

## ARCHITECTURE, POLITICS AND THE PUBLIC REALM

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A prominent architectural theorist recently complained that contemporary architecture is now stymied for our lack of a credible political vision.<sup>1</sup> This judgment serves to underline the conjoining of these two realms even if the relation is one which, for the most part, has almost entirely escaped the notice of thinkers in both disciplines. Doubtless each will account for such past indifference in his own fashion, but it is my contention that it is no longer a desirable or tenable state of affairs. For the political theorist, in particular, the promise expected at the intersection of these two fields, first highlighted by the Goodmans' early pioneering work, still remains to be realized.<sup>2</sup> Although animated by a somewhat different set of concerns than those of the Goodmans, I hope that this paper will help reawaken interest in the political theory of architecture.

To grasp this kind of subject, we must look first at the "politics" of architecture in past societies. I do not mean the politics and quarrels of individual architects, doubtless the usual modern treatment of this theme.<sup>3</sup> The "politics" of architecture here will concern rather the *inherently political* role which architecture seems invariably to perform in one polity or another. This emphasis will mean of course that we must depress for our purposes the importance of the aesthetic or technical faces of architecture — and certainly turn our backs upon the historically vacuous slogan, "art for art's sake." Indeed, I propose to turn this epithet on its head so that — at least for the art of architecture — it shall read "an art principally for the state's sake".<sup>4</sup>

Those who find such a remark provocative might begin by examining the world's architectural remains. For, in whatever antique condition they come to us and from whatever time and place, these buildings almost all betray a political or "stately" character, easily recognisable whether in the palaces of Versailles or Schönbrunn, the tombs of the ancient Pharaohs, the temples of the Acropolis, or the Gothic cathedrals of mediaeval Europe. Indeed, because of this intimate connection between architecture and the state's order architects have themselves argued that in the buildings of past ages we have the most reliable guides to the "life" of each civilization.

In fact, the art of architecture has virtually always served principally public interests — large state or quasi-state institutions. This "public" character of architecture, evident in any chronicle on world architecture, can be seen by the continuous string of monumental works of architectural art focussing almost exclusively on capitols, courts, palaces, tombs, temples, and churches. These,

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after all, are the buildings expressing the state's order, a civilization's creed, its ruling institutions and classes, its political economy. Yet the politics of this connection have never been adequately grasped and addressed by political theory. What political function, for example, does architecture actually serve?

At its simplest level, architecture "houses" the principal institutions of a society; it provides a "space" wherein the activities of social and political institutions can be carried out. This role demands from the architect enormous skill and knowledge of the workings of those institutions even if, in this respect, except for scale, the "housing" function is hardly more than an extension of its modest domestic equivalent. But of course we know that in the case of the state and related institutions, the architectural function undergoes an ineluctable expansion, far beyond mere commodiousness and shelter. The *political* demand is that architecture shall make edifices befitting the importance and power of these institutions, that it shall make these institutions appear mighty and durable, and that it shall, in its symbolism and expressive form, state dramatically something of these institutions' "idea" of the world.

Such stately associations give to architecture, unlike any of the other arts, a special historical brilliance and meaning. Whether they be pyramids or parthenon, such buildings are the ghosts of time past, as the millions who make pilgrimages to see them quite readily understand. But for those interested in the political theory of architecture, there is much more to be gleaned here than antique wonder. Held out are the promise and possibility of truly integrating the distinctively "public" art of architecture into our understanding both of *politics* and of the *public realm*.

### The Politics of Architecture

We must begin this enterprise by maintaining a wary distance from virtually all of the standard modern works in architectural theory. This distance is necessary for a variety of good reasons, not least of which is the patent avoidance and obfuscation of the subject by most architectural theorists.<sup>5</sup> Instead, we must look to the critical mining of history for unearthing the essential links between architecture and politics.

Despite the currently fashionable notion that almost any building — even a bicycle shed — can be architecture if only it satisfies our aesthetic standards, the historical record suggests that great architecture has always been restricted to a much more refined *class* of activities and meanings than the modern privatized notion understands.<sup>6</sup> Nor is this limitation simply accidental or arbitrary. Hard as it may be for the aestheticians of art to accept, the pretty bicycle shed is not likely to qualify as great architecture, even if the unlikely combination of desirous patron and skilled architect were present to attempt

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to give bicycle shelter some architectural significance. The whole venture would be lacking existentially significant roots and betray a trivial social and political content.

