

Get the Job: Architect Bags Ultimate Client

by [John Henry](#) (July 2020)



The Architect's Dream, Thomas Cole, 1840

One of the quotes I remember jokingly thrown out during my architecture regimen at Texas A&M was that the first rule of business in the field was to 'get the job'. If an architect does not receive a commission, he/she has no work and is of no value. In thinking about this several years later and trying to compare it to other industries, the closest I could come to was a director with earnest capabilities and vision, but had no producers with whom to finance a film. Recessions are not

good for architects or anyone else, and this short tale is about how a young graduate finally found his ultimate patron during a difficult time.

Al had just graduated from a technical institute of architecture and was eager, altruistic, and hopeful that he could embark upon his career immediately. The country was in a depression however, so he lost himself in sports and romance. He loved hiking and boating. His father was a developer but was also having trouble with his business. No one was hiring at the time.

Fortunately, a friend contacted Al to remodel an older structure into a clubhouse. The work was done quickly and under budget. As the club grew, another remodeling was in order and Al eagerly duplicated his efforts and won Karl's admiration insisting that the club's president was interested in meeting him for some larger projects!

One of the issues I knew I was going to confront in the profession I was studying was whether I could design buildings whose purpose contradicted my faith. I was overly sensitive to that and feared in dread that I would have to one day agree to design a wine or beer factory or some other works dealing with a forbidden vice. I never had to deal with that issue to this day



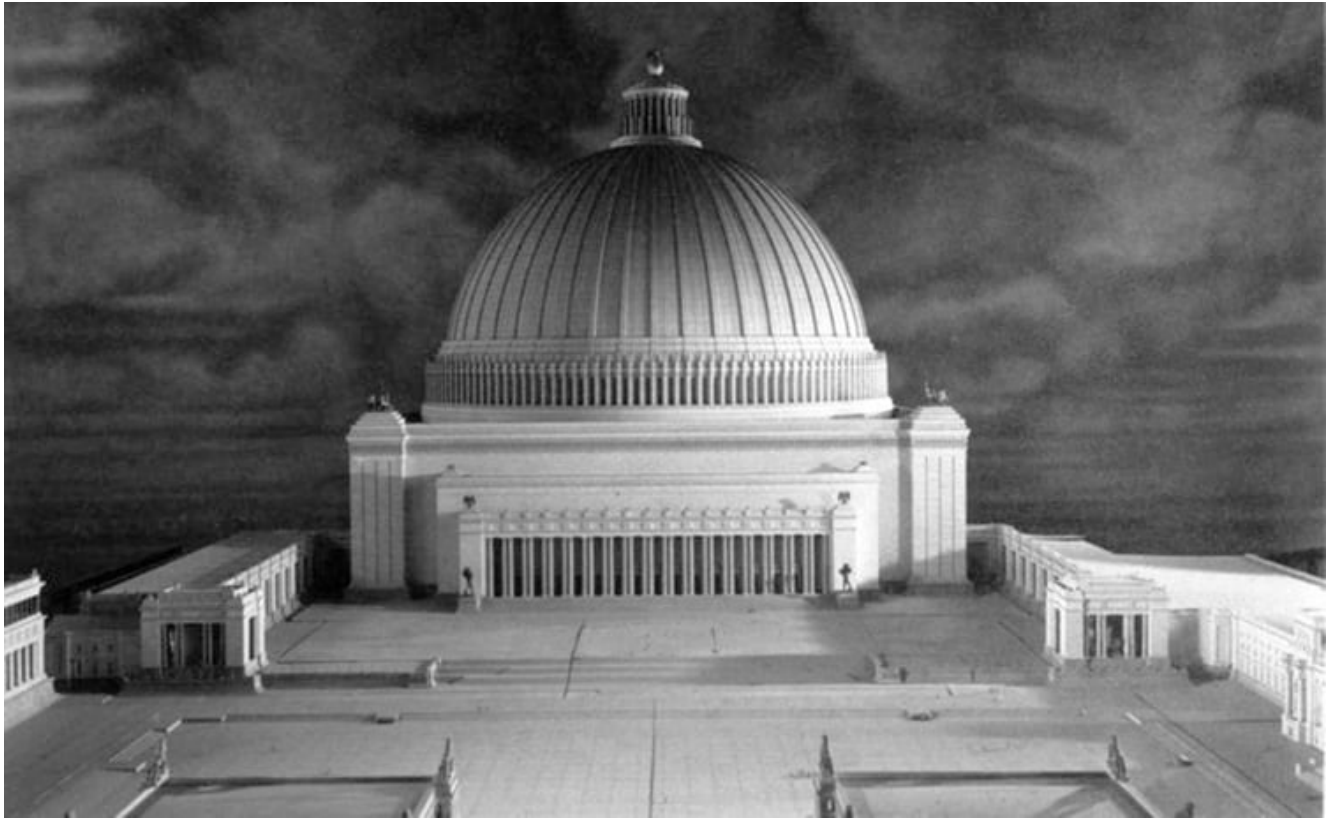
but wonder even now if the politically correct environment we have at this time might result in a lawsuit if I did not agree to design something I found abhorrent.

