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Ulm in the year V

by Lucius Burckhardt

Germany 1955: a renaissance of modernism after the cultural obscurantism of the Nazis—unfortunately under the sign of a pronouncedly commercial mentality. Opposition to the abuses of the "German miracle" allied to naturist idealism had a part to play in the choice of the "Cow Mountain" (Kuhberg) near Ulm as the site of the Hochschule für Gestaltung (Institute of Industrial Design). It is difficult to feel any surprise over the fact that in the long run this institute so far from the centre and out of cultural and industrial contact was not able to accommodate itself to the serious and alien spirit of its first director, Max Bill, who left in 1959. By way of a curious but very Hegelian contradiction, the "idealism" in question claimed that it had discovered one knows not what "formalist" deviation in the spirit that guided the instruction given by the man who first breathed life into the institute. This has for its rather disquieting consequence a general confusion that is giving rise to a market economy in industrial design and purely abstract speculations regarding "human engineering". On the other hand, the number of teachers has gone down very sharply and it was not without difficulty that a new collective administrative body was formed. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that, to the extent that the institute is able to free itself of its sectarianism, Ulm may well remain indispensable, as it is the sole place of instruction that allows for direct contact with the practical world and is, moreover, anxious to come to terms with the theoretical problems implied in the field that is its own.

Ready-made Façades

by Thomas Schmid

In the USA it is already the custom to sell curtain walls by the thousand; these purlin-construction units only have to be attached to brackets on the building itself. The danger of a schematization of design resulting can be avoided if the architects reflect in a constructive manner on the consequences of using this system. The examples given in this issue will show that in this respect something can be achieved.

A Propos the 12th Milan Triennale

by Benedikt Huber

The times are past when the Triennale was in the van of the fight for "good design", taken up nowadays, less dogmatically, by the advertising specialists. Three years ago, therefore, the decision was taken to centre each triennale around one theme—this year: the home and school (the latter not being easy to export). At the same time a retrospective exhibition devoted to F.L. Wright (organized by C. Scarpa) revealed, curiously enough, in its manner of presentation current Italian taste, which is roughly between Wright and modern style. Another general characteristic: no longer was there any difference between the various exhibitor nations, as everybody spoke in the lingua franca of "modernism". Fortunately, there were a few outsiders, like Mexico, Poland and Switzerland. As for the theme selected—a truly complex one—the majority failed to come to grips with it, with the exception, perhaps, of Italy and, above all, Mexico, where the school is in fact a vital problem. In conclusion it may be said that whereas the pioneers of a rebirth in architecture and design in general were aiming at projects within the grasp of those with lean purses, nowadays, given the current economic plethora, the main preoccupation is to create new needs for the newly affluent, that is to say, practically everyone. It remains to be said that thanks to the possibility it affords us of assessing the situation (fortunate or otherwise) the Triennale retains and will retain some documentary value.

Sanitary Apparatus Design

by Max Ernst Haefeli

In general the development in the design of sanitary apparatus is characterized by the honesty with which it follows technical progress and attempts to realize a general programme that will allow architects to work homogeneously.

Orthomorphism of the Street

by Fritz Maurer

At the present time town-planning is little occupied with the space between buildings, that is to say, the street, which is, however, an informing factor, a form of orthomorphism. Now, it is all too true that the disposition of our streets is usually conditioned by exclusively technical considerations. The photographs shown here will only go to show the urgency of the problem, which is one that city officials and private persons ought to become more and more aware of.

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The Mandala Shape in Architecture

by Karl Litz

Every symbol (in German "Sinnbild"—meaningful picture) is a sign that is not open to rational elucidation. This is doubtless the reason why the "deliberate" symbols of contemporary architecture are all unauthentic; the actual language of symbolism is, by definition, obscure and composed of signs whose sense we can feel but not know. Because of this it is necessary to call history as a witness, for it can enlighten us about the potentialities within us crying to be delivered into the world of being. It is from this point of view that the author handles the universal symbol of the mandala—"circle" in Sanscrit—which is of such importance in the third phase of Buddhism, but which is also an absolutely general magico-religious symbol. C.G. Jung sees in it a projection of the "self", Jaspers a token of the trans-subjective being. In architecture it is principally met in religious buildings—it is the stupa of Buddhism (the finest example of which is the temple of Boro Boodoor near Djakarta); it is the Islamic Kaaba (Kaaba = die); and it is also (though no longer in a pure state in the west, where the mandala becomes irregular) the original square plan of the Christian basilica, then an idea transported in its essence to the centre of Carolingian churches, of those of the Renaissance, in particular, St. Peter's in Rome as Michelangelo envisaged it (in front of the Maderna nave). All these forms are ritually connected with the *circumambulatory*, of which the cloister offers us another example. The mediaeval town itself, concentric in shape around its centre the church, is a mandala before anything else. The architectural mandala is the consummate form of the mandala itself and of architecture.

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Values and Criteria in Modern Art

by Georg Schmidt

Reading this essay where the author touches on so many problems at once that it would be folly to try and present an adequate summary of it, where both his long experience and his idiosyncrasies find their place, we shall remember above all the attempt made to show that normative elements and judgements (values, criteria) are not the same according to whether an artist, a collector, a museum curator or a historian of art is in question. If we are able to distinguish the timeless values of content, form and quality, it is nevertheless historicism that both allows and obliges us to consider modern art (and modern means nothing more or less than contemporary) according to its own criteria and values. The fact that tachism, informal art, and action painting have taught us to assess older works in a hitherto unknown way (for example, as to their "handwriting" and their "tangibility") is enough to make us acknowledge that this huge movement with its variety of names is an authentic new style. This art, the antinaturalism of which is derived from the discovery of photography in the nineteenth century and the outstripping of classical physics in the twentieth, is on the whole a unanimous no given in reply by the artistic spirit to the "economic miracle" of the contemporary world. We should be courageous enough to admit that this art of our times is just the reply that the latter deserves. True, one like certain people may dream of the reintegration of reality or, like the author, of the reintegration of form; but from now on the future in the main will depend on the force which man is willing to deploy in abstaining from doing all that is technically open to him—in short, the maintenance of that which is human and vital at any price. And if Germany and Russia have taught us in the thirties no longer to confuse our desires with the world's progress, we are nevertheless aware both of the role played by our personal aims in shaping it and of the extent of their influence.

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