Clearly the great historical works of architectural art derive much of their power, character, and definition — indeed their very status as architecture — from their standing as profound institutional metaphors, and not merely as aesthetically pleasing buildings. Of course, in practice, the two dimensions converge in every civilization, since it is always for *significant* institutions that the “arts” of buildings are most lavishly reserved. But this convergence ought not to obscure the institutional basis of architectural art, since its iconographic and emblematic power crucially depends upon it. Once this relationship is fully grasped, the political function of architecture can begin to be better understood and the possibility of a genuine “political theory of architecture” become more apparent.

If, as I have argued earlier, architecture is invariably about large state or quasi-state institutions, we may properly expect it to provide an important political service. Typically this service has consisted of the raising up of a profusion of wonderfully designed buildings and structures — palaces, churches, capitols, courts, tombs, and temples — all enshrining each civilization’s code of “law and order.” This conservative, stabilizing function may, of course, be sought by long-established institutional elites or by revolutionary regimes hoping to consolidate through architectural art their political grip upon dissident forces. But whatever the character of the political order, the essentially *conservative* alliance between architecture and power remains. It is for this reason that Norris Kelly Smith called architecture an “Establishment art”:

To put it bluntly, architecture has always been the art of the Establishment. It has been bought and paid for exclusively by successful, prosperous, property-owning institutions with a stake in the preservation of the status quo, and it has generally exhibited its greatest power and originality at times when those institutions have been threatened and in need of support. Needless to say, the other arts have also been patronized by members of those institutions. The uniqueness of architecture lies in the fact that it is *about* the institutional establishment, as the other arts generally are not, though on occasion they may be.<sup>7</sup>

A review of the history of architecture shows that Smith’s hint about a varied but nonetheless decipherable *pattern* in architectural building takes us

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even more deeply into what we might call a “dialectical understanding of the politics of architecture.” For the pattern indicates that it is almost always at *critical* junctures in the life of each civilization that architecture is so frequently and spectacularly employed. The pattern discloses an ironical conjunction of political weakness (actual or imminent) and architectural strength, a relationship first recognized by Parkinson and propounded as his sixth law.<sup>8</sup>

The architecture of ancient Egypt, for example, has almost invariably given us the impression of its monumentally *static* and *stable* character as it no doubt was expected to do for its contemporaries. To view the pyramids at Giza, the colossal halls at Karnak, or the giant figures of Ramses II carved out of the rock cliff at Abu Simbel, leaves us (as standard works in Egyptian architecture never tire of insisting), with a deep sense of the monolithic, unchanging power of pharaoh's Egypt. The architecture evokes from us an awful *acceptance* of that regime's political power, strength, and durability.

That affirming of the politics of architecture is clear enough, even if a substantial part of its meaning still remains for us hidden and paradoxical. For the architectural art suggests, and is deliberately intended to suggest, an especially well-ordered and secure polity however, belied by actual political conditions. Hence, the assumed congruence between architecture and state is at best shaky, the architectural function serving to camouflage the deeper contradictions and dangers of the political order. This camouflaging function depends on architecture's special power to suggest stability and power — to compel awe and acceptance of the regime through a monumental art — and is the chief reason it is especially resorted to by institutional patrons who are threatened and in trouble. Such an account of the history of architecture is very much at variance with the often woolly, romantic, neo-Hegelian philosophy of modern architectural theory, but situates it quite rightly into the context of political affairs, revealing its ambivalent and defensive character. At the same time, such an account helps overturn an otherwise deceptively easy portrait of great architecture's proud and self-confident patrons.<sup>9</sup>

The great pyramids of the Old Kingdom dedicated to Cheops, Chephren, and Mycerinus, for example, represent the highest artistic achievement in monumentalism and abstract geometric power in this form, and yet they arise not uncoincidentally immediately before the power of the pharaohs is crippled by a rising feudal nobility. It took almost two hundred years of disorder before the authority of the pharaohs was once again restored in the Middle Kingdom. The stable promise which these great works of architecture suggest was therefore deceptive and misleading. The same is true of the colossal halls of Karnak and the monumental cliff temples which arise as reactive symbols to the disorder in the state and religious realm brought about

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by Akhenaten's revolutionary initiatives. Egyptian stability was severely pressed by the young pharaoh's outright assault upon the temple of Amon and on the power of its priests. Externally, the Egyptian empire was already weakening from the highpoint which Akhenaten's great grandfather, Tuthmosis, had built, just as surely as the hold of the pharaohs on the priesthood was also weakening. Yet, precisely after the crushing of Akhenaten's changes, we see the greatest profusion of monumental architectural art in Egyptian history.<sup>10</sup> Architectural appearances aside, however, all was not well in Egypt.