Al was told to meet the club president in the capitol city, and was naturally anxious about this first encounter, which went well but was somewhat foreboding. He agreed

understood precisely the effect required and using the centerpiece of a stadium (he first designed and partially built) as a backdrop, he concocted a spectacle that impressed thousands. He took these drawings and some others to his professor, whom he also assisted a few years earlier. Prof. Tessenow told Albert frankly that his work was inferior and that he obviously had not learned much under his tutelage.

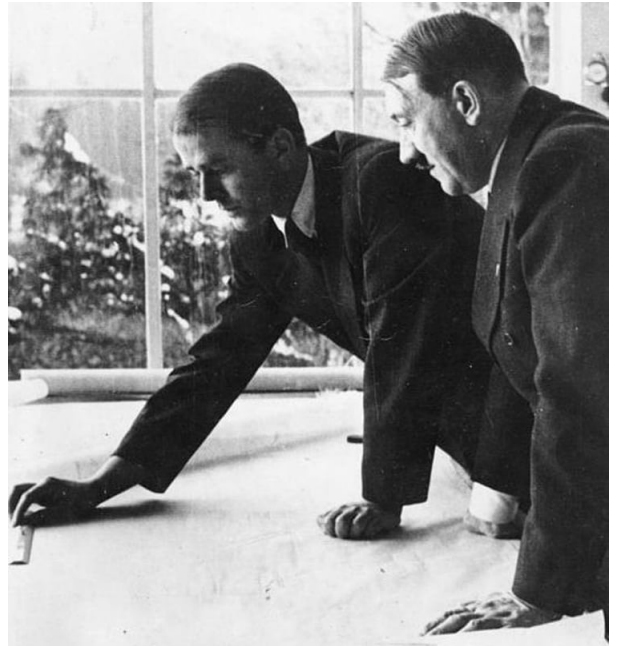


Albert had used Greek and Roman imagery to glorify his patron's ideals but amplified them to such a degree that they seemed out of scale and quite cinematic. The negative feedback from his esteemed professor hurt Albert's pride, but he went on to design many more wondrous buildings for his patron. Albert and his client Adolph would go on walking side by side comparing the volumes and heights of ancient pyramids to the new Peoples Hall in Berlin.



One night, alone in the rec room of my dorm whilst at Lamar Tech, I had the TV to myself and found PBS replaying documentary footage of Hitler's speeches, the history of the war, cities in ruins, etc. I was dumbfounded and transfixed. I had never seen anything like this before. I was sequestered through high school in a U.S. forces dependent school system overseas. We had read about the wars in Europe, but these film clips brought the grim reality to life: they were mesmerizing to me. They animated something that seemed grotesque, stunning, horrible, and almost burlesque at the same time.

About 10 years after I graduated from TAMU, I was watching television again and PBS had on a two-hour drama. I had missed the first half hour and had no idea what the movie was about. I was watching this young blonde-haired man on a placid lake with his fiancée. He was laughing and they were enjoying themselves. Soon he was working at a drafting table and I guessed he must have been an architect or engineer. I do not remember the dialogue, just the imagery.



The most memorable part of the production was Albert finding himself in a huge impressive building being led to stately somber room at the end of a long corridor. In the room a single light shone on a table. A man in shadows was sitting behind it. There was a gun on the table in front of him. It was a chilling moment, one that I have never forgotten.

Although I missed the second part of the movie I found later that it was based on a book Albert Speer wrote in Spandau prison entitled: "Inside the Third Reich".

