Modern Architecture's Disastrous Legacy

by [James Stevens Curl](#) (January 2019)

Hulme Crescents, Manchester, England, at one time, the largest housing estate in Europe. Constructed in 1972 but, plagued by construction problems, mold and vermin, demolished in 1993. (Image courtesy of *Manchester Evening News*)

> *And religion … [enjoins and sanctions] … the great aim of culture, [that] of setting ourselves to ascertain what perfection is and to make it prevail …* —Matthew Arnold (1822-88) [1]
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> *In many of the great works in architecture there is a sublimity of thought, a fertility of invention, and a boldness of design, which exalted minds alone could produce*

> *… The student … should not only reflect on what he has read in his study but he must, from actual mensurations taken by himself, make finished sketches of such structures as are most valuable; he must closely meditate upon the original purposes for which they were raised; he must consider how far situation and materials influenced the architects of these structures. The mouldings, the ornaments, the most minute details, must not escape his observation …* —Sir John Soane (1753-1837)[2]

Introduction

Sir John Soane (1753-1837), the great English architect, in his lectures at the Royal Academy in London, declared that architecture 'in particular, and the arts and sciences in general, for their great use and ornament in civilized society have in all ages been cultivated and cherished,'[3] not least for their 'beneficial' influences. Indeed Soane, steeped in the 'ideals of the *Encyclopédistes* and the French Enlightenment,'[4] also studied the 'sensationalist[5] and associational philosophy[6] of the Picturesque movement in Britain.'[7] His colossal library reflected his concerns with 'civic virtue and with the search for origins, whether those of language' (in Étienne Bonnot de Condillac [1714-80]); 'of

society' (in Jean-Jacques Rousseau [1712-78]); 'of architecture' (in Marc-Antoine Laugier [1713-69] and Antoine-Chrysostôme Quatremère de Quincy [1755-1849]); 'of religious or sexual symbolism' (in Baron d'Hancarville [1719-1805] and Richard Payne Knight [1751-1824]); 'of primitive customs, laws, and religions' (in Antoine-Yves Goguet [1716-58] and Joseph-François Lafiteau [1681-1746]); 'of music' (in Jean-Philippe Rameau [1683-1764]); and 'of plant forms' (in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe [1749-1832]).[8] He castigated persons who claimed to be architects, but were ignorant of such matters, following the 'fashion of the day,' the 'shadow and not the substance.'[9] Regrettably, fashion, shadows, and 'empty gestures'[10] seem to be followed at present by many connected with architecture, to judge from the fatuous contents of journals and the nauseating hagiographies of 'star' architects.[11] These unsavory matters are all investigated in my recent book, *Making Dystopia: The Strange Rise and Survival of Architectural Barbarism.*[12]

Architecture, art, history, literature, music, philosophy, poetry, science, religion, embedded in the culture of the West, were once valued as essential to the enrichment, even the life, of the spirit and mind. Culture, which might be regarded as the intellectual part, even the essence, of a true civilization, permeating it through and through, used to inform university education: it was a kind of consciousness that continuously revived and acted as a catalyst to thought and understanding. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, not only is free speech threatened, but any airing of
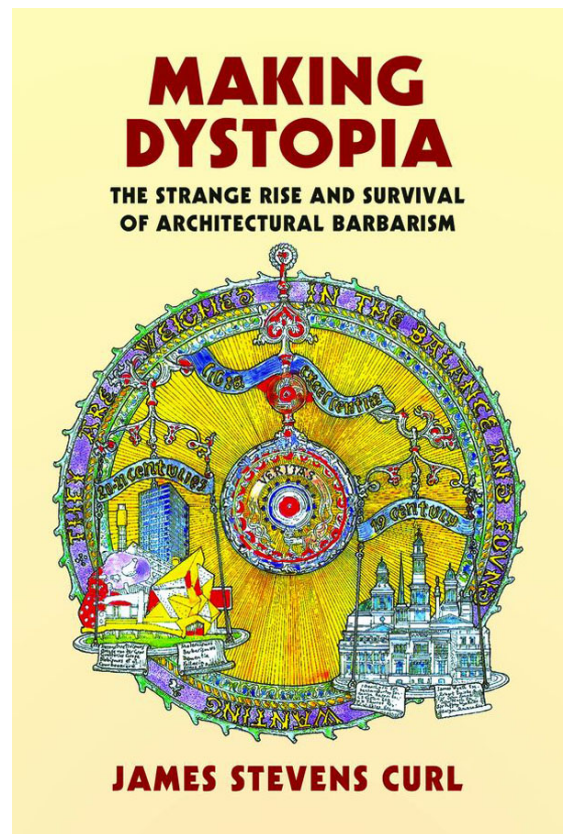
views which might be worthy of rational debate is increasingly prohibited,[13] and even 'culture' has become an offensive term. The very word has been largely discarded: Lionel Brett (1913-2004—4th Viscount Esher from 1963), memorably remarked that when politicians and civil servants hear the word 'culture', they 'feel for their blue pencils,'[14] a statement reminiscent of the rather more violent reaction recorded in Hanns Johst's (1890-1978) play, *Schlageter*, involving the release of the safety-catch of a Browning.[15] In addition, a further threat to culture may be detected in the so-called 'no-platforming' now apparently endemic in places supposedly connected with Higher Education. This not only stifles dissent, it curtails thought, abolishes honest debate, and destroys academic freedom.[16]

An essential element of education is to learn how to dispute and test ideas and differing points of view and, to do that, those views and ideas have to be heard and argued. No longer, it seems, are we permitted to debate, to think, to express ideas or, as Horace (65-8BC) put it, *atque inter silvas Academi quaerere verum*.[17]

In the groves of the academy of the near future, as Edmund Burke (1729/30-97) observed of similar mentalities, eventually nothing will be seen at the end of every vista but the gallows[18] or, very likely, something far, far worse. 'Those who attempt to level never equalize,'[19] Burke reminded us in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790):

