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VALUES FOR STRIVING

Human life in the future intensively depends on the values we care for and think worth promotion. Here I want to call attention to some few of those values I estimate as important for the education and work of future architects. I give short outlines of a subjective selection.

The importance of history

It is exceedingly important to acquire some knowledge of history of architecture and above all the events during the XIXth and XXth centuries because from that epoch spring the most important lines of our modern development of architecture and design in general.

One line is the modern movement of great artistic liberation and simplification. One, not very much remembered, starting point of this simplification we can trace in the Great exhibition in London 1851, in the famous Crystal Palace. There the Welsh architect Owen Jones was entrusted by Joseph Paxton, master of the enormous iron construction, so to speak to make architecture of the unmanageable material masses and the untameable inner space just by decorating with colour.

Jones took a drastic step in his own artistic development. He, as the author of the widely spread Grammar of Ornament, the most penetrating book of historic styles, made a sudden break in his whole art by abandoning all known precepts for ornamentation. Instead he had all the thousands of cast iron elements painted in clearly defined portions of blue, yellow and red, a drastic stroke that made critics call the palace the most magnificent building in the world.

This was about a decade before William Morris, the artist and author, and the architect Philip Webb created the Red House near London substituting historic villa styles by free use of English tradition on the spot with red brick and wood; and in the plan substituting overloaded social representation by purest interest in simplified middle-class bourgeois private life.

From such middle XIXth century architects in Europe and the USA we can derive much of, for example, Louis Sullivan's making architecture of the bulky skyscrapers in Buffalo and Chicago or Östbergs Town Hall in Stockholm, in the past century bridging the development to the still greater simplification and synthesising work of the Futurists of 1909, Voysey, Le Corbusier with followers, the Cubist and functionalist architects that, on and on, dominated architecture in many countries from about 1910 till the end of the XXth century, with all their successes and lots of mistakes.

The patterns and trends of the great simplification have been questioned and architects infect the works of their own and others by introducing something they call post-modern, thus trying to lead architecture back to the fatal confusion called "the battle of styles".

Easing the houseplan

Around 1800, as a special variant of Enlightenment inventiveness, many European architects managed to liberate house planning from the inadaptability of the ruling symmetry introduced by the XVth century Renaissance, denying Medieval traditions. They succeeded by the more pliable methods in use to-day which we take as given, self-evident.

However, like so many changes, this new method, we can call it modern, had its rather complex origin and growth so it is worthwhile saving it from oblivion. We can illustrate the events by a short sequence of

plans by the long-lived, internationally oriented Danish architect Christian Frederik Hansen (1756-1845), widely in request just during the decades around 1800, busy in Altona and Copenhagen.

His Villa Rainville, dating from 1794, is still dominated by late baroque classicism. Hall and salon are arranged symmetrically on a central axis and the subordinate rooms on its sides added symmetrically within the strictly enclosing rectangular walls.

From 1795, then, dates a decisive change in Hansen's planning methods, with the country-side Altona villa Gebauer. Here the architect has taken up whole-heartedly the radicalist patterns of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux whose architecture and drawings he had studied carefully during learning years in Paris. Hansen adheres closely to Ledoux by enclosing the whole sum of rooms within the rigid cylinder form of the walls, dividing out, so to speak, second-hand, rooms with forced function and symmetry, leaving baroque use and differentiation conventions behind, symmetry being just formal, but driven to its peak in architectural history.

Ledouxian influence seems to have remained an episode in Hansen's career. How he has left Ledoux' absolutism we can observe in the Villa Vilhelmsdal in Copenhagen. The total sum of the rooms is still enclosed in a rigid form, this time a rectangle. But here we see how the radical experimenting has had, we could say, a loosening effect inside the walls. Inner differentiation according to function is introduced into the rooms instead of the conventional tradition of the Baroque. The representative stiffness of the ancien régime is succeeded by bourgeois liberality. The rooms have got their forms more according to their uses. The asymmetrically situated staircase lacks monumental ambition. It is set in communication with the functionally grouped rooms by a connecting space with the clearly differentiated rooms for everyday life and no representation, socially.

Another more advanced line of house-plan development we can observe in a villa by John Nash, the English architect, contemporaneous to Hansen. His country-side villa at Luscombe in Devonshire from 1801 with its Norman-style exterior, leaving classicism behind, contains a surprising blend of old and new features in its plan. The Baroque is reminiscent in the grouping of entrance, connection room, and being drawn-up in an axis; whereas eating room, library, servant's room and veranda are most liberally added, caring nothing about representation. Each in its own way, Hansen, Nash and lots of architects around 1800 can be called half-conscious-unconscious introducers, precursors of functionalist thinking in bourgeois Europe.

Town and Country

Another important side of contemporary architecture is the development of Town and Country. Here one of your eminent Spanish urbanists during the XIXth century, maybe forgotten today, made an important contribution: Alberto Soria y Mata.

In the year 1882, about 120 years ago he was busy with the problem Town-Country, in his own age as well as the future. In order to convert the contradiction of Town and Country from being a permanent source of conflict into a more or less democratic co-operation, he took up the double catch-word: *ruralizar la vida urbana – urbanizar el campo*.

Of course this was not a suggestion to develop the two sides by some sort of greyish mixture or nivellation. What he meant was something more constructive, we could formulate it like this: give to towns and cities what they are everywhere missing – to the urban districts parks and landscapes and necessary institutions for education; give to the country-side better communication and administration and cultural institutions – all among lots of necessities of the emerging industrialised society.

In the context of Soria's age his work has the character of a constructive attempt to prescribe a comprehensive method for handling the complex planning problems of his own time and prevent a series of evil conditions for the populations.