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3.2. INTEGRATION IN THE ENVIRONMENT

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INTEGRATION OF THE MUSEUM INTO THE ENVIRONMENT

The museum is characterized by its programme, the nature, the status and the manner of communication of its holdings, the quantity and the quality of its visitors, the level of its means, the place and the role of its location. This location has changed throughout the centuries, as a result of the other criteria: a major criterion, a symbol whose full-circled evolution, it is interesting to study, ending somehow as it has started, from the Ecomuseum to the Ecomuseum.

In a first phase, i.e. the origins of the museum, the museum is the temple, the museum is the residence of the Sovereign and of the great. The faithful crowd into the first, and only the privileged by birth, fortune or genius enter the second. But current practices and matters of prestige are equally blended. And one finds there also the buds of museology: on the one hand, the treasure, and on the other, the glass cabinet and the gallery. In short, the museum and the museum location are one in this initial phase, precursor of the ecomuseum, which can be assimilated to the most advanced of ecomuseums - the living ecomuseum. (1)

In a second phase, which may be situated towards the end of the 18th century, the museum secures a distinct location, public or private status. An atmosphere of the sanctuary or palace continues to reign there. Mysteries take place there: mysteries of art, of science, of technology, all conveyed in hermetic language by a kind of officiating priest who is called curator. A place which is in principle open to all, and which in fact is only open to the informed visitor, or those who think they are; where it is proper to go, without any obligation to understand. Above all, the museum has become the expression of taste, of curiosity, of "distinguished" leisure of a bourgeois society which has gained economic power. The museum belongs to the network of the institutions of this society. "Covered" museums with programmes of art, science or technology, housed in temples or palaces no longer used as such, or appearing to be; "Open" museums, such as botanical and zoological gardens; in any case, urban museums, whose location does not blend with the surroundings in question - keepers as they are of objects, specimens out of context with the exterior surroundings, be they natural or cultural, historic or contemporary, recent or remote.

Comes a third phase which starts towards the end of the 19th century and during which, as the case may be, the museum does not blend or blends afresh with its location. The tendency in both cases is to intensify the expression of the environment; it is specifically ecological (2), since it meets a growing cultural need by the public: a consequence of the democratisation of society.

In the first case, the museum remains what it was during the preceding period - its location continues to be urban. It keeps on collecting museum pieces detached from their external environment, still

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(1) The term "ecomuseum" is discussed further in the text.

(2) cf. G. Carroll Lindsay, "Creating and building Environment Exhibits," in "Museums and the Environment, the Environment Committee, American Association of Museums", New York, Arkville Press, 1971.

in the form of "oriented" collections, according to habit. Better still, and this is new, in the form of objects and specimens grouped around subjects (1) which call to mind with increasing intensity the environment from which these objects originate. Thus, by a natural history museum, a) in the field, close observation and representative sampling of an eco-system; 2) in the museum itself, the presentation of this eco-system by systematic themes or in a fully ecological manner of a diorama. Thus, still by an archaeological museum, 1) stratigraphic excavations of a funeral site; 2) in the museum itself, the interpretation of this site by technological, functional, artistic and chronological themes, etc., or in a fully ecological form of models of the site and of reconstituted graves.

In the second case, the museum is located in the environment concerned, which it helps to preserve and enhance. Its programme identifies itself with this location - it is already an ecomuseum. Thus, in a cultural, present-day or early environment, an archaeological or historical site museum; thus, in a natural environment, a natural park, which is the appropriate site of the museum, together with a visitor's centre.

The fourth phase, quite recent, is remarkable through an even greater intensification of the ecological role of the museum. Of course, the museum continues to study, preserve and explain natural and human environments. From then on, it is its duty to use a dynamic and constructive policy of the environment, under the impulsion of varied and cumulative factors. Thus, in developed countries, through the powers that be, too often the frustration of the poorest classes and ethnic minorities of society. As in the developing countries, too often there is looting, by the developed countries, of natural and human resources of the former. Thus, throughout the world, the realization of the risks incurred by humanity, due to the continued industrial growth and the increasingly grave injustices and pollutions which result from it.

Placed in an urban environment, belonging to an environment created by man and inhabited by man, the museum must, more than ever, enlist itself in the service of this human environment, and of this community, whose sacrifices sustain it. This leads to the disintegration of the museum building, with regard to the museum institution. In the same way, the notion of museum -collection disintegrates, since the whole of the environment adds itself to the transportable object and to the document: historic monuments, notable sites, problems of urbanization, itineraries of discovery which arise from the museum in the same manner as a series of prehistoric vases in the community which still uses them, but employed from time to time during exceptional occasions.

Architecturally speaking, this will allow an infinite number of variations which depend only on two fundamental rules: museological programming and urban planning.

Socially, the museum becomes the instrument of education, of culture and of "animation" and indeed of entertainment, in the deepest sense. In other words, one must make the community participate

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(1) See note 2 on the preceding page

in the creation of its own condition of life, either by proving the need for a harmonious continuity (dimension, time), or by causing greater awareness of the interrelation of the different aspects of environment (dimension, space).

Thus the Anacostia Museum in Washington has galvanized an entire poor quarter of Washington in its battle against rats and troubled the conscience of the richer districts of the same city in this respect; thus, Muse, the Brooklyn Museum's animation programme, has brought about the discovery of their convergences and the rediscovery of the filiation of their ideas - at the sight of Pharaonic bas-reliefs - by visitors of neighbouring quarters, who turned spontaneously into archaeologists; similarly, the museum of the city of Dresden, makes its visitors vote on projects of satellite cities; thus the urban community museum at Le Creusot-Monceau-les-Mines wishes to transform the peasant who has remained a producer, as well as the metallurgical mechanic, into subjects and not objects, of rural evolution, of the industrial evolution of that community; thus, the Ecomuseum of the new town of Evry should convey the substratum, the why and how of today and tomorrow of that town; thus, the museum in Niamey confronted with the spectacle of the diversity of the Nigerian nation, should encourage its unity; thus, each zoological garden should conjure up to the child and to his parents the parable of the Naked Ape.

Set in its natural environment, the park encourages man to appreciate nature, teaches him to understand it, provides him with the sense of relationship between nature and himself; discloses the value, for his own well-being of the natural balances that the park illustrates.

The traditional museum is a more or less grandiose edifice to which one accedes by a flight of steps, gate, turnstile. Indeed the new museum may be a central medium, a clearing-house but it is first of all a consciousness. It is judged as much from outside as inside; the visitor does not enter, he is within. Better than in the past or yesterday, more than ever, in time and in space, it is an instrument for communication and activation of the environment, an ecomuseum.

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