> *'under a false shew of liberty, but, in truth,' aiming 'to exercise an unnatural inverted domination, tyrannically to exact … an abject submission to their occasional will, extinguishing thereby … all moral principle, all sense of dignity, all use of judgment, and all consistency of character,'*[20] *their 'tongue betrays them. Their language is in the patois of fraud … in the cant and gibberish of hypocrisy.'*[21] *Burke asked 'what sort of a thing must be a nation of gross … ferocious, … poor and sordid barbarians,*

destitute of religion, honour … ? Already there appears a poverty of conception, a coarseness and vulgarity in all the proceedings … Their liberty is not liberal. Their science is presumptuous ignorance. Their humanity is savage and brutal.'[22]

Burke's powerfully expressed views still merit attention. He might well have been describing disciples of Modernism who did so much to destroy, and then *imposed*, by bullying and violent assertion, their preferences, prejudices, and illogical certainties on humanity:[23] His remarks could also be applied to those who support banning anyone with 'offensive' views from giving utterance to them.[24] Some demand the 'right' to close their minds against new ideas or anything else that 'threatens' them, including high culture.[25] Illiberalism is no way to protect liberalism or liberty.[26] Furthermore, research on support for restrictions on free speech[27] carried out by the Higher Education Policy Institute and published with the title *Keeping Schtum? What students think of free speech*, makes depressing reading.[28]

High & Mass Culture

Perception of 'culture' as suspect is widespread, not least because it represents, as Sir John Soane realized, a vast inherited legacy of wisdom and beauty.[29] So-called 'popular' or 'mass culture' (which can be 'absorbed' without intellectual effort and does not require knowledge of the past),[30] is a mechanism of distraction providing easily accessed entertainment.[31] Some commentators have suggested that 'mass' or 'popular culture' might be a system of crowd-control,[32] consisting largely of deliberately manufactured illusions to hide truths. In this respect, the superbly choreographed (that is, *designed*) mass displays of regimented crowds, marching uniformed thousands, standards and flags, searchlights, and responses to shouted assertions in National Socialist rallies at Nuremberg, or similar events in other totalitarian societies, can also be regarded as manufactured

illusions, manipulated certainly, but creating impressions that they represent the common will.

There was an *architectural* input to those rallies too, not least in the buildings conceived as settings for them, but the movements of the masses of people were also *designed*: the manipulation of huge numbers of people through declamation, assertions that sound as though they are based in fact, and the need of human beings to *belong* to and be part of some sort of movement, has uncomfortable parallels with the ways in which Modernism was disseminated.

If such techniques of mass culture could be used to put over simplistic notions, to whip up emotions (including hatred), to obtain approbation and confirmation of consolidation of power, to gain a perceived legitimacy, they could also be employed to advertise and sell mostly useless commercial products. High culture, true culture, on the other hand, which requires time, patience, intellectual effort, and a degree of receptive sensibility to acquire, is perceived as 'threatening', and it is easy for the demagogue to use his mastery over the crowd to have it shouted down.

It would seem that the 'momentum of ignorance, rashness, presumption'[33] gathers speed: the age of the Enlightenment has long passed: that 'of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators'[34] has succeeded.

No true culture (within which must be included real architecture, as it was perceived by Soane,[35] Vitruvius (*c.*80/70-after 15BC),[36] Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639),[37] Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723),[38] and many others), it would appear, can develop except in relation to a knowledge of religion,[39] something that, if mediaeval Europe's achievements are considered, for example, would seem to be beyond question (although 'mediaeval' is another word that is increasingly used as a term of abuse).[40] A 'community of culture,' as T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) called it,[41] had nothing

to do with secularism, ascetic retreatism, or cosmopolitanism (which sounds very much like the International Style in architecture), and held within it a realization that culture is that which actually makes life worth living.[42]

Popular 'culture', however, largely depends on *spectacle*, often veering toward the violent and pornographic:[43] Even that *soixante-huitard* guru, Guy Debord (1931-94), produced a critique of the 'Society of the Spectacle,'[44] while Gilles Lipovetsky (1944-) and Jean Serroy (1946-) have demonstrated that the products churned out in modern consumerist societies have little to do with use, but are all about appearance, image, and sensation, advertised just long enough to attract purchasers in droves[45] until superseded by different illusions.[46] Indeed, Lipovetsky and Serroy have written of a 'disorientated society' and of a global non-culture dealing in representation, brand-names rather than objects, and seductive imagery concerned only with commercial gain.[47] And architecture, from which any understanding of history (an understanding of which Soane deemed essential for any architect of worth)[48] and the importance of religion *in* history[49] has been abstracted, is hugely diminished by the phenomena of image, sensationalism, and the seeking after anything that could be described by that over-used and foolish word, 'iconic'.

It is interesting that many of the recent, deeply thought, and sensitive warnings about the destruction and corruption of values in society have come from Latin America, where some elements of an old culture or cultures still precariously survive, despite attempts to swamp them with consumerist bling. The Peruvian writer, Mario Vargas Llosa (1936-), amplified the work of Eliot as set out in the latter's *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*, originally published in a post-war world not then defined (or perhaps corrupted and diseased) by television or the internet.[50] Vargas Llosa[51] held that 'high culture' involves *judgements* that should equip

humankind, confident and sure of where it stands, to discard what are merely fashionable 'popular' (but actually *imposed* on the public) ephemera in favor of those values that inform great art, and regretted that relativism, levelling, and the *spectacle* have replaced analytical thought.

High culture is not just an 'epiphenomenon of social and domestic life, but an autonomous' *reality* in which 'ideas, aesthetic values, and works of art and literature' connect with the 'rest of social existence', and are not just 'reflections', but the very *sources* of economic, political, religious, and social phenomena.[52] The problem, as Vargas Llosa recognised, is that judgements themselves have become unacceptable: exhortations *not* to be 'judgmental' have become commonplace, presumably because they involve *discrimination*, and that is not allowed either. Humankind is becoming conditioned to accept without question what is advertised: the widespread acceptance of 'iconic' buildings by 'star' architects, promoted in glossy pufferies, is a prime example of this tendency.

