

CHARLES JENCKS

MODERN
MOVEMENTS IN
ARCHITECTURE

Second edition



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Penguin Books

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England
Viking Penguin Inc., 40 West 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010, U.S.A.
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4
Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

First published 1973

Reprinted 1977, 1980, 1982

Second edition, with a new Introduction and Postscript, 1985

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Filmset by Oliver Burridge Filmsetting Ltd
and printed in Great Britain
by Butler & Tanner Ltd, Frome and London

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Designed by Gerald Cinamon and Paul McAlinden

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In a historical study such as this, one builds up enormous debts, of very different kinds, which should be acknowledged, if not adequately paid back. Perhaps the most important debt is to those whose ideas have shaped the book: Hannah Arendt's ideas on politics and revolution, I. A. Richards's and Coleridge's ideas on the imagination, and E. H. Gombrich's ideas on the way art, or here architecture, can communicate meaning. The reader will find detailed acknowledgement of these ideas in the notes, but I must emphasize here my utmost gratitude to these people. Without their writings, and example, this book would never have developed. I feel a similar kind of gratitude to the architects Le Corbusier, James Stirling and Aldo van Eyck whose work and presence have also sustained my interest in the whole project.

There is a different kind of creditor, to whom I am indebted for personal aid, discussion, gossip, first hand information and just acquaintance: the students of the Architectural Association where I have been teaching, the architects Peter Cook, Joseph Zaleski and Alan Colquhoun, the historians Thomas Stevens and Eduard Sekler and a constant friend, the architectural theorist George Baird. Without these people, and the ever present stimulus of *Architectural Design*, this book would have been out of date and architecturally irrelevant. The last named magazine has been especially important in keeping my thoughts on edge and information diverse. Even when I disagree with its policy and trenchant comments, I am aware that its choice of subject is unique and its eye for architectural relevance the most acute.

Finally a word of thanks to my two critics - Reyner Banham who supervised this book in an earlier form when it was a thesis and my editor Nikos Stangos who suggested

alterations and cuts. Just to invert convention, I would like to say that if any omissions, errors or infelicities remain, they are solely the fault of my two critics, but I am acutely conscious that the reverse is true. They have been tough, vigilant and creative in their close readings – ideal readers in a sense – and I alone remain, alas, responsible for any faults which still exist.

Charles Jencks

London, July 1971

Introduction to the Second Edition

Since I wrote this book as my doctoral thesis under Reyner Banham the architectural world and my view of it have altered considerably. At the RIBA several years back I rebuked my former teacher for holding inconsistent opinions in the space of a few months, a point he parried with the quip, 'to prove you have a mind, you have to change it'.

There are probably other means of proving one's intellectual existence, but consistent change, along a certain direction, is still one of them. As the reader will soon discover this book was, in 1971, a polemic in favour of pluralism and against a restricted Modernism – hence the *s* of its *Modern Movements*. In 1984 it still is this, but now there are two new movements to add and a postscript on Late- and Post-Modern architecture. The architecture world has itself become more tolerant in the intervening years, even, perhaps, becoming too permissive. In any case, the direction of change I have followed, supported and then named – Post-Modernism – grew out of the critiques one can find in this book: my own criticisms of Gropius, Mies and the more bureaucratic firms of Modernism, and the writings of Jane Jacobs, Lewis Mumford, Robert Venturi, the Advocate Planners and a host of others. I developed these in 1975 to the point where my initial sympathies with Modernism were seriously checked if not altogether rejected, a development which parallels that of the Post-Modern architects themselves. I mention all this not only because there is still widespread misunderstanding and controversy on the matter, but also to make my own position as author clear to the reader. Post-Modernism does *not* reject Modernism totally, as traditionalists might, but develops its own hybrid language partly from its predecessor.

In 1984, fateful year, when our architectural future is being stamped by ever larger bureaucratic firms, when our biggest offices such as those led by Walter Gropius perpetrate a form of historicist kitsch in the Middle East, or Singapore, or many foreign countries - see plate 67 - it is time to reassess our recent past and Western culture together: criticize the unthinking Modernism and historicism which are so commercially successful. We should avoid the extreme polemic towards which this practice is leading and pick up the pieces of a fragmented architectural culture, part *avant-garde*, part traditional. It's possible to make discriminations of quality without resorting to ideology, a point with which my theory of multivalence, below, is meant to deal.

The best Post-Modern architecture is hybrid, like the best Pre-Modernism of the generation practising in 1900; it is trying to stitch together past and future without compromise, without giving up the commitment to the modern world, and its current technology, and the commitment to Western culture, or local traditions. The hybrid is difficult to achieve, certainly more demanding than the single-minded attention to aesthetics and technology that the brilliant Mies van der Rohe followed. It is also as a language richer in scope, making full use of the architectural means including ornament, symbolism, craftsmanship, polychromy and metaphor. It signifies the return to architecture as a balanced and enjoyable art.

