

THEORY OF UGLY AND ORDINARY AND RELATED AND CONTRARY THEORIES

ORIGINS AND FURTHER DEFINITION OF UGLY AND ORDINARY

Let us describe our own experience as architects to explain how we came to ugly and ordinary architecture. After the appearance of *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*,⁵ we began to realize that few of our firm's buildings were complex and contradictory, at least not in their purely architectural qualities of space and structure as opposed to their symbolic content. We had failed to fit into our buildings double-functioning or vestigial elements, circumstantial distortions, expedient devices, eventful exceptions, exceptional diagonals, things in things, crowded or contained intricacies, linings or layerings, residual spaces, redundant spaces, ambiguities, inflections, dualities, difficult wholes, or the phenomena of both-and. There was little in our work of inclusion, inconsistency, compromise, accommodation, adaptation, superadjacency, equivalence, multiple focus, juxtaposition, or good and bad space.

Most of the complexities and contradictions we relished thinking about we did not use, because we did not have the opportunity. Venturi and Rauch did not get big commissions whose programs and settings justified complex and contradictory forms, and as artists we could not impose on our work inapplicable ideas that we liked as critics. A building should not be a vehicle for an architect's ideas, etc. Also our budgets were low, and we did not want to design a building twice—once to fit some heroic idea of its importance to society and the world of art and, after the bids came in, a second time to reflect the client's and society's restricted idea of our architecture's value. Whether society was right or wrong was not for us at that moment to argue. Therefore our Brighton Beach Housing entry did not turn out a megastructure for living in or our Fire Station in Columbus, Indiana, a personalized essay in civic monumentality for a pedestrian piazza by the side of the highway. They turned out "ugly and ordinary," as two such divergent critics as Philip Johnson and Gordon Bunshaft have described our work. "Ugly" or "beautiful" is perhaps a question of semantics in this context, but these two architects did catch the spirit, in a way.

Architecture may be ordinary—or rather, conventional—in two ways: in how it is constructed or in how it is seen, that is, in its process or in its symbolism. To construct conventionally is to use ordinary materials and engineering, accepting the present and usual organization of the

building industry and its financial structure and hoping to ensure fast, sound, and economical construction. This is good in the short run, and the short run is what our clients have largely retained us architects for. Architectural theories of the short run tend toward the idealization and generalization of expediency. Architecture for the long run requires creation, rather than adaptation, and response to advanced technology and sophisticated organization. It depends on sound research that may perhaps be promoted in the architect's office but should be financed outside it, because the client's fee is not adequate for and not intended for that purpose. Although architects have not wished to recognize it, most architectural problems are of the expedient type, and the more architects become involved in social problems, the more this is true. In general the world cannot wait for the architect to build his or her utopia, and in the main the architect's concern should belong not with what ought to be but with what is—and with how to help improve it now. This is a humbler role for architects than the Modern movement has wanted to accept; however, it is artistically a more promising one.

UGLY AND ORDINARY AS SYMBOL AND STYLE

Artistically, the use of conventional elements in ordinary architecture—be they dumb doorknobs or the familiar forms of existing construction systems—evokes associations from past experience. Such elements may be carefully chosen or thoughtfully adapted from existing vocabularies or standard catalogs rather than uniquely created via original data and artistic intuition. To design a window, for instance, you start not only with the abstract function of modulating light rays and breezes to serve interior space but with the image of window—of all the windows you know plus others you find out about. This approach is symbolically and functionally conventional, but it promotes an architecture of meaning, broader and richer if less dramatic than the architecture of expression.

We have shown how heroic and original (H&O) architecture derives dramatic expression from the connotative meanings of its "original" elements: It gives off abstract meanings—or rather, expressions—recognizable in the physiognomic character of the architectural elements. Ugly and ordinary (U&O) architecture, on the other hand, includes denotative meanings as well, derived from its familiar elements; that is, it suggests more or less concrete meanings via association and past experience. The "brutalism" of an H&O fire station comes from its rough texture; its civic monumentality comes from its big scale; the expression of structure and program and "truth to materials" comes from the particular articulations of its forms. Its total image derives from these purely architectural qualities transmitted through abstract forms, tex-

5. Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art and Graham Foundation, 1966).

tures, and colors, carefully composed (Fig. 115). The total image of our U&O fire house—an image implying civic character as well as specific use—comes from the conventions of roadside architecture that it follows; from the decorated false facade, from the banality through familiarity of the standard aluminum sash and roll-up doors, and from the flagpole in front—not to mention the conspicuous sign that identifies it through spelling, the most denotative of symbols; FIRE STATION NO. 4 (Fig. 116). These elements act as symbols as well as expressive architectural abstractions. They are not merely ordinary but represent ordinariness symbolically and stylistically; they are enriching as well, because they add a layer of literary meaning.

Richness can come from conventional architecture. For 300 years European architecture was variations on a Classical norm—a rich conformity. But it can also come through an adjusting of the scale or context of familiar and conventional elements to produce unusual meanings. Pop artists used unusual juxtapositions of everyday objects in tense and vivid plays between old and new associations to flout the everyday interdependence of context and meaning, giving us a new interpretation of twentieth-century cultural artifacts. The familiar that is a little off has a strange and revealing power.

The double-hung window in Guild House is familiar in form but unusually large in size and horizontal in proportion, like the big, distorted Campbell Soup can in Andy Warhol's painting. This typical window is also juxtaposed with a smaller window of the same form and proportion. The exact location of the bigger window on a parallel plane behind the smaller window tends to disturb the habitual perception of distance through perspective; the resultant symbolic and optical tensions are, we maintain, a means of making boring architecture interesting—a more valid means than the irrelevant articulations of today's strident but boring minimegastructures (Fig. 117).

AGAINST DUCKS, OR UGLY AND ORDINARY OVER HEROIC AND ORIGINAL, OR THINK LITTLE

We should not emphasize the ironic richness of banality in today's artistic context at the expense of discussing the appropriateness and inevitability of U&O architecture on a wider basis. Why do we uphold the symbolism of the ordinary via the decorated shed over the symbolism of the heroic via the sculptural duck? Because this is not the time and ours is not the environment for heroic communication through pure architecture. Each medium has its day, and the rhetorical environmental statements of our time—civic, commercial, or residential—will come from media more purely symbolic, perhaps less static and more adapt-

able to the scale of our environment. The iconography and mixed media of roadside commercial architecture will point the way, if we will look.

Housing for the elderly on the Oak Street Connector, if it had to be a monument, would have been more economical, socially responsible, and amenable as a conventional apartment building, lost by the side of the expressway, with a big sign on top blinking, I AM A MONUMENT. Decoration is cheaper (Fig. 139).

THEORIES OF SYMBOLISM AND ASSOCIATION IN ARCHITECTURE

Basic to the argument for the decorated shed is the assumption that symbolism is essential in architecture and that the model from a previous time or from the existing city is part of the source material, and the replication⁶ of elements is part of the design method of this architecture. That is, architecture that depends on association in its perception depends on association in its creation.

We have approached the justification of symbolism in architecture pragmatically, using concrete examples, rather than abstractly through the science of semiotic or through *a priori* theorizing.⁷ However, other approaches have rendered similar results. Alan Colquhoun has written of architecture as part of a "system of communications within society" and describes the anthropological and psychological basis for the use of a typology of forms in design, suggesting that not only are we not "free from the forms of the past, and from the availability of these forms as typological models, but that, if we assume we are free, we have lost control over a very active sector of our imagination and of our power to communicate with others."⁸

Colquhoun describes the essentially "representational" quality of the artifacts of primitive culture and their relationships, and discusses the continuing anthropological basis for "iconic values" in the products of technology. The cosmological systems of primitive peoples were not "close to nature" but intellectual and artificial. Colquhoun illustrates

6. G. Hersey, "Replication Replicated," *Perspecta 10*, *The Yale Architectural Journal*, New Haven (1955), pp. 211-248.

7. These abstract approaches have recently been explored in a series of essays edited by Charles Jencks and George Baird, *Meaning in Architecture* (New York: George Braziller, 1969). We are indebted particularly to the formulations of Charles Jencks, George Baird, and Alan Colquhoun.

