

Call for papers

Making architectural history through the prism of environmental and decolonial issues

Paris Institute for Advanced Study

École nationale supérieure d'architecture Paris-Malaquais/Université PSL

Paris, April 9-10-11, 2025.

Organization:

Paris Institute for Advanced Study (IEA), ENSA Paris Malaquais-ACS/AUSser-Université Paris Sciences et Lettres, ENSA Paris La Villette-AHTTEP/AUSser, ENSA Paris Est-OCS/AUSser-Université Gustave Eiffel, ENSA Grenoble-AE&CC

In an undoubtedly cyclical process, numerous recent publications invite us to "rethink" or "revisit" historiography of architecture¹, seeking to go beyond monographic approaches, criticism of architectural objects and the presentation of architectural movements. Their aim is to apprehend the architectural field through the prism of current social concerns within the late, complex modernities (whatever prefixes are often attached to them).²

For almost two decades now, postcolonial³ (or even decolonial) studies and environmental studies, as well as gender studies, have penetrated the discipline with force, to the point where some evoke the emergence of "new" or "alternative" histories⁴. It now seems necessary to take a reflective and critical look at architecture in the light of current concerns.

¹ Tom Avermaete, Véronique Patteuw, Léa-Catherine Szacka and Hans Teerds (eds.), "Critical Regionalism Revisited", *OASE*, n°103, 2019; Maristella Casciato, Daniel E. Coslette and Vikramaditya (eds.), *Rethinking Global Modernism. Architectural Historiography and the Postcolonial*, Abingdon/Oxon, Routledge, 2022; Elie G. Haddad and David Rifkind (eds.), *A Critical History of Contemporary Architecture, 1960-2010*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014.

² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1991.

³ Sibel Bozdoğan, "Architectural History in Professional Education: Reflections on Postcolonial Challenges to the Modern Survey", *Journal of Architectural Education*, no. 4, vol. 52, May 1999, pp. 207-215; Lu Duanfang (eds.), *Third World Modernism. Architecture, Development and Identity*, New York, Routledge, 2011; Felipe Hernandez, *Bhabha for Architects*, London, Routledge, 2010.

⁴ See the program for the "Nouvelles histoires" lecture series organized by Paul Bouet, Fanny Lopez and Frédérique Mocquet at ENSA Paris-Est from March 1 to May 15, 2022: <https://www.paris-est.archi.fr/agenda/cycle-des-lecons-du-mardi-2021-2022-s2>

From historiography to the epistemology of history, what are the "new problems, new approaches, new objects" - taking up and updating the propositions of Pierre Nora and Jacques Le Goff - new periodizations, new geographical areas of architectural history?

This symposium aims to clarify the complexity of these narratives, which are both plural and situated, in order to better understand the methodological questions they raise and the contemporary issues they illuminate. It will question these new data and make them resonate with approaches that claim to be postcolonial and/or environmental. It will examine the epistemological implications of the use of certain notions, such as the anthropocene⁵, and their mobilization in the field of architectural research. In what way, where and how might environmental and decolonial thinking come together to encourage the exploration of uncharted aspects of history? Malcom Ferdinand invites us to think about "decolonial ecology" from a Caribbean perspective, using decolonial critique and struggles against cultural and racist discrimination as a lever for environmental struggles⁶. Given that modernity is intrinsically colonial in its relationship with the world, and is driven by a Eurocentric universalism, this symposium will also examine the possibility of certain architectural modernities being postcolonial, or even decolonial. Current historical approaches that challenge Eurocentrism and attempt to redefine certain fundamentals of the architectural discipline - in the diversity of its meanings, scales and modalities - will be at the heart of the symposium. The symposium also intends to explore the impact these new postures may have on the relationship between, on the one hand, attempts to rewrite great histories of architecture using a "Braudelian" long-term approach⁷ - with works that are also "mainstream"⁸ - and, on the other hand, examples of more micro-historical approaches⁹.

In our view, the new decolonial and environmental histories represent an opportunity to reaffirm the role of the historian as a committed intellectual: in particular, for the history of architecture, they provide an opportunity to reconsider certain meanings of the architectural discipline, notably the notion of the project, and the architect's knowledge, practices and forms of action in the "present time".

