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Typologies of Incommensurability

Abstract

In reference to Michel Foucault's depiction of ordering systems under transformation, the text attempts to project how typological thinking in architecture reacts to global transformations that currently rearrange the relations between social, political, scientific and cultural practices. It argues that spatial arrangements and constellations are increasingly produced by confrontation and negotiation between incommensurable entities rather than pre-established orders. In turn, typological ordering is losing its prescriptive authority and instead opens the space for new combinations that challenge predominant typological models and archetypes.

In order to make the current turn in epistemological practice tangible, two historic moments of typological thinking are highlighted. The comparative method of Jean-Nicolas-Luis Durand's classification system from the beginning of the 19th century serves as the basis for a rationalized understanding of typology, where ideal architectural models or archetypes are replaced within a more general and contingent notion of building types. The second moment builds up on Le Corbusier's pictorial representations of architectures in relation to objects of technological progress. Whereas in the first case typological categorization is developed and communicated through analytical drawings, abstract floor plans and elevations, the latter case makes use of visual associations in order to classify new emerging building types as testimonies of a modern industrialized society.

Between rational reasoning and associative imagination, the third part reviews a set of photographs from the archive of the contemporary photographer Armin Linke capturing today's environments for knowledge production and collective organization. The photographs that are commented by the French philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour are showcasing conditions marked by a multiplicity of ordering systems to deliver a descriptive visual example that underlines the above outlined hypothesis.