


# The images of postmodernism as symbolic capital: Modernity as 'l'esprit du temps' or as 'un projet inachevé'?

## Conference Poster

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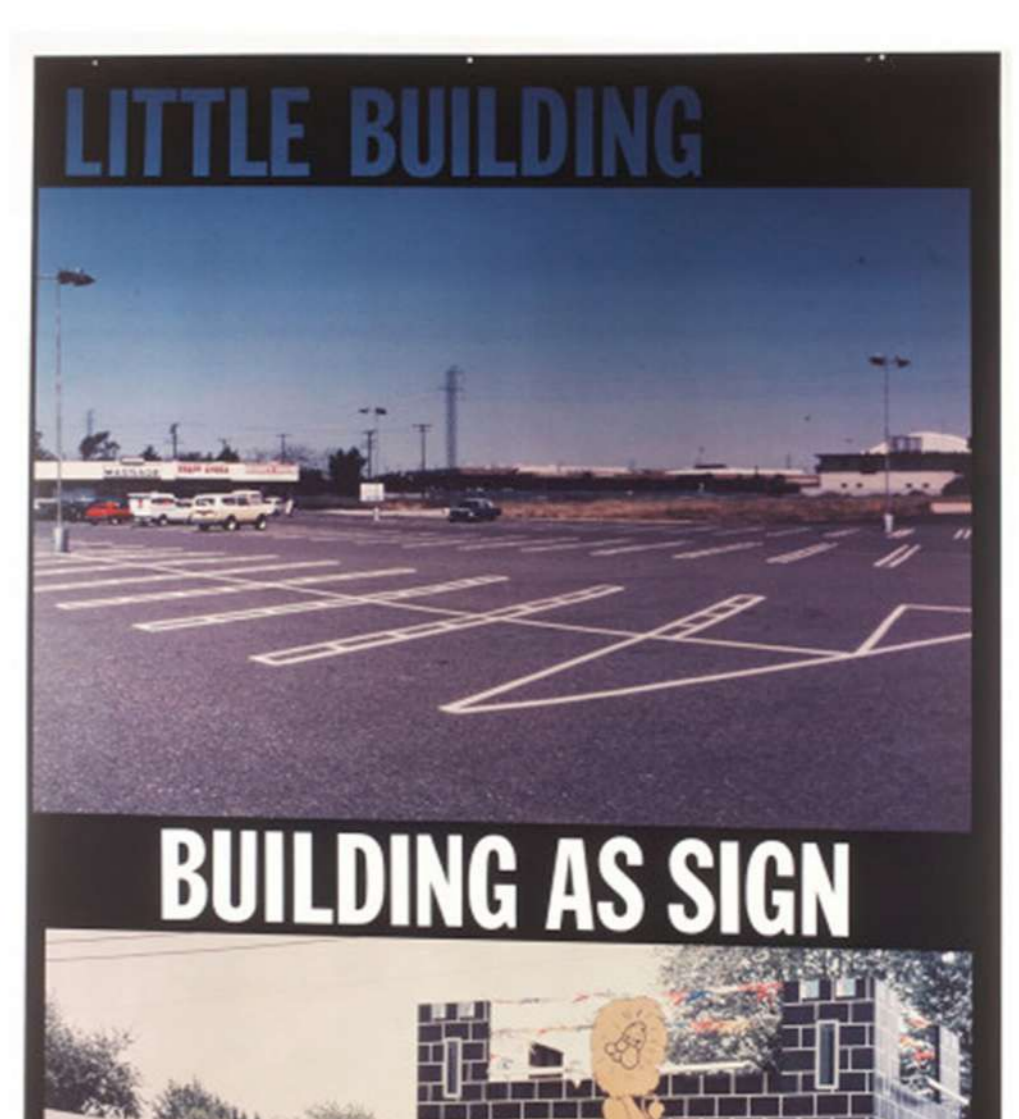
