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Boredom as Space

Episodes of Modern Architecture

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PhD Thesis 88

A doctoral thesis submitted to:
Oslo School of Architecture and Design

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Abstract

Boredom is both cause and effect of the cycle of innovation — the disaffection with the old drives the search for the new and promotes mechanisms of transgression that encourage experimentation. Due to its relational and critical essence, the condition constitutes a state of ambiguity and ambivalence, susceptible to multiple representations. These characteristics coincide with the paradoxes of modernity. The overpowering processes of capitalism, industrialization, secularization, rationalization and urbanization have resulted in an everyday life characterised by monotony, predictability and self-interest. Within this context, boredom emerges not only as an alternative sensibility to the values and visions of modernism but also as a way of conceptualising space. It is thus an instrument by which to reconsider the experience and the continuous changes of modern architecture.

To explore the infiltration of boredom in the production of the built environment as well as in the discipline of architecture, this dissertation begins with the coining of the term in English in the nineteenth century and extends to the present. It follows a tripartite division organised chronologically and framed by philosophical elaborations by Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Andrew Benjamin. Each section is composed of episodes that analyse literary and architectural sources, accompanied by interviews with Peter Cook, Charles Jencks, Rem Koolhaas, Sylvia Lavin, Herbert Morris, and Jorge Silvetti.