A few more years passed and one day, as was my habit browsing bookstores for any travel or technical book on architecture I could find, I saw a small paperback on another shelf. That was Speer's book I thought! I looked guiltily around and put it in with my other finds and checked out at the cashier. I did not open it right away but when I started reading, I went into some kind of mental warp, a fantasy land starting with a young man out of college, like me, who desperately needed to start his career. It was totally engrossing.

I had a red pen and marked passage after passage of

import, not only the architecturally significant points, but slowly realizing what this was all about: an apology that Speer was mounting for the German people who he claimed were either ignorant, kept ignorant, or who were forced somehow to accept his patron's heinous activities against their will. Both points to me now were vitally important. But I was finding myself more interested in the morality and ethics of the Nazi regime. While anti-Jewish sentiment was sparse in Speer's recounting of events, I realized that this was being downplayed for a purpose.

I continued to watch with a sort of childlike fascination and horror the black and white filmstrips on television, catching a glimpse of Speer now and then, the jig that Hitler danced, the rehearsed feverish speeches, the adulating crowds, the concentration camps, the death and destruction.



Here was a well-educated elite, so to speak (even his family did not like the choice of Speer's spouse, a lowly cabinet maker's daughter) who quickly found himself more interested in his own advancement and prestige over any mounting ethical irregularities in his patron's actions. Speer claims he was not interested in the party politics, and indeed he was forced after some time—sheepishly he says—to display the black and white on red armband and other Nazi regalia.

In the end I realized he traded his soul for ambition and power.

He would come into a meeting of generals with blueprints under his arm and Hitler, intrigued, would stand up immediately and join Speer down a tunnel into an enormous room where a scale model of the new Berlin was being meticulously crafted to exacting scale. They would spend hours there pouring over new plans while the generals in the war room fumed. In Speer, Hitler found a confidant, a true artistic soulmate. Speer was the man Hitler had wanted to be.

Speer had great moments of glory with his patron and was quickly promoted over all building works in Germany and finally to a position for which he had no previous qualification: head of Munitions. He was truly Hitler's right-hand man. Everyone around Hitler was jealous of Speer. Historians claim that under Speer's cool efficiency and using slave labor from conquered lands, he extended the war for two years by repetitively harnessing 'resources' and rebuilding bombed factories enabling the quick-starting of production of war materiel. Speer wanted to be instrumental in the creation and construction of the Thousand Year Reich. His name was on everything.



Previous to absorbing Speer's account, my hero was Frank Lloyd Wright. Here was a man with a big head who claimed he was the best architect the world had ever seen. His autobiography is almost as impossible to believe as Speer's account. Both were quite persuasive. But Wright gave me something quite necessary: an honest confidence. Speer was a true ghoul who adopted any means to achieve an objective. Wright was an architect who flouted convention, had a silver tongue and charm, and did what he pleased – what he thought was right and most suitable for a changing world. At Texas A&M we were ordered to watch Ayn Rand's 'The Fountainhead' on film. It was a sort of brainwashing. Almost a propaganda piece. The protagonist, Roark, was cast as a Modernist who demanded that his ideas were not to be appropriated by the masses. Individuality was sacrosanct. Architecture was a right, a force.

And that takes us back to Speer and Nazi propaganda. He was the only one who accepted any blame for German atrocities and thus was sentenced to 20 years in prison, where he secretly and illegally wrote his first tome and smuggled it

out to a publisher. Here was propaganda on a level of evil that Wright would never have approached although I must wonder. FLW had socialist leanings. What if . . . ?