Deliberate wrecking of the interaction between high culture and the rest of social existence is an almighty disaster that degrades the spirit and perhaps even humanity's capacity to understand itself. Without the ability to comprehend basic truths about morality and beauty, among the many aspects of life that have been corrupted or ignored (or both) by Modernism, working hand-in-glove with commerce and big business, humans are truly lost, adrift in a sea polluted with the flotsam and jetsam of discarded toys promoted by fashion, with nothing to which they can hold fast. High culture has been suppressed, even superseded, by advertising and the mass-media: cultural, intellectual, and political realities have been displaced, corrupted, pushed contemptuously aside. The vulgar spectacle of Pornotopia[53] dictates illusions of reality; and only the moment counts, the NOW, for what is past is consigned to oblivion, and the future is too frightening to

be given a thought.

Vargas Llosa called as witness to his profoundly argued case Octavio Paz Lozano (1914-98), the Mexican writer, with whom he shared a gloomily perceptive view of a dying culture, one with which I completely concur, though it gives me no pleasure so to do. Paz Lozano was suspicious, as well we might all be, with full justification, of 'The Spectacle', by which he appears to have meant something akin to the mass-witness of pre-Columbian human sacrifice transmuted into public executions and later widespread use of media such as film, television, and the internet to watch extreme violence and killings. 'The Spectacle', therefore, is something intrinsically cruel, for 'spectators' who enjoy it have no memory, lack any semblance of an active conscience, and are incapable of feeling anything like regret or remorse. A society of *voyeurs*, which is clearly what has evolved in the West, lives for *novelty* of *any* sort, provided it is *new* (a little, weaselly word, but one that is constantly employed in persuasive advertisements, for newness, unsullied by the past, or supposedly so, is a great selling-point): it views exponentially more violent, bloody scenes of death and destruction as 'entertainment'.

If the society of 'The Spectacle' moves further and further towards lurid, sadistic, distorted ugliness, even murder, eventually, fully sated, it will be left with nothing but the boredom of a grotesque surfeit of idolatry: and idolatry, as we learn from a study of religion, is the Great Sin through which even the deities are finally lost to humankind,[54] but to judge from the current state of the West, the *Lares* and *Penates* were sent packing long ago, and our families, homes, and streets are watched over by them no more. No Insurance Company, celestial or terrestrial, would accept the risk instead.

Robert Musil (1880-1942), indeed, suggested that if the human race could dream collectively, it would dream the murderer,

Moosbrugger, who occupies a significant place in his gigantic novel, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (The Man without Qualities). Musil foresaw that what confronts society is what is good, true, and beautiful in reverse, or inverted. The absence of standards by which hideous crimes can be judged underscores that, increasingly, there are no measurements for crime on any scale, and so the evil, the false, and the hideous, universally imposed, become inevitable.[55] Humankind has been detached from the cultural and religious roots of its history,[56] quite deliberately, as those roots are not commercial, to be sold in the market-place: their value is incalculable, and therefore of no value to a society that, arguably, has lost its way. It may well be that the destruction of aesthetic, compassionate, educational, empathetic, ethical, and religious standards, parts of the agenda established in the manifestoes of Modernism, has played no small part in the making of Dystopia by brainwashed architects and their devious apologists.
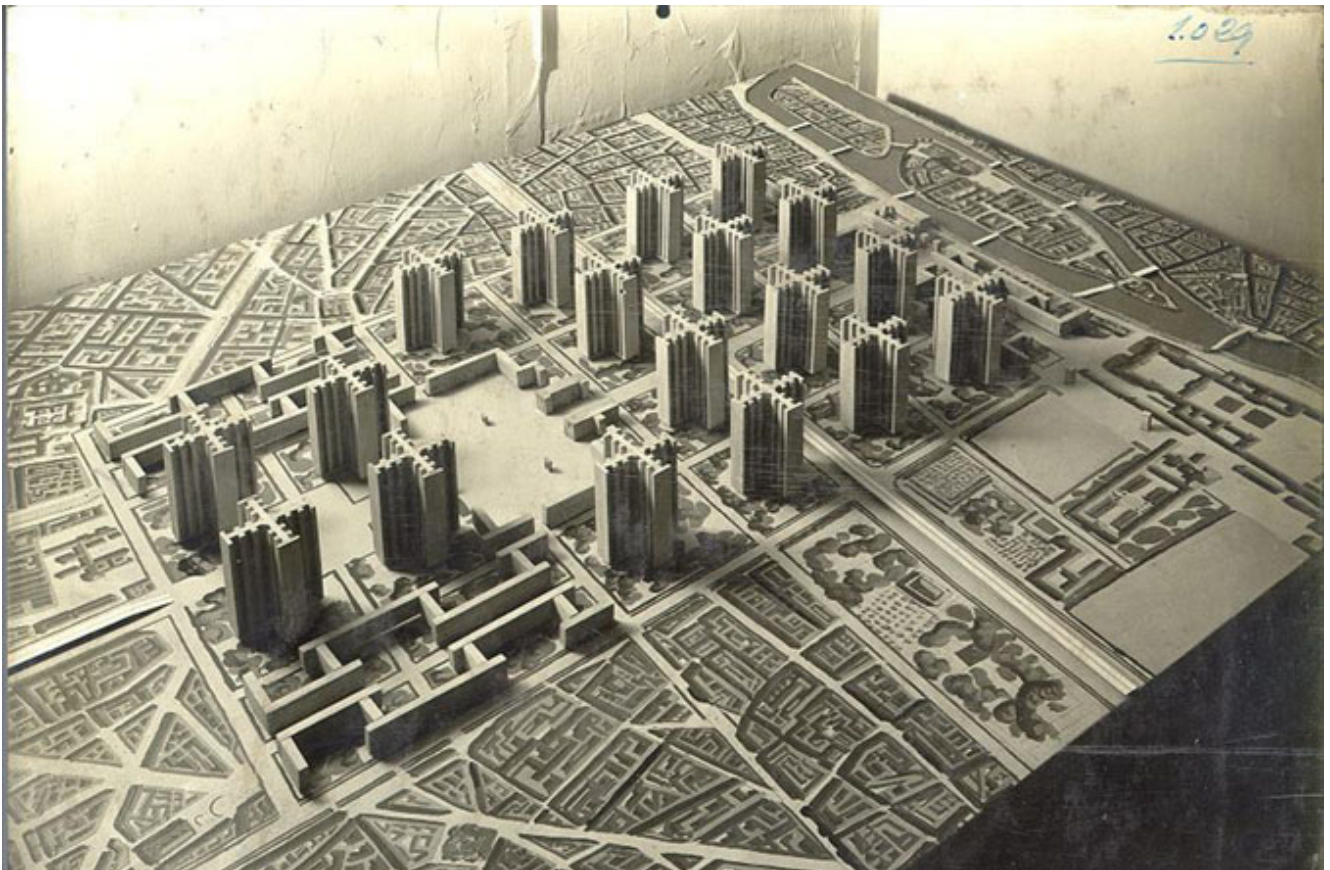
In this context one might consider the 'star-architect' as,

