

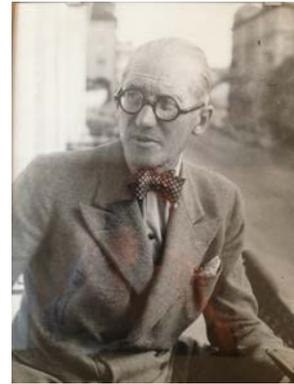
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# THE SYMBOLIC APPROACH OR READING BETWEEN THE LINES

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*The business of architecture is to establish emotional relationships by means of raw materials.  
Architecture goes beyond utilitarian needs.  
Architecture is a plastic thing.  
The spirit of order, a unity of intention.  
The sense of relationships; architecture deals with quantities.  
Passion can create drama out of inert stone.*

*Le Corbusier  
Towards a New Architecture*



Over the past fifteen years there has emerged an obsession with the 'design method' which has understandably paralleled the scientific and mathematical explosion of the computer. It has become common place that many households have their own small calculator and it is with the shopper even in the isles at any grocery store. It is obvious that the computer has touched all our lives and little wonder of the dependency of a society to its marvels.

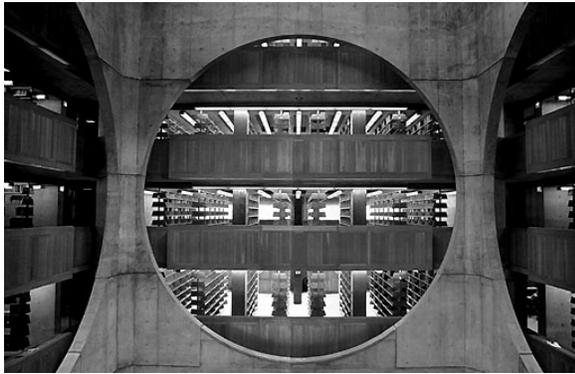


Theoreticians, scientists and even architects have spent much energy in defining the 'method of design'. J. C. Jones points out in his article "The state-of-the-art in design methods", that "the problem is that of devising languages of design." It is clear that if one is to define the process there must exist a language. Mr. Jones continues,

*Certainly this business of language construction is the essential step between piecemeal evolution of man-made things up to the present and the intelligent control that many people now wish to apply to the whole process of technological change.*

Understanding and articulating the 'design method' will enable the designer to program the computer, the ultimate step if one is to feed in the "input" and receive the "output."

This is most certainly the utopian dream. Only in Utopia does there exist the possibility of approaching the design method divorced of bias and sterile thought that is implied in this process defining. It is to this growing direction I object.



It is far too ridiculous to think of architecture as a clean and non-bias process or indeed a process at all. It is said that Louis Kahn once said, "Beer is a process but Architecture is an emotion."

Symbolism in architecture is certainly one of the oldest basis for the development of architecture and its evolution to a high art. Symbolism spans from the origins of primitive village plans, the Roman Pantheon as the ideal dome of Heaven, the 1920's heroic period of 'the machine' symbol, to our present search for the symbol interpretation of our times or epoch. Richard Llewelyn-Davies in these past Gropius lecture sited Mies Van der Rohe's definition "Architecture did not



belong to the time but to the epoch." Mr. Davies continues to state that indeed our epoch is 'indeterminacy' and our search for the symbol must be reflective. If one is to design

for growth and change (indeterminism) the isonomic symbolism that J. B. Jackson's discusses in his class lectures is certain to develop. Jackson points out that the Greek Revival is the expression of this isonomy and applied to any type of structure from banks to houses. Many fine



examples of the Greek Revival, showing the importance of this symbol, may be seen in the pattern books of Andrew Jackson Downing. The question arises, what Mr. Davies is looking to find, the revitalization of glued-on Greek Revival or the electronic circuitry of Archigram capable of expanding and reprograming itself. I would only

look forward to a revitalization of the Greek Revival versus electronic circuit systems that, as seen in any good television set, will soon be obsolete.

Even if the symbol emerges its statement is one to be interpreted and as seen in the development of a modern architecture evolving the symbol of socialism and a utopian life, the meaning is quickly changed to accommodate the American dream of independence. The machine soon becomes confused with the demonstration of the technology and the true meaning of the architecture is submerged and its poetic imagery is lost.

In Colin Rowe's Introduction to a somewhat recent catalogue of architecture as high design or art there exists one paragraph that sums-up my feelings concerning the computer and its importance to an art in search of a meaning.

*And, to this catalogue, there must also be added the notion that we ignore the situation altogether: that, in default of that convenient anti-'art' entity of the Twenties called 'the machine', we substitute the equally useful entities designated 'the computer' and 'the people' and that, if these two abstractions are absolutely at variance with each other, we will not indulge ourselves in too many scruples about this problem. It is a problem which exists only in the minds of the far too sensitive; and if research and data-collection are the wave of the future - if the public wisdom so indicates - then it is certainly to the future we belong.*

*Colin Rowe  
Introduction  
Five Architects*

