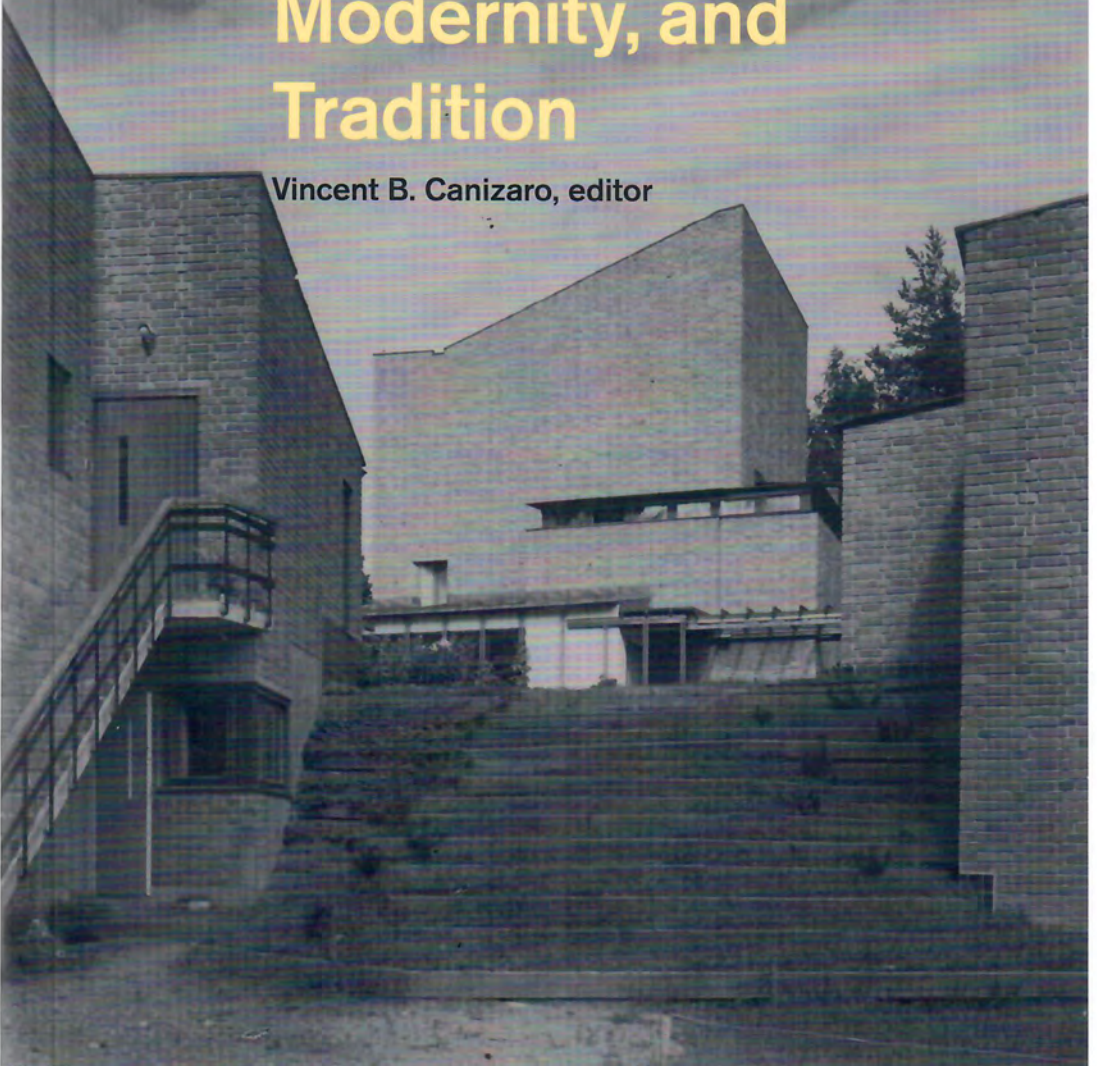


Architectural Regionalism

Collected Writings
on Place, Identity,
Modernity, and
Tradition

Vincent B. Canizaro, editor



Juhani Pallasmaa's essay was initially a lecture given at a conference on Nordic tradition in Copenhagen organized by the magazine *Skala* in March, 1988. In preparing his essay for this volume he commented: "The themes of my paper were raised by the evident loss of the sense of place and cultural specificity projected by processes of globalization and commodification."ⁱ Like the proponents of critical regionalism, Pallasmaa is concerned with the debilitating effects of postmodernity on the value and meaning of architectural environments. But as a theorist and architect who employs phenomenology, his perspective on such issues is predominately experiential and psychological. Accordingly, Pallasmaa emphasizes the estrangement and alienation produced by many modern and postmodern developments including cultural overemphasis on the promise of technologically mediated experiences and the establishment of economics and efficiency as the primary basis of value.