History affords us many other illustrations of Parkinson's law. The building of the Parthenon and other structures on the Athenian acropolis was hardly completed before the disastrous Peloponnesian War brought about Athen's ruin. Between the Persian sacking of Athens in 479 and the perils of Greek inter-city warfare lay merely a few short decades, and even then, only for a few trifling years did the architectural glory of Greece truly coincide with its political power. The record shows that the Acropolis was thrown up at great speed at precisely the point when the political dangers to Athens were as grave as she had ever faced. The paradox is even more striking when we remember that this great architectural feat was financed by funds which imperial Athens had confiscated from her subjects and "allies" — architecture purchased at a fatal political price.

Russell Meiggs, in an interesting essay on the politics of the Parthenon, was able to uncover many of the political objectives of the Acropolis rebuilding programme in the stabilization sought by Athens' "imperial democrats." By extending the benefits of this reconstruction to artists, craftsmen, merchants — indeed to the whole Athenian economy — the architectural venture promised to weaken the power of the oligarchical party by displacing its former aristocratic grip upon artistic patronage. At the same time, under the direction of Pericles' friend, Phidias, the emblematic power of the new art was consciously intended to surpass all of Athens' past, if not that of all Greece. The new Acropolis would then, on grounds both of economics and art, solidify support for the new and exceedingly fragile democracy. More than a little awareness of the political stakes was involved in Plutarch's dramatic account of the final Thucydides-Pericles encounter over the rebuilding programme.<sup>11</sup> The upshot, however, sadly confirms Parkinson's law: the architectural art succeeded beyond all expectations in dazzling the world for all time, but the expected political stabilization was cruelly short-lived.

The conjunction of superlative architecture with political threats and instability does not end here. At many other points, this peculiarly ironical relation between architectural strength and political disorder is revealed:

One thinks immediately of . . . the mighty works of

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Roman architecture that arose during the century-long period of disruption that extends from the time of Caracalla to that of Constantine; of Justinian's great church that was begun only six weeks after the destruction of an earlier building in the course of city-wide rioting that threatened to oust the emperor from his throne; of the magnificent architectural defense of the institution of monasticism that was made in the twelfth century when that institution was already declining and in constant need of reform; of the connection between the outbreak of the reformation and the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica on a grander scale than any that man had previously envisioned; and of other examples too numerous to mention.<sup>12</sup>

This use of architecture to stamp out schism, heresy, rebellion, or general political instability ought to add an intriguing dimension to our understanding both of politics and this special art. Though this relation has not to my knowledge ever figured prominently in any political theory or in contemporary theories of architecture, it may turn out to be an especially pregnant signpost of social and political change: the architectural splendour itself pointing darkly toward the onset of mature institutional malaise. Careful work in cultural and political history will be needed to help refine and amplify on these preliminary insights, but whatever the precise nature of the outcome, we can confidently expect that further studies into the interplay between politics and architecture will awaken political theory into what has been up to now, a largely neglected area of concern.

### Architecture and the Public Realm

Yet the special "public" significance of architecture is not exhausted in the foregoing treatment of its political character. In fact, ever since the Greeks taught us that the "public" constitutes a special and more exacting sense of the political, we have been able to understand and distinguish for example authentically "public" architecture from the mere funerary works of autocratic political systems. In this respect, architectural theory reruns the West's political weighting of Greece over Egypt, Athens over Thebes. For in terms of an art truly integrated into the *via publica*, the architecture of classical Athens has always been decisive, the very picture of a whole citizenry defining and embellishing its public space. This democratic, if not less stately conception of architecture, has essentially formed our ideal vision of this special public art.

