



Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science (MIT Press)

By Alberto Pérez-Gómez

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Between the late Renaissance and the early nineteenth century, the ancient arts of architecture were being profoundly transformed by the scientific revolution. This important book, which won the 1984 Alice Davis Hitchcock Award, traces the process by which the mystical and numerological grounds for the use of number and geometry in building gave way to the more functional and technical ones that prevail in architectural theory and practice today. Throughout, it relates the major architectural treatises of successive generations to the larger culture and the writings of philosophers, mathematicians, scientists, and engineers.

The book leads the reader through the controversy that was generated by Claude Perrault in the seventeenth century. His writings began to cast doubt on the absolute aesthetic value of the classical orders and the "perfect" proportions that were architecture's legacy from Pythagorean times. Thus the once immutable "invisible" system lost its special status forever. The book focuses in particular on eighteenth-century developments in the science of mechanics and emerging techniques in structural analysis which slowly entered the architectural treatises and found their way into practice, often by way of civil and military engineers. And by the nineteenth century, the book notes, even architectural rendering and drawing were radically changed through the introduction of new descriptive and projective geometries.

Tracing these fundamental changes in architectural intentions, Pérez-Gómez challenges many popular misconceptions about the theory and history of modern architecture. At the same time, he suggests an intangible loss, that of a culture's power to express through a building its total mathematical, mystical, and magical world-view.

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Editorial Review

Review

A heroic and high-flying attempt to banish the demons of positivism, structuralism, and modernism from the architectural arena. Whether he knows it or not the author is issuing the summons for a return to Classicism.

(George Hersey, Professor of the History of Art, Yale University, and author of *Pythagorean Palaces*)

Geometry was demoted from its regal status as the generator of forms to being the servant of surveyors and engineers. It is a paradox that this happened as techniques of mensuration and construction, as well as geometrical speculation, intensified. Pérez-Gómez has placed this paradox in its proper context, scientific and philosophical. But most important to me, he has shown how much that is done and written about architecture nowadays is a direct consequence of that demotion. This book is essential reading for anyone who believes that architecture must reaffirm its role as the theatre of memory and metaphor -- that there is no such thing as a meaningless structure.

(Joseph Rykwert, Professor of the History of Architecture, University of Essex, UK)

Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

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About the Author

Alberto Pérez-Gómez is Saidye Rosner Bronfman Professor of the History of Architecture at McGill University. He is the author of *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (MIT Press, 1983) and (with Louise Pelletier) *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* (MIT Press, 1997).

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