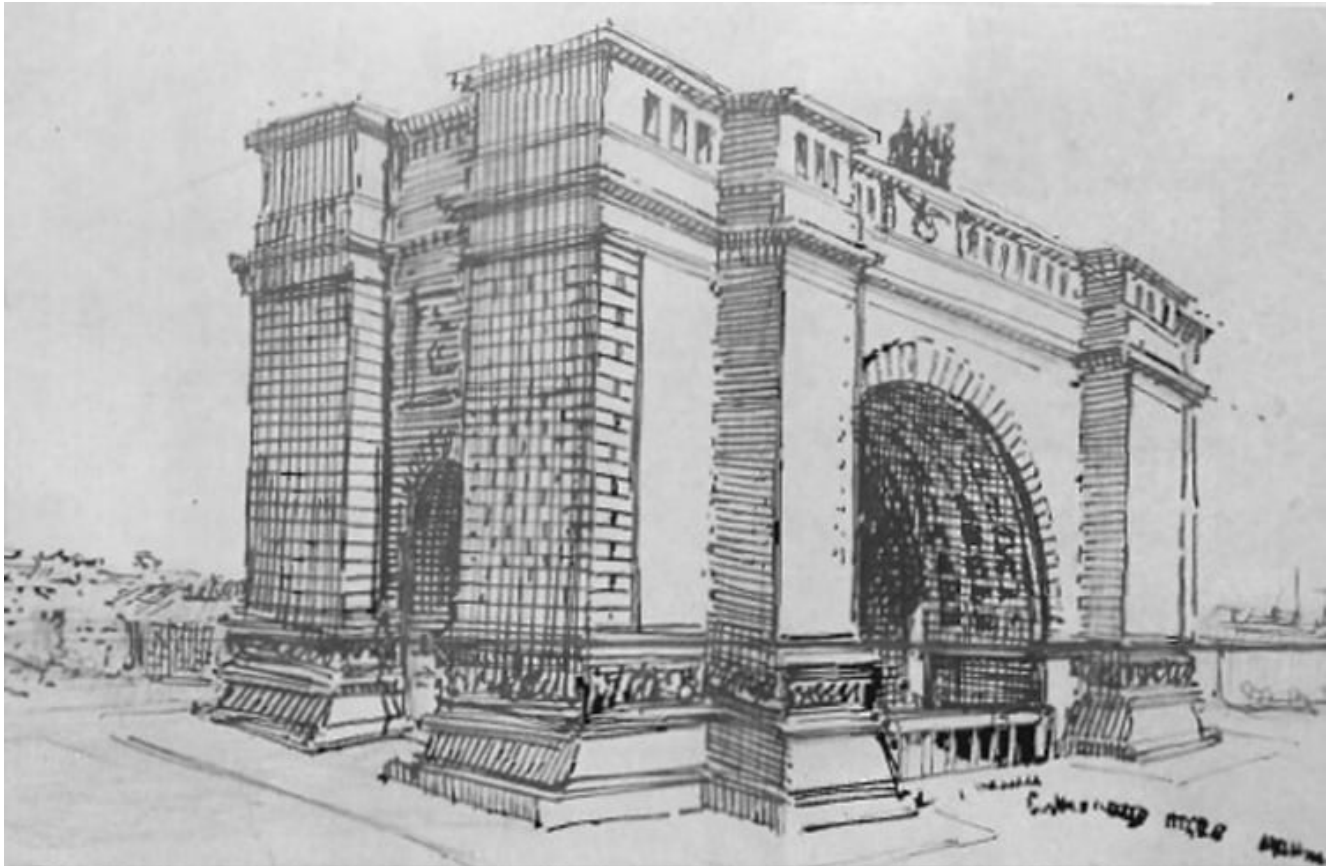
The romantic notion that Speer was spinning was that he started out as a young lad following his muse. I could relate to that, and apparently many others as well. He was innocent; he just wanted to practice what he had just heard preached. And this is how Speer seduces the reader to cling to his narrative. He craftily presents an artistic innocence and absolution from political motives. (this is typically attributed to art: an apolitical journey) It is superb propaganda. He learned well from Goebbels. He claims he really did not care much about politics. I believe that was truly the case for Speer at the beginning. But when he tasted power, his moral sensibility was seared as soon as he smelled foul judgment and action at the top. He lost his moral compass. This was the case with everyone that touched the Nazi myth. Some historians claim that inept and less than qualified

Germans filled the important Nazi positions. There is some truth to that, but the educated elite were the engineers, doctors, scientists, planners, social psychologists, lawyers, manufacturers and businessmen. They ran the show. They were entirely responsible. All of them. They absolutely knew better.

Zeiss, Bayer, Porsche, Bosch, and Siemens among many other now respectable outfits, were aiding and abetting a genocidal group. They were tired of war reparations at the end of the first world war and were in an economic depression. Their profits were low or nil. They all wanted their factories humming again. The medical groups and other professionals needed to get their businesses back on track and quickly. They did not wish to suffer years of possible stagnation with no end in sight. People were hungry, desperate and without hope. Hitler was their answer. And the German people saw a savior.