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Of course, such a vision was beclouded with considerable ambiguity. Athenian politics was in many respects seriously deficient: apart from the large section of her population formally excluded from the public world, aristocratic leadership exercised by the scions of prominent families dominated the public realm.<sup>13</sup> In her external relations too, Athens, after the Peace of Kallias, leaned more strongly toward imperial than quietly democratic intentions. These unpleasant contradictions might have marred the architectural glory of Athens, were her buildings still not the finest approximation to "public" building we have ever seen. Nor is this fact *simply* because they were built and used by the citizens themselves. The architectural history of the Acropolis shows with what deliberate self-consciousness the people of Athens affixed a new "public" claim upon them. The rebuilding of the Acropolis took place at a critical political juncture in Athenian history, the struggle between the "oligarchical" and "democratic" parties finally came to a head. This struggle, appropriately enough, centered around the nature, financing, and meaning of the Acropolis rebuilding programme. It was here that the oligarchical party led by Thucydides decided to take their stand against Pericles and the radical democrats. Upon that struggle, so colourfully related by Plutarch, rested the fate of this uniquely "public" architecture.<sup>14</sup>

The debate began with two principal objections advanced by the oligarchical party: the sheer extravagance of the rebuilding and the dishonour brought upon Athens by the highhanded financing of it. Since the massive architectural venture could only be mounted by diverting Delian League funds contributed by all Greek states for their common war against Persia, the issues were carefully designed both to expose the uncomfortable connection between Athenian democracy and imperialism and to set up the radical's leader, Pericles, for ostracism. Pericles' reply sidestepped the imperial question by claiming that so long as the Athenians provided their allies with a continuing defence against Persia, they "owed no account to the allies for the money," concentrating instead on the twin benefits of the programme: economic benefits at once for virtually everyone in Athens, and eternal glory for their state thereafter.<sup>15</sup> With such blandishments, the outcome was inevitable. But although the oligarchy was outvoted and Thucydides himself shortly thereafter sent into exile, his words as dramatized by Plutarch nonetheless have a cranky but decidedly prophetic ring:

Greece cannot but resent it as an insufferable affront, and consider herself to be tyrannised over openly, when she sees the treasure, which was contributed by her upon a necessity for the war, wantonly lavished out by us upon our city, to gild her all over, and to adorn and set her

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forth, as it were some vain woman, hung around with precious stones and figures and temples, which cost a world of money.<sup>16</sup>

Many writers have acknowledged that it is only in the years following the mid-point of the fifth century B.C. that this crucial conflict between the *demos* and *oligoi* begins to "take the form of a deep division" and that Athenian imperialism is firmly put in place.<sup>17</sup> Although Pericles clearly exercised powerful leadership on these issues, the public itself was deliberating and voting on its own future, with the rebuilding of the temples a crucial part both of the people's own democratic political stabilization at home and of imperial pretensions abroad. Thus the architecture did not simply serve as the occasion for debate over these larger issues. Once completed, the architecture was expected to establish the new Athenian regime as the leader of all Greece. Her allies and subjects were expected, for example, to develop Athenian religious cults, to participate each year in the Panathenic Processional to the Acropolis, and to acknowledge Athen's cultural and religious leadership.<sup>18</sup>

The jealously guarded public status of the architectural building on and near the Acropolis during the latter part of the fifth century B.C. can only be grasped against a customary backdrop of aristocratic patronage. Prior to Ephialtes' democratic reforms, most of the public buildings erected after the Persian sacking of Athens were built and paid for exclusively by well-to-do aristocratic families: the Stoa Poikile by Peisinx, the development of the Academy and south wall of the Acropolis by Kimon, the Temple of Artemis of Good Counsel by Themistocles. It was only the political shift toward democracy that the principle of a whole people's control and patronage over its public space was vigorously asserted. As Russell Meiggs puts it:

It was the *demos* in its assembly that should decide what public buildings were to be built, and who should build them. Commissioners elected by the people should supervise the progress of the work and its financing. Their accounts should be controlled by public auditors chosen by the people, and should be publicly summarized on stone and set up where all who wished could see them.<sup>19</sup>

The public's claim upon its architecture was, in fact, put to the test later as the burden of the rebuilding programme began to mount. Plutarch recounts that Pericles, on hearing a chorus of public grumbling:

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asked them, [the Athenians] in the assembly if they thought that the expense was heavy, and when they said "very heavy indeed", he said: "Let the expense then be not yours but mine and these buildings that we are dedicating will have my name inscribed on them". The response was unequivocal: 'They cried out that the expenditure must come from public money and that in guiding their building policy he should spare nothing.'<sup>20</sup>

Although this resort to architecture on the grand scale did not bring democratic Athens the assured political pre-eminence which she sought, but may instead have helped precipitate her downfall, this vision of public architecture has ever since remained an exemplary spectacle. Not even this architecture's whitewashing of imperialism has been able to dislodge the special public character of Athenian architecture nor weaken its place in architectural history and theory. In the whole history of architecture, for example, only the Gothic cathedral even remotely offers as powerful an iconographic symbol of a whole people united in its architecture. The special institutional interests and restricted political foundation of mediaeval architecture makes it, however, an unequal rival to Athens.<sup>21</sup> This point suggests an extraordinarily profound connection between architecture and the public order, a relation which, once grasped, can help us understand the nature of our modern crisis in architecture and politics.