effectively, an idol: it should be remembered that a generation or two ago, and even today (as an article by Anthony Daniels in *Quadrant* eloquently points out),[57] 'Le Corbusier' (pseudonym of Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris [1887-1965]) could do no wrong, and was virtually deified in Modernist architectural circles, a phenomenon I have called 'Corbusianity', for it was nothing more or less than a pseudo-religious cult. A few brave critics of cultural fetishism have seen the dangers that lie in such exemplars of obvious idolatry; not to corral humankind within any conventional religious fold, but to celebrate those aspects of high culture (such as Classical or Gothic architecture and the formal architectural traditions of the rest of the world) that require serious effort, as Soane stressed in his lectures,[58] in order to understand them.

Access to a world of thought, beauty, satisfying aesthetics, ideas, and breadth of knowledge cannot be had without hard work, and that involves analysis and study of the past, too:[59] In other words, the study of history (from which religion cannot be excised).[60] Study opens doors, and leads to further doors that swing open to reveal countless aspects of knowledge: 'popular culture' distracts, and the more ignorant human beings are of those things that make life beautiful, the easier they are to control.[61] There can be far more to life than being a spectator, with delusions that there is nothing else.[62]

Matthew Arnold noted that culture was about 'acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world, and thus with the history of the human spirit.'[63] History must involve, too, an understanding of the role of religion in history, without which the last two millennia, say, of European history makes no sense at all.[64] Culture is certainly not about the Derrida-led[65] 'deconstruction' of works in order to expose 'racist', 'sexist', 'homophobic', 'Eurocentric', and other labels, then writing about such

unravelling in obfuscatory language that makes no sense, other than as a manifestation of a widespread repudiation of the spirit of free enquiry and the dethroning of reason, both once central to the Enlightenment.[66] The use of jargon, of course, in the rarefied 'compound' of '*Academe*', ensures the survival of that 'compound' as the habitat of those who set themselves apart, a kind of priesthood of jargon studies and Nihilism.[67] And that 'compound' was certainly set up from the 1920s, from which the high-priests of Modernism issued their manifestoes, slogans, assertions, and demands from which reason was indeed dethroned and history and culture expunged.

High culture enshrines, in some aesthetically refined way, many centuries of humankind's experiences: its essence, as history shows, is steeped in religion.[68] One of the obvious problems of 'popular culture' is that it depends on spectacle and fantasy, on products churned out for the pleasure-market, ever more outlandish, to distract from realities and truths, and obliterate what remains of any spiritual essence in everyday existence. That which nourishes the inner being has to be earned: it cannot be obtained on tick, or acquired online like a commercial commodity; it comes to console, if at all, through endeavor, humility, and penitence.[69] It also presupposes the acquisition of a basic vocabulary, a language, an understanding, all of which require patient, dedicated study and attention-spans of more than a few seconds: it needs to be understood in context, and that means in terms of history and religion.[70]

Soane emphasized these points at the beginning of the nineteenth century: his views are as relevant today than they were then, and are probably even more urgently necessary to heed.[71] For example, he unequivocally stated that it was essential 'to impress upon the mind of the student in architecture the necessity for close, unremitted, application, or deep, indefatigable, research, and that not a moment must be lost from study, even from earliest youth, by him who is

desirous of attaining superior excellence in architecture'.[72] Soane warned that we must not be 'led astray by fashion and caprice, or by a vain and foolish pursuit after novelty and paltry conceits', for the results, often of 'great magnitude', 'objects of admiration at the time', and erected at enormous expense, 'are not subjects for imitation . . . reflect no honour on those who raised them, nor will they ever be referred to as standards of taste,'[73] remarks that could well be applied to much that is foolishly labelled 'iconic' today. Throughout his lectures, Soane refers to principles, appropriate precedents, the necessity of diligent study, and the importance of a coherent language of architecture, embedded in the culture of a healthy society. Architecture, he said, 'speaks a language of its own . . . and, above all, a building, like an historical picture, must tell its own tale'.[74]

Communication, as Frantz Fanon (1925-61) pointed out, necessitates the use of a certain syntax, a grasp of the morphology of a language, but it requires, above all, a culture in order to support 'the weight of a civilization.'[75] Unfortunately, the virus of Deconstruction has been highly successful in the dismantling of traditions in art, architecture, literature, and much else of cultural relevance: like a biological virus it partially destroys its host, avoiding complete obliteration, because, if that were to occur, further transmission would cease.[76]