How does this compare to the recent 'opening' of our country during a terrible pandemic? Is there a moral issue here that has not been fully argued? Is there a parallel to 1934 Germany in some respects? We see the government taking civil liberty in exchange for medical security. But 35 million people are on the streets, unemployed. Is the 'cure' worse than the disease? How much is being truly sacrificed in lives lost to a virus without a vaccine just to get the economy going again? But aren't there other costs, possibly worse, that come with massive unemployment and a potential crisis with a civil war brewing? Are Disney and Delta a bit too eager to open their 'gates'? Is individual security and corporate profit worth a few more weeks or months of an inert economy?

If you allow, I must say a few words more about Hitler's obsession. When an architect finds a client who genuinely loves art and buildings, the work is fluent and the feedback immediate. You like the same cities, the same designs, the same details. You become one with your client.



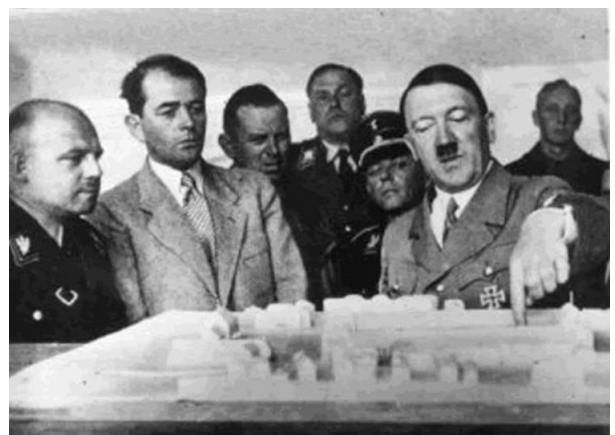
Hitler's sketch of a triumphal arch (enormous domed hall in the background), 1925 (SPEER ARCHIV)

I was somewhat avenged in a perverse manner when I saw for the first time Hitler's architectural sketches. I was floored. I could not believe that he had such a good eye! We had to understand perspective and produce accurate depictions of space in our university studies. Hitler's drawings were accurate and much more detailed than those of one of our flouted Modern 'heroes': Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, more commonly remembered as Le Corbusier. Corbu's sketches were wildly loose and disjointed to my eye. Hitler's were well drawn, even three dimensional and properly shaded to indicate depth. He even indicated correct perspective. So many modern and postmodern, Decon loving architects I have seen over the last 40 years could not draw very well at all. The computer was used as a crutch. But in Hitler one could sense a latent talent.



Then I read in other accounts that Hitler roamed the streets of Vienna after WW1 and sold watercolors to passersby. He loved beautiful buildings, he admired traditional architecture. He marveled at the city and how it presented itself proudly with monuments as medals.

I started buying more books about Speer and Hitler. Hitler and the occult, the propaganda machine concocted with Goebbels, the war economy backed by industrialists and some U.S. financiers, etc.



