ON_BEING WITH--IT

EXPERIÊNCIAS PEDAGÓGICAS SOBRE TERRITÓRIO NA EAUM

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I came into architecture by accident, by way of an ambition to become a biologist, because I hated the specialisation which the biologists insisted on. What interested me was not the diseases of the hind gut of the red locust, but what James Fisher still calls 'natural history'. Perhaps that is this that has given me a sense of picture not quite of the kind of art and architecture which art historians would have and which, in the city of York itself, the Minster, York or Durham, is not much more carefully created than theirs, and in fact is on the whole much more beautiful. Certainly I see architecture, landscape and town planning as one operation, one task, of building the environment, and everything I am about to say will be coloured by this.

The most important function the RIBA can perform at present is to defend the profession from attack. This attack comes firstly from the Establishment, embodied in the Monopolies Commission, which in my view has no real mandate to examine the professions, and in the Prices & Incomes Board, which has even less. Such bodies are symptomatic of a vague jealousy of professional life which seems to be in the air nowadays; but they worry me far less than the second attack, which comes from youth. This is serious: if young men do not want to be professionals but aim to join the 'commercial world', the professions might as well fold up now. Lastly, there is a good deal of sniping from within the profession, from those of our own members who want to abandon professional attitudes.

I start from the premise that there exists a definable professional task of building the environment, which society urgently needs. The architect is the best suited to that task. I see him as the independent guide to the making of the built environment. In fact, independence is the key to professional life. It is not a question of intellectual activity versus manual, or of providing a shelter under which well-trained people can get away with murder. A (Symposium) diagram on existence to create conditions in which certain kinds of work, which is trainable in the ordinary commercial sense, can be done. This independence is protected for the sake of the country, not the workers, and for society. The architect must have the power to answer all the questions: Why? How? At what cost? With what staff and what organisation? How long will it take? How useful, and how flexible when we change our minds after a few years? And how good will it be to live in?

Independent experts

It appeals to me as how architects act as a half-dozen men on a site plan, from the sun, quiet, warmth and privacy that is enjoyed – or not – by the people who use and inhabit our buildings. My hero is above all the aesthete who wants to build a piece of sculpture so enormous that he can't get anyone to finance it except by calling it a building, but someone like the great Joseph Paxton – often called a gardener but so much more than that – who could in 1850 conceive and build, out of his own head and from his own resources, a glass palace covering 23 acres, in a new and simplified technique, taking 48 years from the day he drew the first sketch on a piece of blotting paper to the day Queen Victoria opened the exhibition. Professionalism means responsibility. It follows that the architect must be responsible for the building of the building, every aspect of it, the design of it, the building committee, only manage his independent building techniques becoming sophisticated, if not more.
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eaum, guimarães
sexta, 18 novembro 2016
9:30 — 17:30

Seminários
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