The purpose of humankind is not merely eating, drinking, copulating, and looking for shelter: once material needs are met, other needs become apparent. These vary in each individual, and the more a society is civilized and cultured, the more will individuality be developed. This, of course, is the opposite of what happens in a corporate State or in systems where the individual is subsumed into an amorphous mass based on the questionable notion of the 'common good'. More and more, it seems that the modern State is becoming an

exploiter and a robber, demoralizing, even terrorizing, its citizens. Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) fully understood the dangers, and invoked moral and anthropocentric religious principles that could promise a more harmonious future for humankind: he instinctively comprehended that within real art lay paths to happiness and truth, but that political impositions and statutes were by their very nature untruthful.[77]

A longing for order, for harmony, for wholeness, for some sort of construct that might be conducive to a stable society within which culture and art could flourish to enhance the quality of life itself, was expressed in the concept of the ideal city.[78] It would be interesting, or perhaps horrifying, to look at what might be conceived in terms of such an ideal today. In the past there were those geometrical images produced during the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance period, but it is difficult to imagine a contemporary equivalent in times of increasing cultural and religious confusion and fragmentation, political correctness, and much else. In an ideal city, humankind would be liberated to enhance its own culture and civilization; but if culture and civilization have been fractured and corrupted to such an extent that they no longer have any sense of continuity, and their roots have been grubbed up to create the desert of the *tabula rasa*, it is tricky to perceive how such aspirations might succeed.

Social identity and a healthy common culture give stability as well as the freedom to develop high culture to new plateaux within the social framework, but since there is always a dynamic and daemonic principle in civilization-culture (the Apollonian/Dionysian clash of opposites, as propounded by Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche [1844-1900]), there is inevitably an element of risk, in that the stability of the structure could well be upset. Repressive *régimes* are well aware of this, and tend to stultify *or* exploit (within prescribed

limits) creativity; but in the second decade of the twenty-first century, by substituting packaging and commercialized fashion for true creativity, the danger of real ideas erupting and threatening the modern State has been considerably minimized. By cheapening art and rendering it insignificant and meaningless, the greatest enemy of the modern State has been rendered impotent: that has been part of the disastrous legacy of Modernism, the ally of repression, and itself repressive (though this is a contrary view to that expressed by orthodox Modernists, who claimed spuriously that their groundless assertions were associated with liberalism, freedom, and democracy, when they clearly were nothing of the sort, and in fact imposed a dictatorship of emptiness).[79]

Historically, the ideal city gave meaning and sense to the appearance of things, providing inspiration for new ideals: in terms of religion, the ideal city combined the realities of this world and a more metaphysical context, so that the City of God became synonymous with Paradise. An ideal city could become an absolute reality, in essence a symbol of humankind's aspirations in the highest sense of cultural achievement, ordered existence, and moral stature, humane in the fullest sense, both in terms of aesthetics and social function: it might represent harmony and balance relating the whole of the cosmos to the realities of daily urban life. Through that balance and a lack of repressive restraint, it could even represent ethical perfection, the flowering of a whole civilization. Such a city, with its acropolis-forum-marketplace; its cloister-quiet-area-enclosed spaces; its cathedral-temple-spiritual center must, of course, be of a higher order than a mere conglomeration of a mass of people functioning as workers of some kind or another. An ideal city will not have 'slums'; but the answer is not necessarily to clear 'slums' (as the sound, stone-built, handsome Gorbals tenements in Glasgow were erroneously perceived), but to cleanse them, as Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) pointed out,[80] and as a recent rather wonderful book on Homs has

reinforced.[81]

Geddes, too, was very much concerned with the beauty and aesthetics of cities in which a multiplicity of activities could flourish, and individuals could carry out many activities of a cultural nature within a harmoniously ordered city, rather like players in a first-class orchestra. Such a city is not stultified in its growth, and must be a living organism: as a living phenomenon, aesthetic aspects come to the fore, for there is very little ugliness in Nature, where life and death are part of a logical sequence.

Cities that are operated on too often, subjected to drastic surgery or constant interference in their natural functions based on theories such as those promoted by so-called 'schools of architecture' will sicken and die, as Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) courageously revealed.[82] Far too often, decisions on town and country planning are taken by those who do not like towns: richnesses of the phenomena of town or city life terrify many. The bleeding-off of populations from large urban centers to populate new towns, for example, brings in its wake new problems; but those theories and practices concerning new towns and 'overspill' populations owe much to the horror many founders of town-planning theories felt for large cities. All this is most peculiar since many of the founders of the new-towns movement were at least sympathetic to the

aims of Socialism, and, according to Socialist theory, a city must provide the essentials for an ideal Communist community, centralized, standardized, and uniform in its social organization.[83]

Some have suggested that the patterns inherent in the layouts of ideal Socialist cities should reflect the unity of 'the people' as a whole and the classlessness of the society inhabiting them: indeed, the qualities of residential areas, and the social composition of those areas, should be everywhere the same. Throughout Eastern Europe, we were told, thousands of hectares/acres were covered in urban complexes to house people, and these were genuine new cities, constructed on previously virgin sites, representing the Utopia of urban planning in socialist design.[84] If this had been the case, it should have been a compulsory requirement that every student of town planning should visit such Socialist Utopias: I did indeed see several of them, and came to the conclusion that they had many similar problems to those becoming all too apparent in the West, not least in the British Isles.

While there was a tendency among many to believe that political ideology was the essential factor in town-planning, it is clear that the relationship between the ideal and its realization was only tenuous, and that what resulted was not only violently hated (thereby sparking outbreaks of extreme, but understandable, vandalism), but often had to be demolished long before costs of construction had been paid off.[85]

Modernist-based experiments of the inter-war years, and their widespread imposition after 1945 did not produce a glorious Utopia, nor can it be claimed that they transcended anything far worse than mediocrity. The annihilation of historic cities and whole districts, based on those intellectual dissolvents and vaporous outpourings of Modernism (that twilit world of abstractions, all about 'making humanity better,' but actually driving it mad), was a crime against civilization, a policy of wanton destruction swallowed whole by adolescents of all ages.