### **The Fate of Architecture and Politics in the Modern World**

In a curious sense, our own period simultaneously bears out the force of the previous maxims on architecture and politics and suggests the deranged pattern of their relations. Hence, an architectural interpretation of our own time reveals the same intense connection between the establishment and architecture as in earlier times, but radically overturns its former stately, public character. Even a casual glimpse at the skylines of our cities shows how thoroughly stately and religious edifices are now dwarfed by the gleaming structures of the modern corporate capitalist elite. These buildings, after all, constitute the architectural showcase of modernism, the typical, privatized although institutional artifacts of our own times. This architectural displacement of the political and public realm has had a decisive and ultimately demoralizing effect upon architecture and politics. In view of our earlier analysis, this is understandable. But the deeper tragedy of this practical severance of architecture and the public realm consists in an impoverishment of theory. Thinkers in politics and architecture alike have for some time now lost touch with the thematic understandings developed earlier in this paper.<sup>22</sup>

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They have lost sight of their mutual dependency. Any revitalization of the status of architecture or the public realm will thus depend on remembering and restoring their essential connections.

Although the roots of this crisis lie deeply embedded in liberalism and its stress upon the private and the social, it is not accidental that modern architecture makes its appearance at precisely the time when the western capitalist order has reached its mature and corporate form. In the United States, Germany, and France, the architectural pioneers of modernism begin to develop and expound the principles of modern architecture in order to give expression to our own age's now dominant bourgeois "spirit" and institutions. Although volumes have been written about these revolutionary artists and the special properties of their art, architectural historians have not had much penchant or training for examining its deeper economic and political significance. Indeed, analysts of the theory of modern architecture have for the most part deliberately eschewed that kind of realism and indulged themselves instead in the extravagant idealism of the heroes of modern architecture themselves.<sup>23</sup>

Part of that idealism has consisted in the ready acceptance of a romantic but ultimately bland de-politicized theory both of older and contemporary architecture. Thus, on the historical plane, instead of studying the actual exciting connections between architecture and politics in past ages, too many architectural theorists ever since Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc have made the raising up of great architecture look like a spontaneous and mystical product of each historical "age" and its "people." From the vantage point of our own time, the same theorists have attempted to subsume the special political and institutional quality of most modern architecture in some vague "spirit" of modernism presumably shared by all people of this age. This de-ratiocination of experience has been part of the dubious and lamentable legacy of Hegelian historicism, which had overawed the principal architectural theorists of the nineteenth century like Ruskin, Pugin, and Viollet-le-Duc and which, through them, has so thoroughly penetrated twentieth-century architectural theory.<sup>24</sup>

If, however, we refuse to go along with any simple-minded equation of the spirit of the age with the interests of the patrons of architecture — if we instead ask the same questions about modern architecture that we have formerly done of the politics of earlier architectural expressions — a much more revealing picture of it can be had. In particular, with a firmer grip on the institutional roots of modern architecture, we will have a better understanding of its politics, of its inherent limits to be the noble world architecture which its leaders sought to make it, and of the reasons for its precipitate decline since the 1960's. Ultimately, such an analysis promises to give us a better insight into the weakening significance and endurance of architecture as a *public art*.