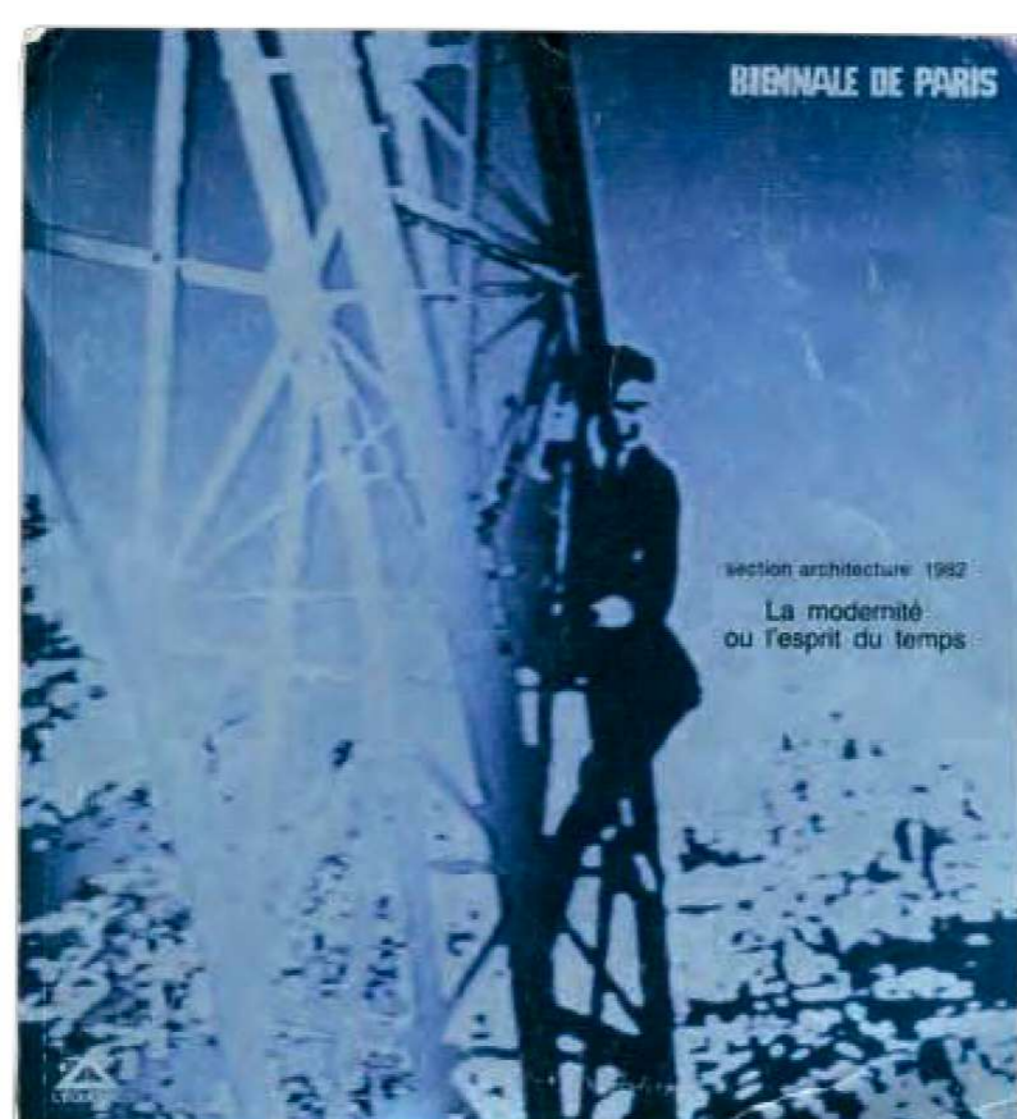
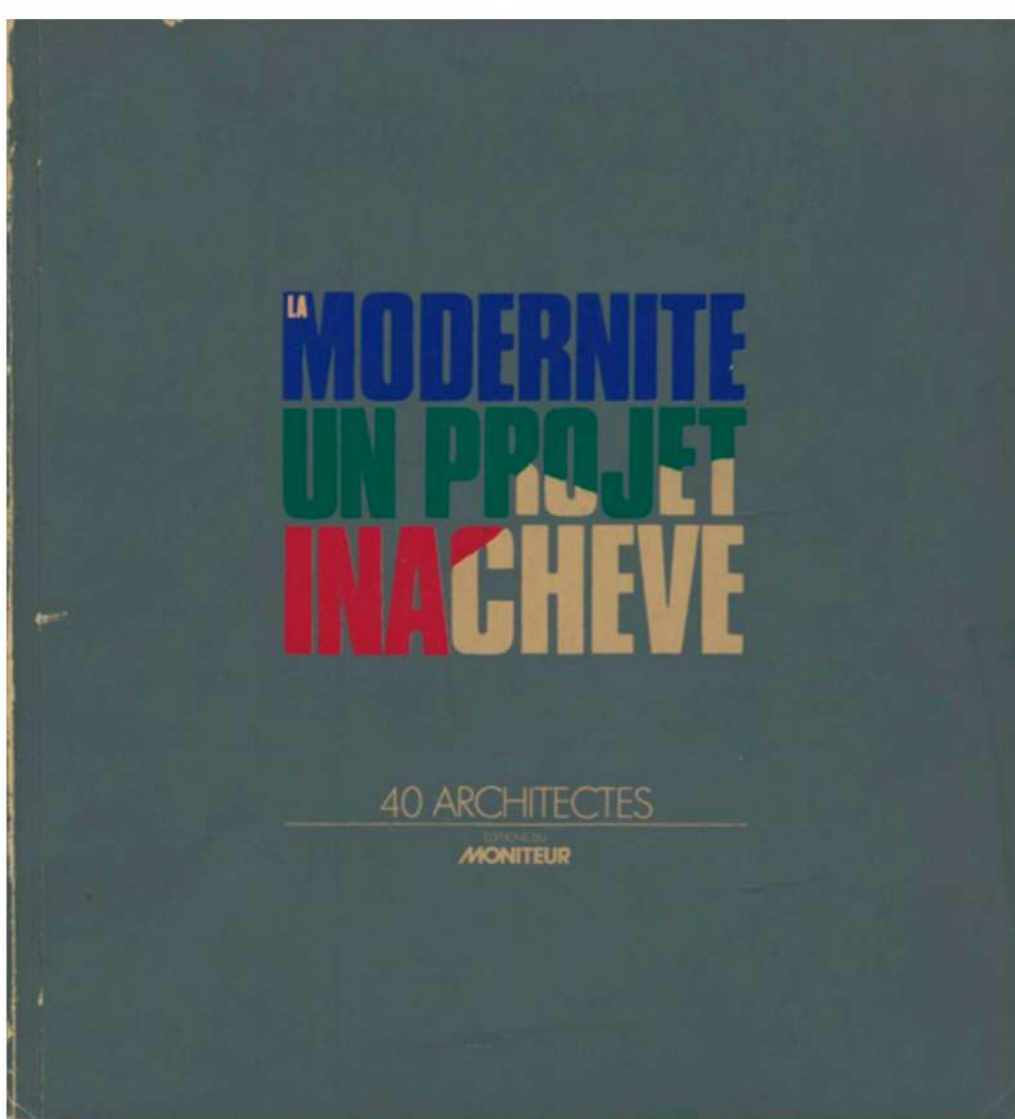
## The images of postmodernism as symbolic capital: Modernity as 'l'esprit du temps' or as 'un projet inachevé'?

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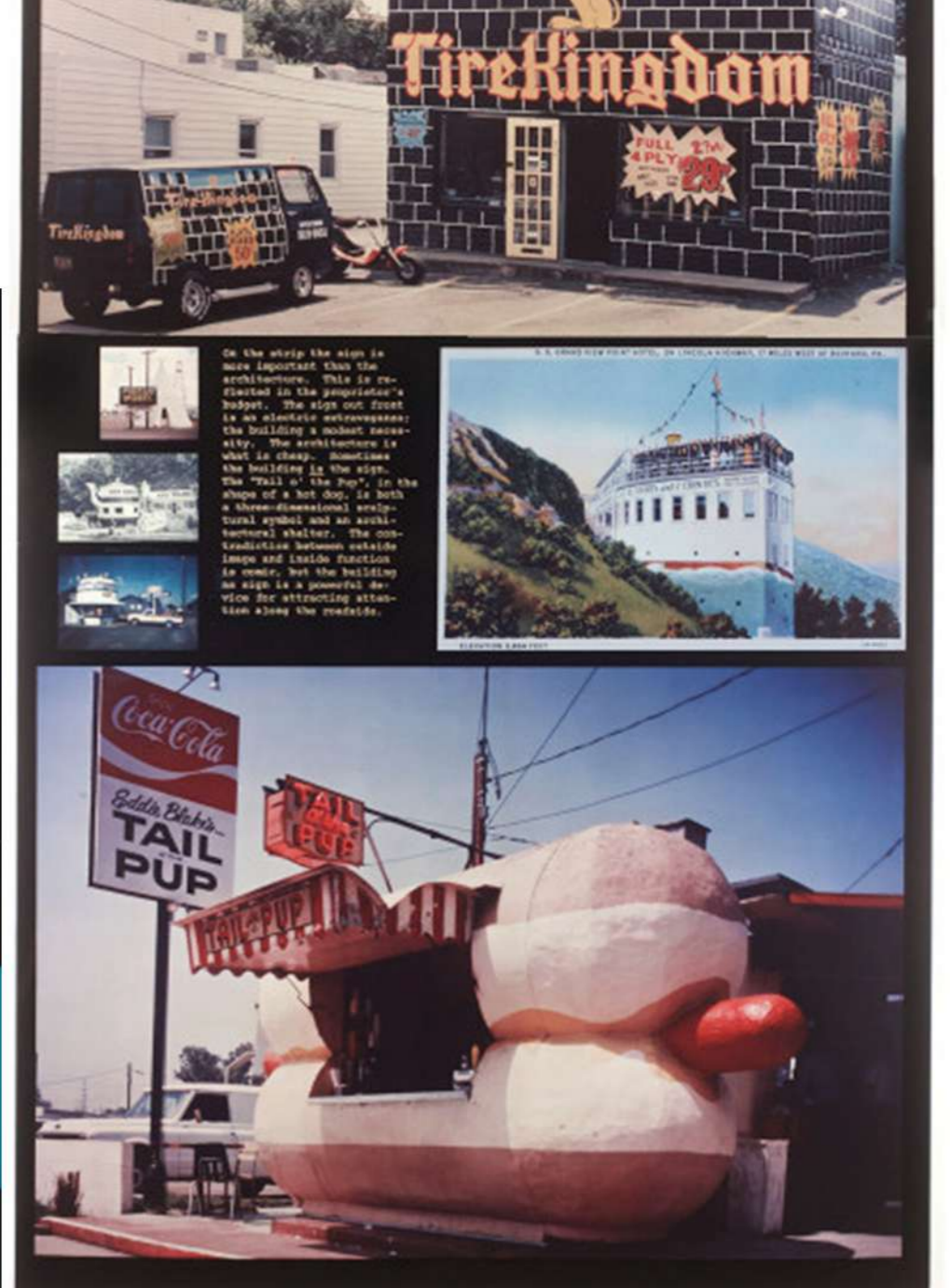
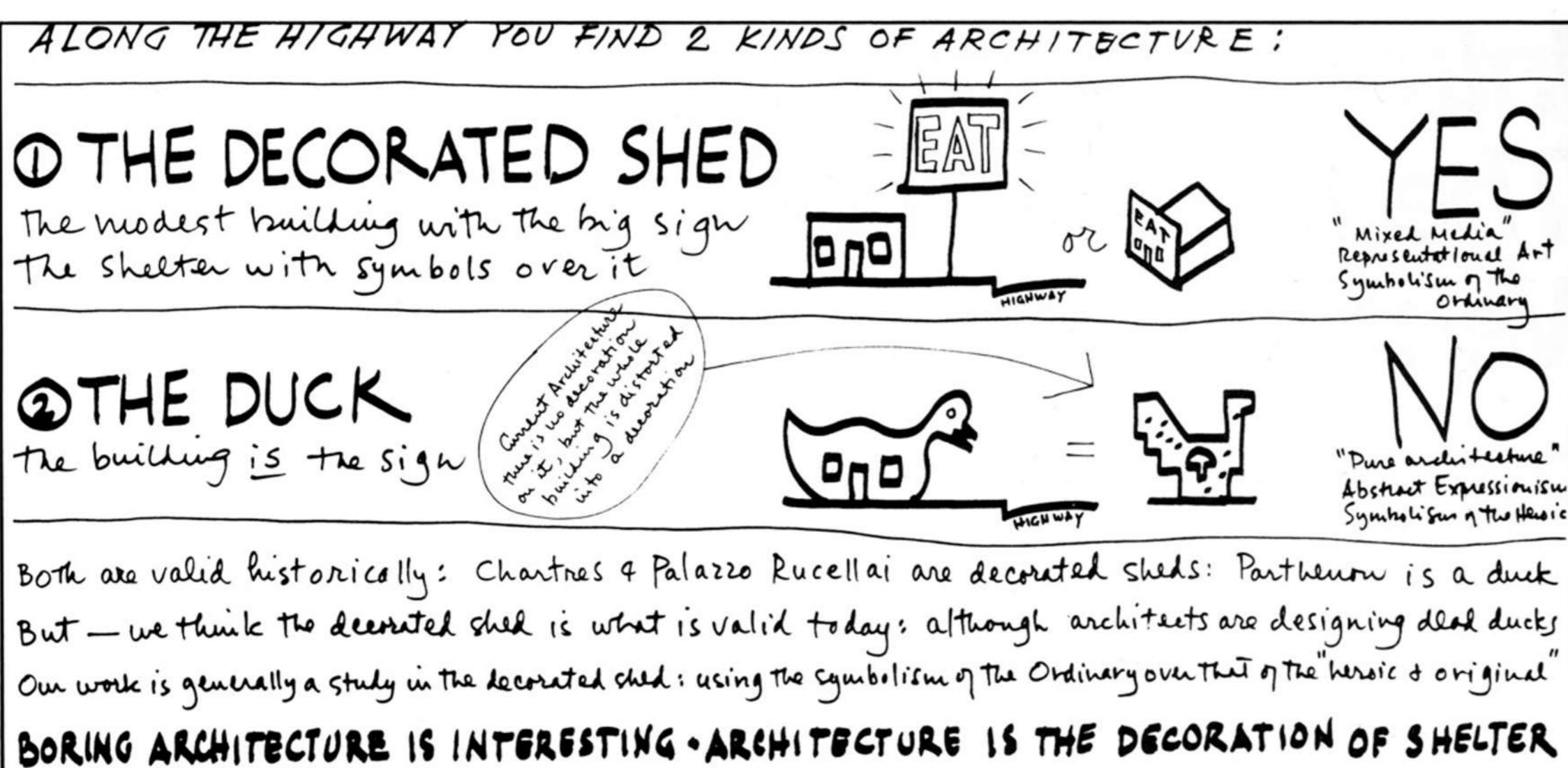
### ABSTRACT

The poster examines the impact of the exhibitions "La Presenza del passato" curated by Paolo Portoghesi for the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 1980, and "Architectures en France: Modernité, post-modernité" curated by Chantal Béret and held at the Centre Pompidou and the Institut français d'architecture in Paris in 1981 on two exhibitions centred on the concept of modernity and held in Paris in 1982: "La Modernité ou l'esprit du temps" curated by Jean Nouvel, Patrice Goulet and François Barré and organised in the framework of the architectural section of the XIIe Biennale of Paris, and "La Modernité, un projet inachevé" curated by Paul Chemetov and Jean-Claude