8. Alan Colquhoun, "Typology and Design Method," *Arena, Journal of the Architectural Association* (June 1967), pp. 11-14, republished in Charles Jencks and George Baird, *Meaning in Architecture*.

this point by quoting from Claude Lévi-Strauss's description of kinship systems:⁹

"Certainly the biological family is present and persists in human society. But what gives to kinship its character as a social fact is not what it must conserve of nature; it is the essential step by which it separates itself from nature. A system of kinship does not consist of objective blood ties; it exists only in the consciousness of men; it is an arbitrary system of representations, not the spontaneous development of a situation of fact."

Colquhoun claims that there is a

"parallel between such systems and the way modern man still approaches the world. And what was true of primitive man in all the ramifications of his practical and emotional life—namely the need to *represent* the phenomenal world in such a way that it becomes a coherent and logical system—persists in our own organizations, and more particularly in our attitude toward the man-made objects of our environment."¹⁰

The perceptual-psychological necessity for representation in art and architecture in Colquhoun's argument is based on E. H. Gombrich's book *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*. Gombrich rejects the belief born of Modern Expressionist theory that "shapes have physiognomic or expressive content which communicates itself to us directly."¹¹ He demonstrates, Colquhoun says, that

"the arrangement of forms such as found in a painting by Kandinsky is in fact very low in content, unless we attribute to these forms some system of conventional meanings not inherent in the forms themselves. His thesis is that physiognomic forms are ambiguous, though not wholly without expressive value, and that they can only be interpreted within a particular cultural ambience."¹²

Gombrich illustrates this by reference to the supposed inherent affective qualities of color exemplified in traffic signals; and Colquhoun cites the recent adoption by the Chinese of the color red for go, indicating action and forward movement, and of green for stop, indicating inaction and caution—this easy reversal itself indicating the triumph of con-

vention over physiognomy in our understanding of the meaning of form.

Colquhoun argues against the proposition of Modern architecture that form should be the result of the application of physical or mathematical laws rather than of previous association or aesthetic ideologies. Not only are these laws themselves human constructs, but in the real world, even the world of advanced technology, they are not totally determining; there are areas of free choice. If "in a world of pure technology this area is invariably dealt with by adapting previous solutions," then even more will this be the case in architecture where laws and facts are still less capable of leading directly to form. He grants that systems of representation are not altogether independent of the facts of the objective world, and indeed "the modern movement in architecture was an attempt to modify the representational systems which had been inherited from the pre-industrial past, and which had no longer seemed operable within the context of a rapidly changing technology."¹³

The viewing of physical laws and empirical facts as the fundamental source of form in Modern architectural theory Colquhoun calls "bio-technical determinism":

"And it is from this theory that the current belief in the supreme importance of scientific methods of analysis and classification derives. The essence of the functional doctrine of the modern movement was not that beauty or order or meaning were unnecessary, but that it could no longer be found in the deliberate search for final form, and the path by which the artifact affected the observer aesthetically was seen as short-circuiting the process of formalization. Form was merely the result of a logical process by which the operational needs and the operational techniques were brought together. Ultimately these would fuse in a kind of biological extension of life, and function and technology would become totally transparent."¹⁴

The limitations inherent in this approach, even for technical engineering problems, were acknowledged—obliquely—in Modern theory. But they were to be overcome through the integrating magic of intuition and without reference to historical models. That form results from intention as well as deterministic process was acknowledged in the writings of Le Corbusier, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and other leaders of the Modern movement in their descriptions of the "intuition," "imagination," "inventiveness," and "free and innumerable plastic events" that regulate architectural design. What resulted, Colquhoun says, was a "tension of two apparently contradictory ideas—biological determinism on one hand, and free expression on the other," within the doctrine of the

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

9. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

10. Colquhoun, "Typology and Design Method," pp. 11-14.

11. E. H. Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on Art* (London: Phaidon Press; Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1963), pp. 45-69.

12. Colquhoun, "Typology and Design Method," pp. 11-14.

Modern movement. Through excluding a body of traditional practice for the sake of "science," a vacuum was left that was filled ironically by a form of permissive expressionism: "What appears on the surface as a hard, rational discipline of design, turns out rather paradoxically to be a mystical belief in the intuitive process."¹⁵

FIRMNESS + COMMODITY \neq DELIGHT: MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND THE INDUSTRIAL VERNACULAR

Vitruvius wrote, via Sir Henry Wootton, that architecture was Firmness and Commodity and Delight. Gropius (or perhaps only his followers) implied, via the bio-technical determinism just described, that Firmness and Commodity equal Delight; that structure plus program rather simply result in form; that beauty is a by-product; and that—to tamper with the equation in another way—the process of making architecture becomes the image of architecture. Louis Kahn in the 1950s said that the architect should be surprised by the appearance of his design (Fig. 118).

Presumed in these equations is that process and image are never contradictory and that Delight is a result of the clarity and harmony of these simple relationships, untinged, of course, by the beauty of symbolism and ornament or by the associations of preconceived form: Architecture is frozen process.

The historians of the Modern movement concentrated on the innovative engineering structures of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as prototypes for Modern architecture, but it is significant that the bridges of Maillart are not architecture, and the hangars of Freysinnet are hardly architecture. As engineering solutions, their programs are simple and without the inherent contradictions of architectural programs. To traverse a ravine directly, safely, and cheaply or to protect a big space from the rain without intervening supports is all that is required of these structures. The unavoidable symbolic content of even such simple, utilitarian constructions and the unavoidable use of what Colquhoun calls typologies were ignored by the theorists of the Modern movement. The not infrequent ornamentation of these forms was excused as a deviant architectural hangover, characteristic of the times. But the ornamentation of utilitarian superstructures is typical of all times. The defensive walls of the medieval city were topped with elaborately varied crenelations and studded with rhetorically ornamented gates. The applied decorations of the classic structures of the Industrial Revolution (we see them as more classic than innovative) are another manifestation of the decorated shed—for example, the elaborated gusset plates of the frame bridges, or the modified Corinthian capitals of the fluted cast-iron columns in loft buildings, or the eclectically stylish en-

15. Ibid.

trances and fanciful parapets of their fronts.

The decoration of the shed in nineteenth-century industrial architecture was often ignored by architects and theorists of the Modern movement through selective viewing of buildings or through contrived cropping of photographs. Even today as architects stress the complexity of these buildings (for instance, the complex massing and clerestoried roof lines of the mills of the English industrial Midlands) rather than their simplicity, their not infrequent ornament is still discounted.

Mies van der Rohe looked at only the backs of Albert Kahn's factories in the Midwest and developed his minimal vocabulary of steel I-sections framing industrial sash. The fronts of Kahn's sheds almost always contained administrative offices and, being early twentieth-century creations, were graciously Art Deco rather than historical eclectic (Figs. 119, 120). The plastic massing up front, characteristic of this style, grandly contradicted the skeletal behind.

INDUSTRIAL ICONOGRAPHY

More important than Mies's forgetting the decoration was his copying the shed, that is, his deriving associations from the body of the building rather than from its facade. The architecture of the Modern movement, during its early decades and through a number of its masters, developed a vocabulary of forms based on a variety of industrial models whose conventions and proportions were no less explicit than the Classical orders of the Renaissance. What Mies did with linear industrial buildings in the 1940s, Le Corbusier had done with plastic grain elevators in the 1920s, and Gropius had done with the Bauhaus in the 1930s, imitating his own earlier factory, the Faguswerk, of 1911. Their factorylike buildings were more than "influenced" by the industrial vernacular structures of the then recent past, in the sense that historians have described influences among artists and movements. Their buildings were explicitly adapted from these sources, and largely for their symbolic content, because industrial structures *represented*, for European architects, the brave new world of science and technology. The architects of the early Modern movement, in discarding the admittedly obsolete symbolism of historical eclecticism, substituted that of the industrial vernacular. To put it another way, as Romantics still, they achieved a new sensibility through evoking the remote in place—that is, the contemporary industrial quarter on the other side of the tracks, which they transferred to the civic areas of the city—rather than evoking, as did the earlier Romantics, the remote in time through the replication of stylistic ornament of the past. That is, the Moderns employed a design method based on typological models and developed an archi-

tectural iconography based on their interpretation of the progressive technology of the Industrial Revolution (Fig. 121).