And hardly anyone seems to notice now: people have been conditioned to accept the inevitability of ugliness, bog-standard design, visual squalor, and the inimical environments forced on humanity and, as studies have shown, become unwell as a result. One reluctantly comes to the conclusion that human beings now look with their ears.

It is submitted that at least part of the problem that led to this state of affairs was the gaping hole in the heart of a dogmatic and dictatorial Modernism: the jettisoning not only of rich and wonderful architectural languages capable of infinite variations of expression (a huge part of the culture of the West), but of any transcendental spiritual aspirations whatsoever.[86] The movement established a supposedly irrefutable orthodoxy from which no aspiring architect could deviate, and then stepped back, blamed everyone else for the awful consequences of the Dystopian reality for which it had been responsible, or even brazenly denied there was ever any problem at all. It could be argued that the one essential element Modernists could never adopt was freedom:[87] from the very start, the cult demanded total obedience and belief in a reductionist scheme of things from which beauty was forever excluded.

Afterword: Nemesis

It is difficult, when considering the psychotic process that passes for 'architecture' today, not to form the opinion that the courses architecture and town-planning have taken almost universally since 1945 have been deranged.

Panaceas have proved not to be anything of the sort, yet, despite early evidence of failure, they were still applied. The 'scientific', supposedly 'rational' bases of the Modern Movement in architecture were neither. Inclusion of the works of many designers in books about what is supposed to be great architecture is mistaken. Challenges to the orthodoxies of Modernism which have created an inhuman world are denounced by

those who just want more-of-the-same because they have vested interests in continuing the ruinous policies that have virtually destroyed all vestiges of civilized living. Worship of 'star' architects is idolatry, with everything that idolatry brings as Nemesis: Western heroes of architecture are simply self-interested servants of big business, vast corporations, or repressive *régimes* abroad. There is ample evidence, however, that there is a mighty reaction to what 'celebrity' architects are doing in other countries,[88] where the main ways of making buildings and designing settlements over the centuries were wholly unlike existing 'paradigms'.[89] Critical voices are already starting to be audible, even in the cowed West itself.[90]

What Western architects, producing yet more blobs or wildly expensive Parametricist fantasies that might amuse for a short time, but are not fit for purpose, and will cost billions to maintain, do not seem to begin to understand is that there is a huge reaction to what they are doing in traditional societies where spiritual values survive, rather than the vulgar commercial 'celebrity' ones that conspire to make them 'stars' among themselves, among sensation-seekers, and among those of all ages in thrall to advertising.[91] This is a fatal weakness at the very heart of the West.[92]

In 1965 the *avant-garde* magazine *Bau* featured a photograph of the launch-pads for rockets at the American base of Cape Canaveral, labelling it 'cathedrals of a new worldview'; and in the same year Reyner Banham (1922-88) claimed that in 'Gizmos' (which he defined as any mass-produced gadget, such as a cordless shaver or a transistor radio), representing popular technology, could be found the true essence of contemporary architecture.[93] In 1968 the Austrian architect, Hans Hollein (1934-2014), suggested that everything, including lipstick, pill-capsules, space-suits, and even those ubiquitous photographs of 'Che' Guevara (1928-67) so prized by adolescents, was 'architecture',[94] a view which might arouse

some doubts, even serious misgivings, for if what Banham and Hollein *decided* was architecture *really was* architecture, then the rest of us might decide we did not want it.[95]

Soon afterward the *soixante-huitards* had their 'revolution' in Paris, and many artifacts, including plaster-casts of Classical architectural details held in academies,[96] were smashed by those not defecating on theatre-seats. Some architects and visionaries loosely associated with the 1968 upheavals took part in a conference about design at Aspen, Colorado, including François Dallegret (1937-), who had collaborated with Banham on 'A Home is not a House' in 1965.[97] That conference was held near the end of an era in which it was widely and naïvely supposed that technological progress would lead inevitably to a far more enlightened, prosperous, and 'liberal' society, and on a global scale, too: a piece of wishful thinking that has turned out to be founded on quicksand, and that signaled the beginning of the end of a time when Modernists believed technological advances and social development went hand-in-hand, mutually interdependent.[98] The unswerving belief of those *avant-garde* techno-utopians was pure *Hubris*: the future did not lie in the so-called 'High Tech' of the *Centre Pompidou*, any more than it did with a Modernist insistence that architects had to reinvent society through new ways of living or face decline and disintegration. Indeed, it looks as though architectural interference with the urban fabric has not saved it at all, but is successfully killing it.

Many in architectural circles fondly imagined that design involving major rôles for computers would resolve the aesthetic confusions of Post-Modernism. Practitioners of Parametric design[99] also believed that Parametricism would respond to social/political pressures, but all it seems to have done is to create extravagant interlopers that respect nothing except themselves. Both represent yet another catastrophic, wasteful failure, based on *Hubris* and attitudes

masquerading as 'scientific' when they are nothing of the sort. They 'exacerbate rather than solve the main failings' of Modern architecture, 'and not only because they are energy-profligate, anti-urban, stand-alone buildings that fail to define urban space and defy relationship with other buildings and humans.'[100] Parametricism, indeed, has been identified as a 'perfect example of . . . a sunset effect, an exaggerated caricature of now obsolete characteristics of a waning era.'[101]

In the 1920s and 1930s speed and fast motor-cars were very much admired, and the commercial/manufacturing interests promoting them hugely influenced the destruction of urban fabric and the creating of an environment dominated by highways from the 1950s onwards.[102] Indeed, places with primitive roads and without fast cars were objects of mirth and contempt, while open roads and shiny machines were associated with Modernity and glamour. Later, some entrepreneurs succeeded in associating sex with 'upward mobility' in campaigns for hedonistic utilitarianism in the magazine, *Playboy*,[103] predictably praised by Reyner Banham, who, trendy as ever, claimed he only read it for its architectural/design content. Indeed, scattered among the ample bosoms, bottoms, salacious cartoons, and lavishly composed suggestive 'centerfolds' were laudatory hagiographies of the faulty deities of architectural Modernism: architectural and sexual revolutions were thereby inextricably intertwined, as revealed in an amusing volume entitled *Pornotopia*.[104]

It is possible that our times will be viewed with astonishment in the future because of our inability to exercise intelligent critical judgement concerning what passes as 'architecture' (much of which is irrelevant in relation to pressing contemporary problems), but which is often only empty show, ignoring context, gobbling up money, and possessing no meaning other than as an assertion of overweening self-importance.

