

THE OPEN FORM IN ARCHITECTURE—THE ART OF THE GREAT NUMBER

We have come to Otterlo to ask and try to answer a simple question: What do we have in common, and how are we to fight for it?

In defining "what," we may not be able to go further than listing those things we disagree with in architecture as it has been till now. "How" signifies the means which we consider proper and their application in realizing the new idea.

What

Architecture until now:

has not solved the problem of necessary quantity. The gap in the quantity of apartments and social facilities is decreasing very slowly, and often increasing instead of decreasing.

has, as a "closed form," not accepted changes in the mode of life, and becomes obsolete before it is even realized.

has broadly disregarded the tenant's psychological needs and is often inhuman.

has been wasteful of financial means.

Architects, who believe in the miraculous function of the Closed Form as the means for overcoming the stalemate of quantity, have been designing minimum apartments of the past half century—and these ineffectually. The demand is constantly increasing, and the standard of "quantity" housing is decreasing. Indeed, even the most magnificent attainments of "small quantities" based on the Closed Form, like Vällingby or the Cité d'Habitation in Marseilles, have, for various reasons, failed the test. It seems to me that Brasilia-Capital will be antique before it is completed, for it, too, is based on the Closed Form.

I am not an adherent of a compulsory evolution. However, I do believe that evolution can be accelerated. I consider the organic disregard of free polemics in architecture an anachronistic convention of the Closed Form as well as a repercussion of the traditional system of construction.

How

I believe that, in a given material situation, the present "swelling" society, which has an arsenal of means, can afford to build homes and public facilities in sufficient quantity, and on an increasingly higher standard.

The problem of quantity, unsolved till now, lies in the manner in which the methods of the Closed Form are used to solve other substances—the large quantity. The sooner we cast off the shackles of the Closed Form—the form on which we have been brought up and consequently often do not perceive its deleterious effect—the sooner will we solve the basic task of architecture.

I consider that the problem of dynamic quantity can be resolved without lowering the standards of quality through the use of the "open form" as a basis. Acting in the new language of the Open Form we understand by the term "quantity" the filling in of the gap of housing and public utilities left in legacy by the Closed Form and the parallel increase in building with the natural increase in population.

The term "quality" in the language of the Open Form should be understood as the recognition of the individual in a collective.

The basic elements of the Open Form presented above are the meshed vectors which will form the new architecture. The new number will produce new quality and conversely the concept of the new quality will help us resolve the number.

The Open Form, unlike the Closed Form, does not exclude the energy of the client's initiative but on contrary treats it as a basic, organic, and inseparable component element. This fact is of a fundamental significance to the client's psychological need of identity.

The rhythm of our times and the functioning of the Closed Form (which appears in a particularly drastic form in the faulty

interpretation of industrialization from which emerges the monstrous shape of dull standardization) causes the individuality to become lost in the collective: the individual stands apart from the action. The Open Form is to aid the individual in finding himself in the collective, to make him indispensable in the creation of his own surroundings.

It seems that society should make possible the development of the individual. There should be a synthesis between the objective social elements and the subjective individual elements. This organic necessity of our society—the mutual permeation of superficially opposed elements—will in result produce a more proper distribution of means assigned for this purpose. It will aid in solving the problem of filling in the gaps of the lacking means, and consequently will resolve the problem of quantity. We must consider only those elements objective and social which we attain due to society. Subjective elements are those which we can and wish to resolve ourselves.

In the first group we include action based on area planning in the scale of a country-city-planning on the scale of a region or city. In detail, it will mean the preparation of the "sites" for "one-family houses" on the first floor, second floor, third floor, fourth floor, etc., up to the top floor in a skyscraper. Preparation of "sites" for construction will depend upon the solution of such elements as: the influence of local conditions on the formation of city planning groups; the "passe-partout" for social living; a common means of communication; of installations; of fundamental economics in building; and so on. The choice of the place "where" in the city, by way of answer to public information, will be made by the client. This is the first instance in which the objective and subjective elements permeate each other. After the "site" has been chosen, the tenant decides on the system in which the home is to be built.

How?

Here the second instance may occur where the objective and subjective elements permeate each other. That is, if society will build homes on the order of the client, an architect or some other specialist, invited by the client, may participate. This phase of construction may be carried out by the client himself, or by some other energy but always at the decision of the client. This phase may be carried out successfully on a large scale only if it is previously properly organized and the material base is large and varied and properly prepared. This stage, from the viewpoint of the organization of the construction as well as the establishment and development of the bases, should evolve gradually. Problems will arise and grow gradually and in this connection the answers will evolve organically.

The third instance of permeation is the completely new architectural task: a communicative transmission to our psychology of the organic and bountiful chaos of events in a form received by this manner, not through the elimination of separate forms but by recognizing the separate component elements by means of additional plastic effects.

The manifestation of the Open Form will be therefore the discernibleness of the individual in the multiple, and the discernibleness of the number. In housing we shall have a polemic of viewpoints on the creation of one's own surroundings, characterized by an appropriate "background." In social postulated, these will be separate events: people, circumstances, and so on.

The Open Form differs from the Closed Form by recognizing concrete people—not the abstract so-called "average"—by leaving a margin for evoking one's own latent essence. It is an individual-collective phenomenon and, because of that, multi-stratified and alive.

The problem and scope of the permeation of subjective and objective elements depends upon the traits and needs of the group

(community). An enormous role is played by the distribution of material means, the living standard of society, the accessible material base and the psychological elements.

By recognizing the very extensive substance, we enter upon the field of new aesthetics in architecture—the aesthetics of the Open Form. As Dadaism in painting broke the barrier of traditional aesthetics, so the Open Form in architecture will bring us closer to the "ordinary, mundane, things found, broken, accidental" (Pierre Restany). The role of the artist-architect is altered from the previous exclusively personal and conceptional role (imposing the Closed Form in manifestation of which the form is defined beforehand and that most often for non-existing persons) to the conceptional-coordinating role. An all-knowing architect must realize, in the face of the high level of specialization in present times, that he does not know everything himself. Hence, the architect superspecialist is obsolescent in present times.

The wealth of Open Form in architecture as well as its development will depend on the polemics of the various component parts, comprehended as various individualities, playing the leading role in its substance, serving each tenant individually, and not defined beforehand in its manifestation.

The Closed Form has created aesthetics for its own use. The Open Form—the art of events—will also look for its own methods of study, its own means of expression, its own aesthetics. The Open Form, being the form of the sum of events—of the sum of individualities of a given group—should in consequence lead us to the expression of a group form. Taking into consideration the constantly broadening analysis of component elements, their mutual permeation as well as the indivisible structure of society, we approach the idea of complete, universal, whole, continuous space—space of a different psychology, a different and new morality.