Colquhoun refers to the "iconic power" attributed by "those in the field of design who were—and are—preaching pure technology and so-called objective design method . . . to the creations of technology, which they worship to a degree inconceivable in a scientist."¹⁶ He also writes of "the power of all artifacts to become icons . . . whether or not they were specifically created for this purpose," and he cites nineteenth-century steamships and locomotives as examples of objects "made ostensibly with utilitarian purposes in mind" which "quickly become gestalt entities . . . imbued with aesthetic unity" and symbolic quality. These objects, along with the factories and grain elevators, became explicit typological models that, despite what architects said to the contrary, significantly influenced the method of Modern architectural design and served as sources for its symbolic meanings.

INDUSTRIAL STYLING AND THE CUBIST MODEL

Later critics referred to a "machine aesthetic," and others have accepted the term, but Le Corbusier among the Modern masters was unique in elaborately describing industrial prototypes for his architecture in *Vers une Architecture* (Fig. 122). However, even he claimed the steamship and the grain elevator for their forms rather than their associations, for their simple geometry rather than their industrial image. It is significant, on the other hand, that the buildings of Le Corbusier, illustrated in his book, physically resemble the steamships and the grain elevators but not the Parthenon or the furniture in Santa Maria in Cosmedin or Michelangelo's details for Saint Peter's, which are also illustrated for their simple geometric forms. The industrial prototypes became literal models for Modern architecture, while the historical-architectural prototypes were merely analogs selected for certain of their characteristics. To put it another way, the industrial buildings were symbolically correct; the historical buildings were not.

For the abstract geometrical formalism of Le Corbusier's architecture at this time, Cubism was the model. It was the second model, in part countering that of the nautical-industrial images, and it accounted for the hovering, stuccoed planes that enveloped the industrial sash and spiral stairs in the Villa Savoye. Although historians describe the relation between painting and architecture of this period as a harmonious diffusion of the *Zeitgeist*, it was more an adaptation of the language of painting to that of architecture. The systems of pure, simple forms, sometimes transparent, that penetrate flowing space were explicitly

associated with Cubism and fitted Le Corbusier's famous definition, of that time, of architecture as "the skillful, accurate and magnificent play of masses seen in light."

SYMBOLISM UNADMITTED

A contradiction between what was said and what was done was typical of early Modern architecture: Walter Gropius decried the term "International Style" but created an architectural style and spread a vocabulary of industrial forms that were quite removed from industrial processes. Adolf Loos condemned ornament yet applied beautiful patterns in his own designs and would have erected the most magnificent, if ironic, symbol in the history of skyscrapers if he had won the *Chicago Tribune* competition. The later work of Le Corbusier started a continuing tradition of unacknowledged symbolism, whose indigenous-vernacular forms, in varying manifestations, are still with us.

But it is the contradiction—or at least the lack of correspondence—between image and substance that confirms the role of symbolism and association in orthodox Modern architecture. As we have said, the symbolism of Modern architecture is usually technological and functional, but when these functional elements work symbolically, they usually do not work functionally, for example, Mies's symbolically exposed but substantively encased steel frame and Rudolph's *béton brut* in concrete block or his "mechanical" shafts used for an apartment house rather than a research lab. Some latter-day Modern architectural contradictions are the use of flowing space for private functions, glass walls for western exposures, industrial clerestories for suburban high schools, exposed ducts that collect dust and conduct sound, mass-produced systems for underdeveloped countries, and the impressions of wooden formwork in the concrete of high-labor-cost economies.

We catalog here the failures of these functional elements to function as structure, program, mechanical equipment, lighting, or industrial process, not to criticize them (although on functional grounds they should be criticized), but to demonstrate their symbolism. Nor are we interested in criticizing the functional-technological content of early Modern architectural symbolism. What we criticize is the symbolic content of current Modern architecture and the architect's refusal to acknowledge symbolism.

Modern architects have substituted one set of symbols (Cubist-industrial-process) for another (Romantic-historical-eclecticism) but without being aware of it. This has made for confusing and ironic contradictions that are still with us. The diversity of styles (not to mention the syntactical correctness and suave precision) of the architecture of the 1960s might challenge the versatility of a Victorian eclectic of the 1860s. The

following models serve as sources for symbolic representation in our best buildings today: Cape Kennedy launching pads (Fig. 123); the industrial vernacular of the English Midlands (Fig. 124); Victorian greenhouses (Fig. 125); Futurist zoos (Fig. 126); Constructivist protomega-structures (Fig. 127); space frames (Fig. 128); Piranesian *carceri* (Fig. 129); plastic forms indigenous to the Mediterranean (Fig. 130); pedestrian scale, medieval-space Tuscan hill towns (Fig. 131); and the works of the form givers of the Heroic period (Fig. 132).

FROM LA TOURETTE TO NEIMAN-MARCUS

The stylistic evolution from La Tourette to Neiman-Marcus is a characteristic development of form-giver symbolism in late Modern architecture. Le Corbusier's tense manifestation of late genius, a monastery in a Burgundian field (Fig. 133), is itself a brilliant adaptation of a white plastic vernacular of the eastern Mediterranean. Its forms became an Art and Architecture Building on a street corner in New Haven (Fig. 134), a brick laboratory on the campus at Cornell (Fig. 135), and a *palazzo pubblico* in a piazza in Boston (Fig. 136). A latest version of this Burgundian cloister is a department store off the Westheimer strip in suburban Houston—a pure symbol of progressive gentility set in a sea of parking (Figs. 137, 138). Again, we do not criticize these replications of a classic masterpiece in a different place for a different use, although we suggest the replication would have been done better if it had been accepted philosophically and used wittily, as in the case of a Beaux-Arts department store designed after an Italian palazzo. This series of buildings from Burgundy to Texas illustrates the Modern architect's tendency to glorify originality through copying it.

SLAVISH FORMALISM AND ARTICULATED EXPRESSIONISM

Substituting nonfunctioning imitations of a deterministic process for preconceived form has resulted not only in confusion and irony but in a formalism that is the more slavish for being unadmitted. Those planners and architects who decry formalism in architecture are frequently rigid and arbitrary when the time comes for committing their projects to form. Urban designers, having learned the antiformalist pieties of the architectural profession and the critique of "physical bias" of the planning profession, are often caught in this dilemma. Once the "planning process" has been planned and the "guidelines for development" have been set, plans are filled in with hypothetical buildings to show "possible developments" using the fashionable shapes of the architectural leader fancied by the recent graduate who happens to be "on the design side" of the project in the office at that time, whether or not this

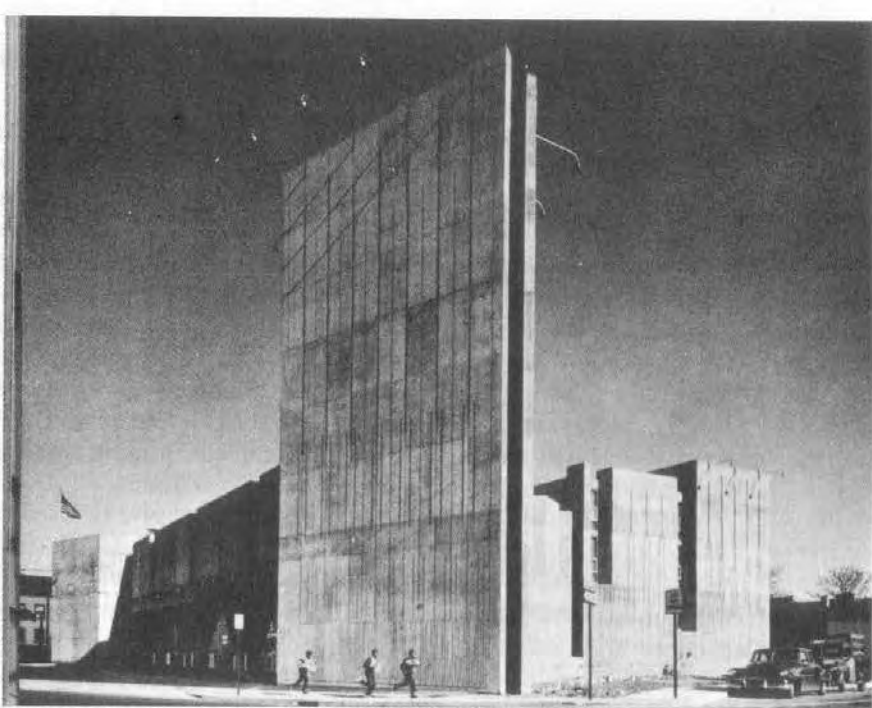
leader's formal vocabulary would be more relevant to the problem than some other formal vocabulary.

