

## ARC 386—Theory I

### NOTES ON *KINDERGARTEN CHATS* BY LOUIS SULLIVAN

#### I. On Architecture as an Expression of Cultural Values

- p. 24 "Therefore, the critical study of architecture becomes not merely the direct study of an art, but, *in extenso*, a study of the social conditions producing it; the study of a newly-shaping type of civilization."
- p. 31 "The architect represents or misrepresents society at large."
- p. 64 "Nothing more clearly reflects the status and the tendencies of a people than the character of its buildings. They are emanations of the people; they visualize for us the soul of our people."
- p. 65 "To project architecture as the projected life of a people is a serious business. It removes architecture from a petty domain and places it where it belongs, an inseparable part of the history of civilization."

#### II. On Architecture as an Expression of American Cultural Values

- p. 31 "Whichever way our architecture goes, so will our country go; or, if you prefer, whichever way our country goes, so will our architecture go."
- p. 32 "I would dissolve for you this wretched illusion called American architecture, and then cause to awaken in your mind the reality of a beautiful, a sane, a logical, a human, living art of your day; an art of and for democracy, an art of and for the American people of your own time."
- p. 77 "The mire of materialism is not American civilization, it is Gomorrah. This is not Democracy, it is madness. It is the growl of a glutton hunt for the Dollar."
- p. 99 "The spirit of democracy is a function seeking expansion in organized social form. . . . Our self-imposed task is thus to seek out the simple: to find broad explanations, satisfying solutions, reliable answers to those questions which affect the health and growth of that democracy under whose banner we live and hope."

#### III. On Architecture as an Expression of Regional Cultural Values

- p. 28 "This particular building is, to be sure, not characteristic of the West. It lacks, utterly, Western frankness, directness—crudity if you will. It is merely a weak-rooted cutting from an Eastern hot house; and it languishes in the open air."

#### IV. On the Inspiration of Nature

- p. 89 "The faculties always cleanse and brighten and glow in Nature's bath. . . . There is something about Nature that gets into you pretty deep and stirs you all up and brings all sorts of strange emotions to the surface."

- p. 112 "In the formation of a great mind, a simple mind, a master mind, solitude is prerequisite; for such a mind is nurtured in contemplation, and strengthened in it. In the quiet, in the silence, alone with itself and Nature, and alone with the subtly interchanging influences and inspirations of Nature and of Self, it grows."

## V. Form Follows Function

- p. 28 "What I might denominate the current jargon of architecture is the incapacity of the insufficiently educated, the unleavened, the half-baked, to express in simple well-chosen language the casual, current experiences of life."
- pp. 43-4 "It stands to reason that a thing looks like what it is, and, vice versa, it is what it looks like. . . . Outward appearances resemble inward purposes. . . . The form, oak tree, resembles and expresses the purpose or function oak. . . . The form, horse, resembles and is the logical output of the function, horse. . . . That which exists in spirit ever seeks and finds its physical counterpart in form, its visible image.:
- p. 46 "There should be a function, a purpose, a reason for each building, a definite explainable relation between the form, the development of each building, and the causes that bring it into that particular shape; and the building, to be good architecture, must, first of all, clearly correspond with its function, must be its image. . . . If a building is properly designed, one should be able with a little attention, to read *through* that building to the *reason* for that building."
- p. 99 "The word function sounds abstract, profound; in reality it means, only, that need, whatever it may be, which is seeking or finding fulfillment."
- p. 27 "In a department store, all masonry would be reduced to a minimum, and there would be an expanse of glass for light and display. . . . In an office building, there would be that regular and equable spacing of windows, that general suggestion of business and business housing."
- p. 170 "So remember, and bear ever in mind in your thinking and in your doings, that FORM EVER FOLLOWS FUNCTION, that this is the law—a universal truth. That the main function, so far as you will be concerned, will focus on the specific needs of those who wish to build, and that such needs are quite apt to be emotional as well as what is so generally called practical."

## VI. Materials/Tectonics

- p. 32 "The materials of a building are but the elements of earth removed from the matrix of nature, and reorganized and reshaped by force; by force mechanical, muscular, mental, emotional, moral and spiritual."
- p. 127 "Under modern social conditions a man may impress upon materials the character of his mind without even touching the materials with his own hand. . . . Though he may lose actual physical contact with materials, he need not, he must not, he shall not lose actual, emotional, intellectual, spiritual contact with them."
- pp. 121-3 "With the pier, the architectural art literally begins. The moment the lintel is laid upon two piers and connects their activities—presto! By the subtlest of conceivable

magic, instantly the Science of Architecture comes into being. . . . The arch is the third and last of our elements—or elementals."

- p. 127 "From the character of a pier may we not discern the character of a race: and from the slowly changing character of a developed pier may we not discern the temperamental changes taking place in a race."

## VII. Synthesis—On Simplicity/Directness/Authenticity

- p. 114 "I am unfolding to you a philosophy of art simpler and deeper than the world has hitherto known, because, through my love of my land, of my people, of Democracy, and of the Infinite Creator, has come the insight and power to do so. My conclusions have been reached not in the racket of the cities, nor in the study of garrulous philosophies, nor in libraries, nor in schools, but in the bounteous open air, within the infinite peace of Nature."
- p. 121 "Let us begin to seek out those manifestations in our art, which, because instinctive and impulsive, may well be called *natural*: and little by little to discern—to discover, as it were—why they are natural. . . . Let me inspire you with the idea, that everything you see around you and about you . . . has a simple basis."
- pp. 140-1 "The true function of the architect is to imitate such buildings as shall correspond to the real needs of the people. . . . He must cause the building to grow naturally, logically and poetically out of its conditions. . . . The real architect is first, last and all the time a poet who uses not words but building materials as a medium of expression. . . . The true work of the architect is to organize, integrate and glorify UTILITY. Then and only then is he truly a MASTER-WORKER."
- p. 164 "Every problem contains and suggests its own solution. Don't waste time looking anywhere else for it. In this mental attitude, in this mood of understanding, lies the technical beginning of the art of expression."

## VIII. On Scholarship/Historical Architecture

- p. 39 "The Roman temple was part of Roman life. . . . It beat with the Roman pulse, was touched with Roman activities, and it waned with Roman glory—it died a Roman death. The Roman temple can no more exist in fact on Monroe Street, Chicago, U.S.A., than can Roman civilization exist there. Such a structure must of necessity be a simulacrum, a ghost."
- p. 130 "When we ask a Modern American architect to solve with candor any one of a hundred directly and distinctly American problems hitherto unsolved, and further ask him, in the doing, to bring to bear upon his solution the highest qualities and powers of a trained and active sympathy, (true fruits of scholarship), and thereupon, he, shrinking, shrinking the vital issues, builds for us ineffectually, after the manner of civilizations long since gone, though not forgotten, which had little or nothing in common with our own specialized needs, and soulfully dubs his work as of such and such a "style": such man is not a scholar, he is a plain public nuisance."

## **IX. On architecture as an expression of personal values**

- p. 24 "Every building you see is the image of a man you do not see. The man is the reality, the building its offspring. The bricks, stones, steel and what-not came into place in response to an impulse; and the cause at work behind the impulse was mental, not physical."
- p. 26 "He who would have beautiful roses in his garden, must have beautiful roses in his heart."
- p. 44 "John Doe architecture, should there be such an architecture, must mean nothing, if it means not John Doe. Why does John Doe architecture pretend it is John Smith architecture? Are we a nation of liars? I think not. That we architects are a sect, a cult of prevaricators, is another matter."