Regionalism, or regional practice, opens up possibilities available only on the "fringes" of consumer society (an echo of Frampton's use of "interstitial;" see Chapter 7) for the resuscitation of an architecture of meaning—an architecture that supports the cultural identity of those it serves. But it is also potentially a path to "sentimental provincialism" and chauvinism. This same fear led Kenneth Frampton, Alexander Tzonis, and Liane Lefaivre, via Critical Theory, to propose the strategy of "making strange," in which regional elements are employed but used

unconventionally in order to generate awareness. Pallasmaa's formulation would likely reject such a gesture as further alienating in itself, perhaps only ^{exacerbating} exacerbating the problem it meant to solve.

To this Pallasmaa proposes a second regional modernism, for which the primary problem is the loss of meaning and participation, not fear of eclecticism or the avant-gardist desire to represent emerging technologies. He argues for an experientially rich and culturally adapted architecture that integrates culture, the environment, symbolic meaning, and, by necessity, traditions, much as Aalto did with his regional modernism. In summarizing his contribution in 2005, the author commented: "I wanted to point out the significance of tradition for architecture, and, in fact, for all creative work. During the 1980s modernity was frequently accused of abandoning history and tradition; this argument was central in the post-modernist ideology. I intended to remind the reader that tradition and history are complex phenomena and they are strongly present in the dialectical process of questioning characteristic to the modern attitude."ⁱⁱ

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Juhani Pallasmaa

Tradition and Modernity: The Feasibility of Regional Architecture in Post- Modern Society

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Techno-Utopia and Identity

In his book *Homo Faber* the Swiss writer and playwright Max Frisch, an architect by training, portrays a Unesco expert, an engineer—symbol of Modern Man—who continuously travels around the world on his missions. He is a rational and realistic man whose life should be under perfect control. However, he slowly loses contact with locality and place, and finally with his own identity, so much so that he ends up falling in love with his own daughter whom he does not know as the tragic consequence of his loss of roots, the ultimate criterion of reality. Their love ends violently in the daughter's death. Homo Faber's grave mistake was his conviction that with technology the world could be transformed so that it need not be experienced through emotions.

The Modern Movement enthusiastically aspired to create a universal culture. The new “machines for living in” set in “space, light, and greenery” were to emancipate their inhabitants from their bonds with the past, and to cultivate a New Universal Man.

Half a century later, however, the techno-rationally biased and economy-obsessed buildings that have become only too familiar everywhere impair our sense of locality and identity. The standard building of today accelerates estrangement and alienation instead of integrating our world-view and sense of self. Simply, we have lost our faith in utopia.

Meanwhile, we have learned to admire unique and authentic forms of indigenous and vernacular traditions which were earlier hardly considered part of the realm of architecture. We admire the tangible integration of natural and material conditions, patterns of life and forms of building in traditional societies, and this gives us a strengthened sense of causality and existence.

The diversity of building in traditional societies is brought about by the impact of local conditions and the specificity of culture. In our own culture the sheer force of industrial technology, combined with mobility, mass-communication, and uniformity of life-style, is causing cultural entropy that minimalizes diversity. What is the feasibility of regional culture and architecture in a world in which two billion people gather simultaneously around TV sets to watch the same football match? Are we not gradually becoming detached from our foothold in geographic and cultural soil and going to live in a fictitious and fabricated culture, the culture of simulacra that Umberto Eco has written about? Are we not moving towards a worldwide consumerist folklore, a mosaic of impacts and information detached from their origin. Isn't our culture doomed to lose all its authenticity and turn into a planetary waxworks-show?

Diversification versus Unification

Beyond doubt, the gradual disappearance of a sense of locality and of human message from our buildings is the result of cultural factors underlying the act of building—the values and ways of thinking and action that govern our civilization.

