The Uses and Abuses of Human Geography: Difference and Space at World’s Expositions

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RÉSUMÉS

This paper probes the French human geographic and ethnographic traditions, and their use and abuse in architecture and architectural history, c. 1920–50. Human geography has given architectural history a highly ambivalent heritage. On the one hand, its insistence on the specificity and localization of differences between cultures (and its documentation of such differences) has been strategic for the development of post-colonial national cultures and the theorization of postcolonial spatiality. On the other, it views geographically located difference as historically immutable and fixed according to social Darwinian evolutionary hierarchies, a mentality deeply embedded in architectural history. I will talk about the ways human geography as a discipline attempted to fix both European and non-European cultures spatially and temporally (e.g., Lévy-Bruhl, Vidal de la Blache, Halbwachs), discuss geography’s influence on architectural history (e.g., Lavedan) and its implication with colonialism, and read that effort “against the grain” by means of postwar ethnographers like Lévi-Strauss and Leiris who questioned the degree to which difference and identity could be so stabilized. I might then cite briefly recent work on geography, such as Irit Rogoff’s book on contemporary art and Gillian Rose’s feminist geography that critiques the legacy of the human geographic enterprise. By illustration, I will compare pre-WWII and post-WWII world’s fairs (e.g., Paris 1931 and Brussels 1958), and read them as manifestations of the human geographic agenda.
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Index chronologique: XXᵉ siècle, époque contemporaine
Index géographique: France
Mots-clés: géographie humaine

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