The substitution of expression for representation through disdain for symbolism and ornament has resulted in an architecture where expression has become expressionism. Owing perhaps to the meager meanings available from abstract forms and unadorned functional elements, the characteristic forms of late Modern architecture are often overstated. Conversely, they are often understated in their context as with Latourette on the Westheimer strip. Louis Kahn once called exaggeration the architect's tool to create ornament. But exaggeration of structure and program (and, in the 1950s and 1960s, mechanical equipment, that is, ducts equal decoration) has become a substitute for ornament.

ARTICULATION AS ORNAMENT

To replace ornament and explicit symbolism, Modern architects indulge in distortion and overarticulation. Strident distortion at large scale and "sensitive" articulation at small scale result in an expressionism that is, to us, meaningless and irrelevant, an architectural soap opera in which to be progressive is to look outlandish. On the one hand, consider all those residential, civic, and institutional buildings whose thin complexities (stepped terraces; accordion sections, or plans, or elevations; cantilevered clerestories; diagonal zoos; textured striations and flying bridges or buttresses) almost parallel the strident distortions of a McDonald's hamburger stand but lack the commercial program and distracting setting that justify the stridency of Strip architecture. On the other hand, consider sensitively articulated structural frames and cantilevered bays that modulate a facade, define interior spaces, or reflect variations in the program. These busy bumps and subtle dents are put there for scale and rhythm and richness too, but they are as irrelevant and meaningless as the pilaster bas-relief on a Renaissance palace (which they resemble), because they are seen mostly in big spaces (often parking lots) and at high speeds.

Articulated architecture today is like a minuet in a discotheque, because even off the highway our sensibilities remain attuned to its bold scale and detail. Perhaps in the cacaphonic context of our real landscape we are impatient with any architectural detail at all. Furthermore, sensitive articulation is an expensive luxury best eliminated before the bids come in. The two-foot cantilever on the face of a building, put there to suit a sensitive nuance of the program discerned only by the architect, is a hangover from more stable times. Today programs can change during the course of construction. We cannot afford too-literal conjunctions between form and transient functions. In sum, while today's forms are too strident for their function in our environment, to-



115. Central Fire Station, New Haven, 1959-1962; Earl P. Carlin, Architect; Paul E. Pozzi, Peter Millard, Associates



116. Fire Station No. 4, Columbus, Indiana, 1965-1967; Venturi and Rauch



117. Guild House, windows

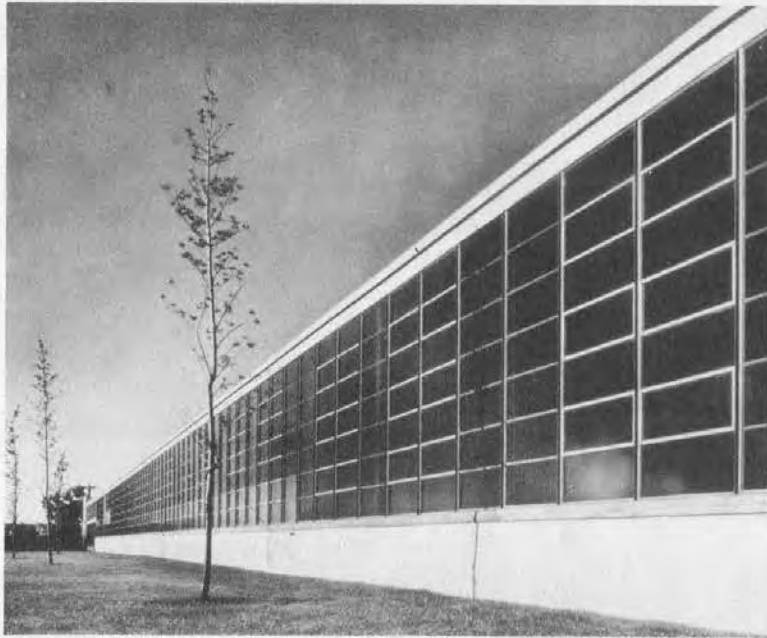
VITRUVIUS:

- (A) Firmness +
- (B) Commodity +
- (C) Delight

GROPIUS:

$$(A) + (B) = (C)$$

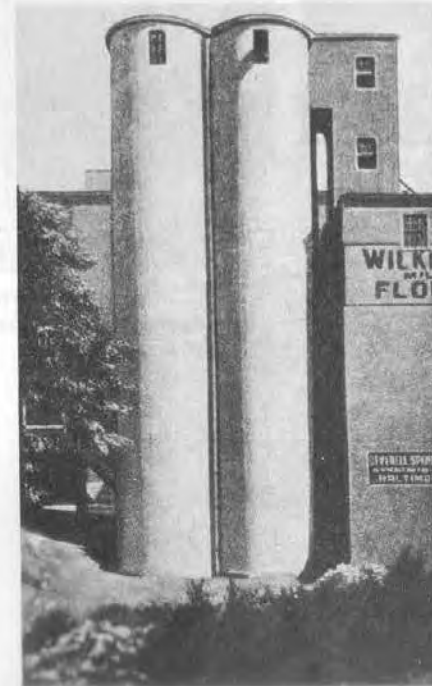
118. Vitruvius and Gropius



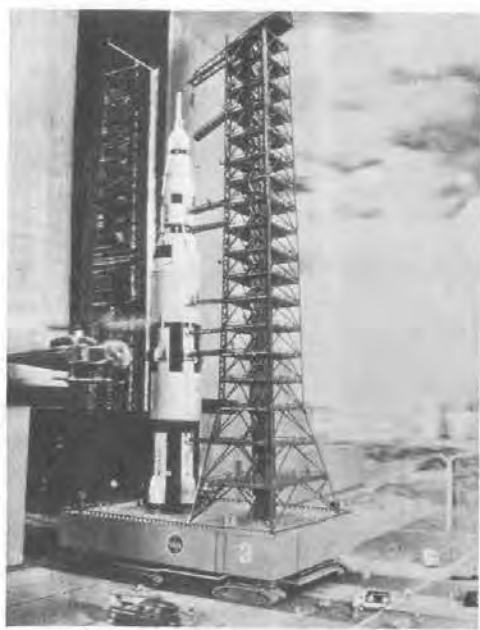
119. Plant for Lady Esther, Ltd., Clearing, Illinois; Albert Kahn



121. Bauhaus, Dessau, Germany, 1925-1926; Walter Gropius



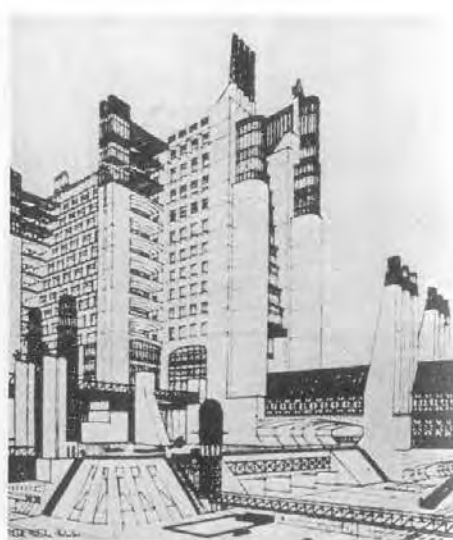
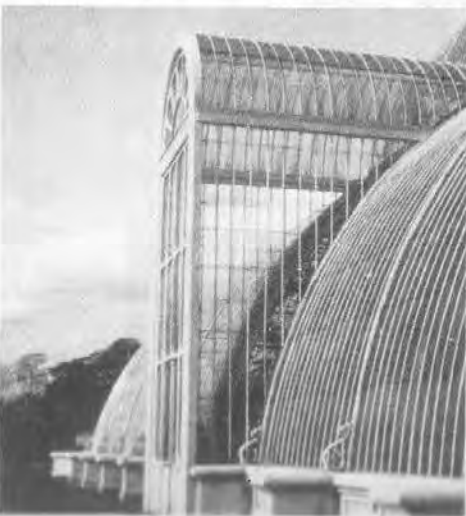
122. Grain elevator from Le Corbusier's



