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7<sup>th</sup> Bernardo Secchi Working Seminar  
**SPACE, LIFE, AND POLITICS:  
COUNTER-PROJECTS AND THE  
SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION**

28-29 October, 2024

*Call for contributions*

FONDATION  
BRAILLARD  
ARCHITECTES

**THE ECO-  
CENTURY  
PROJECT**

Initiated by **Fondation Brillard Architectes**, Geneva, and **Habitat Research Center**, EPFL, the **Bernardo Secchi Working Seminars (JBS)** began in 2015. An international, interdisciplinary forum, it addresses key urban and regional issues for ecological transition amid the climate crisis.

Dedicated to the late planner Bernardo Secchi (1934-2014), Professor at the Schools of Architecture in Geneva and Venice, the seminar honours his legacy. As an internationally acclaimed urbanist, Secchi consistently advocated for a **critical understanding and innovative action**, shaping the just and optimal development of the urban realm through his writings and projects.



7<sup>th</sup> Bernardo Secchi Working Seminar

## Space, life, and politics: Counter-projects and the Socio-Ecological Transition

28-29 October, 2024

### Call for contributions

Marking Bernardo Secchi's 10<sup>th</sup> memorial anniversary, the JBS 2024 extends the reflection initiated in 2022, focusing on the ecological, social, and spatial transition of modern urbanized territories.

Delving into the interplay between socio-ecological Transition and radical adaptations in our practices, policies, and projects, the seminar aims to unravel the inherent tensions in navigating these complex dynamics.

*« The metaphysical and methodological commitment of modern western urbanism is towards conceiving the project of the city and the territory as being part of a vaster biopolitical action »<sup>1</sup>*

*Bernardo Secchi*

As per Bernardo Secchi, European democratic culture forms the canvas for a “vaster biopolitical action”. This endeavour intricately shapes and transforms urban spaces with the goal of safeguarding, educating, and emancipating its people. Consequently, the planning and design of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are characterised as techno-scientific and creative extensions of this enduring tradition.

Today, this contemporary project concerning space and life, often pejoratively labelled “biopolitical” by Michel Foucault<sup>2</sup>, grapples with profound economic, social, and environmental challenges such as threats to ecosystems from excessive extraction, societal divisions, escalating spatial injustices, weakened economies, and global health risks. **Redirecting designers' focus on space, life, and politics becomes a pivotal approach to devise planning and design tools for a habitable, equitable, and healthy planet amidst these complexities.** Enabling this socio-ecological and spatial transition necessitates a fresh start, marked by a fundamental conceptual shift favouring novel connections among space, life, and politics.

### Working hypothesis

The seminar aims to share, challenge, and delve into the hypothesis that a Transition project demands a distinct epistemological and operational framework. **As the social and ecological Transition shapes a novel “biopolitical regime”, now is the opportune moment to contemplate alternative initiatives<sup>3</sup>—counter-projects.**

A counter-project goes beyond merely proposing an alternative hypothesis to an existing project; it entails a redefinition of its objectives, structures, and implementation strategies. Significantly, counter-projects can introduce entirely different systems—alternative worldviews—thus legitimising positions currently marginalised

1. Secchi, B. (2014). *A tradição europeia do planejamento: culturas epolíticas*. In E. Ribeiro Peixoto, M. F. Derntl, P.P. Palazzo, R. Trevisan (eds.), *Tempos e escalas da cidade e do urbanismo: quatro palestras, XIII Seminário de história da Cidade e do Urbanismo (SHCU)*. Brasília: Universidade de Brasília.

2. Foucault, M. (2007). *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*. In Senellart, M. (ed.) (2007). Palgrave Macmillan

3. See Viganò, P. (2023). *Il Giardino Biopolitico. Spazi, vite, transizione*. Torino: Donzelli (fr. transl. Viganò, P. (2023). *Le jardin biopolitique. Espaces, vies et transition*. Geneva: Metispresses)

by mainstream or dominant discourses. They serve as plausible alternatives, not due to their avant-garde nature, but because they represent radical hypotheses crafted in spatial contexts, offering insights into how we can reimagine our evolving urban life and landscapes during times of profound transformation.