The institutional shift of modern architecture from public to private

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building can be seen both in the early architectural artifacts of modernism and in its polemics and theory. From whatever country the modern movement takes root, buildings arise which henceforth will serve as architectural icons of our age: office and apartment towers, department stores, factories, private dwellings for the bourgeois avant-garde, mass schools, churches, concert halls, and of course "housing blocks," — all with a characteristic "machine age" look. This style was the highwater mark of the industrial revolution, when the architect was compelled to come to terms with mass housing and the realities of the labouring world within the terms of an industrial motif, while at the same giving the new ruling classes who, in effect, has sponsored this new world order, their own characteristic architectural defence and status. Indeed, underneath all of modern architecture's revolutionary rhetoric concerning the phoniness of commercial interests wrapping themselves in architectural neoclassicism, lay a hard-headed realism about the transformed ruling order and the duty and power of the new corporate classes to break free from feudal or aristocratic dress. Nothing quite dramatized that transformation better than the skyscraper, which in its economy, purity, rationalism, and power announced the triumph of the bourgeois age. However, if history is any guide, such an architectural flowering in the full ripeness of bourgeois civilization would not necessarily bode well for such a world order. On the contrary, it would merely bear witness to the immense dangers and contradictions against which this mature architecture was directed.

If the writings of the early modern architectural leaders are considered, the shift of architectural attention toward this new commercial elite is unmistakable, even if it is shot through with contradictions and concerns between the architectural *ideal* and the *actual* conditions of bourgeois rule. Thus, despite virtually endless denunciations of the greed and misery engendered by a capitalist society, all of the chief artists of the modernist movement in architecture tilted decisively toward an idealized corporate world of business tycoon, bureaucrat, and "scientific" manager.<sup>25</sup> This tendency is clear enough, for example, in the pristine reductionism of a Mies van der Rohe skyscraper, or in the ideal city models of Le Corbusier, where life is altogether given over to an exaltation of work and its elite. It is apparent too in their rabid enthusiasm for machine-age, mass produced products like steel railway cars, ships and even tanks and airplanes, but it is most obvious in the architect's blatant appeals to the capitalist to take up this architecture or face "overthrow." While denouncing profitability as a norm, Le Corbusier and many others proceeded to defend their architectural plans as a "profit-making form of organization" whose iconographic power would establish the "eminence" of such families as the Rockefellers, "the great masters of economic destiny."<sup>26</sup> Of course, when the tide seemed to turn against the capitalist order, especially during the depression days, or when this elite

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seemed to pay insufficient attention to the architectural leaders' advice, most of them were ready to put the "new age" look to the service of the communists, the fascists, or almost any centralized bureaucratic elite. But the essentially privatized roots of the architecture remained intact nonetheless. Here then was an architecture as sensitive as ever to establishment interests in society but, which though deeply intoxicated by the spell of Athens, remained tragically cut off from the public realm. This separation of course casts contemporary architecture into precisely the same crisis condition as our politics.

Ever since the eighteenth century, political thinkers have understood and viewed with more and more alarm the relentless erosion and absorption of the public realm. Indeed, almost no other concern so dominates the intellectual imagination of contemporary political theory.<sup>27</sup> It is the *nature* of the crisis in these two related public arts that must be understood in the light of such reflections. Such understanding entails *remembering* associations which have ceased to hold in our own time and *using* such memory to help redress weaknesses in the theory and practice of each art. Political theory has already advanced much further along this road of re-examination than has architectural theory, and ought therefore to provide a particularly fruitful basis for rethinking the fundamentals of architectural theory at the point of impasse in modernism. In fact, this body of theory together with the recovery of the *historical* relations of architecture, politics and the public realm along the lines attempted earlier, ought to show the necessarily weakened and problematical status both of modern architecture and modern architectural theory.

The first important task is to grasp the implications of the earlier argument about architecture as an establishment art in the context of our own time, and to see the obstacles thus presented to any architecture of *enduring public* significance. This discovery is not simply a matter of recognizing the privatized nature of a modern political economy, but of seeing the institutional politics of our architecture aimed at subverting the larger activity of politics and the public realm itself. When this phenomenon is set aside the deeper and traditional link between architecture and the public world which since Athens has been so celebrated in architectural history, the nature of this crisis can be seen to consist in an irremediable war within architecture itself. Its *establishment* role (in former times kept within more or less circumscribed "public" institutions) has now broken free from its public moorings without, however, losing its political Parkinson-like character.<sup>28</sup> The eradication of the truly political takes place in virtually every leading architect's drawing board models of a rationalized twentieth century. Neither the Bauhaus, Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, nor any other founder of the principles of architectural modernism made room in their social models for any public

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center, for institutions for political speech and action, or even for political leadership as such. Instead, as illustrated in Le Corbusier's City of Tomorrow, for example, all of men's activities revolve around a privatized world of eating, sleeping, and physical exercise in or near the family domain, a world of busy labouring in splendid glass skyscrapers, and the to-and-fro of transit. Such an architectural jewel, from the heyday of the international movement in the 1920's, shows that the *public* role of architecture had already fallen on bad times.