Is it possible to alter the course of our culture? Is the ^{or in the} resuscitation of regional architecture in postindustrial and Post-Modern society feasible? Indeed, can authentic architecture exist at all in the metaphysical materialism that we live in?

Clearly our identity, and mental well-being, cannot be supported by a universally standardized and abstracted environment. Cultural anthropology has revealed that we do not live in separate physical and mental worlds. The two realms are totally fused and consequently the organization of our physical world is a projection of the mental one and vice versa.

An architecture capable of supporting our identity has to be situationally, culturally, and symbolically articulated. I am disturbed by the notion of regionalism because of its geographic and ethnological connotations and would rather speak of situational or culture-specific architecture.

The fundamental message of architecture is the very basic existential expression: How does it feel to be a human being in this world? And the task of architecture is to make us experience our existence with deeper significance and purpose. Architecture is to make us know and remember who we are. In the words of Aldo van Eyck: "Architecture must facilitate Man's homecoming."

Constituents of Locality

What are the constituents of a sense of specific locality? They are of course reflections of natural, physical, and social realities. They are expressions and experiences of specific nature, geography, landscape, local materials, skills, and cultural patterns. But they are not detached elements: the qualities of culturally adapted architecture are inseparably integrated in tradition. Without continuity of an authentic tradition even a well-intentioned use of surface elements of regional character is doomed to sentimental scenography, to be a naïvely shallow architectural souvenir.

Culture is not composed of elements which can be disassembled and re-composed: culture has to be lived. Cultures mature and sediment slowly as they become fused into the context and continuity of tradition. Culture is an entity of facts and beliefs, history and present material realities and mental conditions. It proceeds unconsciously and cannot be manipulated from outside. Hence, an authentic culturally differentiated architecture can only be born from differentiated patterns of culture, not from fashionable ideals in design. But do such conditions really exist in our time?

The profoundly Mexican architecture of Luis Barragán, for instance, echoes distinct deep-structure features of Mexican culture and life, particularly the presence of death as an accepted dimension of life, and turns these cultural ingredients into his unique metaphysical and surreal art, which is traditional and individual, timeless and radical at the same time.

The architecture of Alvaro Siza is an abstraction and condensation of social and building traditions of Oporto. His architecture is abstracted to the degree that one can hardly trace this tradition but its presence is felt in the authoritative quality of his architecture.

The regionalist architecture of Hungarian Imre Makovecz is more explicitly generated from images of Hungarian mythology and folklore and there is a feeling of cultural scenography in his work that suggests archaic rites; one expects people to appear on the scene dressed in medieval tunics.

It seems that in our time regional identity is possible only on the fringes which have not been conquered by consumer society.

The Hidden Dimensions of Culture

As structural anthropology has taught us, the relations of man, artifacts, and culture are very complex. The difficulties of rationally conceiving these relations arise mainly because decisive interaction takes place on an unconscious biocultural level. These hidden dimensions have been brilliantly pointed out by Edward T. Hall, whose books on unconscious and culturally conditioned uses of space are invaluable to an architect. To deny these differences is now pure ignorance. Knowledge of the cultural conditioning of our behavior in space and place is rapidly increasing. Recent studies on the spatial geometry concealed in language, for instance, show that even language conditions man's spatial behavior in a way specific to that particular language.

The psycho-linguistic studies of the Norwegian-born Finn Frode Strømnes have revealed astonishing differences in spatial imagery and use of space between Finnish- and Swedish-speaking people, for instance, and these differences are no doubt reflected in Finnish and Swedish architecture. It is difficult to analyze what constitutes Swedishness or Finnishness in architecture but it is perceived at a glance. Language itself can be used to generate architecture. In addition to his morphological studies of Finnish landscapes, Reima Pietilä has deliberately attempted to project the rhythms, complexities, and topological nature of Finnish language in his architecture.

We Finns tend to organize space topologically on the basis of an amorphous

"forest geometry" as opposed to the "geometry of town" that guides European thinking. The geometry of the forest is most clearly expressed in Alvar Aalto's work in the elaborate use of forest metaphor at Villa Mairea and the New York Pavilion. This assumption is not at all surprising if one knows Hall's observations on the radial pattern of thinking among the French and the gridiron thinking of the Americans.

