Chapter 14

The Anthropocene Style: Towards a New Decorative Style

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ABSTRACT

Our study for a new Anthropocene style is to re-evaluate the domestic space today, to rethink their decorative style to meet the new thermal regulations and to invent the architectural language of the interior in the era of the Anthropocene. The ambition is to offer a new style in the History of Decorative Arts after the Regency Style, Louis XV style, the Empire style or Louis Philippe Style among others, to invent the Anthropocene style of today. Using elegant, innovative, discounting art of interior design and decoration to meet the contemporary challenges in sustainable development, reduction of energy and greenhouse gas emissions. Redrawing the lines, patterns and geometry of walls, ceiling, floors, woodwork, moldings according to the optical behavior of the solar rays to multiply natural sunlight, to reduce conduction of excessive heat accumulated on the ceiling, to increase the coefficient of thermal insulation of walls and impede cold bridges. Rethinking the intelligence of materials to choose the material basing on specific physical behavior such as optical, thermal, acoustic absorption or reflection, porosity or proofing to water vapor, air, their factor of conductivity or diffusivity. Rethinking materials in terms of its colors, textures with physical value, choosing innovative and non-toxic materials as interior materials, to reflect infrared, absorb the other wavelengths, let them go elsewhere, while at the same time they reflect the shorter wavelengths of white light or absorb to enjoy even their heat.

INTRODUCTION

The living space of contemporary people today is clearly confronted to an upheaval if not a complete turnabout in the traditional ordering of its categories and balances: between inside and outside, artificial and natural, enclosed and open. The “natural” as opposed to the “artificial” (insofar as the term “natural” qualifies that part of the real world that has not been modified by humankind), literally no longer exists. As a result of technical progress and population growth, and of swift industrial development after the middle of the 19th century, today the planet Earth itself, its atmosphere and its surface strata, have been
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transformed into artifices by human activity, as witness the phenomena of pollution and global warming. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger saw the origin of these phenomena in the project of modern technique, which proceeded by what he termed “provocation” or “critical ordering”, that is to say by subjecting nature to reason, taming it. If, prior to this, nature had neither objective nor duty, the aim of modern technique was to impose on nature a single vocation, an unequivocal use, a single use, thus depriving it of its non-determination, open-endedness and irrationality. Technique is the instrument of this transformation of the natural into the artificial. And architecture is part of the process, since its aim is to extract climate and geography from their space/time state of nature to make them domestic and reasonable. Ideally, we may argue that at one time there was a clearcut and simple dichotomy between the interior of the house, its architecture and the city around it (artificial space), and the exterior of the house, its environment and atmosphere (natural space). In the interior, architecture had created a technically controlled space in which an artificial climate and reconfigured geography held sway, making conditions more smooth, more convenient, more comfortable and more temperate all year round. Homes were thus settings for domestic geologies and humanist weather conditions, places of symmetry, balance and homogeneity. Outside, the environment was the domain of natural climate and primitive geography, unpredictable and intemperate, wild as forest or mountain, wind, cold and rain: asymmetrical, unbalanced, heterogeneous. But this dichotomy no longer exists today. Change began at the local level with agricultural exploitation and urban pollution, before spreading worldwide, to the scale of the entire planet, with the present-day phenomenon of global warming. It is not a figure of speech to say that the whole world and its climates have become products of human activity today: although we may heat and cool only the interiors of our houses, it is the exteriors of our houses, meaning climates all over the Earth, that are rising by measurable degrees, due to the phenomenon of global warming. Time was when the external environment, the terrestrial atmosphere and the countryside, belonged to the realm of the natural, but from now on they too are in the category of the artificial.

DOMESTIC GEOLOGY, INTERIOR WEATHER; INDOOR SUN

The reaction to climate change today is to implement a policy known as “sustainable development”. In the construction industry, this policy translates into fairly basic technical solutions, foremost among which is the reduction of energy used for heating and cooling. Remedial techniques put into play rely mainly on improving the building’s thermal insulation, ensuring good weatherproofing, and providing for the renewal and evacuation of air flow. Ironically, these measures conspire to produce an interior environment that is even more removed from the exterior than was previously the case, precluding all direct sense relationship with the external local context, other than that of a comprehensive interface: insulated, separated, controlled. This is a paradox: the technical measures put forward by architecture to achieve sustainable development accentuate the modern-day break between external environment and interior environment. Our living space has been upended by these transformations of hierarchy in the dialectical rapport between natural and artificial, exterior and interior. If the external environment, beyond architecture, is no longer natural, might we not put forward the hypothesis of a “naturalization” of interior space? Might not the interior environment of buildings be reconfigured in the name of sustainable development, not only as the locale of artifice but also as that of nature, that is to say of what is asymmetrical, unbalanced and heterogeneous? A second nature that ensures a domestic geology and an interior meteorology. If nature, which by definition has always been excluded from the interior of