The same kind of conclusion is arrived at by Charles Jencks after an extensive review of the entire modern movement in architecture:

One of the conclusions to be drawn from a study of recent architecture is the problematic nature of architecture itself. Not only is it thrown into doubt by those who would replace it with a "social service", or engineering, but it is questioned even by successfully practising architects. The reason is not hard to find. It concerns the consumer societies for which architecture is built and the undeniable banality of their building tasks and commissions. At present the most talented architects are designing beautiful candle shops and boutiques for the sophisticated, office buildings for soap and whiskey monopolies, playthings for the rich of Monte Carlo and technical gadgetry for the Worlds Fairs. Such designs are in every formal and technical way provocative and carried through with great integrity, but they can never transcend the limited social and political goals for which they were created.<sup>29</sup>

Given the political economy of modern architecture — its dependence upon wealthy but limited institutions, and its complete inability to draw on the public realm for its strength and durability — Jencks' judgment concerning the ultimate banality of modern architectural art has to signal a crisis both for the modern architects and their patrons. For the architect, it announces their failure to present compelling icons reflecting our alleged *zeitgeist*; for the patrons, it speaks of the political limits of architectural art and announces the onset of Parkinson's sixth law. Although Jencks does not situate his verdict on modern architecture in the larger world of politics which ultimately makes the verdict possible, it is no accident that his views on the failure of modern architecture, together with a chorus of others, takes place during and after the 1960's when the bureaucratic and capitalist order is subject to sustained attack

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and demands for a deeper public life are advanced. In other words, the political stabilization sought by the bourgeois patrons of modern architecture is at least as dubious as that sought by earlier architectural elites. The skyscraper is unlikely to compel long-term awe and respect for the corporate and administrative interests which it both houses and reflects, nor will it therefore determine the order of the world. Instead, the memory of the public realm, celebrated in a truly public architecture, is likely to go on haunting our age.

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### Notes

1. Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973.
2. Paul and Percival Goodman, *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and of Life*, New York: Vintage, 1947.
3. See for example, Donald Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970.
4. I am especially indebted to the work of Norris Kelly Smith for first bringing this notion to my attention and for opening my eyes to its possibilities. His works will be cited as appropriate later on.
5. As noted immediately above, this stricture can hardly be brought to bear on the architectural historian, Norris Kelly Smith, whose work has been principally aimed at correcting such oversights in modern architectural thought.
6. Indeed, as I will go on to argue later, it is precisely this theoretical confusion about the role and purposes of architecture which fatally weakens modern architectural theory and practise. Since architecture has historically almost invariably been restricted to what is most *public* and *significant* in each society, its *meaning* as architecture has also necessarily depended on more than its undoubted aesthetic properties.
7. Norris Kelly Smith, *Frank Lloyd Wright: A Study in Architectural Content*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966, p. 9.
8. C. Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson's Laws*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1957.
9. No one could quite outdo the Egyptian pharaohs for the sheer vanity of architectural patron, as reams of self indulgent praise in the hieroglyphs shows. But underneath all of this, the spectre of attrition, of political and military breakdown — indeed of the ignominious shadow of the grave robbers — is never entirely absent. In fact, it would seem that the more that spectre came to haunt the ruling classes, the more grandiose and obsessive became the architecture.
10. As Hausen's book also indicates, the character of this art, together with painting and sculpture, is invariably conservative and institutional — especially developed by artists who live dependent on temple or court workshops. The convention that dictated monumental frontality for the pharaoh and other notables and yet permitted some measure of naturalism in the treatment of other persons of less exalted rank was a *political* and *class* convention: art

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subordinated to establishment interests. The ideological function of art is easily recognized when Aknaton's political break with the old order quickly lead to a much more consciously naturalist art for the court, an art just as quickly suppressed when his political revolution was crushed. Arnold Hausen, *The Social History of Art*, Vol. 1, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951.

