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Lucius Burckhardt
Où allons-nous?

Lucius Burckhardt tente de mettre en lumière quelques-unes des tendances essentielles dans l'architecture des années soixante-dix, afin de réfléchir ensuite sur les éléments d'inspiration qu'elle pourrait transmettre aux futures années quatre-vingts.

Le rêve du grand conteneur, de l'édifice flexible doté d'installations disponibles et ubiquitaires (climat, énergie, Son et Lumière répartis en tout lieu par des prises de courant), semble s'être évanoui avant même de vivre sa réalisation. Le rêve était trop ambitieux: il n'était réalisable ni matériellement ni intellectuellement; on ne pouvait anticiper l'avenir.

A l'autre pôle, on trouve les éléments qui se proposent de redonner à l'expression architecturale signification et clarté dans les formes. En Suisse, ces tentatives se sont avant tout manifestées dans la variante tessinoise du «razionalismo» italien. Une part importante devra en être développée, alors qu'il faudra renoncer à ce qui n'est finalement que «cliché».

Le style international a fait place aux tendances régionalistes: retour au «village». Cependant, lorsque des décors aux origines régionalistes diverses sont accumulés sans discernement, on dénonce une idylle mal comprise, dans laquelle la classe moyenne tente d'oublier par les loisirs la base économique de son existence. Pourtant, le régionalisme permettrait d'échapper à une manière de bâtir et d'habiter pétrifiée en routine. Il pourrait donner les moyens de briser le tabou de la spécialisation qui, particulièrement en Suisse, domine un très grand nombre de locataires, donc de «consommateurs» de bâtiments. Certes, les résultats de la construction amateur ne sont pas toujours réjouissants, mais la privation des bases artisanales et techniques de la construction imposée à une grande part de la population, dans la mesure où celle-ci ne dispose pas plus de ses logements qu'elle n'a le droit d'en prendre la responsabilité, est sans doute encore plus lourde de conséquences.

En même temps, il serait possible de trouver des éléments permettant de s'éloigner des standards et des normes, ainsi que de substituer la petite création décentralisée à la grande technologie routinière.

N'oublions pas non plus que cela conduirait aussi à mieux construire en accord avec l'écologie, à atténuer l'aliénation et à retrouver le sens de la responsabilité et de l'initiative personnelle.

René Furer
«Suisse Miniature»

Avec son article intitulé «Suisse Miniature», René Furer, Professeur en théorie d'architecture à l'ETH de Zurich, aborde le problème que pose l'excès de simplification en matière d'histoire. Lorsqu'il fait le bilan de la dernière période architecturale, il part de l'année 1973, celle de la première crise du pétrole, celle des dimanches sans voiture en Suisse. Autrement dit, pour Furer, l'architecture se développe dans le cadre général de la société.

A la lumière de quatre exemples d'environnement bâti, Furer montre les contradictions apparues lors de la période écoulée. Ainsi le «chemin rupestre» créé artificiellement là-haut sur le Dolder zurichois, le jardin botanique à Zurich où les techniciens du climat font croître n'importe quelle végétation, alors qu'à l'extérieur «dans la nature» les arbres ordinaires ne survivent qu'à grand-peine.

Examinant le cas du concours pour la prison de Regensdorf, Furer parle du «pénitencier humain». On apporte un peu de paysage entre les murs qui enferment l'homme. Ceux qui y voient une ambiance monacale, avec un cynisme conscient ou inconscient, oublient la différence entre la retraite librement consentie du moine et le bannissement dicté par le juge.

Dans le concours pour un nouveau bâtiment administratif cantonal à Berne, Furer détecte deux nouvelles solutions types: la halle que cerne une couronne de bureaux et le bâtiment à cours d'éclairage; nouveauté inattendue pour Berne qui, depuis l'immeuble SUVA de Salvisberg datant des années trente, n'a pas toujours eu la main heureuse en matière d'édifices publics.

Jürgen Joedicke
L'architecture suisse vue de l'Allemagne

En matière d'architecture, les échanges d'idées entre la Suisse et l'Allemagne étaient très intenses jusqu'en 1933. Nombre de Suisses étudiaient dans les écoles d'architecture allemandes, et Hannes Meyer, natif de Bâle, devint chef du Bauhaus en 1928.

L'ensemble de Neubühl/Zurich (M.E. Haefeli, W.M. Moser + E. Roth, R. Steiger + C. Hubacher, P. Artaria + B. Schmidt), influencé par celui de Weissenhof à Stuttgart, fut un véritable projet d'habitat social (1930-32).

La seconde guerre mondiale étant terminée, l'échange d'idées se rétablit peu à peu. Pour les architectes allemands, la Suisse devenait une fenêtre ouverte sur le monde.

Dès 1951, Max Bill, qui avait étudié au Bauhaus de Dessau entre

1927 et 1929, fut appelé comme recteur par l'Ecole Supérieure de Composition à Ulm, dont il projeta les bâtiments (1953-55).