'The flaws in all this stuff . . . are so obvious,' Peter Buchanan has written, that 'future generations will be aghast it was ever taken seriously, let alone mistaken' for harbingers of what was to come.[105]

Conspicuous Deconstructivism or its mis-shapen offspring, Parametricism,[106] are no substitutes for real architecture, and belong in the realms of extravagance, passing fashion, showing off, and superfluous bling, which a rich *élite* and international corporations feel entitled to inflict on everybody else.[107] A reaction may come sooner than some predict, and it may not be containable: 'increasingly unequal times' may provoke an upheaval against an 'anti-democratic neoliberal ethos' that imposes its monuments to egotism on the world.[108]

Only a few disciplines have any chance at all of counteracting the worst aspects of architectural Modernism: these are history (including the history of religion); true science; hands-on study of how materials are used in building and how they fit together (brickwork, for example); and detailed studies of old buildings and established urban contexts with the intention of developing conservation techniques and methods of slotting in where appropriate new designs that respect existing grain and character (from all of which the cult deliberately distanced itself over the last century).

There have been warnings, including the pioneering work of 1959 by Henry Hope Reed (1915-2013),[109] who argued that contemporary architecture was fraudulent, empty of intellectual content, ugly, and illiterate. His influence on brave, pioneering practitioners associated with New Urbanism and New Classicism has been profound. Initially, Hope Reed's's work was largely ignored, but it has certainly made a profound impact in parts of the U S A, as can be seen in the distinguished work of T.H. Beeby (1941-), Allan Greenberg (1938-), R.A.M. Stern (1939-), and many others. In the creations of those architects who have rejected the Modernist

stranglehold, perhaps, there lie some glimmerings of hope.

At the School of Architecture, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana, USA (the only one that teaches young student architects the *practice*, as opposed to merely the *history*, of traditional and Classical architecture), the competition to design the Walsh Family Hall at that School was won (2014) by the English architect, John Simpson (1954-), with a scheme embedded in Classicism. It includes the Institute for the Study of Classical Architecture and Urbanism,[110] a foundation that would be unthinkable without the early work of Hope Reed. Some perceptive young men and women are beginning to see and understand some of the dangers in blind acceptance of Modernism (a few former students have worked in joiners' workshops and learned the basics of some building-trades, such as how to lay bricks, because they realized they could not 'design' brick buildings without knowing how the materials were put together to create something structurally sound and aesthetically pleasing), but the damage is so widespread, on a global scale, that it will be extremely difficult to begin to repair, especially as tidal-waves of adulation and pufferies are confined to 'star' architects and their 'iconic' works.

Apart from the Dystopias it has created, Modernism has left another legacy: the rash of private 'estates' (especially in the south-east of England but visible almost everywhere to a greater or lesser degree) demonstrates that formal architecture has been largely abandoned, forgotten, and rejected. It is little wonder the contemporary housing market is dominated by speculative builders who have no problems giving the public architecturally illiterate parodies of 'Georgian', 'Tudor'[111] and other styles bearing no resemblance to the originals, because most of today's architects have neither the skills nor the wit to break out of their constricting stylistic straitjacket, nor does their school-of-architecture 'training' equip them with the scholarship and knowledge to be able to produce correct

'period' detailing. The public as a whole, indeed, never embraced what Modernists insisted on giving them: large numbers of working-class people, however, had crude Modernism forced upon them, and they did not like that at all.

Those still able to afford to buy dwellings reject mass calisthenics and refuse to do what they are told by architectural bullies whose failures are legion. This is a sorry state of affairs compared with late-Georgian times when pattern-books were widely available, resulting in agreeable buildings that did not assault the sensibilities: even mediocre talents were therefore guided to produce acceptable architecture, when not tempted to be spuriously 'original'.

The appalling architectural illiteracy of the ghastly 'housing estates' is Modernism's true Nemesis.[112]

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[3] Watkin (1996) 490

[4] *Ibid.* 1

[5] Not in the common modern usage, but suggesting perception by means of the senses

[6] Curl (2011) 13-17

[7] Watkin (1996) 1

[8] All quotes from Watkin (1996) 1

[9] Sir John Soane's Museum archives 1/212

[10] Buchanan (2015), a deeply thought and passionate article, full of wisdom and common sense

[11] Mehaffy & Salingaros (2013) is interesting in this respect

[12] Curl (2018)

[13] *See*, for example, reports of this phenomenon in *The Times* (18 January 2016) 1, 9

[14] Speech in the House of Lords (2 March 1960)

[15] *Wenn ich Kultur höre … entsichere ich meinen Browning* (Johst [1933] Act 1 Sc. 1). Albert Leo Schlageter (1894-1923), former soldier, member of the *Freikorps*, who took part in the Kapp-Lüttwitz *Putsch* (1920), carried out sabotage operations against French forces occupying the Ruhr, and was executed by a French firing-squad (1923). He became a hero of National Socialism

[16] Hillman ((2016)

[17] And seek for Truth in the Groves of Academe. Horace (2014) *Epistulae* **ii**/2 line 45

[18] *See* Burke (1823) v 151

[19] *Ibid.* 103

[20] *Ibid.* 178

[21] *Ibid.* 195

[22] *Ibid.* 154-5

[23] For a key figure in this, *see* Daniels (2015)