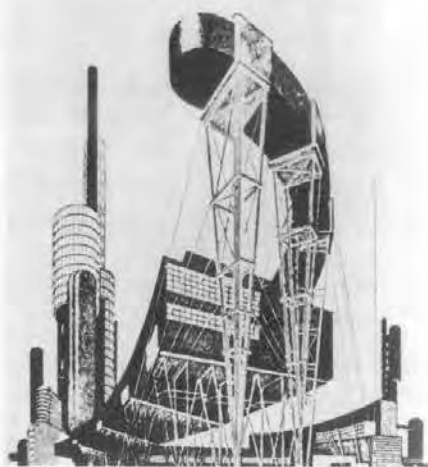
123. Cape Kennedy



124. St. Stephen's Maltings, Canterbury



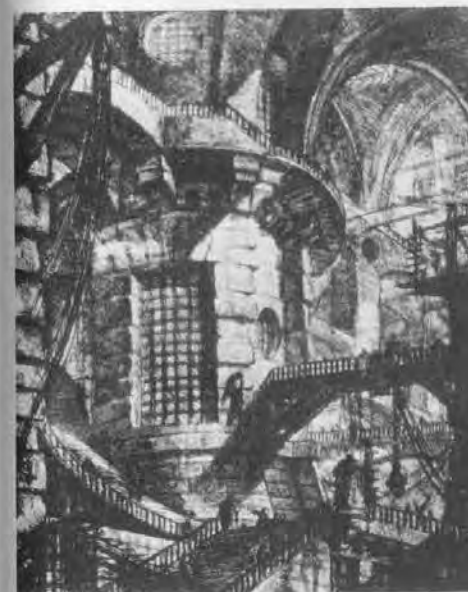
126. Project for a Subway, 1914; Antonio Sant'Elia



127. Russian Constructivist sketch for an industrial building from Tchernikov's *101 Fantasies*



128. Geodesic "Playdome"; Buckminster Fuller



129. *Carceri*; Giovanni Battista Piranesi



130. Procida, Italy



131. Piazza Cavour, San Gimignano



132. High Court building, Chandigarh, 1951-1956; Le Corbusier



133. Monastery of La Tourette, Evreux, France, 1956-1960;
Le Corbusier



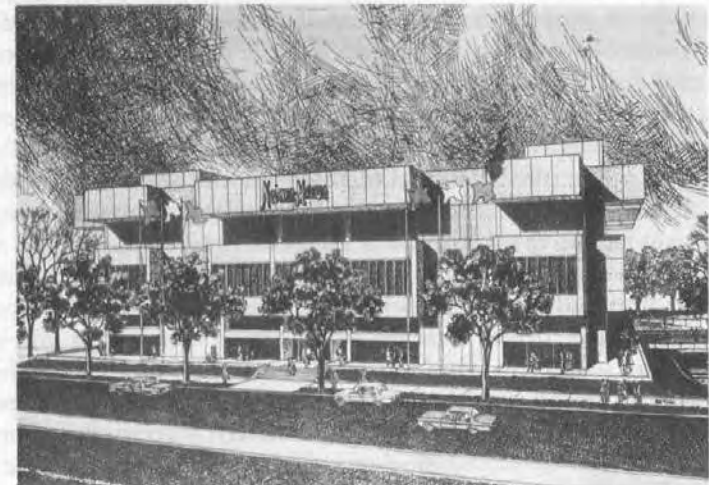
134. Yale University Art and Architecture
Building, New Haven, 1962-1963; Paul
Rudolph



135. Cornell University Agronomy Building



136. City Hall, Boston, 1963; Kallman, McKinnell, and Knowles



137. Neiman-Marcus store, Houston, Texas; Hellmuth, Obata,
and Kassabaum



day's details are too sensitive for the timbre of our environment. However, at the opposite extreme, there is an individual need for intimacy and detail, unmet by Modern design but satisfied by the five-eighths scale reproductions in Disneyland, by the caricatures of human scale in the patios of garden apartments, and by the seven-eighths scale furnishings of the fancy interiors of Levittown model homes.

SPACE AS GOD

Perhaps the most tyrannical element in our architecture now is space. Space has been contrived by architects and deified by critics, filling the vacuum created by fugitive symbolism. If articulation has taken over from ornament in the architecture of abstract expressionism, space is what displaced symbolism. Our heroic and original symbols, from *carceri* to Cape Kennedy, feed our late Romantic egos and satisfy our lust for expressionistic, acrobatic space for a new age in architecture. It's space and light—light as an element for distorting space for further dramatization. The spatial replication today of the mills of the nineteenth-century industrial Midlands illustrates the irrelevance of these borrowings. The complex diagonal clerestories and sheer glass walls and roofs of early industrial architecture responded to the need for natural light and the availability of minimum artificial light for a 12-hour working day in a latitude where winter days are short and winters are long. On the other hand, the Manchester mill owner could depend on a cool climate in the summer, low heating standards in the winter and cheap and docile labor to put up with the conditions and repair the leaks. Today, however, most buildings need windows to look out of rather than glass walls for light, because our lighting standards are higher than can be satisfied through daylight alone, and areas of glass must be kept small and ceilings reasonably low to contain the air conditioning and meet the budget. Therefore our aesthetic impact should come from sources other than light, more symbolic and less spatial sources.

MEGASTRUCTURES AND DESIGN CONTROL

Recent Modern architecture has achieved formalism while rejecting form, promoted expressionism while ignoring ornament, and deified space while rejecting symbols. Confusions and ironies result from this unpleasantly complex and contradictory situation. Ironically we glorify originality through replication of the forms of Modern masters. There is little harm in this symbolic individualism except for its effect on the budget, but there is harm in imposing on the whole landscape heroic representations of the masters' unique creations. Such symbolic heroism lies behind the Modern proclivity for the megastructure and for

total design. Architects who demand evidence of process in the forms of individual buildings reject it in the form of the city, where it is arguably more defensible. Total design is the opposite of the incremental city that grows through the decisions of many: total design conceives a messianic role for the architect as corrector of the mess of urban sprawl; it promotes a city dominated by pure architecture and maintained through "design review," and supports today's architecture of urban renewal and fine arts commissions. The Boston City Hall and its urban complex are the archetype of enlightened urban renewal. The profusion of symbolic forms, which recall the extravagances of the General Grant period, and the revival of the medieval piazza and its *palazzo pubblico* are in the end a bore. It is too architectural. A conventional loft would accommodate a bureaucracy better, perhaps with a blinking sign on top saying I AM A MONUMENT (Fig. 139).

However, no architecture is not the answer to too much architecture. The reaction of the antiarchitects of *Architectural Design* is perhaps as futile as the endless fondling of irrelevant subtleties at the other extreme in the other magazines, though it is possibly less harmful only because it seldom gets built, plugged in, or inflated. The world science futurist metaphysic, the megastructuralist mystique, and the look-Mano-buildings environmental suits and pods are a repetition of the mistakes of another generation. Their overdependence on a space-age, futurist, or science-fiction technology parallels the machine aestheticism of the 1920s and approaches its ultimate mannerism. They are, however, unlike the architecture of the 1920s, artistically a deadend and socially a cop-out.