Garcias and held at the École des beaux-arts in Paris. Through a comparison of these two exhibitions, it presents the divergences and affinities between the attitudes of Nouvel and Chemetov regarding the commoditization and aestheticization of the image and their perception of the architectural signs. It departs from the controversy between Jürgen Habermas's approach, in "La Modernité, un projet inachevé", where he claims that modernity is an unfinished project, and Jean François Lyotard's approach, in *La condition postmoderne*, where he considers modernity as an outdated project, in order to interpret the conflict between the aforementioned exhibitions. The debate between Habermas and Lyotard is related to the crisis of the idea that the architectural language must symbolize and embody the essence of the time, the Zeitgeist. This debate between Habermas and Lyotard is related to the question about the end or the continuation of modernity. According to Habermas, the project for the emancipation of modernity should not be abandoned. Habermas' critiques of postmodernity are associated with his disapproval of Lyotard's stance towards aesthetic modernity. Habermas criticised Lyotard for abandoning the idea that modernity can still bring about changes in the lived world and everyday life.

The debate that the aforementioned exhibitions represent is linked to the emergence of two trends in relation to the reinvention of modernity. Following Pierre Bourdieu's approach, we could claim that the tension between the ways in which each of these exhibitions treats the role of the image within architectural design and the role of architecture for the construction of a vision regarding progress is the expression of two divergent positions in social space. The tension between the approaches of the two exhibitions is related to how their curators conceptualised its relation to the approach of the Team 10 Jean Nouvel argued, in *La Modernité ou l'esprit du temps*, that being "Modern today is not holding the torch of the modern movement, Team Ten or 