Si dans les décades précédentes, les rapports réciproques entre l'Allemagne et la Suisse étaient essentiellement centrés sur les architectes de la Suisse alémanique, l'intérêt des architectes allemands se porte aujourd'hui aussi sur les travaux de jeunes architectes tessinois tels que Mario Botta, Luigi Snozzi, Bruno Reinlin et Fabio Reinhart.

Al Imfeld
Les dix dernières années

Au lieu de considérer l'acte de bâtir comme une opération matérielle, Al Imfeld en examine la signification par six assertions interrogatives:

- L'anarchie de la construction forcenée témoigne-t-elle d'une désorientation totale, ou est-elle la manifestation d'une conscience réclameur de nouvelles formes et le signe d'une recherche en général?

- L'architecture des 10 dernières années a-t-elle été démocratique? Ou n'est-ce pas plutôt l'économie de marché qui a «joué» là, avec ses principes de concurrence impitoyable poussant à construire par prestige ou par besoin de placer son argent, au lieu de créer de l'espace pour habiter et travailler, donc de l'environnement?

- Le principe de «l'univers-village», où chacun peut acheter et avoir, construire et posséder la même chose toujours et partout, n'a pas conduit à l'équilibre mais à un appauvrissement dans lequel le personnel, individuellement défini n'a plus de place, et les minorités ne sont pas les dernières à subir les conséquences de ce principe.

- Dans leurs immeubles, leurs quartiers et leurs cités, les hommes ne se sentent plus chez eux. Toute une industrie de la sublimation a exploité cette misère (fuite dans la verdure, folie des voyages), de sorte que des régions entières qui auraient encore autorisé le repos et le changement, sont aujourd'hui devenues des arènes de loisirs standardisées.

- Actuellement, l'acte de bâtir s'oriente sur le seul «projet» et non sur le «processus». Dans leurs blocs de logements, les hommes sont rangés comme les volailles dans leurs cages et les constructeurs ne veulent pas savoir comment ils y vivent vraiment.

- Les nouvelles expériences (régionalisme, le «village») restent enlisées dans l'esthétique. Ne devrait-on pas construire plus avec les habitants plutôt que de bâtir «pour» eux?

Lucius Burckhardt
What of the future?

Lucius Burckhardt makes an attempt to disclose some of the important trends in architecture during the 70s in order to raise the question as to what we can take with us into the 80s.

The dream of the big container, of the flexible building with handy, ubiquitous installations (air-conditioning, power, "Son et Lumière" at every point and out of every electric plug) seems to have faded even before it could be realized. The dream has turned out to have been much too ambitious; it was not realizable either on the concrete or on the abstract planes; the future could not be anticipated.

At the opposite pole are the efforts to restore to architecture its expressive power, significance and comprehensible shape. In Switzerland these endeavours have emerged most clearly in the variant of Italian "razionalismo" applied by architects in the Ticino. There is room here for all kinds of further development, but what is in effect merely "quotation" will have to be left behind.

The international style has been replaced by regionalistic tendencies, the return to the "village". However, where bits and pieces of various regional origins are all shaken together at random, people began to criticize the notion of the falsely understood idyll in which a comfortable middle-class society seeks to forget the economic basis of its life in leisure activities. Nevertheless, regionalism does offer a way out of a petrified and hum-drum way of building and living. It could make it possible to break up the high specialization of the building trades, which is confronted, especially in Switzerland, by an extremely high proportion of non-owner residents, that is to say, building "consumers". The results of do-it-yourself construction are not always very happy, but alienation from the handicraft and technical basis of architecture, which has been imposed on much of the population, who neither own their homes nor may assume responsibility for them, may be an even more serious matter.

At the same time it would be possible to get away from standards and norms and to substitute the small, decentralized invention for big-scale technological routine. That would, again, lead to building that is ecologically more adequate, would reduce alienation and restore to residents more responsibility and authority, but against all this would be not architecture but the "building trades".

Mario Botta

The significance of the architectural and natural environment

What I think about architecture at the present time is the result of the knowledge and general culture of my age. In a way it is the collective cultural heritage handed down by the preceding generations, the totality of all viewpoints and ideas which has determined and nourished my training. In other words, this cultural heritage determines the theoretical situation of the present-day architect, who is, directly or indirectly, the heir of everything that has been produced earlier.

Architecture and environment: Between architecture and environment (whether architectural or natural) there exists a reciprocal and permanent relationship (give and take). I believe that the quality of every work of architecture depends quite directly on the intensity of this dynamic interchange. What I like about architecture is not the given object as such but the spatial, emotional and other relationships growing out of the interplay between it and its environment. This relationship forms the basis of my endeavours to understand the different aspects and of my way of practising architecture and interpreting it.

A misunderstanding that always crops up in estimating the relationships between architecture and environment is the idea that every new architectural act has to be subordinated to the already existing, more highly rated values of the environment. Many architects likewise adopt this attitude. I believe, however, that this attitude is based rather on fear and mistrust in the face of any new means of expression than on sensitivity and respect for the existing values. In most cases it is not a conservative but a reactionary attitude. This kind of conception of the relations between architecture and environment has also directly influenced most legislation and helped to put a special impress on what is known as "common sense", without, however, preventing real estate speculation.