The megastructure has been promoted by the elaborate journalism of groups such as Archigram who reject architecture but whose urban visions and mural-scale graphics go beyond the last, megalomaniac gasps of the late Beaux-Arts delineators. Unlike urban sprawl architecture, megastructures lend themselves to total design and to extremely beautiful models, significantly impressive in the boardrooms of cultural foundations or in the pages of *Time* magazine but unrelated to anything achievable or desirable in the present social or technical context. The occasionally witty exercises in Pop imagery of the megastructure visionaries are fine as an end in themselves, more literary than architectural in intent. They are a bore as architectural theory and ultimately, as well as immediately, unresponsive to the real and interesting problems now.

Meanwhile, every community and state is appointing its design review board to promote the architectural revolution of the last generation and corrupt its members through rule-by-man rather than rule-by-law procedures. "Total design" comes to mean "total control" as confident art commissioners who have learned what is right promote a deadening

mediocrity by rejecting the "good" and the "bad" and the new they do not recognize, all of which, in combination and in the end, make the city. (See Appendix.)

MISPLACED TECHNOLOGICAL ZEAL

The old revolutionaries of the fine arts commissions and the new revolutionaries of the megastructures are, in our opinion, equally irrelevant, both socially and artistically. They also share the same tradition in architectural technology, taking the progressive, revolutionary, machine-aesthetic stance of the early Modern architects; part of being "heroic and original" is being advanced technologically. The discrepancies between substance and image in Modern architecture's technological *machismo* and the costliness of its frequently empty gestures emerged earlier than architects would admit. Methods of industrial production turned out to be largely inapplicable to the construction of buildings. Many elegant structural systems (space frames, for instance), although they were highly efficient in relating stress to material and economical for spanning large industrial structures, failed decisively to work within the program, space, and budget of the more prosaic and usual architectural commissions. As Philip Johnson said, you can't put a door in a geodesic dome.

Furthermore, many architects who concentrated on engineering forms ignored other aspects of the building industry, for example, financing, distribution, existing trades, and conventional materials and methods. These important facets, as the developers have known, are highly subject to the improving effects of technology, including managerial technology, and affect the final form and cost of architecture substantially more than does innovative constructional technology. Architects have contributed little to the crucial building needs of this country—especially in housing—partly because their predilections for advanced technology of the symbolic and visionary kind have impeded their effectiveness within the going systems of construction.

While focusing on their favorite form of technological voodooism over the last 40 years (that is, researching industrialized methods of prefabrication), architects have until recently ignored the mobile home industry. This industry, without the architects' help and using a traditional technology—essentially carpentry, which is then related to innovative methods of distribution—is now producing one-fifth of the annual output of housing in America. Architects should forget about being great technical innovators in housing construction and concentrate on adapting this new and useful technology to more broadly defined needs than it serves today and on developing a vivid mobile home symbolism for mass markets (Fig. 140).

WHICH TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION?

It is significant that the "advanced technology" favored by progressive Modern architecture continues to be even today that of mass production and industrialization, nineteenth-century style. Even Archigram's structural visions are Jules Verne versions of the Industrial Revolution with an appliqué of Pop-aerospace terminology (Fig. 141). However, the American aerospace industry itself, the chosen model of latter-day architectural megastructuralists, is facing its own trauma of extinction owing to oversize and overspecialization. As Peter Barnes in the *New Republic* suggests,¹⁷

"From a purely economic standpoint, the aerospace giants have become more of a burden to the nation than an asset. Despite the myriad promises that science holds in store, America does not now need any great new strides forward in technology, at least in the aerospace field. What it needs is breathing space, a chance to evaluate the impact of current technology and to distribute the fruits of progress more equitably. It needs to think small, not big."

According to Barnes, Boeing's "Operation Breakthrough" housing project required \$7,750 per house unit in site-management costs alone, excluding costs of architectural services or construction.

The relevant revolution today is the current electronic one. Architecturally, the symbol systems that electronics purveys so well are more important than its engineering content. The most urgent technological problem facing us is the humane meshing of advanced scientific and technical systems with our imperfect and exploited human systems, a problem worthy of the best attention of architecture's scientific ideologies and visionaries.

For us the most boring pavilions at Expo '67 were those that corresponded to the progressive structures of nineteenth-century world's fairs celebrated by Sigfried Giedion; while the Czech Pavilion—an architectural and structural nonentity, but tatooed with symbols and moving pictures—was by far the most interesting. It also had the longest lines of spectators; the show, not the building, drew the crowd. The Czech Pavilion was almost a decorated shed.

PREINDUSTRIAL IMAGERY FOR A POSTINDUSTRIAL ERA

A language of preindustrial forms has complemented that of industrial forms in late Modern architecture. Le Corbusier's early sketches of Mediterranean villages probably initiated the preoccupation of Modern

17. Peter Barnes, "Aerospace Dinosaurs," *The New Republic*, March 27, 1971, p. 19.

architects and theorists with vernacular, indigenous, or anonymous architecture. The simple, planar geometry of white Mediterranean forms appealed to the Cubist-Purist aesthetic of the young Le Corbusier, and their bold, rude plasticity was transformed into the *béton brut* of his late work. Then *béton brut* became a style—the style after the post-Miesian reaction against frame and panel architecture, with a vocabulary of forms, not to mention an explicit system of proportions, the Modulor, as precise as those of the Renaissance orders.

Architects who have adapted the forms of La Tourette for heroic symbolic purposes far removed from their original meaning, in using them in precast units, brick and baked enamel, from the industrial parks of New Jersey to the architectural monuments of Tokyo, have also harked back to the Mediterranean handcraft vernacular that inspired La Tourette. Vernacular models are popular where advanced technology is, even for Modern architects, farfetched, that is, for individual houses in the suburbs. The acceptance of primitive vernacular architecture has let in traditional architecture by the back door in the name of “regionalism.” Today even traditional American shed roofs and boards-and-battens are accepted and replace the flat roofs and imitation concrete that architects strove for and clients resisted in suburbia.

What architects now call anonymous architecture comes close to what we are calling Ordinary architecture, but it is not the same because it eschews symbolism and style. While architects have adapted the simple forms of vernacular architecture, they have largely ignored the complex symbolism behind them. They themselves have used the vernacular vocabularies symbolically, to suggest association with the past and simple, deterministic virtue, that is, as early examples of a correspondence between structural methods, social organization, and environmental influences, paralleling at a primitive level the benign processes that shape the industrial vernacular. Yet, ironically, architects—except for Aldo van Eyck in Africa and Gunther Nitschke in Japan—have discounted the symbolic values that invest these forms and dominate, so anthropologists tell us, the artifactual environment of primitive cultures, often contradicting function and structure in their influence on form.

FROM LA TOURETTE TO LEVITTOWN

It is a further irony that Modern architects, who can embrace vernacular architecture remote in place or time, can contemptuously reject the current vernacular of the United States, that is, the merchant builders’ vernacular of Levittown and the commercial vernacular of Route 66. This aversion to the conventional building around us could be an exotic survival of nineteenth-century Romanticism, but we think it is merely that architects are able to discern the symbolism in the forms of their

own vernacular. They are unable to discern, either through ignorance or detachment, the symbolism of Mykonos or the Dogon. They understand the symbolism of Levittown and do not like it, nor are they prepared to suspend judgment on it in order to learn and, by learning, to make subsequent judgment more sensitive (Fig. 142). The content of the symbols, commercial hucksterism and middle-middle-class social aspiration, is so distasteful to many architects that they are unable to investigate openmindedly the basis for the symbolism or to analyze the forms of suburbia for their functional value; indeed they find it difficult to concede that any “liberal” architect could do so.¹⁸

Architects who find middle-middle-class social aspirations distasteful and like uncluttered architectural form see only too well the symbolism in the suburban residential landscape—for instance, in its stylish “bi-levels” in the Regency, Williamsburg, New Orleans, French Provincial, or Prairie-Organic modes, and its ornamented ranches with carriage lanterns, mansards, and antiqued brick. They recognize the symbolism, but they do not accept it. To them the symbolic decoration of the split-level suburban sheds represents the debased, materialistic values of a consumer economy where people are brainwashed by mass marketing and have no choice but to move into the tacky-tacky, with its vulgar violations of the nature of materials and its visual pollution of architectural sensibilities, and surely, therefore, the ecology.

