civility

The silly old quip "To say something smart, think of something stupid, and say the opposite", is oxymoronic, but could have some validity through interpretation. Most of what's being said in architecture these days is simply just self-referential nonsensical babble in the abstract artistic sensibilities of being abstruse, convoluted and obscure. Today there is urban babble. There is campus babble. There is elitist babble. So many cities, college campuses and affluent environs have been ruined by self-important babbling. So many in charge, have mindlessly followed the winds of fashion, departing from the original order and pattern of things, only to end up with an incoherent wilderness. Using the quip analogy could be a path of backing out of the babbling by applying a more civilized architecture; buildings that used to reference history, mesh with their neighbors, embrace dominant existing building technologies, and be relevant to culture.

Modernism has disposed of any reflection of human etiquette and dignity in buildings for the sake of technology and ego. The buildings of today are no longer civilized. The traditions of civility; being polite, considerate and with good manners is no longer followed. The humanizing aspect of being civil could be compared to the cultivated virtues of the genteel, that is, what was considered a suitable 'lady' and 'gentleman'. Those bygone qualities were refinement, repose, discretion and suavity. It's time once again for those qualities to be reintroduced into building design.

For a person to be refined is a crystallineness of composition, the smoothing out of harshness and severity, to be composed, honed and polished. This humanistic characteristic reflected in a building would be careful tuning of proportion, pattern and details, perfect adjustment of each part to the function performed, appropriate elements for their uses, and with a complimentary human scale. A building would be identifiable as to what it is, what it houses and how it houses it in a dignified way.

For a person to be reposed is to have a gracefulness in actions and words, to avoid ready utterance of momentary thoughts, to think first and speak afterward. It is to be reserved with a calmness of attitude and propriety of conduct. This humanistic characteristic reflected in a building would be an unpretentious stature, self-contained, polite, serene and somber. The building would harmonize with its context; it would fit in and be sympathetic with its surroundings in an earnest composure with a neighborly decorum.

For a person to be discrete is to hold one's tongue when speech is unnecessary, it is to have a resigned empathy and circumspection of consequences. It is to be non-assertive, modest and free of vanity. This humanistic characteristic reflected in a building would have a quiet sincerity, unobtrusive and non-offensive with an honest expression of detail and use. The building would not be screaming for attention or stick out looking like it was transplanted there.

For a person to be suave is to be intelligent, sophisticated, confident, diplomatic and tactful. It is to be knowledgeable through acquired wisdom, structured observation and experience, aware of history. This human characteristic reflected in a building would be archetypal, have richness from antecedence, and be cognizant of precedent and echo relevance of the past with a continuity for the present and into the future.

A return to civility in architecture would put the culture of architecture back into practice, in lieu of the spectacle object design practice it has devolved to.

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