Charles Jencks

London, November 1983

INTRODUCTION: THE PLURALITY OF APPROACHES

Every critical opinion is an ellipsis; a conditional assertion,
with the conditional part omitted. (I. A. RICHARDS)

There is a conventional view among historians and the general public that some unified theory and practice called 'Modern Architecture' really exists. Perhaps, from time to time, this capital-lettered concept has enjoyed a wide understanding and informed consensus, so that it does make sense to call this area of agreement Modern Architecture. But more often than not its use is generally informed by ignorance. Those who use it are either unaware of the plurality of live architectural traditions, or else they hope to coalesce this plurality into some integrated movement. For instance, when one hears a historian say 'The Modern Movement', one knows what to expect next: some all-embracing theory, one or two lines of architectural development, something called 'the true style of our century', and a single melodrama with heroes and villains who perform their expected roles according to the historian's loaded script. Dazzled by this display of a consistent plot and inexorable development, the reader forgets to ask about all the missing actors and their various feats – all that which ends up on the scrap heap of the historian's rejection pile. In part this selection and omission of data is desirable, since it creates some conceptual order out of the overwhelming complexity of detail. But unfortunately it often serves to reinforce one ideology – one tradition of development – at the expense of a live plurality.

This can be shown with one characteristic example. Nikolaus Pevsner, in his *Pioneers of Modern Design*,¹ gives a very clear account of certain developments that led, as

his sub-title explains, 'From William Morris to Walter Gropius'. Looking back after thirty years at his book, he said in 1966:

To me what had been achieved in 1914 was *the* style of the century. It never occurred to me to look beyond. Here was the one and only style which fitted all those aspects which mattered, aspects of economics and sociology, of materials and function.²

This candid admission is very interesting for what it helps explain about Pevsner's and other historians' work. Like so many of his generation, Pevsner believes that there is a deterministic relation between certain content and form, or 'those aspects' which he mentions and 'the style' - instead of adopting the more flexible notion that the relation between style and content is 'unmotivated'.³ Furthermore, Pevsner's statement is a frank avowal of his own selective values. And this obviously explains why he originally left out two such important architects as Gaudi and Sant'Elia - whom he called 'freaks' and 'fantasts' until, as he suggests, the swing of opinion forced him to insert them into the main body of the text.

There are many such 'ideological' omissions in Pevsner's book, as in all histories of modern architecture,⁴ and we could justify them as the historian's 'interpretative licence' if their effect were not so profound. For what has been the historian's actual effect on architectural history? Conservative, élitist and prophetic. This has been as much as anything because architectural theory has become itself historicist, or motivated by arguments which contend that there is one inevitable line of development. In one of the key theoretical formulations, *Vers une architecture* (1923), Le Corbusier tried to persuade his listeners that 'industry [is] overwhelming us like a flood which rolls on toward its destined ends'. Perhaps his ideals were positive and the effect salutary, but the method of argument was as dangerous as any determinism, which contends that one should follow the general trend of realistic events wherever they lead.

The historian of recent architecture has, for the most part, followed the same line of argument by implicitly becoming either an apologist for a single tradition, say the International Style, or the prophet of inevitable development, say technology and structural determinism. Prac-

tising architects and the public are naturally persuaded by these convincing arguments and so the amount of live traditions or alternatives to the future is radically limited. Because of such suppression two architectural movements, Futurism and Expressionism, were surgically removed from our memory for thirty years. However, this kind of omission may be due as much to the historian's methodology as to his ideology. Trained to look for links between architects, he assumes they always exist. As the very basis of his work, he looks for links between contemporaries or across time as if there were either one all-pervasive world tradition which everyone was in touch with, or only one possible moral and logical development.

Opposed to both the *Zeitgeist* theory and the single strand theory, this study of recent architecture postulates a *series of discontinuous movements* and treats this pluralism with different methods, in different chapters. This is not to say, however, that I will or even could avoid omitting certain architects and keep from using selective concepts. As the reader will soon discover, I have made use of various ideas such as multivalence, Camp, and the 'six' traditions' which are just as restrictive as other concepts. The use of concepts is as inevitable in historical writing as in science, a point which is amusingly made by E. H. Gombrich in his discussion of 'Classification and its Discontents'.⁵ The crucial questions are whether the concepts illuminate their objects, have great explanatory power, are relevant in themselves and as plural as the developments.

