



INTERIOR ECOLOGIES

Research on non-human environments

A conference organized by HEAD – Genève
Master Interior Architecture (MAIA)
Interior Architecture Department

Monday-Tuesday 5th-6th December 2022
HEAD-Genève, Design Room, Avenue de Châtelaine 7, 1203 Genève



Image credits: Central Park, Taichung, Taiwan / Philippe Rahm architectes, Mosbach paysagistes, Ricky Liu & associates, Photographe: Philippe Rahm architectes

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The conference aims to bring together a series of transversal personalities who will address the subject of non-human architecture. From simple greenhouses to botanic facilities, data centres and automated interiors, never before in history has architecture produced so many interiors for the non-human, challenging disciplinary notions on tectonics, light and comfort, and entire regulatory frameworks. Once designed for and with the human, contemporary interiors have instead become exponentially complex materialisations where the politics of our present moment are played out. Ultimately, who are they for?

Titled *Interior ecologies*, this conference will examine the glossaries that characterise contemporary ecology and their implications for interior architecture. From the postmodern concept of sustainability in the 1980s to that of the Anthropocene in the 2000s, and from the contemporary paradigms of the Post-human to the Capitalocene and the Cthulucene in the 2010s, a series of lectures and round tables will explore the entanglements between interior spaces, environments and media through successive decentralisations: from the old totalitarianisms that humans have built amongst themselves for centuries (inclusivity) to their position in relation to non-humans (ecology), and finally their relation to machines and their outputs, both real and virtual (technology).

Interior Ecologies calls for a vision where the non-human will be central, empowering the agency of traditionally obliterated actors. This involves not only solutions to environmental challenges, but above all the study of the ecosystemic relations between non-living and living organisms (including humans) as crucial for the discipline of interior architecture.

Javier F. Contreras, Philippe Rahm, Vera Sacchetti, Roberto Zancan
- Scientific Comitee of the conference

Monday 05 Of December 2022

09:15 – 09:30

Philippe Rahm, HEAD – Genève

Introduction

Session 1

09:30 – 12:30

Madeleine Kessler, MK Architecture, London

Sana Frini, Cornell University, Ithaca NY

Leonid Slonimskiy, HEAD – Genève

Round-table discussion on Philippe Rahm's studio, entitled «*Should the pencil be credited as the author too? - How the non-human is driving interior architecture*»

Break 12:30 - 14:30

Section 2

Chair: Javier Fernandez Contreras, Roberto Zancan, HEAD – Genève

14:30 – 15:00

Javier Fernandez Contreras, Roberto Zancan, HEAD – Genève

Interior Ecologies - a research project

15:00 – 15:45

Timothy James LeCain, Montana State University, USA

From Interiors to Interiority: How do the Non-Human Things and Organisms We Live With Help to Make Us Human?

Break 15:45 - 16:00

16:00 - 16:45

Marie Godfrain, M Le Monde, Paris

Shifting the focus: how designers are shifting their approach to design

16:45 - 17:30

Elisabetta Rattalino, University of Bozen-Bolzano

Radical vegetable gardens: a constellation

Break 17:30 - 17:45

17:45 - 18:15

MAIA students' presentation (first year students)

Experimenting with postnatural and more-than-human perspectives

18:15 - 19:00

Chair : Philippe Rahm, Roberto Zancan, HEAD – Genève

Round table discussion

Tuesday 06 Of December 2022

Session 3

09:00 – 12:30

Madeleine Kessler, MK Architecture, London

Sana Frini, Cornell University, Ithaca NY

Vera Sacchetti, HEAD – Genève

Round-table discussion on Philippe Rahm's studio, entitled «Should the pencil be credited as the author too? - How the non-human is driving interior architecture»

Break 12:30 - 14:00

Section 4

Chair: Valentina De Luigi, Vera Sacchetti, HEAD – Genève

14:00 – 14:45

Gabriel Alonso, Institute for Postnatural Studies, Madrid

The skins of the sensuous

14:45 – 15:30

Isabelle Daéron, Studio Idaë, Paris

Encyclia

15:30 – 16:15

Barbara Brondi, BRH Architects, Torino

The homeostasis of a non-dual threshold

Break 16:15 - 16:30

16:30 - 17:00

MAIA students' presentation (second year students)

Diverse dimensions of Interior ecologies

17:00 - 18:00

Chair : Valentina De Luigi, Vera Sacchetti, MAIA second year students, HEAD – Genève

Round table discussion

Abstracts

Philippe Rahm

HEAD – Genève

Studio «Should the pencil be credited as the author too? - How the non-human is driving interior architecture»

Professor: Philippe Rahm (Philippe Rahm architectes)

Assistant: Phi Nguyen

The abundance of energy provided by coal and oil for more than a century has gradually made us lose sight of the natural dependence of human products, aesthetics and design, on material and non-human conditions, which actually participate as much in the success of artistic creation as the human genius. What would 1960s aesthetics have looked like without oil, which was used for plastic and all the moulded forms typical of the 60s? What would the new millennium's aesthetics look like without 3D software? What would modern aesthetics be like without coal, used for central heating and air conditioning? What would Roman architecture have looked like if Vitruvius had worked with AutoCAD? What would Le Corbusier's buildings have been like if he had used Rhino 3D software? Our interior design studio will question the dependence of design on non-human material conditions of representation, construction and conditions by accepting that pencils, erasers, ink, 2D software, 3D software, and also wood, earth, stone, rain, wind and gravity can be co-authors, alongside humans, of a project.

MAIA students' presentation (first year students)

HEAD – Genève

Experimenting with postnatural and more-than-human perspectives

Coordination: Cécile-Diama Samb

This presentation by 1st-year MAIA students will focus on a selection of research projects developed during two workshops (autumn 2022 semester). The first workshop was led by the Institute for Post-natural Studies and focused on generating a critical practice toward new contemporary interiors by applying new perspectives on botany and coexistence. The second workshop was led by Lucia Petroiusti and aimed to develop a set of conceptual and practical tools for designers to adapt to a multi-perspective, multispecies sense of the planetary.

MAIA students' presentation (second year students)

HEAD – Genève

Diverse dimensions of Interior ecologies

Coordination: Vera Sacchetti

The 2nd-year MAIA students will present a summary of their impressions of the conference. Drawing on their experience organising a series of lectures focused on the various dimensions of Interior ecologies throughout the course of the semester, they will reflect on the learnings and outcomes of the conference.

Timothy James LeCain

Montana State University, USA

From Interiors to Interiority: How do the Non-Human Things and Organisms We Live With Help to Make Us Human?

This talk develops novel theories and methods to better analyse how interior architectural spaces help generate the interiority of an embodied form of human cognition. Contemporary humanistic and scientific insights suggest that individuals and cultures emerge in part from our interactions with creative non-human organisms and objects around us. However, among historians, much of this work has focused on the “natural” external environment. This talk further develops these methods to better analyse how interior architectural spaces help generate the interiority of an embodied form of human cognition.

Marie Godfrain

M Le Monde, Paris

Shifting the focus: how designers are shifting their approach to design

If the 20th century was the century of functionalism and of man as the central value of design production, it took climate change, the collapse of wildlife and the Covid-19 pandemic to remind us that we were only a link in the chain in the living world and no longer at the top of it. Designers have now realised that the “non-individual” is a persona to be considered in the field of object design or speculative design – a movement that is also part of the exodus of many young designers to the countryside, thus shifting their point of view on the place of man in the Earth’s ecosystem.

Elisabetta Rattalino

University of Bozen-Bolzano

Radical vegetable gardens: a constellation

This lecture presents selected artists’ and designers’ vegetable gardens from the 1960s to the present day to envisage possibilities of more-than-human coexistence in interior environments. Since the late 1960s, artists and designers have been working on vegetable gardens to imagine and develop alternative ways of relating to plants, soil, water, air and other humans and other-than-humans. Gilardi’s Tappeti Natura (1966), Gruppo 9999’s Green House (1972), Luis Benedit’s Phitotron (1972), Haha collective’s Flood (1996), BAU’s curatorial programme at the greenhouse Caldera (2022) and Fritz Haeg’s Edible Estates (2010) are just a few but nonetheless valuable examples. In this lecture, these and other art projects will turn into a temporary constellation to think through issues at stake in past and present artists’ experiments with domestic-scale gardening.

Gabriel Alonso

Institute for Postnatural Studies, Madrid

The skins of the sensuous

It is not only through veils, skins and membranes, but also borders and containment strategies, that we establish relationships of closeness or division between living beings, substances and matters within the world. This multi-scale journey offers a genealogy of the epidermic that may foster an ecology of touch, symbiosis and coexistence away from our anthropocentric understanding of exchanges. By analysing architecture, technology or devices that have separated us from the world, we will go deeper into non-human ways of affecting the senses rather than the intellect, revealing the subtle dependence of multispecies cognition on the natural environment.

Isabelle Daëron

Studio Idaë, Paris

Encyclia

This talk will address projects connecting natural resources and habitability. Studio Idaë is a firm that brings together urban design, spatial design and research. Some of their projects, including a rainwater harvester, a leaf collector and devices for the non-drinking water network in Paris, focus on the use of natural flows such as water, wind and sunlight.

Barbara Brondi

BRH Architects, Torino

The homeostasis of a non-dual threshold

This talk focuses on the role of design in establishing relations between nature and culture, interior and exterior, organic and inorganic, mind and body, and human and non-human. Designing things and creating objects is the main way to shape the material world in which we spend our lives. Being in contact with these goods and products helps determine our imagination and causes different, conflicting feelings. The overcoming of the centrality and dominance of the human over objects, creatures and artificial lives forces us to develop new ideas of design; a fluid model to develop around the idea of borders – a model not based on duality and opposition between elements, but on the concept of borders; an in-between space where it would be possible to contaminate living creatures and inanimate objects, feelings and rationality that are abstract and concrete.

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Scientific Comitee: Javier F. Contreras, Philippe Rahm, Vera Sacchetti

Scientific Deputy: Roberto Zancan

Space Design of the conference: Robin Delerce

Organization: Javier Fernandez Contreras, Valentina De Luigi, Robin Delerce,
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