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Wednesday 1st February 5:30-7:00pm Library (Department of Architecture)

From the Conventional to the Latent Reality of Contemporary Architecture

The development of European architecture went through three different stages. The first, in which architectural principles were formed in the framework of cosmological thinking, that culminated at the end of the 17C. The transformation of cosmological into astronomical thinking, where the unity of celestial and terrestrial phenomena was reduced to a narrow domain of celestial mechanics (astrophysics), lost its ability to serve as a reference for the phenomena on earth, where architecture itself is situated.

The loss of cosmological reference was gradually replaced by reference to history, focused primarily on the question of origins (Solomon's temple, primitive hut etc.). The reference to history was inevitably more relative than cosmology. This led to the well known historical arbitrariness of the 19C and as a result to a search for a new objectivity of architectural principles and order. The most conspicuous in that search was J.N.L. Durand's selection of the most important buildings in history, analysed and reduced to primary elements that would allow him to create a universal 'mechanism of composition'. Durand's work was motivated by the assumption that history had run its course and reached a standstill at the end of the 18cC.

History therefore could be transformed into a new form of understanding, into a theory, which would be a recapitulation and consummation of its past as well as the foundation of a new architectural order. The fulfilment of Durand's theoretical project is a process of which we are still a part.

However, the theoretical positions and projects that dominate our current situation have not eliminated the presence and role of natural (cosmic) conditions and history. Nature and history were absorbed in theory, but their presence and power are still active in the deeper strata of our culture. From the current theoretical point of view they appear as a latent reality (world) of contemporary culture and architecture.

All welcome.

