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Palais de Tokyo – Monument of Modernity

Art Politics and Aesthetics in the 20th and 21st century

Today, the Palais de Tokyo is an international centre of contemporary art in Paris, also known by virtue of relational aesthetics brought forward by Nicolas Bourriaud, who co-founded it with Jérôme Sans. It was projected for national and municipal museums of modern art on the occasion of the 1937 world fair. A monographic study of its genesis up to the contemporary site was yet missing.

This study examines the thought and projects that occupied it, based on central exhibitions and vast materials from the archives of cultural politics and arts administration: Musée National d'Art Moderne (1937-1977), the conception of the Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Art et d'Essai (1977-1986), Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques (IHEAP, 1988-1990), préfiguration d'Orsay, Maison de la Photographie (1984-1993), a project for Palais des Images/Palais du Cinéma (1984-1998, with Cinémathèque, FÉMIS, BIFI), Site de création contemporaine (2002-).

The study also focuses on the Palais as a monument for thinking of art's function in society, from the context of an international exchange on modern museums in the thirties, up to contemporary debates of political aesthetics, particularly of relational art, the discourse of participatory art, 'New Institutionalism' and philosophical aesthetics. The study also provides a global view on the genesis of relational aesthetics and its principal critiques. Thus, the Palais de Tokyo is considered as monument, a space of social memory of art following Aby Warburg and a theoretical frame based on Walter Benjamin, informing on its crucial role in the development of formal criteria of theories of art's social role in the 20th and 21st centuries.