Certain deep-structure properties specific to local culture vigorously resist change. For instance, the tone of speech characteristic to a region has been observed to persist through many successive generations after a family has moved from the region. I have been astonished by the persistence of gestural and body language characteristic to a given culture. There is no way of mistaking a French or an Italian by his gesturing or an American by his way of walking, or of not instantly spotting an American in European context by his higher level of voice.

Body and muscle systems are strongly connected with cultural identity. Evidently an authentic building tradition must be related to such unconscious factors. Mud-building traditions, in West Africa for instance, seem more related to man's tactile sense than visual. Culturally there is a tendency to develop away from the tactile towards the visual. Yet we return to the tactile mode in certain emotional states, for instance, caressing our dear ones.

Consequently, a culturally adapted architecture is not merely a matter of visual style but of integration of culture, behavior, and environment. To deny cultural differentiation is foolish. A culturally specific character or style cannot be consciously learned and added on the surface of design; it is a result of being profoundly subject to a specific pattern of culture and of the creative synthesis which fuses conscious intentions and unconscious conditioning, memories, and experiences in a dialogue between the individual and the collective.

All artists elaborate their self-image in their art, and a differentiated building tradition supports the collective self-image of an entire culture. This applies also to apparently traditionless building in America—the strip, for instance.

Individual and Tradition

The creative artist's relation to history is equally complex. Authentic artists are usually more concerned with a general feeling for time and history than any factual history or its products. In an essay written in 1919, entitled "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot describes perceptively this "historical sense" and a poet's position in the challenge of tradition:

Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense...and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature...has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a

writer traditional and it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.¹

Today's fashionable attempts to re-create a sense of place and rootedness in history through application of historical and regional motifs usually fail because of the one-dimensionally literal use of reference and a manipulation of motifs on the surface level.

Instead of being born from an integrity of cultural forces—the inner necessity, as Kandinsky named it—the historicism of today is a form of intellectual manipulation. Culture is taken as an objectified, external, and given reality which can be consciously applied and expressed in design. The past is taken as a source from which to select instead of being the continuum and context of creative work. Instead of being accepted as an autonomous process, culture has been turned into an object of deliberate fabrication.

The present concern with regionalism has the evident danger of turning into sentimental provincialism, whereas vital products of art in our specialized culture are always born from an open confrontation between the universal and the unique, the individual and the collective, the traditional and the revolutionary.

In an essay entitled "What is a Classic," T. S. Eliot describes mental provincialism:

...a provincialism, not of space, but of time: one for which history is merely the chronicle of human devices which have served their turn and been scrapped, one for which the world is the property solely of the living, a property in which the dead hold no shares.²

Alvar Aalto's Regionalist Strategies

The most outspoken advocate of situationally adapted Modernity in the Nordic countries as well as within the Modern Movement as a whole was, of course, Alvar Aalto.

After his short enthusiasm for the main stream of the Modern Movement and its universalist ideals, Aalto emphatically expressed his suspicion of universal and techno-utopian ideology. In Aalto's thinking the task of architecture was to mediate between man and technology and support his social and cultural integration.

There is an unexplainable sense of rootedness and Finnishness in Aalto's designs. His architecture seems to activate certain deep responses in the observer. His biomorphisms give subconscious associations with the organic world, and his layered compositions give an impression of environments formed by tradition and history. Aalto uses imagery that activates subconscious association. He uses, for instance, metaphorically condensed images of town and landscape reminiscent of medieval paintings. In one of his early essays,

presumably an introduction to a planned book which never progressed beyond this introduction, he praises Andrea Mantegna's painting *Christ in the Vineyard* as a magnificent representation of "an architectonic landscape" and a "synthetic landscape." The desire to create a "synthetic landscape" seems to have persisted in his own work throughout his life, and it clearly contributes to the adaptive character of his architecture. He synthesized not only the Finnish landscape in his architecture but also the Finnish temperament.

In his compositions Aalto tended to understate main compositional elements, like the entrance, and guided one's attention elsewhere. This understatement is reminiscent of Pieter Brueghel's paintings in which the mythical event is hidden in the middle of everyday life. There is a relaxed vernacular feeling, an air of invitation and curiosity rather than an attempt to impose and silence.

Aalto's architecture is connected with a general sense of time and place rather than with any specific style or place. His work gives simultaneously faint hints of archaic history, antiquity, vernacular Mediterranean building, and anonymous Finnish peasant tradition.

