design principles

The importance of this building is manifested at sight, and rests upon a radiation, which becomes increasingly manifest upon inspection. This radiation makes the building accessible, but it is a quality which has clear English precedent—as in the architecture of Samuel's work at Hadlow Hall, or in All Saints', Margaret Street.

But it is here a radiation which owes nothing to precedent, and everything to the inner mechanism of the Modern Movement. It does not merely imply a special kind of plan or structure, but a peculiar embodiment—originality—of the modern answers and routine solutions—which provides the whole design from original conception to finished details. While it is but one of many designs which have lately rejected the slow disorder of the free-plan school, it goes further than any in linking on formal legibility, as well as compactness and economical circulation, and it may be read from all directions as a labelling of inner courts. (The architectural gain given by the block plan is balanced by the risk of equal in interior courts; and if the architect's claim that 'it is a school, and a prime' is justified, it is because they saw that without a radical solution to the courtyard problem, pretty detailing and applied art-work could only make a mere artistic pique. Their solution implied maximum glazing as a first principle, and that in its turn implied a steel frame. But such a frame was another first principle in the conception of the classroom blocks which enclose the courts carried in H-frames welded up from 8-inch RHS's, the 8-inch dimension being implicit in the use of Plastic Theory as a structuring discipline, and that, in turn, made possible by welding. But both Plastic Theory and welding views from a conception of steel as a natural material—not as a kind of arbitrary stiffness cut to length, but as a durable, sustainable substance with ductile and plastic limits to the surface, feel, and appearance of its own, to be appreciated and used as Queen Anne builders used brick, or Regency engineers used stone.

That is why architects and engineers, as in all other matters, in asserting that there is a traditional building, free from the sentimentalism of Frank Lloyd Wright or the formalism of Mies van der Rohe. This may seem a hard saying, since Mies is the obvious comparison, but at Hoxton even every element is truly what it appears to be, serving as necessary structure and necessary decoration. The brick panel in the end elevations is not only there to set off the glass visually, but also to provide necessary blank walls internally, thus only to afford the frame through which the student theory must they do. They were conceived from the very first, as were all other elements, as performing structurally, functionally and decoratively as parts of an integrated architecture.

This imposes an existential responsibility upon the architect for every being built, every joint welded, every panel offered up, everything, for the first hand held in the hands (in the interests of maintenance and because a joint could serve to resist overturning moments), apart from those, literally every structural and functional element is visible, and, since there is nothing else to see, they are the totality of the architectural elements. For this reason the Hoxton studio is a crude representation of the architect's drawing, and the Clerk of Works begins to resemble an almost forgotten status.

Equality, there must be a new aesthetic of materials, which must be valued for the surfaces they have to deal with the site—painted stone is used where structurally or functionally inevitable—a valuation like that of the Fladsworth, who accepted their materials 'as found', a valuation built into the Modern Movement by Methyl-Naph, in the processes of the designing and the Clerk of Works becomes an almost forgotten status.

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