This viewpoint throws out the variety with the vulgarity. In dismissing the architectural value of the Strip, it discounts also its simple and commonsense functional organization, which meets the needs of our sensibilities in an automobile environment of big spaces and fast movement, including the need for explicit and heightened symbolism. Similarly, in suburbia, the eclectic ornament on and around each of the relatively small houses reaches out to you visually across the relatively big lawns and makes an impact that pure architectural articulation could never make, at least in time, before you have passed on to the next house. The lawn sculpture partway between the house and the curving curb acts as a visual booster within this space, linking the symbolic architecture to the moving vehicle. So sculptural jockeys, carriage lamps, wagon wheels, fancy house numbers, fragments of split-rail fences, and mailboxes on erect chains all have a spatial as well as a symbolic role. Their forms identify vast space as do the urns in Le Nôtre’s parterres, the ruined temples in English parks, and the sign in the A&P parking lot (Fig. 143).

But the symbolic meanings of the forms in builder’s vernacular also serve to identify and support the individualism of the owner. The occu-

18. This, perhaps, accounts for the fact that we have been called “Nixonites,” “Reaganites,” or the equivalent, by Roger Montgomery, Ulrich Franzen, Kenneth Frampton, and a whole graduating class of Cooper Union.

pant of an anonymous vernacular tenement on an Italian medieval street could achieve identity through decoration on a front door—or perhaps through the *bella figura* of clothing—within the scale of a spatially limited, foot-going community. The same held for families behind the unified facades of Nash's London terraces. But for the middle-class suburbanite living, not in an antebellum mansion, but in a smaller version lost in a large space, identity must come through symbolic treatment of the form of the house, either through styling provided by the developer (for instance, split-level Colonial) or through a variety of symbolic ornaments applied thereafter by the owner (the Rococo lamp in the picture window or the wagon wheel out front, Fig. 144).

The critics of suburban iconography attribute its infinite combinations of standard ornamental elements to clutter rather than variety. This can be dismissed by suburbia's connoisseurs as the insensitivity of the uninitiate. To call these artifacts of our culture crude is to be mistaken concerning scale. It is like condemning theater sets for being crude at five feet or condemning plaster *putti*, made to be seen high above a Baroque cornice, for lacking the refinements of a Mino da Fiesole bas-relief on a Renaissance tomb. Also, the boldness of the suburban doodads distracts the eye from the telephone poles that even the silent majority does not like.

SILENT-WHITE-MAJORITY ARCHITECTURE

Many people like suburbia. This is the compelling reason for learning from Levittown. The ultimate irony is that although Modern architecture from the start has claimed a strong social basis for its philosophy, Modern architects have worked to keep formal and social concerns separate rather than together. In dismissing Levittown, Modern architects, who have characteristically promoted the role of the social sciences in architecture, reject whole sets of dominant social patterns because they do not like the architectural consequences of these patterns. Conversely, by defining Levittown as "silent-white-majority" architecture, they reject it again because they do not like what they believe to be the silent white majority's political views. These architects reject the very heterogeneity of our society that makes the social sciences relevant to architecture in the first place. As Experts with Ideals, who pay lip service to the social sciences, they build for Man rather than for people—this means, to suit themselves, that is, to suit their own particular upper-middle-class values, which they assign to everyone. Most suburbanites reject the limited formal vocabularies architects' values promote, or accept them 20 years later modified by the tract builder: The Usonian house becomes the ranch house. Only the very poor, via public

housing, are dominated by architects' values. Developers build for markets rather than for Man and probably do less harm than authoritarian architects would do if they had the developers' power.

One does not have to agree with hard-hat politics to support the rights of the middle-middle class to their own architectural aesthetics, and we have found that Levittown-type aesthetics are shared by most members of the middle-middle class, black as well as white, liberal as well as conservative. If analyzing suburbia's architecture implies that one has let the Nixon regime "penetrate even the field of architectural criticism,"¹⁹ then the field of urban planning has been infiltrated by Nixonites for more than 10 years—by Abrams, Gans, Webber, Dyckman, and Davidoff. For our critique is nothing new; the social planners have been making it for more than a decade. But in this Nixon-silent-majority diatribe, especially in its architectural, as opposed to its racial and military, dimensions, there is a fine line between liberalism and old-fashioned class snobbery.

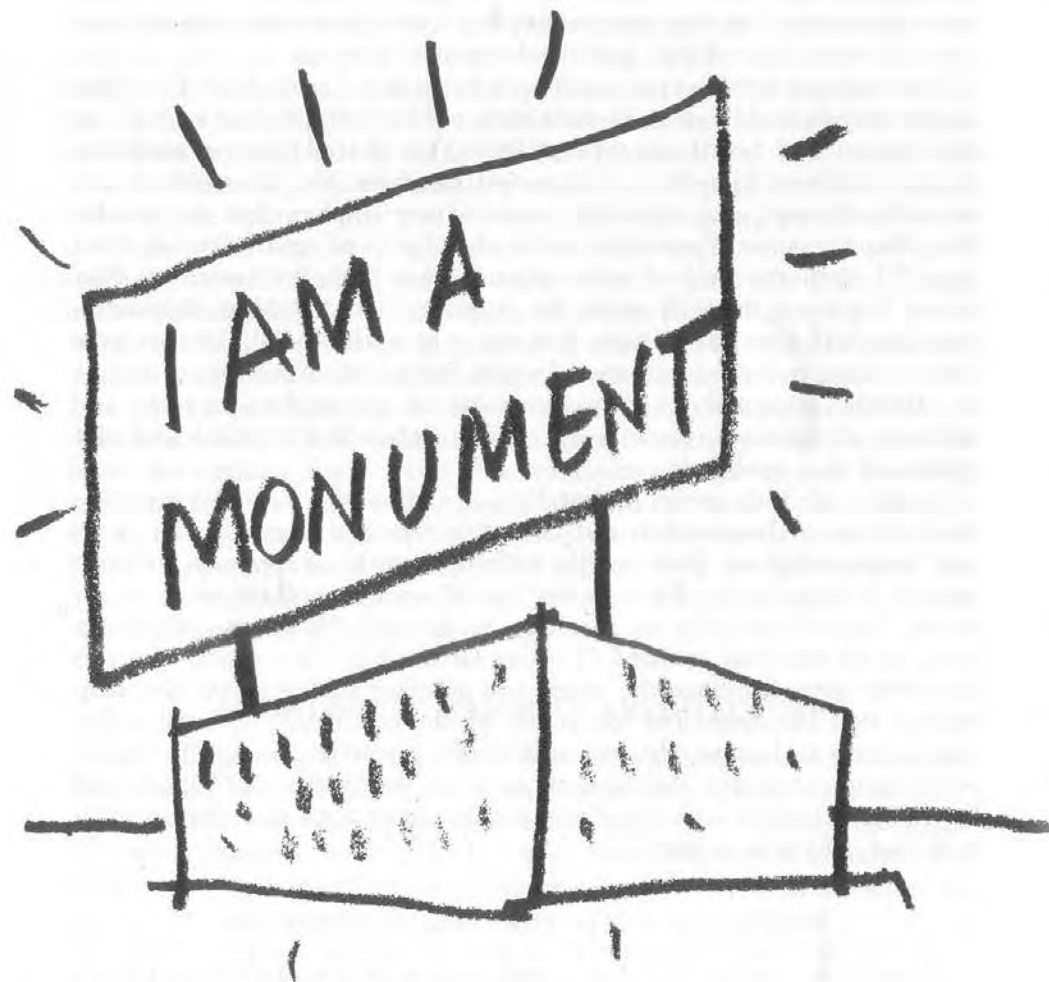
Another obvious point is that "visual pollution" (usually someone else's house or business) is not the same order of phenomenon as air and water pollution. You can like billboards without approving of strip mining in Appalachia. There is no "good" way to pollute land, air, or water. Sprawl and strip we can learn to do well. However, *Life* magazine, in an editorial entitled "Erasing Grown-Up Vandalism," equates suburban sprawl, billboards, wires, and gasoline stations with the strip mining that has despoiled too much of the country.²⁰ "Visual pollution" seems to inspire editorial writers and photographers, who view it with alarm, to poetic descriptions of it in the manner of Milton and Doré. Their style is often in direct conflict with their opprobrium. If it is all bad, why is it so inspiring?

