

Preface

The Essence of Architecture:

We relate everything around us to ourselves. Our surroundings affect us by their size, light, shadow, colour, and so on. How we feel depends very much on whether we are in the city or in the country, in big spaces or in small ones.

Our reactions to these conditions are originally unconscious, and we take note of them only in outstanding cases such as when feeling sublime pleasure from a detail or a perfect relationship to the environment or when experiencing some gross feelings of displeasure. However, our point of departure should be this: turning unconscious reactions into a consciousness. By training our ability to capture these differences and their influence on us, by being in conscious contact with our surroundings, we learn the essence of architecture.

In order to improve our conception of architecture, we must also understand that the architectural expression under all varying conditions is closely related to the structure of the society. The very essence of architecture can be likened to the seed in nature, and some of the transparency of the principle of growth as found in nature ought to be a fundamental concept in the architectural process.

Thinking of the seeds, producing plants and trees – all the seeds of a common species would develop in the same way if not for the fact that the conditions for growth are so varied and each plant has the innate ability of developing without compromise. Seeds of a common species produce plants with individual characteristics under different conditions.

Our environment, the time we live in, is totally different from any previous one, but the essence of architecture, the seed, is the same. The study of existing architecture is letting oneself be influenced directly by it. One must become aware of how the solutions and the details are dependent on the time in which they are created.

In order for the architect to be able to master his means of expression, he has to experiment. He must practice like the musician does, experiment with masses, with rhythmic forms made up of masses grouped

together, combinations of colour, light, and shadow, and so on. He must use his senses intensely and by all this train his ability to create new forms.

An intimate knowledge of the materials is needed. An architect must be able to understand the structure of the tree, the heaviness and hardness of the stone, the character of glass; he must become one with his materials and be able to form and use them in harmony with their nature. When he understands the nature of a material, then its potentials are much more real to him than by means of mathematical formulas and arts. For the architect, mathematics is a means to ascertain that his assumptions were true.

What is needed is a healthy approach to life. Understanding how to walk, stand, sit, and lie down so that it feels good. Enjoying the sun, the shadow, the water against one's body, the earth, and all the less definable sense impressions. An urge for comfort must be the basis for all architecture if a harmony shall be achieved between the spaces that are made and the activities that will take place in them. This is very simple rationality and common sense.

What is needed is the ability to create a harmony out of all the demands that are raised in connection with a project, the ability to make all these demands melt together and form a novel entity – as in nature – compromises are not known in nature; all difficulties are accepted, not as difficulties but just as new factors which, without conflict, grow to a unified whole.

To understand all the inspiration that can be found in man's numerous forms of expression, to work on the basis of our hands, our eyes, our feet, our stomach, on the basis of the way we move, and not on the basis of statistical norms and rules formed on the principle of averages, this is the road to a varied and human architecture.

To be in touch with the time, with the environment, to see the inspiration provided by the project itself, is necessary in order to be able to translate the demands of the project into an architectural language that can formulate a unity from the different factors.

At the same time, the architect must possess the ability to give his imagination free rein, this ability that is sometimes called creativity, sometimes daydreaming."

Jørn Utzon, 1948 *Arkitekturens inderste væsen*
(translated by Flemming Bo Andersen)