[24] David Aaronovitch in *The Times* (5 November 2015) 31; Nicola Woolcock in *The Times* (6 November 2015) 5

[25] *See*, for example, *RIBA Journal* cxxv/10 (October 2018) 111-2, for sneering, pusillanimous, infantile insults

[26] *See* Alvesson (2014); Curl (2018*a*)

[27] Valentine Low in *The Times* (23 May 2016) 6

[28] Hillman (2016) *passim*

[29] Watkin (1996) *passim*

[30] Scruton (2015*a*)

[31] *See* Eliot (1948) on this

[32] Adorno *et al.* (2010), for example, and *see* Scruton (2015*a*)

[33] Burke (1823) v 99

[34] *Ibid.* 148

[35] Watkin (1996) 489-667

[36] Vitruvius Pollio (1999) i iii 2

[37] Wotton (1624) pl. i

[38] Wren (1942) 126. *See also* Stephen Wren (ed.) (1750)

[39] Eliot (1948) 27

[40] *See*, for interesting remarks on the longevity and power of religion, Hurd (2015), Reiss (2016), and Spencer (2016)

[41] Eliot (1948) 50

[42] *Ibid.* 27

[43] *See* Preciado (2014) for an interesting interpretation

[44] Debord (2013)

[45] Walker (2016)

[46] *See* Serroy & Lipovetsky (2008); Lipovetsky & Serroy (2013)

[47] Scruton (2015*a*)

[48] Watkin (1996) 491 and *passim*

[49] Spencer (2016) should be read on this

[50] Scruton (2015*a*)

[51] Vargas Llosa (2015)

[52] Quoted in *The New York Review of Books* lxiii/9 (26 May-8 June 2016) 46

[53] Preciado (2014) *passim*

[54] Scruton (2015*a*)

[55] Musil (1979) xviii

[56] Yet *see* Spencer (2016) for how Christianity has shaped values in the West

[57] Daniels (2015)

[58] *See* Watkin (1996) 489-667

[59] *Ibid.* 491

[60] Hurd (2015), Spencer (2016)

[61] Scruton (2015*a*)

[62] Vargas Llosa (2015) is splendid on this

[63] Arnold (1873) xiii

[64] Spencer (2016)

[65] After Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), whose opaque writings have been regarded as profound, for reasons that elude the present writer

[66] Scruton (2015) 82

[67] Salingaros *et al.* (2004) Part 7

[68] Spencer (2016)

[69] *See* Vargas Llosa (2015) *passim*

[70] *See* Hurd (2015) and Spencer (2016) for the global importance of religion and how it has shaped values

[71] *See* Watkin (1996) 489-667

[72] *Ibid.* 609

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] Soane Museum Archives 1.259 fol [7]

[75] Fanon (1967) 17-18

[76] For these matters, *see* Salingaros *et al.* (2004) *passim*

[77] Tolstoy (1933) *passim*

[78] Eaton (2001); Rosenau (1983)

[79] Alvesson (2014); Curl (2018*a*)

[80] For this and other matters *see* Geddes (1998)

[81] al-Sabouni (2016), a volume which deserves to be read by everyone connected in any way with architecture and planning

[82] Jacobs (1961)

[83] *See* Fisher (1962)

[84] *Ibid.*, and *see also* Korn (1953)

[85] *The Architectural Review* ccxl/1437 (December 2016/January 2017) 33-4

[86] *See* Cullmann (1961); Fisher (1962); Geddes (1998); Mannheim (1968); Mead (1966); Rosenau (1983)

[87] There are perceptive comments on such matters in Drexler (ed.) (1977) 6-59

[88] *The Times* (25 February 2016) 18

[89] al-Sabouni (2016) *passim*

[90] Daniels (2015)

[91] *See* Dyckhoff (2017) for an interesting take

[92] al-Sabouni (2016) is revealing on these matters. *See also* Murray (2017)

[93] The article on Gizmos was reproduced in Banham (1981) 108-14

[94] 'Alles ist Architektur' in *Bau: Zeitschrift für Architektur und Städtebau* **i**/2 (1968) 1-32

[95] *See also* Liane Lefaivre (2003): 'Everything is Architecture' in *Harvard Design Magazine* **xviii** (Summer) 1-5

[96] One was illustrated in Corbusier (1946) 199

[97] 'A Home is not a House' in *Art in America* **ii** (April 1965) 70-9

[98] *The Architectural Review* ccxxxviii/1423 (September 2015) 18-20

[99] Schumacher (ed.) (2016) for a depressing read

[100] Buchanan (2015) 32

[101] *Ibid.*

[102] Walker (2016) is illuminating on this

[103] *London Review of Books* xxxviii/8 (21 April 2016) 27-8

[104] Preciado (2014)

[105] Buchanan (2015) 32-5, an excellent critique

[106] *See* Schumacher (2011-12) and Schumacher (ed.) (2016)

[107] Buchanan (2015) 34

[108] *Ibid.*

[109] Reed (1959)

[110] Watkin (2016) 50-61

[111] A vast gulf separates these architectural travesties from scholarly designs of the 'New Urbanists'

[112] For all the above, *see* Jenkins (2006)

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Professor James Stevens Curl has long established an international reputation for wit combined with compassion, thoroughness of research, sound scholarship, and lucidity of style. He has twice been Visiting Fellow at Peterhouse, University of Cambridge, and is a Member of the Royal Irish Academy, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, and a Fellow of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland. In 2014 an Honorary Doctorate of Arts was conferred on him by De Montfort University in recognition of his *distinctive contribution…to the intellectual and cultural life of the nation and region.* On the occasion of its annual Prizes & Medals Ceremony in 2017, the British Academy awarded him the President's Medal for *"outstanding service to the cause of the*

humanities and social sciences" in his wider study of the History of Architecture, covering a vast range of periods and topics, in Britain and Ireland. In 2018 Oxford University Press published his *[Making Dystopia: The Strange Rise and Survival of Architectural Barbarism.](#)*

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