

Rationalism

Rationalism should not be confused with either architecture that is rational or styles and movements that are denoted 'rationalist'. Rationalism in architecture is a body of **guiding principles** that formally stems from the philosophical school of Descartes (1596-1650). His ideas (that knowledge of the world is obtained by reason and the generation of *a priori* truths without the necessity of confirmation of the senses) became translated into architectural theory by Marc-Antoine Laugier in 1753. His essay hypothesized the fundamentals of architecture, by going back to how architecture must have started. The result was the rustic hut which was to have been the primitive archetype that the 'Masters of the Art' have emulated in the greatest works of architecture in antiquity. But despite the fact that the earliest structures were not what Laugier had conceived, being a true Rationalist he was only concerned with what architecture should have been, thereby setting the stage upon which a 'perfect' architecture could be realized.

If one can accept the premise that Laugier was not advocating a Greek Revival but structural rationalism and that structural rationalism can be seen within the broader context of Rationalism, then one can begin to appreciate the essence of Rationalism, which by its very nature, suggests an architecture that is **ordered, logical, consistent, clear and true**.

Thus Rationalism is not a style. It is important to note that in the nineteenth century, both Classical and Gothic Rationalists existed, and that while they formed hostile schools of thought, on more than one occasion opponents learned the principles of Rationalism from the other school. The ideals they held were similar but the means with which they chose to express them differed.

Consequently, Rationalist ideals were put into practice before the twentieth century, although they became more easily visible with the development of new building materials. Rationalism provided the foundation while new materials merely provided the means. For example, if Auguste Perret had not been influenced by Classical Rationalist Julien Gaudet, he might not have realized that the 'true' form and **expression** of concrete was a frame. In-

stead, it is conceivable that he might have continued to use it as a substitute for masonry or as a frame in disguise as others had done.

The sometimes resultant apparent simplicity of Rationalist architecture suggests a minimalism that is **not** nothing, but allows the intent to be rendered clear. This underlying idea is, for example, what Mies Van der Rohe and Aldo Rossi share and achieve in their architecture. The intent of Mies is expressed and defined throughout his buildings and may be obscured by the negative connotation that he is a leader of the Modern Movement. Likewise, it is only when one looks beyond the surface of Rossi's return to the pre-Modern era (when specific building types could more clearly embody tectonic values) that one can comprehend the intrinsic link between Mies and Rossi and their architecture. Each man's architecture and thinking is very different, but their similarity lies in the individual strength of their expressions, stemming from a strict adherence to Rationalist ideals.

It is crucial to grasp the meaning of expression and although it is most explicit on the exterior, it is by no means limited there. It is found in the articulation of interiors and spaces and in most cases, in the attention given to the meticulous details of the building. It is the sum of the parts that generates the total expression and greatness.

Those in pursuit of Rationalist ideals have all believed that architecture should not be of a personal whim because it belongs to civilization and not the individual. They contend that this idea can be realized most successfully by designing in accordance with their principles.

Thus neither the mere presence of square windows puncturing unadorned surfaces nor the mere utilization of glass and steel indicate that the ideals of Rationalism have been pursued. Rationalism is a body of guiding principles that transcends styles, movements and ages, and is reflected in the entire design and construction, expressing order, logic, consistency, clarity and truth. It is hoped that this will not be forgotten amidst the present fervor induced by the rediscovery of Rationalism.

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