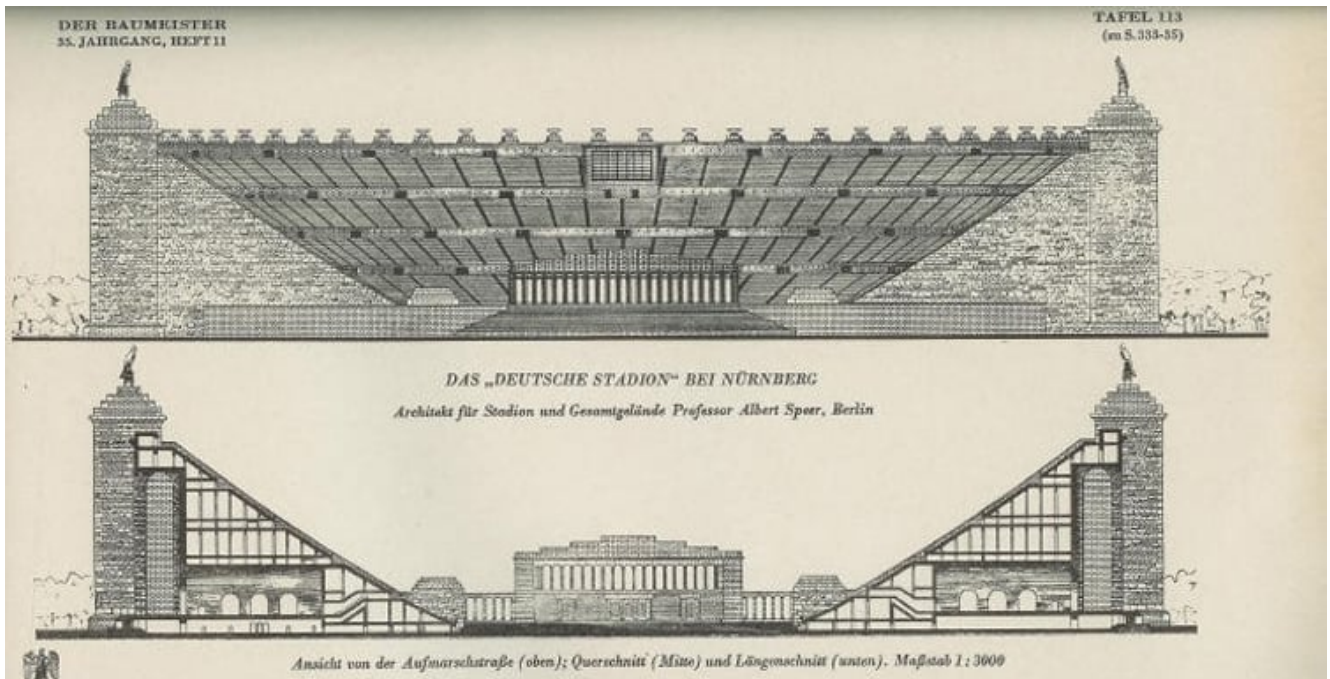
I finally succumbed to acquire the forbidden book: "Mein Kampf". I could only read the first few pages. The rest was vile. In the second chapter titled "Years of Study and Suffering in Vienna", Hitler opined how he desperately wanted to be accepted as a student of fine art in the University. When they rejected his application, he applied again as a

student of Architecture. He was once more turned down. This experience grated on his nerves and he obviously felt some form of discrimination. I have seen some of the watercolors that he must have submitted. They are not works of art, but well crafted.

Some historians claim that we may have never had a second world war if young Adolf had simply matriculated into a profession in which he could bring his dreams to life.

That notion is an amazing tragic irony of immense proportion, if by simply fulfilling the simple imagination of a single student of art we could have averted millions dying and the carnage of war.

And finally—about the architectural style of the Third Reich. (Until only in recent years could one broach a review about any Nazi ‘artistic accomplishments.’) Hitler preferred classicism. It was an obvious symbol of power that he could use for godlike worship. In Vienna he painted buildings inspired by the Greeks and Romans—churches, theaters, splendid government complexes. Hitler desperately wanted to be an architect and part of his quest for land was to take the spoils and use granite, marble, iron and other essential materials to build his overarching vision: the capital of Germania. His enabler was Speer. Speer saw absolutely no problem responding to this moral or artistic approach and essentially discarded his early Modernist teachings to please his client. He ‘sold out,’ which is why his professor was dismayed.



We were taught in the university to respect only one mode or approach to architecture and to reject vehemently the practice of any ancient and out of date method of construction or conception. Anything that was unnecessary was to be rejected. No carved leaf, no hand worked metal, no decorative stone columns, no pediments, no domes, no statues or monuments with properly cast human form. Even symmetry was artificial. Modern art theory parallels much of this nonsense.

Hitler reject modern art (those artists and modernist architects escaped quickly) and instead promoted a superhuman representation and ethos. This associated type of painting, graphics and sculpture was copied to a degree by the Stalin communist regime and is still popular today. Hitler's architecture was necessarily also superhuman in scale. Using classical details, Speer concocted what is now termed 'fascist' designs for the Reich's government buildings. There were seemingly endless colonnades of giant columns, a giant dome, a giant concourse, everything was intended to be viewed as superhuman, which dovetailed into the Aryan myth very well.



Now the Trump administration has indicated a preference for new government buildings and future remodeling in familiar classical styles adopted early in the Republic. The left, (meaning all proponents of the current Modernist idioms—see my reasoning [here](#)) of course has quickly denounced this potential edict and want to compare this action to Hitler's totalitarianism. Hitler despised Modern art and architecture. He termed it "degenerate."



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