CONFERENCE Privacy Matters. How Interiors make and break our Cities

SESSION 4 (11h00 – 12h30)

DESIGNING will investigate the potential of design, which is set to reveal the work of architects, curators, and designers attempting to redefine the bonds between privacy, interiors and cities

The role of privacy in Mies van der Rohe’s interior views: Georg Simmel’s theory of secrecy and architectural representations

This paper places particular emphasis to the analysis of the social theory of German sociologist Georg Simmel. Its main objective is to explain how Simmel’s understanding of the role of privacy can help us better understand the modes of representation characterized Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s perspective views. It will also examine in which sense, in Simmel’s perspective, privacy facilitates sharing. At the core of the paper is Simmel’s article entitled “The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies” originally published in 1906 in the American Journal of Sociology. In this text, which was revised and republished in German in 1908 as "Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung" in Soziologie, Simmel’s develops a theory on secrecy that could help us better understand the role of privacy in Mies van der Rohe’s representations of interior spaces.

At the core of the paper is the role of “negativeness” towards metropolis in Mies van der Rohe’s perspective representations. Manfredo Tafuri analysed the phenomenon of claustrophobia produced by Mies’s collages for the Resor House project, as has been underscored by Robin Evans, who remarks, in “Mies van der Rohe’s Paradoxical Symmetries”: “The problem is that we are being offered two extreme options: either the vertigo of universal extension, or the claustrophobia of living in a crack”. To shed light on “negativeness” towards metropolis in Mies van der Rohe’s thought, the paper analyses the concept to Berührungsangst – the fear for public spaces – in Simmel’s theory. Could the claustrophobic aspect of Mies’s representations identified by Evans be related to the concept of Berührungsangst in Simmel’s approach? The paper aims to respond to this question, paying special attention to the reasons for which the dimension of Berührungsangst in Mies van der Rohe’s representations was intensified during the first years of his resettlement in the United States of America.

Selective References


Brief bio of Dr. Ing. Marianna Charitonidou