SOCIAL ARCHITECTURE AND SYMBOLISM

We architects who hope for a reallocation of national resources toward social purposes must take care to lay emphasis on the purposes and their promotion rather than on the architecture that shelters them. This reorientation will call for ordinary architecture, not ducks. But when there is little money to spend on architecture, then surely greatest architectural imagination is required. Sources for modest buildings and images with social purpose will come, not from the industrial past, but from the everyday city around us, of modest buildings and modest spaces with symbolic appendages.

19. Ulrich Franzen, *Progressive Architecture*, Letter to the Editor (April 1970), p. 8.

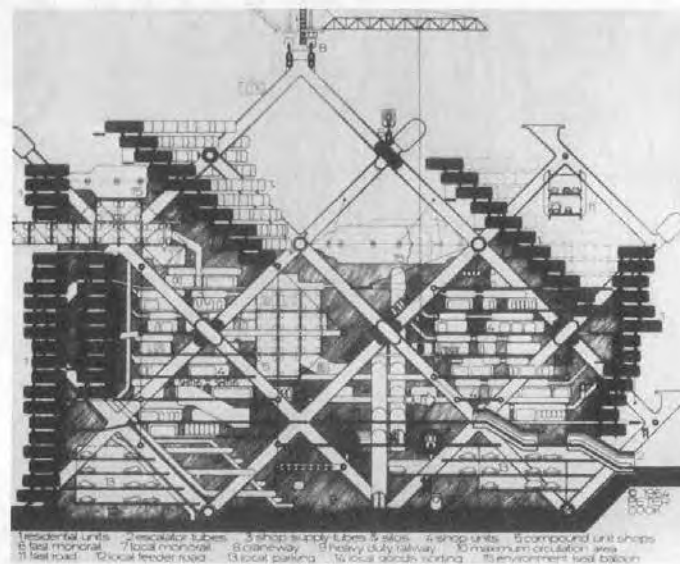
20. *Life* (April 9, 1971), p. 34. Direct quotation was not permitted.



139. Recommendation for a monument



140. Mobile home, California City, California



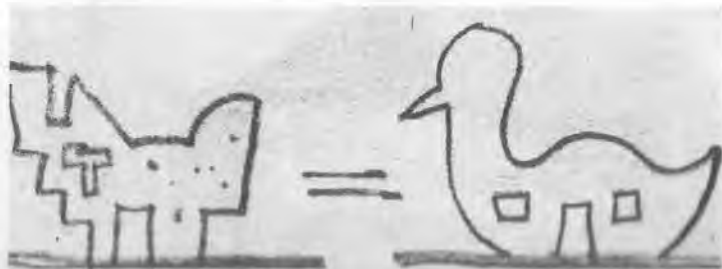
141. "Plug-in City," 1964; Peter Cook



144. Developer's house with applied symbols



145. Flamingo Hotel, Las Vegas



Meeting the architectural implications and the critical social issues of our era will require that we drop our involuted, architectural expressionism and our mistaken claim to be building outside a formal language and find formal languages suited to our times. These languages will incorporate symbolism and rhetorical appliqué. Revolutionary eras are given to didactic symbolism and to the propagandistic use of architecture to promote revolutionary aims. This is as true for the symbolism of today's ghetto rebuilders (African militant or middle-class conservative) as it was for the Romantic Roman republican symbolism of revolutionary France. Boullé was a propagandist and symbolist as well as a formalist. He saw, as we must see, architecture as symbol in space before form in space. To find our symbolism we must go to the suburban edges of the existing city that are symbolically rather than formalistically attractive and represent the aspirations of almost all Americans, including most low-income urban dwellers and most of the silent white majority. Then the archetypal Los Angeles will be our Rome and Las Vegas our Florence; and, like the archetypal grain elevator some generations ago, the Flamingo sign will be the model to shock our sensibilities towards a new architecture (Fig. 145).

HIGH-DESIGN ARCHITECTURE

Finally, learning from popular culture does not remove the architect from his or her status in high culture. But it may alter high culture to make it more sympathetic to current needs and issues. Because high culture and its cultists (last year's variety) are powerful in urban renewal and other establishment circles, we feel that people's architecture as the people want it (and not as some architect decides Man needs it) does not stand much chance against urban renewal until it hangs in the academy and therefore is acceptable to the decision makers. Helping this to happen is a not-reprehensible part of the role of the high-design architect; it provides, together with moral subversion through irony and the use of a joke to get to seriousness, the weapons of artists of nonauthoritarian temperament in social situations that do not agree with them. The architect becomes a jester.

Irony may be the tool with which to confront and combine divergent values in architecture for a pluralist society and to accommodate the differences in values that arise between architects and clients. Social classes rarely come together, but if they can make temporary alliances in the designing and building of multivalued community architecture, a sense of paradox and some irony and wit will be needed on all sides.

Understanding the content of Pop's messages and the way that it is projected does not mean that one need agree with, approve of, or repro-

duce that content. If the commercial persuasions that flash on the strip are materialistic manipulation and vapid subcommunication,²¹ which cleverly appeal to our deeper drives but send them only superficial messages, it does not follow that we architects who learn from their techniques must reproduce the content or the superficiality of their messages. (But we *are* indebted to them for helping us to recognize that Modern architecture too has a content and a vapid one at that.) Just as Lichtenstein has borrowed the techniques and images of the comics to convey satire, sorrow, and irony rather than violent high adventure, so may the architect's high reader suggest sorrow, irony, love, the human condition, happiness, or merely the purpose within, rather than the necessity to buy soap or the possibility of an orgy. On the other hand, the interpretation and evaluation of symbolic content in architecture is an ambiguous process. The didactic symbolism of Chartres may represent to some the subtleties of medieval theology and to others the depths of medieval superstition or manipulation. Manipulation is not the monopoly of crass commercialism. And manipulation works both ways: Commercial interests and the billboard lobby manipulate, but so do cultural lobbies and design review boards, when they use their intimidating prestige to promote antisign legislation and beautification.

SUMMARY

The progressive, technological, vernacular, process-oriented, superficially socially concerned, heroic and original content of Modern architecture has been discussed before by critics and historians. Our point is that this content did not flow inevitably from the solving of functional problems but arose from Modern architects' unexplicated iconographic preferences and was manifest through a language—several languages—of form, and that formal languages and associational systems are inevitable and good, becoming tyrannies only when we are unconscious of them. Our other point is that the content of the unacknowledged symbolism of current Modern architecture is silly. We have been designing dead ducks.

We do not know if the time will come for serious architectural oceanographic urbanism, for example, as opposed to the present offshore posturing of the world futurist architectural visionaries. We suspect that one day it may, though hardly in the forms now envisioned. As practicing architects in the here and now, we do not have much interest in such predictions. We do know, however, that the chief resources of our society go into things with little architectural potential: war, electronic communication, outer space, and, to a much lesser extent, social serv-

ices. As we have said, this is not the time and ours is not the environment for heroic communication via pure architecture.

When Modern architects righteously abandoned ornament on buildings, they unconsciously designed buildings that *were* ornament. In promoting Space and Articulation over symbolism and ornament, they distorted the whole building into a duck. They substituted for the innocent and inexpensive practice of applied decoration on a conventional shed the rather cynical and expensive distortion of program and structure to promote a duck; minimegastructures are mostly ducks (Fig. 146). It is now time to reevaluate the once-horrifying statement of John Ruskin that architecture is the decoration of construction, but we should append the warning of Pugin: It is all right to decorate construction but never construct decoration.

21. Thomas Maldonado, *La speranza progettuale, ambiente e società*, Chapter 15, Nuovo Politecnico 35 (Turin: Einaudi, 1970).