⁵ For the concept of the Anthropocene, see Christophe Bonneuil, Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *L'évènement Anthropocène. La terre, l'histoire et nous*, Paris, Seuil, 2013; for the concept of urban revolution and its questioning, see David Graeber, David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, London, Allen Lane, 2021.

⁶ Malcom Ferdinand, *A decolonial ecology. Penser l'écologie depuis le monde caribéen*, Paris, Seuil, 2019.

⁷ For example: Barnabas Calder, *Architecture: From Prehistory to Climate Emergency*, London, Pelican Books, 2021; Hans Ibelings, *Modern Architecture: A Planetary Warming History*, Amsterdam/Montreal, The Architecture Observer, 2023.

⁸ Philippe Rahm, *Histoire naturelle de l'architecture: comment le climat, les épidémies et l'énergie ont façonné la ville et les bâtiments*, Paris, Pavillon de l'Arsenal, 2020.

⁹ For example: Daniel A. Barber, *Modern Architecture and Climate: Design Before Air Conditioning*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2020; Jane Haffner (eds.), *Landscapes of Housing: Design and Planning in the History of Environmental Thought*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2022; Kiel Moe, *Unless: The Seagram Building Construction Ecology*, Barcelona, Actar, 2021.

Areas for consideration

1 - Postcolonial or decolonial histories of architecture

A growing number of publications attempt to write a history of architecture, cities and territories from a global perspective (in a dynamic akin to the "global turn")¹⁰. They highlight the transnational movement of people and ideas through non-unilateral exchanges, using concepts such as "cultural transfer" and "creolization", coined by Michel Espagne and Edouard Glissant respectively¹¹, and inviting us to observe postures that fall somewhere between borrowing and imposition¹². At the turn of the 21st century, Dipesh Chakrabarty called for the "provincialization of Europe"¹³ and Sibel Bozdoğan for a rethinking of conceptions of architectural history through the prism of the "postcolonial challenge", i.e., to open up and decentralize the canons of history, without lapsing into identity-based essentialization.¹⁴

Since then, numerous works have questioned the relationship with the "Other" and the writing of "another history of the world", overturning obsolete oppositions between North and South, between Eurocentric universalism and recognition of local specificities and plural otherness¹⁵. Ezra Akcan, for instance, identified two approaches - one poststructuralist based on the work of Gülsüm Nalbaritoğlu and the other humanist based on the work of Sibel Bozdoğan - in the introduction of postcolonial approaches in the history of architecture¹⁶. For our part, through the contributions of this international symposium we hope, on the one hand, to open up the field of reflection for understanding the temporal, spatial and cultural oversights, erasures and unthinking of architectural history, to contribute to the writing of other histories of architecture. On the other hand, our goal is to begin to draw up the critical and methodological cartographies of histories that endeavor to make explicit who is speaking and from where.

Our aim is to explore the possibility of a radical decolonization of historiography.

¹⁰ Kenneth Frampton (eds.), *World Architecture, 1900-2000: A critical Mosaic [10 volumes]*, Viennes, Springer, 1999-2000; Tom Avermaete, Michelangelo Sabatino, *The Global Turn. Six Journeys of Architecture and the City, 1945-1989*, Nai010 Publishers, 2024 [forthcoming]; Richard Ingersoll, Spiro Kostof, *World Architecture. A Cross-cultural History*, New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

¹¹ Edouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997; Michel Espagne, *Les Transferts culturels franco-allemands*, Paris, PUF, 1999.

¹² Stephen V. Ward, "Re-Examining the International Diffusion of Planning [chapter 3]", in Robert Freestone (eds.), *Urban Planning in a Changing World. The Twentieth Century Experience*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp. 40-60; Mercedes Volait and Joe Nasr (eds.), *Urban Planning: Imported or Exported?*, Chichester, Wiley, 2003.

¹³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000.

¹⁴ Sibel Bozdoğan, "Architectural History in Professional Education: Reflections on Postcolonial Challenges to the Modern Survey", *Journal of Architectural Education*, n°4, vol. 52, May 1999, pp. 207-215.

¹⁵ Zeynep Celik, "Cultural Intersections: Re-visioning Architecture and the City in the Twentieth Century", in Richard Koshalek (eds.), *At the End of the Century. One Hundred Years of Architecture*, New-York, Harry N. Abrams, 1998, pp. 190-227; Philippe Colin, Lissel Quiroz, *Pensées décoloniales: une introduction aux théories critiques d'Amérique Latine*, Paris, La Découverte, 2023; Anthony D. King, *Colonial urban development (Culture, social power and environment)*, London, Routledge, 1976; Pierre Singaravélou, Fabrice Argounès, Camille Faucourt, *Une autre histoire du monde*, Paris/Marseille, Gallimard/Mucem, 2023.

¹⁶ Ezra Akcan, "Postcolonial Theories in Architecture", in Elie G. Haddad and David Rifkind (eds.), *A Critical History of Contemporary Architecture. 1960-2010*, New York, Routledge, 2016 (1st ed. 2014), pp. 115-136.

2 - Environmental histories of architecture

In recent decades, environmental history has sought to explore "the multiple dimensions of man's interactions with nature"¹⁷, while at the same time demonstrating the importance of breaking out of the Western nature-culture dualism¹⁸. However, the boundaries of this field are porous and constantly being questioned, as it both irrigates and feeds on many other disciplines. If "urban history, which goes against the grain of a history in pieces, is in itself an exercise in synthesis"¹⁹, environmental history is even more ambitious, proposing spatial and temporal framings that are unusual in their scope. Climate change is a reminder that the urban question goes hand in hand with an ecological question, the scale of which is very different from that of the industrial era, with its trail of pollution. It is no longer enough to think about the city "in" its territory, more or less extensive, since this territory has become the entire planet.

What's more, the ecological challenge calls into question production methods in the building industry, one of the most polluting sectors, and requires a transformation of the world of architecture and its practices. This makes multidisciplinary approaches all the more necessary. The notion of environment, where natural data and human artificiality intermingle, is taking its place at the heart of the architectural project and redefining it. The history of architecture cannot escape this new interpretative paradigm. The major question to be addressed by this symposium is: what does environmental history have to do with the history of architecture?

Environmental history has undoubtedly focused attention on new "actors" such as the earth, raw materials, energy resources, materials and living or inanimate non-humans. First of all, the colloquium would like to investigate to which extent this shift enables us to better understand the relationships between architecture and "what surrounds it" over time, paying close attention to the chosen vocabulary (nature, milieu, *Umwelt*, environment, etc.). We would also like to reflect on what practicing architects, historians and theorists understand by the word "environment", whose meaning changes based on the historical moment, in a process of co-construction of societies and their contexts, two complementary risks: on the one hand, that of ideologizing the notion of environment, too often mobilized as a simplistic and reductive interpretative key, beyond specific temporal and geographical contexts; on the other, the techno-solutionist approach, often widespread within architectural disciplines.

In this sense, architecture – as a material and "transformative" object par excellence at the heart of the interaction between man and the earth's resources – links socio-cultural questions to issues of environmental history, understood as a process driven by the fundamental concept of change.

¹⁷ Carolyn Merchant, *The Columbian Guide to American Environmental History*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2002.

¹⁸ Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013 [*Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005].

¹⁹ Jean-Luc Pinol, *Introduction*, in *Histoire de l'Europe Urbaine : Tome 1, La ville antique*, Paris, Seuil, 2011. On the place of the urban environment within environmental history, see Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud, "Pour une histoire environnementale de l'urbain", *Histoire urbaine*, n° 18, 2007, p. 5-21.

Crossroads

Proposals for intervention may fall in two lines of thinking, opening up to cross-cutting topics and approaches. As shown by several works - such as *Conservation in Africa. People, Policies and Practice* (1987)²⁰, through to more recent research on so-called tropical architectures, such as *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Colonial Networks, Nature and Technoscience* (2016)²¹ - postcolonial and environmental histories are closely linked.

General bibliography

Tom Avermaete, Serhat Karakayali, Marion von Osten, *Colonial Modern. Aesthetics of the Past – Rebellions for the Future*, London, Black Dog Publishing, 2010.

Guillaume Blanc, Antonin Plarier et Iris Seri-Hersch, « Vers une histoire socio-environnementale des empires contemporains », *Histoire Politique*, n° 48, 2022. Online : <http://journals.openedition.org/histoirepolitique/8326>

Guillaume Blanc, Élise Demeulenaere and Wolf Feuerhahn (eds.), *Humanités environnementales*, Paris, Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2017. Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.psorbonne.84270>

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Jiat-Hwee Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Colonial Networks, Nature and Technoscience*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2016.

Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II et Mabel O. Wilson, *Race and Modern Architecture*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020.

Filippo De Pieri, "Architectural history, planning history, and the environmental perspective: a report from Iceland", *Planning Perspectives*, n° 39-5, 2024, pp. 1171-1178. Online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02665433.2024.2364342>

Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013 [*Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005].

Lu Duanfang (eds.), *Third World Modernism. Architecture, Development and Identity*, New York, Routledge, 2011.

Vera Egbers, Christa Kamleithner, Özge Sezer, Alexandra Skedzuhn-Safir, *Architectures of Colonialism: Constructed Histories, Conflicting Memories*, Basel, Birkhauser, 2024.

Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *Sans transition. Une nouvelle histoire de l'énergie*, Paris, Seuil, 2024.

Stéphane Frioux, Renaud Bécot (eds.), *Écrire l'histoire environnementale au xxie siècle - Sources, méthodes, pratiques*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2022.

Elie G. Haddad, David Rifkind (eds.), *A Critical History of Contemporary Architecture, 1960-2010*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014.

Jane Haffner (eds.), *Landscapes of Housing: Design and Planning in the History of Environmental Thought*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2022.

²⁰ David Anderson, Richard Grove (eds.), *Conservation in Africa. People, Policies and Practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

²¹ Jiat-Hwee Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Colonial Networks, Nature and Technoscience*, London, Routledge, 2016.

Richard Ingersoll, Spiro Kostof, *World Architecture. A Cross-cultural History*, Oxford, Oxford university Press, 2013.

François Jarrige, Alexis Vrignon (eds.), *Face à la puissance. Une histoire des énergies alternatives à l'âge industriel*, Paris, La Découverte, 2020.

Anthony D. King, *Colonial urban development (Culture, social power and environment)*, London, Routledge, 1976.

Fabien Locher, Grégory Quenet, "Environmental History: The Origins, Stakes, and Perspectives of a New Site for Research", in *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine*, n° 56-4(4), 2009, pp. 7-38.

Itohan Osayimwese, « From Postcolonial to Decolonial Architectural History: A Method », in *Kritische berichte: Zeitschrift für Kunst und Kulturwissenschaften*, n° 3, 2021, pp. 16-38.

Alice Thomine-Berrada, Barry Bergdol (eds.), *Repenser les limites : l'architecture à travers l'espace, le temps et les disciplines*, Paris, INHA, 2005.

Grégory Quenet, *Qu'est-ce que l'histoire environnementale ?*, Ceyzérieu dans l'Ain, Champ Vallon, 2014.

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Practical information

Venue and dates:: Paris Institute for Advanced Study / ENSA Paris-Malaquais, April 9-10-11, 2025.

Conference schedule: 3 days, with 2 sessions per day. Each day will be introduced by a guest lecture. The sessions will be themed (by axis and/or transversal), and will consist of 4/5 presentations followed by a discussion.

Application procedure and deadlines

Conference language: English and French

Abstract submission: January 15, 2025

Proposals for contributions should be sent no later than January 15, 2025 to ieanewhistories@gmail.com

They should be written in English or French. Each proposal, in a single .pdf file, must specify the theme and include name, email address, professional affiliation, address, telephone number, a short scientific biography (200 words max.) of the author, a title and a 500-word abstract. The abstract will be used to assess the relevance of the proposal, and should include a research question, methodology, corpus/sources/field and bibliographical references.

The file must be named as follows: Axe (1 or 2 according to your choice or 1+2), hyphen, surname.

Response to selected candidates: early February 2025

Extended abstract sent: April 2, 2025

Text between 1,500 and 2,000 words, in English or French, outlining the oral presentation and the general structure of the article to come, including an essential bibliography. It will be a prerequisite for the drafting of papers for publication in the proceedings, which will be subject to a selection process after the colloquium. Precise editorial standards for extended abstracts will be sent at a later date.

Steering committee

Diane Aymard (AAU/CRENAU-Nantes), Federico Ferrari (ENSAPM-ACS/AUSser-PSL), Marilena Kourniati (ENSAPLV-AHTTEP/AUSser), Christelle Lecoeur (ENSAPM-PSL), Marilia Macedo Espina (ENSAPM-ACS/AUSser-PSL), Sophie Paviol (ENSAG-AE&CC).

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