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Baths in the Light of History

by S. Giedion

In ancient times and, to some extent, in the Middle Ages, both western and Islamic, the taking of a bath was regarded as an act of regeneration. Not only the body was relaxed and, along with it, the mind; it was a means of achieving that harmonious, leisurely gratuitousness which the Greeks called *ἀρετή*, a state of mind and body which for them was the essential condition if there was to be disinterested thinking and real culture. In this respect we may say that the conception of relaxation in the various cultures, linked up with the bath, serves to classify them. Furthermore the bath, looked at from this point of view, is at the same time a function of social order; society takes upon itself to supply its members with the regenerative bath, either as an integral component of the gymnasium (Greece) or by constructing elaborate thermal baths (Rome), while in Islam the bath is not taken for any specific reason except the bodily well-being it engenders. It is a peculiar contradiction that the 17th and 18th centuries, which laid the foundations of modern secular thought, not only eliminated the bath, under the influence as much of the Counter-Reformation as of the Reformation, in its regenerative function, but denied it the right even to serve the purpose of cleanliness. (In 18th century engravings, the bath appears as part of an erotic scene; bath and sin are one and the same thing.) From the eighteenth century onwards, however, the 'return to Nature' effects a change; then the Silesian farmer Vincenz Priessnitz (1799-1851) preaches natural healing and, in America, the Presbyterian clergyman Sylvester Graham, about 1830, makes hydrotherapy a fashion. About 1850 the Turkish bath became the craze and, finally, the Swiss Arnold Rickli (1823-1906) launches the idea of 'atmospheric cures' (air and sun baths). Nowadays, however, our civilization, which makes man subsidiary to production, regards the bath almost exclusively as a means of cleanliness. In spite of the technical improvements which account for the bath's general success, our bathroom, a mere appendage to the bedroom, is really a primitive form of the bath to be found in Crete, long before the Greek gymnasium came on the scene. When the creation of baths on classical lines is suggested, the excuse offered is lack of capital. But the lack of cash is more often than not a mere pretext; the real reason is that a society like ours has no room for institutions whose only justification would be to bring relaxation to its members.

Aarau Baths

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1954-55; Project: Max E. Haefeli, arch. FAS/SIA, Zürich
Construction: Haefeli, Moser, Steiger, arch. FAS/SIA, Zürich

Following a competition organized in 1952, the main outlines of the project under review were accepted. The baths form part of the sports grounds (including the shooting range) which have been laid out on the right bank of the Aare. There is an uninhibited view of the beautiful countryside and the attempt has been made to give bathers an even better opportunity than at Allenmoos (Zürich) to undress in the perfectly ventilated cloakrooms. The children's area has been placed in the middle of the big pools for adults to enable parents to bathe and watch over their offspring at the same time. Among other things the baths are embellished by Erwin Rehmann's sculpture.

Enlargement of Schönenwerd's Baths

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1954-55; Project: Max E. Haefeli, arch. FAS/SIA, Zürich
Construction: Haefeli, Moser, Steiger, arch. FAS/SIA, Zürich

The increasing pollution of the water of the Aare has led to its being forbidden for young people to bathe in it. It was therefore necessary to enlarge the existing pool, this being rendered possible by the commune's generosity in presenting a site. To obtain the depth required for diving, the bath's concrete periphery projects above ground. All constructions are in wood.

Horgen Baths by the Lake of Zürich

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1956; H. Escher & R. Weilenmann, arch. FAS/SIA, Zürich

The baths, in the park of Villa Seerose, have been arranged so as to mirror as much as possible the beautiful stand of trees, consideration also being taken of the need to re-integrate the baths into the park when the bathing season is over. A unitary beach has not been created, but various pools, the areas between them being divided into zones to avoid giving bathers the impression that they are lost in an anonymous crowd.

Laufenburg Baths, Aarau

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1954; E. Neuenschwander & R. Brennenstuhl, arch. SIA, Zürich

In 1952 the commune decided to renovate the baths, the Laufenburg Electricity Company making a gift of the site. The lay-out is at three levels above the Rhine. The old pool has been left as it was, but a new paddling pool added. Buildings, furniture and sunshades are in yellow, green and blue.

New Baths and Renovation of the Quellenhof Hotel at Ragaz

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1956-57; O. Glaus, arch. FAS/SIA, Zürich

Constructed in 1870 and closed in 1939, then badly damaged by fire, the time had come to renovate the Quellenhof Hotel and install 40 new bathrooms and lavatories. For reasons of economy, the old furniture was used. There are new baths and pavilions for the various kinds of cures. The large covered pool has been entirely reconstructed.

Pavilion of the Cachat Springs at Evian (Haute-Savoie)

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1956-57; architect: G. Novarina, Thonon; construction: J. Prouvé, Paris

The glass walls of the pavilion make it completely transparent and open up the view to the North and the Lake of Geneva. It comprises a Pump Room and a concert hall, separated only by Raoul Ubac's wall painting at half the height of the building. All constructional elements give evidence of Jean Prouvé's expert hand.

Athletics School at Formia, Italy

320

Architect Dr. Vitellozzi, Rome; Sergio Musmeal, Engineer

A site of 77,000 square meters, bordering on the Via Appia, has been laid out to create above all an agreeable atmosphere, the grounds being cut off from the main traffic route and without walls blocking the view of the Monti Aurunci. The various buildings (school, hall, teachers' and guest rooms) adjoin the stadium (Stadio degli Aranci) with its stands providing seating for 2,000.

Sports Centre of the University of Mexico

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Erected in the Pedregal lava desert, the university campus of Mexico covers an area of 7,300 hectares and comprises an Olympic stadium for 110,000 spectators by Augusto Perez. The arena was dug out of the earth, the material being used to construct the rows of seats, only the 48 vomitories being in concrete. On the outer supporting wall, a mosaic by Diego Rivera. The frontons for the pelota have been strongly influenced by Aztec architecture and the general impression is of a taste for the monumental which must be understood historically.

The Sculptor Etienne Hajdu

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by Carola Giedion-Welcker

Born at Turda (Rumania) in 1907, E. H. came to Paris in 1927. He first went to Bourdelle's studio and then to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, leaving the latter after being profoundly impressed by Léger's exhibition (1930). Acquired French nationality. Travelled in Greece, Crete, Holland. After demobilisation in 1940 lived at Bagnères in the Pyrenees where he worked as a hewer of stone. In 1946 he moved to Montrouge (Seine) where he models and casts large reliefs in plaster. In 1950 he went to Bagneux (Paris outskirts) where he created large reliefs in lead, copper and, finally, in aluminium, as well as sculptures in stone and metal. The author of this article regards E. H. as one of the outstanding artists of the second non-figurative generation. Going beyond Brancusi and Arp, H. is haunted by the desire to establish the unity of background, form, plan, volume and structure surfaces. This he conceives and puts into effect by insisting on ever closer collaboration between the plastic arts and architecture.