The Two Si(gh)tes of the Same Coin: The Inherent Duality of the Eiffel Tower

For Guy de Maupassant and Roland Barthes, the Eiffel Tower represents a crucial moment in French history in that it is a unique—and daunting—edifice that both sees everything and is seen by everyone. In effect, the famous Tower embodies the culmination of geographical conceptions of the French nineteenth century that aimed to control and contrive space at a glance, and which translated in a new high vantage point that empowered the tourist's sight, now dominating space and transforming the city into a landscape. Around the turn of the twentieth century and the 1889's Exposition Universelle in Paris, the Eiffel Tower crystallized a shift that brought forth a universally exposed space from which nothing remained hidden. This communication gives a better understanding of the euphoria around spatial domination, and which finds its roots in geographical and cartographic representations of space that participated in and reenacted the power of the French empire. The Eiffel Tower, in such context, concretized the French imperial and geographical grasp on a space made public and inevitable. However, the open structure of the monument and its ecosystem made of shops, restaurants and so on make it a complex object that is impossible to understand in its entirety. To that end, this talk also proposes to show the ambiguities of a site that frames other objects while, at the same time, is itself an object that resists being framed.