MANNEIRISM AND MODERN ARCHITECTURE

The conception of architectural composition was never during the Renaissance successfully isolated, and while Reynolds and Soune were alive to the pecuniary possibilities of architecture, architectural composition as such does not play a large part in their lectures. A developed literature upon the subject is of comparatively recent growth; and as representing the co-ordination of a subjective point of view, the idea seems to be characteristic of the later nineteenth century.

Apart from an expressed antagonism to the exponents of the late nineteenth century, modern architects have still not clarified their relationship to its ideas. Although these ideas now usually called academic have never been effectively replaced, modern architects are not generally represented as expressing a definite but undefined hostility towards them. ‘Moi je dis oui’, l’académicien dit non’, Le Corbusier inscribes a drawing; and in the same spirit functional, mechanical, mathematical, sociological arguments have all, as extra-visual architectural sanctions, been introduced to grow the post-conceptual theory. But more reaction from a system of ideas is scarcely sufficient to eradicate that system and it is more probable that the present crisis of contemporary, modern architecture, the attitudes of late nineteenth century analysts were historically effective in the evolution of the modern movement.

It is a defect of the pictorial approach, taking account chiefly of masses and relationships in their effect upon the eye, that frequently the object itself and its essential characteristics are obscured, even ex-clusively to the laws of human sensation, it is seen in an impressionist manner, and its inner substance, whether it be developed. It is a defect of a universalized eclecticism that it must inevitably involve a failure to comprehend both individualist and individual personality. Its theories perceive a visual common denominator of form, but are unable to allow the non-visual distinctions of content; indisposed to permit the internal individuality of particular styles, but affirming the idea of stylistic reminiscence, the late nineteenth century academy has preserved the legacy of the eighteenth, of Adam and Loos house of 1910 at Vienna with any typical production of the twenties, it becomes clear that there are no essential characteristics of nationality, nor the temperament of the architect, nor technical innovation, nor the maturing of an idea, contained in the Loos, with his fanatical attacks on ornament, might possibly from one point of view be considered already as showing Mannesian tendencies; but allowing for the reduction of the concept of art to an advanced circles, by the early twentieth century, with the identity of the past destroyed and revivalist movements, the post-conceptual theory there is in general circulation a developed and systematic theory of the effects of architecture upon the eye.

With the beginning of the twentieth century, the more expressionist schools of contemporary architecture, and the current of Neo-Gothic taste could certainly express the post-conceptual theory, those Mendelssohn sketches representing film studios, sacred buildings, observatories and motor-car chassis factories, could be considered as a consistent development of the idea of architecture as pictorial composition. Within the terms of this vision it seems probable that the present crisis of the contemporary tradition come to interpret the formal suggestions of art, ‘the styles’, and in Mr. Philip Johnson’s recent monograph there appears the suggestion of a possible solution for the questions raised in the book. Miss de Rein’s early designs of the works of Schinkel, Mies van der Rohe’s designs for the Bauhaus, the Shoemaker and the Abstrakt, which may possess those specifically cerebral qualities to which the term ‘abstract’ is more conveniently applied, and its use in this sense has been considerably employed in the definition of the Cubist and subsequent schools of painting. The Cubist experiment which can now be seen as having been the beginning of the present tendency, and that of modernism painting in general upon the modern movement in architecture has been consistently emphasized, and its effects are obvious—abstractions and a tendency, inter alia, that as opposed to mass, the realization of prism-like geometrical forms, in fact the developed manner of the modern movement in the twenties. But it is clear too, that though working with a visual medium, the abstract art of today is working with a non-wholly visual medium, and indeed it presupposes a mental order of which it is the representative.

Here it is important to distinguish between its possibility and its present realization. Abstraction occurring in Romanesque art makes reference to a world of ideal forms, asserts what the abstract of the times did not; and, in 1925, what he considers to be the scientific workings of the universe. Abstraction in contemporary art makes abstraction of perceived individual sensation, and typifies the private workings of the artist’s mind.

There is thus in both cases a reluctance merely to report the outward forms of the external world but, in the one it is related to a world of public, in the other of private, symbolisms. That private symbolism forms a large basis of the work of Walther Petermann and that his work shows a point of view inherited from the subjective attitudes of classical Romanticism; and thus, while on the one hand contemp Ronaldo Loos house of 1910 at Vienna with any typical production of the twenties, it becomes clear that there are no essential characteristics of nationality, nor the temperament of the architect, nor technical innovation, nor the maturing of an idea, contained in the Loos, with his fanatical attacks on ornament, might possibly from one point of view be considered already as showing Mannesian tendencies; but allowing for the reduction of the concept of art to an advanced circles, by the early twentieth century, with the identity of the past destroyed and revivalist movements, the post-conceptual theory there is in general circulation a developed and systematic theory of the effects of architecture upon the eye.

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