In an analysis of the relationships and meaningful connections between architecture and environment I have come to the conclusion that three permanent aspects emerge in the elaboration of a project.

First: The understanding and the interpretation of the environment as a physical fact. The land on which we plan to build is then seen as a place on the map, as a special area, as something unique, which is closely bound up with the geography and the morphology of the surroundings into which we intend to intervene. This physical reality demands that the identity of this place be understood and defined, its underlying values

and characteristics be recognized, so that we have points of reference for a continuous dialogue with the new architectural proposal. Thus every patch of land has its own character, its own density and structure as well as its own law, which have to be understood and accepted as an often secret but necessary parameter for the new architectural proposal.

Second: The interpretation of the environment as testimony of history, of memory. This aspect transcends the physical facts. In the case of every new project there emerge from the memory the symbolic aspects, the atavistic toils and unknown struggles in the heart of the earth. The environment is also, and above all, living evidence of this presence of man and of vanished generations.

Third: The concept of time expands the relationships between architecture and environment. An architectural work has the effect really of making a place appear different today from what it was yesterday. This is perhaps the palpable expression of a connection between the work of man (the artificial) and nature. The environment changes and thus alters architecture in connection with the time containing it.

René Furer
"Suisse Miniature"

René Furer, architectural theorist at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, in his article entitled "Suisse Miniature" goes into the question of the dubiousness of round numbers in historical writing. When he sums up the last period of architectural history, he takes as his starting point the year 1973, the year of the first oil crisis, of the motorless Sundays in Switzerland. This means that for Furer architecture takes place in a total social context.

In four examples taken from the built up environment Furer sees the contradictions that have cropped up during the last decade. He shows the "geological walk" up on the Zurich Dolder, the Botanical Garden in Zurich, where the artificial climate technicians fabricate any desired type of vegetation, while outside "in nature" ordinary trees can barely survive.

In the case of the competition for the Regensdorf prison, Furer refers to what is known as "humanistic punishment of criminals". The man behind bars is shown a little landscape on the other side of the wall. A little of the monastic atmosphere is evoked by those who – consciously or in unconscious cynicism – forget the difference between the self-imposed withdrawal of the monk and the banishment imposed by a judge.

In the case of the competition for a new Cantonal office building in

Berne, Furer detects two new types, a wide-span construction girt with offices and the low flat construction with courtyards: unexpected novelties for Berne, which since Salvisberg's SUVA Building dating from the Thirties, has not always had much luck with public buildings.

Jürgen Joedicke
Swiss architecture seen from Germany

Up until 1933 in the field of architecture exchanges of ideas between Switzerland and Germany were very intense. Many Swiss studied at German schools of architecture; Hannes Meyer, born in Basel, in 1928 became Director of Bauhaus.

The Neubühl/Zurich Colony (M.E. Haefeli, W.M. Moser + E. Roth, R. Steiger + C. Hubacher, P. Artaria + H. Schmidt), influenced by the Weissenhof Colony in Stuttgart, became a truly model low-cost housing project (1930–32).

The exchange of ideas was re-established gradually after the end of the 2nd World War. Switzerland became a window on to the world for German architects.

Max Bill, who had studied at Bauhaus in Dessau from 1927 to 1929, was summoned as early as 1951 to be Rector of the Institute of Design in Ulm, and designed the buildings for the University of Ulm (1953–55).

Whereas in recent decades the interchange between Germany and Switzerland was concentrated, rather, on architects from German-speaking Switzerland, at the present time German architects are paying attention to the work of young architects in the Ticino, such as Mario Botta, Luigi Snozzi, Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart.

Al Imfeld
The last 10 years

Al Imfeld postulates the idea of architecture not as a material installation but as the creation of significance. Here are his 6 theses and questions on this subject:

– Is the anarchy of uncontrolled building a sign of lack of orientation or the emergent awareness that new forms must be discovered and that people have to find them by experimenting?

– Was the architecture of the last 10 years democratic? Or, rather, was not the free enterprise system "operating" here with its principle of ruthless competition, building for reasons of prestige and the need for capital investment opportunities instead of building homes and places of work, in other words, a human environment?

– The global village principle, where everybody can always and everywhere buy and have the same thing, and can build and own the same thing, has not led to equality but to desolation, in which there is no longer any room for the personal, the self-determined. This principle is aimed, in the last analysis, at minorities as well.

– People no longer feel at home in their houses, neighbourhoods, cities. This widespread dissatisfaction has resulted in an entire sublimation industry (the movement into unspoiled nature, to far away places), the outcome being that whole regions, where recreation and relaxation were once really possible, have now become standardized arenas of leisure.

– Building is now oriented only towards the "project" instead of the "process". Like poultry in their batteries, people are filed away in apartment blocks; the builders do not really care how they are supposed to live there.

– The new experiments (regionalism, the "village") remain merely aesthetic. Is not the answer to build not "for" residents, but *with* them?