'ordinary ugliness'", while Paul Chemetov is positive towards the ideas of Team 10 and the intention of its members to understand habitat as a place for social interaction. A comparison of the approach of the Atelier d'urbanisme et d'architecture (AUA) and that of the Team 10 would be useful for interpreting their differences as part of a generational conflict through the elaboration of concepts first developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Karl Mannheim. It also explains why the discourse of Team 10 is less critical vis-à-vis the generation of modernism than that of the AUA. Two thought-provoking questions that emerge is the following: is the break with the founding myths of modernity rather a generational rupture than a conceptual one? Should the demystification of modernism be understood as a generational or a conceptual stance?



From left to right: front cover of Paul Chemetov, Jean-Claude Garcias, eds., *La Modernité, un projet inachevé: 40 architectes*. (Paris: Éditions du Moniteur, 1982); front cover of the exhibition catalogue Jean Nouvel, Anne Laure Egg, Odile Fillion, Patrice Goulet, eds., *La Modernité ou l'esprit du temps* (Paris: l'Équerre, 1982); image from the following article: Jean Nouvel, "Fragments: en diffère ... interview: en directs", in *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 231 (1984), 10.



From left to right: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*. First edition, 1972. Credit: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania; Poster of the exhibition "Architectures en France: Modernité/post-modernité", curated by Chantal Béret and held at the Institut Français d'Architecture from 18 November 1981 through 6 February 1982. © Centre Pompidou, 1981. Graphic conception by Werner Jerker; Robert Venturi, John Rauch, and Denise Scott Brown, Architects and Planners, *Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City* Renwick Gallery, Washington D.C. 1974–1976. Building as sign exhibit panel. Credit: Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania.