

Summaries

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Summaries

Page 9

Jean-Claude Steinegger Free from fashion... old-fashioned?

At the present time the discussion — an absolutely necessary one —, of the latest and the very latest developments in architecture is filling the columns of the technical journals. People are already speculating about what will probably come after the "Post-Modern". From this standpoint it may at first glance seem strange that we are reporting, in this Issue, on two architects whose work is scarcely affected by this vehement discussion. It is precisely for this reason that their work, which is not at all easy to assign to any category, is in danger of being ignored. Both of them, Roland Schweitzer and Roland Simounet, persistent and consistent architects, have for more than 20 years created respectable buildings which have attracted little or no attention, and not only in this country.

It is instructive to compare the projects of Schweitzer and Simounet. Parallels and dichotomies as well become visible. Both of them, born between the wars, Schweitzer in 1925, Simounet in 1927, received their training as architects in Paris just after the Second World War. They both live in Paris at the present time. However, they have different backgrounds: Schweitzer is an Alsatian, a Protestant, related to Albert Schweitzer. Simounet, whose family lived for generations in Algeria, friend and comrade of Albert Camus, is a man of the Mediterranean. The atmosphere of their places of origin was decisive, and has influenced their creating down to the present.

Page 11

Claude Schnaidt Roland Schweitzer, Roland Simounet

Modern: Of pressing importance, contemporary; someone profiting from recent technological and scientific progress; someone who takes recent developments in his field of interest into account; someone definitely part of our time: that is the information that may be found in a dictionary.

It has never been an easy task to be modern, much as age-old traditions have always weighed like a nightmare on the mind of the living. Roland Schweitzer and Roland Simounet did not chose the easiest possible way: they are producing genuine modern architecture.

They belong among those

rare people in contemporary France who are bearing evidence to the fact that architects need not irrevocably be destined to merely improve on super-gadgets or to the reproduction of archetypes, that in fact man is not necessarily condemned to live in rabbit-burrows or caves. Schweitzer and Simounet do not tend towards mere declamations, ambiguities or discrepancies between the original project and its realisation. You get your money's worth (their constructions cost rather less than comparable ones), because truly good architecture is self-financing, because they do not overlook details and because their forms are both aim and justification of a process of adequate measures which greatly exceed the drawing-board model. Stubborn, solitary and constantly fighting on all fronts, they might just prove to be nostalgic representants of a demiurgical, professional ambition. In fact however they are just defending their freedom of creation in a society which tries to tame all of us with the sole aim of surviving. Roland Schweitzer and Roland Simounet, may you prosper and continue thus!

Page 17

Roland Schweitzer Nurses' School in Paris, 1970/71

This ensemble replaces — in urban surroundings composed of small compact building units — buildings constructed along the two streets concerned.

The access street to the school forms part of the intersection, just as the lower situated gardens enlarge the space claimed by the street. The fragmentation of the building corresponds to the major elements of the program: in plan and section:

- raised ground-floor: reception lounge, offices, lecture rooms
- all other floors: 106 rooms containing one bed each

The play of visual breaches allows for a second interpretation of the program:

- skylights for the sanitary installations and the laundry
- all-glass walls for the rooms open to general activities and for the living-rooms on each floor
- vertical window enclosures for all rooms
- narrow window gap between two volumes.

The terrace is fully accessible and protected by a concrete wall towards the street side.

The interior courtyard has been lowered below ground level by the height of one story, while its perimeter is emphasized by a gallery on the same level with the adjacent hospital and a patio.

Page 20

Roland Schweitzer Training Centre for Handi- capped in Lavaur (Tarn), 1969

This establishment is dedicated to the general education and the professional formation of adolescents — girls and boys with psychomotoric disturbances or an infirmity of the motor muscles — ranging from 13 to 18 years of age. It provides, outside of schooling, all nursing facilities, places and special installations necessary to their reeducation and reintegration.

The existence of an 18th century manor house and its out-buildings on the grounds marks the focus of all the other building elements of the program:

1. administration — manor house
2. professional instruction classes
3. general lessons
4. nursing facilities
5. general services

Elements 2 to 5 form the village centre with its square.

6. 5 autonomous accommodation units, including a lounge, dining-hall and special accommodations for a family of educators
7. administrative facilities situated in a former barn

This decentralization has led to the defining of a specific architectural vocabulary, in an attempt to organize the entire area into a multitude of distinguishable and easily identifiable places, inside as well as outside ones, whose hierarchization greatly contributes to the stimulation of activity within a certain existing arrangement.

Page 24

Roland Schweitzer Vacation Centre for children, Le Four (Limousin), 1972

Both the project itself and its insertion into already existing units have been carefully planned with the help of pedagogues. The site plan reaches into the forest area, the living-room forming an entity with the adjacent meadows, a tangible space created by man. On one side there is the welcoming but disquieting forest, on the other one the reassuring view of the softly curved meadow and between the buildings the village square radiating feelings of security, a communal place of meeting.

The natural ground of the woods has been preserved by raising the buildings on wooden poles, thus avoiding the destructive use of mechanized tools in a territory whose natural equilibrium was one of the main criteria of this pedagogical project; a project trying to preserve the existing layer of humus, flora and visual surroundings.

In opposition to the lightness of the structures involved, two elements of the overall composition have been realized in a rough kind of native stone: the meeting rooms in the south-western part and a sanitary complex in the north-eastern corner.

Page 27

Roland Schweitzer The Saint Clothilde Institute in Paris, 1976/78

The realization of this project is part of a plan of redevelopment concerning the complex of houses of Reuilly-Picpus (14 ha). The building site includes a green area which has been put under protection. The program is composed of the following 5 units:

- co-ed secondary school centre for 900 pupils
- lounge
- chapel — multipurpose hall
- gymnasiums
- courtyards, play-grounds, green areas.

The general problem consists in making a differentiation between the divers units built on ground level, raised levels and the various materials used in doing so, while still creating a coherent unit composed of distinguishable spaces arranged in a certain hierarchical manner, permitting an inter-penetration of the buildings and the green areas.

The utilization of units sunk below ground level and landscaping has made a simplification of the ground-floor possible, which offers a free view between the "rue de Reuilly" and the park. A determination to establish visual transparency has replaced the old encircling wall once forming a formidable barrier. In fact, the institute stimulates a certain urbanization.

The gymnasiums have been placed below ground level by the height of one story, thus diminishing the importance of their bulk in respect to the other buildings as well as regarding the green areas.

Page 35

Roland Simounet
**School of Architecture, New
 Town of Grenobles-Echirol-
 les (Isère) 1978**

In an attempt to master and structure a very quick demographical expansion, the town of Grenoble had decided, towards the end of the sixties, to create a large zone of coherent urban extension.

It is within this urban context that the construction of new buildings for the School of Architecture has been planned, which had until then formed part of the historical town centre. Four basic elements of organisation regarding the school have architecturally been differentiated:

- Study rooms dedicated to small groups of about fifteen students, occasionally to be combined into two or three joint groups (30 to 45 students) were planned. Constructed in the northern part of the site and on four different levels, these 32 "basic modules" open into the park and receive a diffuse kind of light from the direction of the zenith, a practical aspect concerning the artists' studios.
- There is an "agora", a general place of meeting, exchange of ideas, informal discussions, able to accommodate 500 persons.
- There is a sector dedicated to the instruction of practical knowledge, given to large groups, as for instance those involved in graphics, the making of models and moulding, or in audiovisual concerns. All laboratories and studios are mainly provided with zenithal lighting and given a certain flexibility by way of the play of sliding walls.
- A second "agora" of more reduced dimensions, intended for the exchange of professional ideas - particularly concerning the works on display - was planned, too.

These last two sectors have been arranged so as to be accessible from the public pedestrians' street.

Page 38

Roland Simounet
Vacation Houses in Corsica
First house, 1969:

Visiting some friends I was casually shown a catalogue of light building units, so-called prefabricated constructions, a type of house very likely solving their then pressing problem, namely constructing a house only to be used during the two summer months, a house in Corsica at a beach along the eastern coast, a house with an interesting price in fact.

I knew the site perfectly well: an intact dune along the coast of the Tyrrhenean. Knowing from the very start that it would be possible, I proposed the study of a house with a comparable surface and built for an

equivalent amount of money. The principal facts of the problem: less than fifty square metres, twenty-five thousand francs to be used at the utmost, the presence of the sea taken into account, the size of the site, the isolation of the place and the probable utilization of the house.

The principal preoccupations were the construction of something very compact on the given site, an economical distribution of precisely defined functions and the ensuring of protection of all kinds.

The things aimed at where: the insulation of the walls by means of a double-layered ventilated wall, insulation of the terraces of concrete fashioned from lava, ventilation regulated by a kind of chimney pot and chimneys built at a special angle and a stone floor which could be freshened up by simple washing; protection from the sun by deep window apertures providing the necessary shadow for the walls and the window panes; the window apertures protecting the house from the sea spray and the wind; protection from insects: the window apertures to be closed by plain panels and the deflectors regulating the ventilation to be provided with nylon mosquito nets; protection against the sand: all parts of the woodwork to be equipped with low placed grooves; protection against pine needles, which in turn cover and protect the terrace. The rain drainage system is an open construction, needing no maintenance at all.

It is precisely because of these details that the idea of such a house has been adopted and finally fully accepted. All this was necessary if you wanted to make someone accept the rudeness of the materials used, the sobriety of the units and the rich contrast of empty and utilized spaces.

Second house, 1971:

A few years later an event which greatly surprised and satisfied me occurred. Two families asked me to study their dwellings on the basis of the experience acquired when constructing the first house, theirs being nearby.

The given problem proved to be interesting. I was to find a solution to the problem of the rest and lounge area while combining the two sites and installing the single elements of the project within three different interdependent areas.

The plan for the rest area comprised detached rooms within the pine woods, constructed in two autonomous clusters.

The plan for the lounge area showed a big joint hall with terraces, sheltered loggias, a fire-place for the autumn and a big kitchen. Independent of all this, a big outside oven was built.

The elements of the first house constructed were taken up

again regarding its manner of construction, the protection and natural comfort it offered, the texture of the exterior and interior walls and the rough materials then used.

Page 41

Roland Simounet
**Housing at Evry/
 Courcouronnes, 1975**

The above mentioned building ensemble is situated in the new town of Evry, in the community of Courcouronnes which is part of the district of Essone. It numbers 98 flats, divided into four groups. This project is an answer to the various limitations imposed by the urban pattern in this part of the town, the environment and the program itself:

The facts:

- a flat site, connected to the rest of the town by a single street at the southern side, at the northern one by a raised pedestrians' path and crossed by the R. N. (Route Nationale: national highway) no 446, though bordered by a row of platanes;
 - the presence of an artificially formed site;
 - the nearby village of Courcouronnes providing with its scale;
 - and finally a program imposing the necessity of great density of construction in this zone predominantly destined to individual dwellings;
- As a result of the given relief and the site itself, the units are only artificially enlivened. The are creating a link with the ancient village.

Circulation virtually form the skeleton of the ensemble, the cars penetrate below the buildings into sheltered car parks. None of the vehicles are visible when stationed. A network of pedestrian walks gives access to the apartments. The combination of the flats is very complex. The basic principle applied is a mesh of building units constructed on three half levels whose linking element is a kitchen/dining-room area.

The whole building ensemble is very densely but also very articulatedly constructed. Its apparent complexity hides an underlying simplicity of structure emphasized by numerous repetitive elements.

Page 44

Roland Simounet
**The Nemours Museum of
 Prehistory, 1981**

Raised in the immediate surroundings of Nemours, this museum is situated in the middle of the woods on a very beautiful site strewn with rocks. Though it is flat in its northern part, it takes on a certain relief in the opposite part. The museum is built along the given slope, while respect-

ing the plants and rocks already existing in this place.

In this project we have developed an open kind of solution and rely in this on a detailed research of all aspects of transparency. The main halls have been glazed to a great extent, offering a full view of the interior gardens in which the natural vegetation and rocks have carefully been preserved and where archaeological remains are put in an extension of indoor displays. The rooms housing the show-cases are visually more closed, but do still profit from the overall architectural transparency and visual breaches.

The museum extends over several floor levels, including on the lower levels: the reception, the depository and the current non-permanent exhibitions, while the permanent exhibition rooms are situated on the upper levels. The various levels are connected by way of softly sloping ramps and flights of stairs.

The proposed structures show a great simplicity of features: simple supports, covering materials with supportive functions and tiles of reinforced concrete. The profile of the structure and the skylights is left in evidence and the interior part of the walls is done in natural materials, trying to retain an overall impression of sobriety.