

FROM ECLECTICISM TO DOUBT

ie. elevated, pure,
vs. mundane,
of the world and
its functions

-Is there no risk that this systematic simplification that seems to have become the rule in modern art will result in stultifying art in general, and architecture in particular? That this return to the elementary, (as a purely theoretical investigation) is too intellectual to satisfy the demands of both our minds and our bodies? Man is not purely spiritual. When one sees those great constructions with their ordered lines, and those interiors in which everything seems to respond to strict and cool calculations, one questions whether a human being can be satisfied living there.

-You are right. The return to basic elements, the rejection of everything that is not primordial, responded to a need. It was necessary to discard what was oppressive in order to experience freedom again. But the state of intellectual coldness that was attained, which corresponds only too well to the harsh laws of modern mechanization, can be no more than a passing phase. It is necessary to re-discover the human being in the visual appearance, human will beneath the material appearance, and the pathos of our modern life. Until now one has seen nothing more than a kind of translation into algebraic language.

-To what pathos do you refer?

-That which is inseparable from all real life.

-In short, you wish to rediscover emotion.

-Yes, a purified emotion that can be expressed in thousands of ways. There is no need to return to old complexities: Sometimes it is enough to choose a beautiful material and work it with sincere simplicity. One must reconstruct a modern ideal capable of satisfying a generalized consciousness without losing touch with individual pleasure; and yet beware of all excesses.

-So you advocate a return to feelings, to emotion!

-Indeed. But once again, to an emotion purified by knowledge, enriched by ideas including the knowledge and understanding of scientific achievements. One must only ask of artists that they be of their time.

-You mean that they should live with their time and express it.

-Yes, without any contrivance, of any kind. The work of beauty is more genuine than the artist.

-But how does one express an epoch, especially one like ours, so full of contradictions, in which the past still survives in so many aspects and where, moreover, one is afflicted by so many outrageous affirmations?

-Every work of art is symbolic. It translates, it suggests more of the essential than it represents. Artists are the ones who must find the elements that constitute the intellectual and emotive framework of man as an individual and as part of society.

-Do you believe that inspiration can fulfill such a task?

-It is life itself, the meaning of life, which provides inspiration. But, inspiration cannot replace, any more than faith can, the complex understanding required in the present. One must understand today's living conditions, man's tastes and aspirations, his passions and his needs, and of course, the new techniques and means of construction.

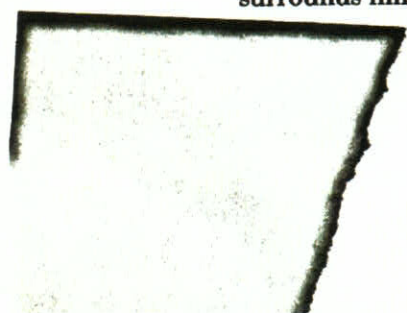
-You demand of the architect a universal mind?

-Almost! What is essential is that he understands the meaning of each thing, and that he knows how to be simple and sound, yet neglect no means of expression. One by one the most diverse materials will be useful to him; and he should be able to express what he wants of the life which surrounds him as easily by the judicious use of new materials as by actual architectural structure.

feeling



LA Moderns
Science
Quote



-There is a word that you have not mentioned, but which I detect in your entire discussion: unity. It is evident that this diversity of inspirational sources, and the disparity of realizations, can only result in chaotic disorder if the architect does not direct them all expressly toward a common goal.

-Indeed, strictly speaking, there is no architectural creation that is not an organic unity. Formerly, unity was completely external; now, we find it necessary for it to be an internal matter, encompassing the smallest details. Can a unity as systematic as what you describe accommodate that diversity you mentioned earlier?

-Of course! An interpretation of the individual, along with his aspirations, his passions and his tastes provides the best understanding of communal life and collective order. Art is based on habit, but not on the fleeting or artificial habit created by fashion. An object must be given the form best suited to the spontaneous gesture or the instinctive reflex that accompanies its use.

-Do you not fear as a consequence that the material aspect of life will prevail over the spiritual?

-The public has already reacted against such a misinterpretation, and there has been swift retaliation. So much for those excesses such as camping gear, lawn furniture, and folding chairs introduced into the home in rooms meant for rest or work. So much for intimacy. So much for atmosphere! Everything was simplified to death. Yet, simplicity does not always follow from simplification, particularly not crude simplification. Formulas are worth nothing; life is everything. And life is the mind and the heart simultaneously.

-In short you wish to react against fashionable formulas, you would revert to the past.

