening (new mythology), or, in France, festivals organized by Bellastock for instance.

We aim to question the utopias and dystopias that have attempted to answer in a structured and constructed way to disorder, chaos, situations of conflict, by paradoxically engaging in a disruptive aesthetic of catastrophe. The question we may ask today is the following: faced with the acceleration of urban phenomena and the rhythm of life, faced with the multiplication of spaces of connection that digitally create a mirror image of the city and fragment temporalities – in which time and space are suspended (Elie Dering) – and faced with the risks taken by populations that concentrate in territories increasingly restricted, how can we visualize, anticipate, write the ideal environment whose expected qualities are to preserve each individual's freedom of movement and action and simultaneously guarantee everyone's need for protection, identification, and existence in a new collective narration, whether it be stable and/or a temporary event?

TWO EVENTS

Several questions will be addressed during our two events that will happen in 2018 in Paris and Montreal. We invite researchers to work on different themes at each event in order to highlight dominant features, constitutive tensions, or even constants. The matter at hand is to understand how architecture conceives of itself when faced with catastrophe, and not as a response to catastrophe.

The first event will last two days at the École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Versailles, and will focus on the territorial systems put in place by human beings throughout history to confront catastrophic, chaotic, entropic phenomena that require setting up new kinds of systems of representation.

We will consider the aesthetic, functional, structural dimensions of architectural systems developed in the past: from vernacular products, "architectural structures without architects", happenings, to products developed by professionals (designers, architects, sometimes even artists) and promoted by public entities and in certain cases elaborated in the context of architectural competitions (which has occasionally led to the development of patents).

Themes

Environmental catastrophes:

- Climate changes and environmental aesthetics.
- Exploitation of resources and human/post-human constructions.
- Natural disasters and temporary shelters.

Economic shifts:

- Cities and great post-industrial structures (abandonment and renovation).

Cultural catastrophes:

- Destruction/reconstruction of heritage or non-heritage buildings.

The second event will last two days at the Université de Montréal, and will question the utopias/dystopias that have attempted to respond to disorder, chaos, situations of conflict by reenacting them through a disruptive aesthetic of catastrophe. New heterotopic enclosures or protected places in which a fragile segment of the population or the well-off hide can be related to other protective places and situations that developed throughout the history of the West. As we question the twentieth century, we will consider productions that functioned as "refuges" from the upheavals of the environmental world or the march that modernity forces on people: Aldo Rossi's Analogous City in the twentieth century, or the Cities at the Edge of the World that Lyonel Feininger created for his children during the war, for instance. Faced with indistinct a-topia and permanent danger, human beings are powerless. We will question the way in which architecture expresses its need to build a protective rhetoric to institute an environment made of shared rituals.

Themes

Narratives, rituals, and catastrophe:

- The catastrophic imaginary in history.
- Apocalyptic narratives and symbolic forms (Carnival, urban fêtes, spontaneous cities, etc.).
- New practices of space as a response to urban or suburban desertification.

Social mutations and new practices:

- Questions of gender or identity in their relations to processes and edifications.
- Major paradigm shifts and obsolescence of practices and representations.

Human/ social catastrophes:

- Architecture of new enclosures (prisons, gated communities).
- Amniotic, protective architecture
- Medical architecture and prosthetic body (or reconstructed body).

Call for papers

Proposals should not exceed 500 words and can be written in English and French. Your proposal should mention whether you are applying to the event in Versailles or Montreal, include a short biography of the author, and be emailed to: leav@versailles.archi.fr before **February 28, 2018**.

Provisional calendar

- December 18, 2017: call for papers launched.
- **February 28, 2018**: deadline for submission.
- Mars 17, 2018: announcement to selected applicants.
- June 8 and 9, 2018: first event at the ÉNSA-Versailles (France).
- October 22 and 23 2018: second event at the Université de Montréal (Canada).

Location of the symposium

- ENSA Versailles, 5, avenue de Sceaux, 78000 Versailles, France.
- Faculté de l'aménagement, École d'architecture, Université de Montréal, 2940, Chemin de la Côte-Sainte-Catherine, Montréal, QC H3C 3J7 (Canada).

Scientific committee

- Paolo Amaldi, architect, PdD in Architecture from the Université de Genève, professor of architectural history and cultures at l'École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Versailles, researcher at LéaV.
- Pierre Boudon, emeritus professor at l'Université de Montréal in the field of communication sciences, director of research at Lalicc (Paris, Sorbonne) as well as at LEAP (Université de Montréal).
- Catherine Bruant, architect, sociologist, director of research at the École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Versailles, director of the research at laboratory LéaV.
- Pierre Caye, philosopher and director of research at CNRS, director of UPR 76.
- Jean-Pierre Chupin, architect, professor at the Université de Montréal, co-director of the laboratoire d'étude de l'architecture potentielle (LEAP) and director of the Research Chair on Competitions and contemporary practices in Architecture (CRC).
- Carmela Cucuzzella, associate professor in the Design and Computation Arts department and holder of the Concordia University Research Chair in Integrated Design, Ecology and Sustainability for the Built Environment.
- Antoine Picon, engineer, architect and historian, director of research at the École des Ponts Paris Tech (LATTS), professor at Harvard.
- Philippe Potié, architect, PdD in History of Art and Civilizations, professor of architectural history and cultures at the École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Versailles, researcher at LéaV.
- Annalisa Viati Navone, architect, PhD in Architecture from the Institut d'architecture of the Université de Genève, professor of architectural history and cultures at l'ÉNSA-V, researcher at LéaV and Archivio del Moderno (Academy of Architecture – Università della Svizzera italiana).

Organization committee

- Paolo Amaldi, LéaV/ÉNSA-V.
- Jean-Pierre Chupin, LEAP/Université de Montréal.
- Carmela Cucuzzella, LEAP/Université de Montréal.
- Susanne Stacher, architect, architecture critic, PhD in Architecture, professor of architecture at the ÉNSA-V, researcher at LéaV.

Scientific office (for any information)

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