

## Embedded positivism (or *Everything is Theoretical*)

Philippe Morel

### Abstract

Since Peter Eisenman's essay "*The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End*" (*Perspecta* 21, Summer, 1984), the discipline of architecture as well as numerous other disciplines related to critical culture or theory regularly pose the question "is this the time of the end?". By posing this question, of course, critical theory forgets to include itself in this possible end; in fact, until now, the discipline of critical theory considers itself as the only discourse surviving. It considers itself as a new kind of universalism and as an unhistorical discourse when it should be perceived as an "*episteme*", in the same way as P. Eisenman describes in the previously mentioned essay, and in Foucault's words the classical period.

Given this, the question of the end becomes the following: firstly, does the precise case of the end of *something* mean the end of *everything* (including of course the end of the viewpoint/theory posing the question, including also, in a logical way, the fact that we should not even be able to ask the question?); secondly, does the 'end of theory' mean the end of critical theory?; thirdly, does the end of theory mean the end of architectural theory?

This essay tries to answer these three questions. Concerning the first one, I suggest that we should either consider that everything is becoming theoretical or that nothing can be theoretical anymore. I suggest that we should avoid asking any theoretical question like 'the end of theory' if we implicitly believe that there is a possible positive answer (yes, this is *the end of theory*).

It is no longer possible to be theoretical if one considers that there is an end to theory, in the same way that it is impossible to be relativistic and then say that relativism is a better approach; or, mentioning Wittgenstein, one cannot be skeptical where there is no question available (*Tractatus* 6.51: "*Scepticism is not irrefutable, but palpably senseless, if it would doubt where a question cannot be asked*"). For logical reasons then, as well as for the other reasons outlined in this essay, I suggest that everything is theoretical.

As for the second question, related to the end of critical theory, it is necessary to point out the fact that we are asking the question of the end of theory not as a critical inquiry, but as an inquiry which contains a kind of "embedded positivism". The fact that we might doubt the existence of theory means that, at least at some point, theory already "disappeared". Finally, the third question posed is taken apart into two distinct questions: is 'the end of theory' another

Zeitgeist that architecture must appropriate, or is 'the end of theory' a new direction in an autonomous discipline?

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Philippe Morel is the principle of EZCT Architecture and Design Research founded in Paris in 2003. EZCT carry out cross-disciplinary theoretical and speculative research into the built environment. Morel's writing has been published widely, including in *Archis* and *Frame* magazines. Morel and EZCT's work has been exhibited in venues in Switzerland, France, The Netherlands and Japan, including having participated and been shown in Archilab. In addition to his private practice, Morel regularly teaches at a number of architecture schools, including Paris-Malaquais in Paris.