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Re-Writing (Post-)Modernity Or: what did Jean-François Lyotard want from Architecture?

Abstract

After the opening of the exhibition “Les Immatériaux” at the Centre Pompidou (1985), Vittorio Gregotti—at the time the director of *Casabella*—asked four philosophers to publish a text on postmodern architecture. Amongst them, Jean-François Lyotard provided a quite critical commentary. The author of *La condition postmoderne*, as well as co-curator of “Les Immatériaux” argued that post-modern architecture is bound to produce nothing else than tiny (his word) alterations of what was had already been done by the modernists. Consequently, we should think of post-modernism as an “ana”—Modernism: the postmodern as the constant anamnesis of modernity. Starting from the reading of his essay, this paper analyses Lyotard’s engagement with postmodern architecture through his writings, as well as the exhibition “Les Immatériaux” (where the work of architects such as Rem Koolhaas and Peter Eisenman was exhibited). By following Lyotard’s arguments (critical of Charles Jencks, Paolo Portoghesi and others), it is argued that the postmodern in architecture could be considered as something different from what it is usually thought to be (a more or less ironic style), thus allowing us to re-write, or even re-think, the notion of the post-modern today.

Keywords

Jean-François Lyotard, Exhibition “Les Immatériaux” (1985), postmodern Philosophy, Modernity/Mostmodernity, Deconstructivism