

## *Preface*

When my previous book, "Towns and Buildings," appeared the learned English historian of architecture, John Summerson, wrote that the preface should have contained some reference to whom the book was written for. The reader should have been warned so that he would avoid being disappointed and annoyed when he discovered how elementary the book actually was. Therefore I now hasten to state that I have endeavored to write the present volume in such a way that even an interested teenager might understand it. Not because I expect to find many readers belonging to that age-group. But if it can be understood by a fourteen-year-old then certainly it will be understood by those who are older. Furthermore, there is also some hope that the author himself has understood what he has written—which the reader is by no means always convinced of when reading books on art.

In writing this volume I naturally hope that my architect colleagues will read it and that they will find something of interest in the thoughts and ideas I have gathered during many years. But the book has a further aim. I believe that it is important to tell people outside our profession what it is that we are engaged in. In olden days the entire community took part in forming the dwellings and implements they used. The individual was in fruitful contact with these things; the anonymous houses were built with a natural feeling for place, materials and use and the result was a remarkably suitable comeliness. Today, in our highly civilized society the houses which ordinary people are doomed to live in and gaze upon are on the whole without quality. We cannot, however, go back to the old method of personally supervised handicrafts. We must strive to advance by arousing interest in and understanding of the work the architect does. The basis of competent professionalism is a sympathetic

and knowledgeable group of amateurs, of non-professional art-lovers. It is not my intention to attempt to teach people what is right or wrong, what is beautiful or ugly. I regard all art as a means of expression and that which may be right for one artist may well be wrong for another. My object is in all modesty to endeavor to explain the instrument the architect plays on, to show what a great range it has and thereby awaken the senses to its music. But even though I do not propose to pass æsthetic judgments, it is very difficult to hide one's likes and dislikes. If one wants to demonstrate the instrument of an art it is not enough to explain its mechanics as a physicist would. One must, as it were, play a tune on it so that the hearer gets an idea of what it can do—and in such case is it possible to avoid putting emphasis and feeling into the performance?

The present volume is about how we perceive things that surround us and it has proved difficult to find the right words for this. More than in any other book, I have struggled with my material in the attempt to formulate it simply and clearly, working it over and over again. But all my exertion would undoubtedly have been unavailing if I had not had illustrations to support the text. Therefore, I would like to thank the Ny Carlsberg Foundation for its help which made the illustrative material possible. I also am greatly indebted to my publishers. That the book has appeared at all is due to the encouragement of Dean Pietro Belluschi of M.I.T. and The M.I.T. Press in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It has been a pleasure to work in close co-operation with Mrs. Eve Wendt who made the translation from Danish and did it so well that I feel that my American and British friends should recognize my voice when reading this book. I am glad to have here an opportunity to express my sincere thanks to her. I also remember with gratitude the pleasant and fruitful co-operation with my friends the printers and the block-makers.

*Steen Eiler Rasmussen.*

# Experiencing Architecture