-On the contrary, I wish to develop these formulas and push them to the point where they re-establish contact with life: enrich them, penetrate their abstraction with reality. Art is not the expression of abstract elements; it must also embrace the expression of more concrete elements and the most private demands of the individual. To sustain inspiration, genuine scientific experimentation is needed.

-You wish architecture to be a symphony in which all forms of inner life are expressed.

-Exactly. Dream and action finding in it equal sustenance.

-Decoration could help a great deal.

-Architecture must be its own decoration. The play of lines and colors should respond so exactly to the needs of the interior atmosphere, that any unattached painting or pictures would appear not only useless but detrimental to the overall harmony.

-Isn't that what the architecture described as avant-garde aims to accomplish?

-Yes, in a sense. But only a sense. For those practitioners, architectural creation must suffice in itself, without regard for the demands of interior life. Often this creation results in erudite proportions, but they seem detached from the principle object, which should be the living human being. Such architecture makes use of the occasional, the accidental, where only universal sentiments should be conveyed and fulfilled, and where man alone should be considered, but the man of a particular period with the tastes, sentiments, and gestures of that period.

-Nonetheless, it is the avant-garde that was the first to stress the need to respect proportions, to create balance and equilibrium.

-This only recalled a very old principle, too long forgotten. Moreover, there was no understanding that proportion and balance are found in art only because they exist already in life, in the principle of existence. Such a stance is too intellectualizing: an art and thought of calculation, lacking heart.

-True, many works are rather cold; is that not because we are still under the influence of the recent past? And is it not the principle of hygiene that is somewhat responsible for the coldness that strikes us?

-Yes! Hygiene one could die of! Hygiene that is misunderstood. Hygiene ought not exclude comfort, nor activity. Indeed, those practitioners are intoxicated by the new machine era. But there is more than the machine. The world is full of living references, living symmetries, difficult to find, but real nevertheless. Their excessive intellectualism tends to suppress what

is marvelous in life, just as their misconceived concern for hygiene makes hygiene intolerable. Their rigid precision has made them neglect the beauty of so many forms: spheres, cylinders, undulating and zigzag lines, ellipsoidal lines and straight lines in movement. Their architecture has no soul.

-Clearly, they construct houses like engineers assembling machines. Is that necessary?

-With regard to technique, yes. But technique is not everything. It is only the means. One must build for human beings, so that man may rediscover in architectural construction the joy of feeling himself, of being in a whole that extends and completes him. The furnishings themselves must lose their individuality and blend into the architectural whole!

-One hardly speaks of anything but standardization and rationalization in the work of today's architects. Could you explain what sense they give to those words? I have often heard them in other contexts, but their meaning can scarcely be associated with architecture.

-It is always the same. Technique becomes the principal preoccupation. By considering only the means, one forgets the goal. If one is not careful, standardization and rationalization, excellent means of reducing costs, will end up producing buildings that are even more soulless and lacking individuality than those we have seen until now. This is rather the search for a type of architecture than for a real style.

-For a certain type of architecture to be valued, it must relate to a generally accepted conception, to a collective taste, to an ideal. How is it possible to attain such a result if one builds without the slightest concern for well-being and personal comfort and without accounting for the needs of individuals to find, in the places they inhabit, characteristics that express their personalities and their individual tastes? How can architects who think only of minimizing costs satisfy both popular taste and please the elite? Moreover, it seems inevitable to me that the search for types results in an extreme simplification, and consequently in conceptions that are as impoverished as they are limited.

-The search for a construction type evidently relates to economic circumstances beyond one's control.

-Undoubtedly! Nonetheless, one should not present as an ideal that which is simply the result of an unfortunate necessity.

-I believe that most people are mistaken about the meaning that should be attributed to the word "type". For them "type" is synonymous with creation simplified to the extreme, and destined to be quickly mass-produced. But I understand it to be other-wise. For me, a house type is none other than a house whose construction has been realized at the lowest cost using the best technical skills, and in which the architecture for a given situation produces the maximum perfection. That is to say, the house type is a model that is not intended to be infinitely reproduced, but rather from which one may draw inspiration to construct other houses in the same spirit.

-This is how one should interpret the quest for an architectural "type" that corresponds to our era. And, if one interprets it accordingly, this quest, far from being dangerous, becomes not only an economic necessity but also a logical and moral one. Not only does it have the advantage of releasing considerable activities for the future; it creates a kind of fundamental unity, which in its diverse details and multiplicity of applications, will grant a greater role to future developments. The type must not answer to purely commercial interests. It must become the very expression of the psychological reality of an era.

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