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Structure – Freedom – Relativation

by Peter Güller

The indeterminate in modern town-planning

The transformation, the rapid technological progress and the manifold interplay of interests within our society are confronting us with the task of re-assessing the traditional – and possibly novel – structural and organizational principles in order to discover how much leeway they leave to indeterminate developments and modifications: We are speaking here of the potential content of structures and mean thereby their specific aptitude for leaving open different design possibilities.

There is investigated, for the time being, the composition, irradiation, patination, uniformity and hierarchy, to discover their qualities that may have some bearing in the elaboration of a 'structural theory':

The potential content of structures

The *composition* is *per se* a self-contained entity, and it permits no formal modifications without there having to be taken into the bargain a decisive loss of quality.

The principle of *irradiation* permits the less prominent parts of a structure to be modified indeterminately in respect of design and disposition without any diminishing of the content of the whole.

Patination: Beneath a patina different objects appear as the expression of a unity, although binding formal elements are not present. The individual patinated objects, as regards their design or position, are to a great extent autonomous.

The structural elements are, within the *uniformity* of a structure, subject to an identical norm both as regards their shape and their mutual relationships. Within the scope of this inner rapport there can be effected any number of purely formal modifications.

The *hierarchy* is the perfect image of a system which coordinates its parts in line with a main goal and therewith keeps them under strict discipline.

Structural designs | Town-planning structures

In the present Issue many different themes are taken up, such as town-planning, architecture, music, pottery, organization. We examine all these areas from the point of view of abstract structure, in line with the principles outlined above, and so arrive at a deeper insight through being compelled to formulate analogies. We also believe that such abstract structural analyses can furnish the key to a closer interdisciplinary co-operation, such as is the case already in the fields of local, regional and national planning.

The basic problem, which is to order a manifold living event and keep it functional, is inducing the modern planner and architect to fixate certain parts of a structure (in the first instance, that which is perennial, the absolutely necessary) and to leave others, correspondingly, subject to the expected transformation of an unimpeded development. This approach we call *partial fixation*.

Partial fixation presupposes in principle a far-reaching insight into the dynamics of a city. However, we should like to set side by side with this particular planning approach still another kind of designing, which is concerned not so much with fixating as with maintaining continuous control of a situation. In clarification of this point the example of Japanese art may be adduced:

Rhythmic properties in Japanese architecture and music
by Peter Güller*Japanese pottery*
by Sophie Lechner

In the last few years there has been an expanding discussion centering on the architecture and the art of Japan. Japanese architecture has the reputation of for centuries deriving possibilities of free design from the use of standardized structural elements. The designs of articles of daily use and of decorative objects are praised for their simple beauty and functionalism.

In this connection, however, these architectural and artistic properties appear to us in a new light: A more profound significance is seen in the specific way in which, in the architecture and art of Japan, these rational design principles and the rules of simple design are managed, exploited and incorporated into a total artistic complex. An artistic meaning is seen no less in the pursuance of numerical arrangements or the principles of pure design. There appear as essential features of Japanese artistic creation a reciprocal penetration of different design principles, the working together of different rhythms and the unconcerned willingness to allow irregularities to emerge or to create them deliberately, as well as to incorporate in the design what seem to be faults.

Japanese art thus has at its disposal a whole range of means of expression running from direct simplicity, from severely geometric structures, from pure form to utter flexibility, to accidental design and to complex articulations of rhythms. What is decisive here is that adherence to one or the other mode of expression is not solely a matter of different artistic

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periods. Rather, we often find united in one and the same work of art the various design principles, as though no particular value were attached to the pursuance of a specific line of development. This tendency to take a sceptical attitude towards direct simplicity, purity and consistency I call a tendency to *compromise*, the tendency to *relativize* things, as it were. The endeavour to achieve clear articulation, flawless design, a creation that is in keeping with the properties of the materials employed, becomes subject to a purely relativist approach.

Relativation

Relativation indicates the existence of a principle that is either not precisely followed or, if need be, is connected up with others, eventually anti-principles. In the creation of an order lies an a priori possibility of a more or less controllable violation, the possibility of an interference with values which are released from dependence on this order or are totally alien to it.

We assume that a concern with this design principle, illustrated here by means of the Japanese example, can be of great significance in view of the highly complex structural problems of our age. A confrontation between what we still strive to achieve – presumably owing to a given cultural tradition – and what is really happening in reality reveals striking discrepancies. This insight into how alien to reality certain of our traditional structural principles are is bound in the end to lead to an attempt to discover design and organizational forms which do not leave to one side the spontaneous but build it into their system from the outset. In general, the formal training of the architect and also his more general organizational training do not aim at all at awakening a sense for the possibilities of combining apparent disparities – such as do occur in reality. The 'theory of design' is lagging behind the necessity to master the manifold, the contradictory.

However, the important thing is, at the crucial moment, to allow the expert combination of the novel and whatever is worth retaining of the old. Adherence to the relativist approach compels the designer to formulate with non-traditional means.

Georges Vantongerloo

by Margit Staber

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Georges Vantongerloo abandoned the naturalistic idiom, in which he had been trained at the Art Academy in Antwerp, at the age of 31, in 1917. He joined the group which had formed around the review 'de Stijl', founded in 1917 by Theo van Doesburg, and became one of the youngest associates of 'de Stijl', and, next to Mondrian, one of the most important. Yet after a time the restrictive principles of neo-classicism no longer satisfied him. He began to investigate the relations of lines and points in a plane, and of cubes and spheres in three-dimensional space. Thus he finally arrived at the 'curve' pictures and the space-encompassing sculptures with open and closed volumes, eventually at his wire sculptures and plexiglass shapes, which generate their own chromatic effects. His oeuvre is not very extensive, and his individual works are modestly dimensioned, but whatever he does represents the artistic realization of an intellectual experiment.

Japanese artists in Europe

by Jeanine Lipsi

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Whereas around the turn of the century Japanese influences in the fields of colour and design were becoming dominant in the work of many European artists, in the first half of the 20th century many Japanese artists came to Europe in order to assimilate European techniques. Tsugurahu Foujita has been settled in Paris since 1913. The author discusses the work of six painters, three sculptors and one engraver, who came from Japan to Paris after 1950, in order to work there either temporarily or permanently. The painters dealt with are Key Sato, Kimura Tshiuta, Kumi Sugai, Yasse Tabuchi, Hisao Domoto, Toshimitsu Imai, the sculptors Isamu Noguchi, Yasuo Mizui and Tetsumi Kudo as well as the engraver Yozo Hamaguchi.