11. See an extended discussion of this issue in Section II, "Architecture and the Public Realm", to follow.
12. Kelly Smith, p. 9.
13. See especially W. Robert Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.
14. Something very similar to the Plutarch account is now accepted by leading scholars of this period. It should be noted, however, that in practical and political importance, the agora clearly outdistanced the Acropolis as Athenian government moved from monarchy, by way of aristocracy towards democracy. It was here where the vital public life of Athens was conducted and where Athenians could meet and talk within or beside the stoas on whose walls were depicted heroic events of the city. It is principally with the Acropolis rebuilding programme, however, that the issue of a public architecture is thoroughly thrashed out and resolved in favour of the demos. See R.E. Wycherley, *How the Greeks Built Cities*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1949, esp. p. 7.
15. This argument would have had little force with Athens' allies since peace had already been established with Persia prior to the rebuilding. Of course Athens had suffered most with the wholesale destruction of her temples earlier in 479 B.C., but this did not wholly justify Athens' present imperial demands. Careful scrutiny of the tribute lists throughout the 440's and later show Athens' continuing demands for tribute as well as the resistance put up by many other Greek city states.
16. Plutarch, *Lives*, London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1910, p. 237.
17. See W. Robert Connor, p. 63.
18. See Russell Meiggs, *The Athenian Empire*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press: 1972.
19. Russell Meiggs, "The Political Implications of the Parthenon — [1963]" in Vincent J. Bruno, ed., *The Parthenon*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1974, p. 110.
20. *Ibid*, p. 109.
21. This has not been sufficiently understood by modern architectural theory which, since the romantic revivals of the nineteenth century, has underplayed the *politics* of architecture and blurred the distinctions between the architecture of institutional elites and that of peoples. This has been helped by its fascination with historicism — with analytic categories of unified "ages" and "spirits" rather than with the contradictions of actual political economies. See my unpublished paper, "Political Theory and Modern Architecture".
22. Even the pioneering work of Paul and Percival Goodman, by stressing the utopian character of modern architectural thinking, could not put this relation of architecture and state as forcefully as was necessary.
23. Nothing illustrates this better than Siegfried Giedion's classic work, *Space, Time, and Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1941), used as standard text in schools of architecture until recently. Modern architect's fascination with heroics and its relation to the historicist theme is treated in David Milne, "The Artist as Political Hero", *Political Theory*, November, 1980. There is, of course, a further need to develop a history and explanation of this theory — of modern architecture's sociology of knowledge, metaphysics, and political economy, but that would move us further afield into other complex matters. What I will try to do here with this article is simply to broadly sketch its characteristic cast of mind and point out important implications and consequences.

## DAVID MILNE

24. This is not the place for a detailed historical explanation of this Hegelian influence in art history and theory, nor for the precise chronicling of the stages by which it came to conquer modern architectural thinking. This is an exceedingly complicated and lengthy story which has only in part been taken up by recent scholarship. The roots of this development are only lightly touched upon by David Watkin's, *Morality and Architecture* (Oxford University Press, 1979), but its baneful effects on modern writers in architecture are ruthlessly exposed.
  25. Probably the only major exception to this rule would be Frank Lloyd Wright whose anarchistic leaning set him apart from the other leaders of the modern movement. See my unpublished manuscript, "Frank Lloyd Wright and a Theory of Democratic Architecture". Yet even here, Wright was frequently drawn away from his romantic preoccupations with domestic architecture toward ideal visions of the corporate world with the Larkin Building in Buffalo, the Johnson's wax building in Racine, the Bartlesville Tower in Oklahoma, or most whimsically, in his drafting board model of a "mile high skyscraper"!
  26. See Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City*, translated by Pamela Knight, Eleanor Levieux, Derek Coltman. New York: Orion Press, 1964, and Le Corbusier, *When the Cathedrals were White*, translated by Francis E. Hyslop, New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1964. It was universally expected of course, that the ameliorization of the human condition built into each of the architects' plans (whatever their obvious differences) would not only resolve the principal contradictions of the age, but usher in a new paradisaical spirit. See Norris Kelly Smith, "Millenary Folly: The Failure of an Eschatology" in N.K. Smith, *On Art and Architecture in the Modern World*, Watkins Glen, N.Y.: American Life Foundation for the University of Victoria, British Columbia, 1971.
  27. No one has pondered this matter with more power and clarity than Hannah Arendt, though the theme is taken up by thinkers of virtually every political hue.
  28. Of course, to the extent that architecture in many earlier societies also tended to reify a much more exclusive and limited sense of the "political" and the "public" than that of Athens, it too suffered from the limits imposed by the nature of the regime. However, no earlier order quite dismantled the state connection so thoroughly.
  29. Jencks, p. 371.
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