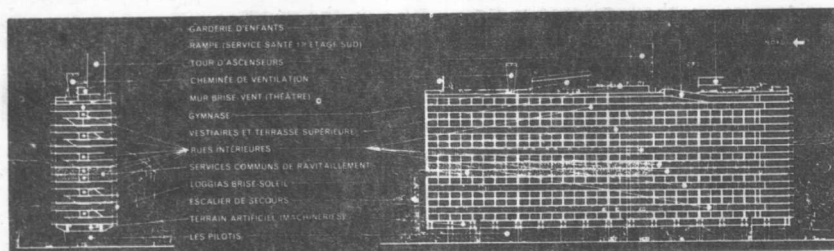
At a certain level of abstraction, there are basically two kinds of historically relevant material: the influential (or that which is interesting because of its importance as a link in a significant chain) and the perfected (or that which has value in itself, as a small, internally relevant world). The first kind of event is part of a movement; literally a development within a tradition or problem situation. Such is the development of the communal house in Russia, or the Pop movement in England, to take two widely different and discontinuous examples discussed in later chapters. The relevance of this kind of developing tradition is best brought out by historical narrative, whereas the second kind of event or building is best analysed critically for its internal relations. For instance the *multivalent* work of Le Corbusier, James Stirling and Aldo van Eyck is so sig-

nificant in itself that historical narrative has to stop - and analysis of internal relations take over.

Since we are all the time making qualitative judgements about buildings and in particular since a selective history is based on judgement above all, I think it is necessary to devote some space to explaining the criterion for selection adopted here. Certain buildings have a richness and density of meaning which make them more enjoyable to inhabit, view and visit than others. These are the buildings which are reinterpreted anew by every generation. We return to them again and again, not necessarily because of any particular meaning which they may convey, but more because of the exciting and deep way in which the meanings are interrelated or fused together into a powerful pattern. For this quality I have adopted the general term multivalence because it points to the presence of multi-valued levels of meaning.⁶ To be more precise, multivalence consists of four distinct qualities: imaginative *creation*, or the putting together of parts in a new way, the *amount* of parts so transformed, the *linkage* between the parts which is the cause of this creation and which allows the parts to *modify* each other. By far the most concrete way of demonstrating the theory of multivalence is to apply it to two works which differ in quality - one by Le Corbusier which shows imaginative fusion and the other by Frederick Gibberd which shows an aggregation of parts that is univalent.

UNITÉ D'HABITATION AND LIVERPOOL CATHEDRAL

The *Unité d'Habitation* by Le Corbusier [1] is probably, within architectural circles at any rate, one of the most famous post-war buildings in the world. It has received much attention in the Press, not all of it favourable, and it remains a prime object of architectural pilgrimage whether by students or practising architects - most of whom are trying to work out the advantages and mistakes of a megastructure and the social ideals of the *Ville Radieuse* which inspired it. In fact the ideals which inspired it go back much further than this and rest ultimately on a series of diverse traditions which Le Corbusier has turned upside-down and synthesized in a creative way.



1. Le Corbusier: *Unité d'Habitation*, Marseilles, France, 1947-52, explanatory section and elevation. Called by Le Corbusier 'A Habitational Unit of Appropriate Size', this 'home' for 1,600 people contains twenty-six different kinds of communal facilities; the amount of elements is a criterion of multivalence.

For instance, he took the idea of an autonomous living unity from Fourier's *Phalanstère* – a nineteenth-century commune of manageable size which would determine its own collective destiny – and envisioned a city made up of them. To see the inversion of the traditional idea, one has only to recall the recurrent Utopian theme of a small, isolated community set off from the unmanageable city. Both the traditional monastery and the Utopian communities of, say, Robert Owen follow this pattern. And yet although Le Corbusier was directly inspired by the Monastery of Ema and Fourier's Utopian socialism,⁷ he really intended his *Unité* as part of larger city schemes – either the *Ville Radieuse* or his replanning projects for St Die and Marseilles, etc. Thus the autonomy and self-sufficiency which is evident in the *Unité* should be seen as only partly intended. What Le Corbusier really wanted was to house the four million French families which were made homeless in the war in a series of related *Unités* which would spread all across France and, most importantly, keep the landscape free from suburban sprawl.

In addition to this inversion of traditional Utopias, his major, social intention was something of a paradox – although a paradox which was shared by most modern architects. This is that family life, the domestic everyday life of the home, is elevated to the level of a public monument. Here is the closest modern equivalent to the Greek Temple [2]; and yet to the Greeks those people who were given over to private, domestic matters were called 'idiots' because they had not entered the public realm where they could become educated and gain their political rights. As if this inversion of classical values were not enough, Le Corbusier has also made other unusual combinations of past traditions: the columns taper downwards

instead of up, the landscape and garden are on the roof instead of the ground, the streets are in the air and internal instead of being external and on the ground, and the shopping centre is on the seventh floor instead of being connected with the commercial life of Marseilles.

All of these inversions were enough to cause difficulty to the inhabitants and to outrage the popular and professional Press. For instance, Jane Jacobs condemned the shopping centre for being unrealistically removed from the city, Lewis Mumford criticized the long, narrow apartment units for being too thin, Sigfried Giedion faulted the internal streets for being dark corridors, and the popular Press attacked the whole idea of housing 1,600 people in a vast, anonymous, inhuman beehive. But all of these faults and affronts to traditional usage could be,

