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Centres of Community Life

by Benedikt Huber

The 8th International Congress on Modern Architecture (CIAM) took up the question of the "civic centre" (The Core of the City, see WERK, No. 11/1952, S. Giedion: "The Humanization of the City"). Giving our cities a centre (or centres) of genuine community life is an essential problem of town-planning, becoming more urgent every day as a result of the dehumanization of our streets caused by the tremendous increase in automobile traffic. – In Switzerland, neighbours feel less need to get together than they do in the Mediterranean countries. Nevertheless, the success of the «Zürich Festival» has led many people to believe that even the Swiss might harbour a latent desire to break out of the individualist isolationism imposed by the conditions of modern life. And though recent plans to regulate traffic are serious enough in their way, they demonstrate that the problems connected with the isolationism cannot be separated from those relating to town-planning in general. – A few solutions deserve special consideration: the creation of "cultural centres" (theatres, museums, concert halls, etc.), as at Basle, and also, *neighbourhood centres*, to prevent the suburbs from becoming mere dormitory towns.

The "Park Theatre" of Grenchen

Ernst Gisel, Arch. FAS/SIA, Zürich, and collaborators

Along with the community hall of Niederurnen (see below), the Park Theatre begun in 1955 at Grenchen is one of the two examples of a community centre recently completed in Switzerland. The project was to create for this place of 14000 inhabitants a centre for meetings, concerts, dramatic performances, etc. The least one can say is that, by making use of the opportunity to introduce variations in the different sections, the architect has known how to forge a truly exemplary unity, the lines of which are directly inspired by the multiple functions of the building and assume a sober and logical character reminding one of the Jorat Theatre, that other achievement of an eminently Swiss architecture.

Construction and Materials of the "Park Theatre"

As the architect E. Gisel explains, his job was to differentiate the elements of a compactly planned unity by means of a variety of cubes set in relation to the surrounding park. The general effect he has striven for was kept from contradicting the variability of the functions assumed by the various buildings. And in the simplicity of the materials utilized, the multiple functions which may devolve upon the various sections of the whole have not been overlooked.

Community Hall at Niederurnen

H. Leuzinger, Arch. FAS, Zürich, H. Howald, Arch., Zürich; Engineer, R. Kruck

A generous donation has made possible the construction of this community hall, intended also for cultural gatherings. It is built on an hexagonal structure, heated by hot air from the heating system of the nearby school.

Reflections on the Capital

by Martin Wagner

The well known former town-planner of Berlin, later professor at Harvard, where he continued to be in close touch with Walter Gropius, after having recalled that the great collective creations (Incas, Mayas, Stonehenge, Lhasa) incorporate the vision of an entire people, demonstrates that the costs of well-thought out town plans would represent but a trifling percentage of the wealth squandered by the modern economy. But obviously a capital is not called into being solely by means of capital. A profound political conception is equally necessary (witness Frederick II "inventing" his capital within the compass of the little Berlin of his day), and again, our Western capitals, having built on their outskirts Versailles, Schönbrunn or Potsdams, had lost the will to erect within their very walls the equivalent of the Acropolis.

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Kurt Schwitters

by Werner Schmalenbach

Born at Hanover in 1887, K.S., after a brief expressionist-cubist period (immediately after the first world war), gave his first exhibition of abstract works at the "Sturm" (Berlin), 1919: first "MERZ" picture (this syllable designating, in addition to the category of the first collages, the collage constructions which will occupy him until the end of his life, and, in a more general way, his specific, non-representational conception of the work of art). There follow the great "MERZ" pictures; in 1920 the lithographs of "Die Kathedrale" and the "Sturmbilderbuch". Also in Hanover builds the first "MERZ" construction (dadaist-surrealist synthesis of painting, sculpture and architecture), destroyed by a bombardment in 1943 (the second "MERZ" construction, in Norway, was burned, and the third, begun in England thanks to a stipend from the Museum of Modern Art, remained unfinished). K.S. has also written (among others the poem "Ursonate", finished about 1932). 1927: busies himself with commercial art and will establish with certain fellow avant-gardists the "Ring neuer Werbegestalter". Emigrates to Norway in 1937. In 1940 flees with his son to England, where he died in January 1948. – As Werner Schmalenbach explains here, the great exhibition organized in Hanover in February 1955 has for the first time revealed the true stature of K.S., who up to now, owing to the dispersal or ignorance of his work, was condemned almost to be known as a mere craftsman of charming collages, whereas his personality from now on compels recognition. The entire dada aspect, the negation, the revolt, is today receding into the background: above and beyond the mere historic circumstances, the art of K.S., because of its essential kindness and seriousness (a seriousness which knows how to be gay), offers itself to us with the same persuasive fullness as any other genuine art whatsoever.

Calligraphy Considered as an Art

by Jan Tschichold

In this article, inspired by the exhibition "Japanese Calligraphy – Western Signs" organized at the Kunsthalle in Basle in February and March, the author insists on the profound difference between the Chinese and Japanese languages, like that between the systems of writing of the two peoples (the Chinese is ideogrammatic, the Japanese syllabic), and then demonstrates that these systems of writing have in common the fact that they are traced with a brush and, in view of the mastery they call for, they constitute the fruit of a lengthy education which is an entire culture in itself. For the East, writing is regarded as an even higher form of art than painting. Obviously, we Westerners who are generally ignorant of the meaning of these signs, tend to regard them as abstract designs. And moreover, it appears very likely that Western abstract art has given a new impetus to calligraphic creations in the present-day Far East.

Present Trends in Painting

by Arnold Rüdinger

The phenomenon of "tachism" which is wholly international (and goes back to 1947/48) signified in the first place a protest against geometric abstract art. It could be defined as an abstract neo-expressionism, or again a resurgence, albeit an abstract one, of fauvism, with which it shares the ambition of "painting only states of the soul". Rejecting at the same time both the object and the constructional element, "tachism" seems to be the pictorial expression of existentialism. The danger of it, especially for young painters, consists in the hypertrophy of the subjective at any price. But there are nevertheless various ways out of this impasse: 1. mastery of means (see Hartung) which is transformation of psychic energy into formal energy; 2. the transposition of the "written" form into ideograms existing prior to the conception (this is the method of the later Klee and of Miró); 3. the "affective saturation" (among others Vieira da Silva), analogous to that of the "Ateliers" of Braque, which are still representational. – We are witnessing the birth of a new objectivity which does not copy the real, but integrates itself with reality.

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