Counter-projects establish the groundwork for contemplating alternative lifestyles, a crucial endeavour in this Transition period where traditional projects and ideas are still progressing toward fruition. Active involvement in dismantling paradigms, decisions, and projects misaligned with today's risks and priorities is imperative. The future shaped by such projects frequently diverges from the aspirations for a habitable, just, and healthy future inherent in current discussions. Therefore, an engaged approach is necessary to reshape the trajectory towards more fitting visions of the future.

## Themes and axes

Hence, the seminar will delve into concerns such as socio-spatial conflicts, strategies for mitigating climate change, counteracting its impacts, and the emergence of new ecologies in modern urbanised regions. All these considerations pivot around the fundamental issue of design and its execution.

The seminar is organised into three main axes:

- **Concrete utopias.** Throughout history, visions, utopias, and future imaginaries have been instrumental in dismantling prevailing paradigms and reimagining the world from a different perspective. Through tangible, measurable, and debatable utopias, this axis facilitates an exploration of the necessary steps to progress in a specific direction. It delves into visions and utopias as effective tools for counter-design and negotiation.

- **Counter-actions and activism.** This axis scrutinises contemporary moments and design dynamics that don't necessarily wait for consensus to act, but instead strive to achieve it through the power of exemplarity. Here, the counter-project adopts a perspective centred on direct actions, operating at various scales and engaging diverse stakeholders. Counteractions play a pivotal role in shaping and advancing policies and regulations, challenging the inertia often associated with planning and established procedures.

- **Radical policies.** The third axis focuses on navigating the space defined by current conditions. It contemplates projects that not only operate within existing policies but also challenge and stretch them to their utmost limits, aiming to counter them from within. Addressing the need to adapt to current conditions, this axis explores radical policies capable of advancing and cultivating counter positions.

**Conditions**

- The 7<sup>th</sup> Bernardo Secchi Working Seminar welcomes **submissions from scholars, practitioners, and stakeholders** navigating the convergence of Space, Life, and Politics. Proposals should present counter-projects addressing the ecological and social Transition. Exploring the interplay of life sciences, political sciences, and disciplines like architecture and planning, **contributors are encouraged to explicitly emphasise design and operational experiences while aligning with one or more of the three guiding axes.**
- Written proposals (800 words, in English) are welcome for submission until **12 am on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024**, sent to: [habitat@epfl.ch](mailto:habitat@epfl.ch)
- The selected proposals will be **disclosed on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024.**
- The selected authors will be invited to present the content of their proposals for 15 minutes at JBS in Geneva/Lausanne on **October 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 2024.** The scientific committee may extend invitations to certain authors for an extended version of their contribution which will be featured in an upcoming publication (Actar), dedicated to the themes explored from 2022 to 2024.
- The final text intended for publication (2,000-2,500 words, accompanied by copyright-free images available in high resolution at the time of text submission) is due **at 12 am on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024.**
- The seminar spans two international working days in Lausanne/Geneva. In commemoration of the 10<sup>th</sup> memorial anniversary of Bernardo Secchi, a subsequent seminar organised by IUAV University of Venice will pay tribute to his legacy.

**Important dates**

- April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, 12 am: submission of proposals
- April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024: announcement of selected proposals
- June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, 12 am: submission of final written contributions
- October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, 12 am: submission of final presentations
- October 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 2024: Bernardo Secchi Working Seminar

**Organizing committee**

- Paola Viganò (HRC-EPFL)
- Panos Mantziaras (FBA)
- Tommaso Pietropolli (HRC-EPFL)
- Hélène Gallezot (FBA)
- Anna Karla de Almeida (HRC-EPFL)

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