

The Cultural Role of Architecture

University of Lincoln, EMMTEC

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## **Freiraum: Ideas of freedom and nature in the work of Mies van der Rohe**

Jan Frohburg, University of Limerick

As early as 1928, Mies van der Rohe prophetically stated that "It must be possible to solve the task of controlling nature and yet create simultaneously a new freedom." Today's architects are challenged to ascertain the freedom of human action in the face of an environment, natural or man-made, that resists our very efforts to control it.

From early Modernism until today, the focus of our attention has shifted – from the centre (or: ideal) to the boundary (or: contextual, real). Accepting the immanent change of paradigm we cannot avoid working within a landscape or territory. Mies van der Rohe's work provides us with a model response to the present-day imperative of establishing individual freedom within a landscape understood as a global entity.

Linking the work of Mies van der Rohe to aspirations as expressed by Goethe, Marx and Nietzsche, this paper sets out to promote a concept of space that is characterised by a great sense of freedom – spatially and intellectually. In addition to creating openness without exposure, Mies endows very individual within his architectural realm with a presence of his or her own in that space. This humanistic ideal is infused in all of Mies van der Rohe's designs and upholds its relevance today. As Mies said, we have achieved a degree of freedom for the modern individual that will not be renounced anymore.

In response to the question of architecture's cultural role, this paper will identify architecture as the place, practice and product of humankind's perpetual effort to creatively establish its freedom. In the words of Goethe's Faust: "Nur der verdient sich Freiheit wie das Leben, der täglich sie erobern muss." [Freedom and life are earned by those alone / Who conquer them each day anew.]

## **Architecture's Reflexivity and the Construction of Identity**

Cristina Silva and Gonçalo Furtado, University of Oporto

In this paper we will demonstrate how architecture is a central point in identity formation, be it by its intrinsic character of presence and social significance; or by its post-modern meaning as cultural activity. The exposition will be divided into three parts. The first two reflecting the referred

aspects, and the third, the conclusion, that focuses the "architects of the star system" as an example of identity in an era of globalization, that is both beneficial and perverse.

In the first chapter, we will adopt Scott Lash's and John Urry's thesis that states that society's structuralist conception is still valid as long as the structures are not considered as social but as information and communication structures. This starting point is fundamental because it gives us the sense of need of *reflexivity* as a way to elaborate the *ambivalences* in order to define *identity* individually and society in general. In this context the architecture, as other cultural activities, emerges with a renewed importance.

In the second chapter, we will show how methods of architecture using processes marked by *reflexivity*, build and destroy *identities*. These *identities* participate in the process of *cultural intermediation* between the architect / author and the public which are reformulated and will become subject of reflection for the architects in their future work.

As we will explain in the third chapter, the phenomenon referred to as "architects of the star-system" is the culmination of the processes described above. The cultural industries began selling the image of the architects as a *brand*, as a guarantee of a certain product he will deliver. We will conclude with a thought on this example of the *identity* formation capacity of architecture in global times ("architects of the star-system"), which in our point of view is at the same time beneficial and perverse.

## **Gothic and Beyond**

MT205

## **Henri Le Secq: Strasbourg and Amiens Cathedral**

Noé Badillo, University of Arizona

Henri Jean-Louis Le Secq's photographs of the Gothic church during the mid nineteenth century are a reification of the divine spirit of the ecclesial body. Intended as a didactic survey of the physiognomy of Catholic churches, his photographs are a record of Gothic structures in the aftermath of the French Revolution. However, another interpretation of these images goes far beyond documentation. Le Secq's image of Strasbourg Cathedral's west façade from 1851, and his image of Amiens Cathedral from 1852, are two photographs that act as a buttress against the destruction and degradation that occurred during the anti-theological movements that led up to the French Revolution, and finally of the French Revolution itself.