The work of Henry Moore evokes a similar abundance of imagery related to nature, geology, plant forms, animal skulls and bones, as well as of archaic products of Man.

Aalto's architecture did not aim at the absoluteness typical of the main line of the Modern Movement. As a result, he could use motifs of history and vernacular tradition, combined with a Modern language, and create architecture remarkably rooted in place and time.

Vernacular style is usually an unorthodox mixture of influences and motifs which have lost much of their original meaning and intactness. In a similar manner, Aalto used the Modernist vocabulary in shamelessly unorthodox combinations with romantic, historicist, and folk motifs. But Aalto's motifs are not borrowings; they are re-creations and they merely hint at a possible origin elsewhere. The use of vernacular motifs gives his buildings a relaxed and unpretentious atmosphere and certainly has facilitated public acceptance of his Modernity. This applies also to Aalto's furniture designs, which represent the very few examples of Modernist vernacular. Innumerable variations and modifications by other designers are a clear indication of the acceptance of Aalto's design as a modern vernacular.

Interaction between the self-conscious high-style of the academic discipline of architecture and unself-conscious vernacular application is an essential aspect of the evolution. A style becomes socially significant as it generates a tradition of anonymous application. And one of the shortcomings of the Modern Movement at large has been its inability to produce a positive vernacular.

Culturally adapted architecture reverberates with tradition. It fuses and reflects the timeless vernacular idiom and, consequently, an authentic culture-specific architecture cannot be invented. It has to rediscover and revitalize aspects of tradition, either explicit characteristics of style or, more convincingly, the hidden dimensions of culture.

Uniting Opposites

The architectures of Alvar Aalto and Luis Barragán reveal that culture-specific character of architecture is not a matter of simple manipulation of recognizable elements. Cultural isolationism and protectionism do not offer any guarantee of unique architecture.

Regional character may be achieved—and usually is—from totally contradictory ingredients. Frank Lloyd Wright's American architecture synthesized themes from North American and Mexican Indian cultures, and European architectural history as well as traditional Japanese architecture. The impact of traditional Japanese art on twentieth-century Western aesthetic ideals is another example of the incredibly composite nature of culture. On the other hand, Le Corbusier's architecture, which was strongly influenced by Mediterranean vernacular tradition, has given rise to one of the strongest contemporary traditions in Japan and India. And this influence is again reflected back to Europe and other parts of the world in the work of Tadao Ando, Charles Correa, and many others.

The journey of Louis Kahn's architecture from his native Estonian island of Saaremaa via Philadelphia to Bangladesh, where his geometric architecture has created a strong school, is equally astonishing.

The most outspoken regionalist group in Finland today, the northern Oulu School, has been most strongly influenced by Charles Moore, whereas today's strong Estonian *avant-garde* is a curious fusion of Russian Constructivism and American Post-Modernism, an artistic marriage of Leonidov and Graves.

A colleague recently made a comment that regional architecture today looks the same in all parts of the world. All great art tends to be regional for the simple reason that it is open to interpretation and, consequently, can echo any cultural conditions. All great art is the common property and heritage of mankind.

But these crusades of inspirations and impulses in the development of culturally adapted architecture are not just products of our communication age.

Peasant churches in Finland, which are usually considered to be genuine products of an indigenous tradition, are clearly echoes of continental high-style. Similarly, the architectural identity of the Grand Duchy of autonomous Finland was created in Neo-Hellenic spirit which, of course, was totally alien for the underdeveloped forest land of the time. The National Romanticism of the turn of the century, which deliberately aimed at creating a national style and overtly sought its inspiration from indigenous mythology and tradition, was, in fact, closer to contemporary examples in Germany and Scotland, even on the other side of the Atlantic in the American Midwest. The Nordic Classicism of the 1920s found inspiration in the Classical vernacular of northern Italy. And half a century later the universal ideals of the International Style were turned into a humane and somewhat romantic version of post-war Modernity in the Nordic countries.

One of the most convincing achievements of Western architecture in an alien cultural context is Henning Larsen's Saudi Arabian Foreign Ministry Riyadh which clearly shows the Nordic sensibility of cultural assimilation. This building

is an exceptionally successful example of architectural diplomacy. Psychologists speak of “situational personality,” referring to the fact that the behavior of a single individual varies more under different environmental conditions than the behavior of different individuals under the same circumstances. Maybe we should credit a designer’s exceptional cultural adaptability to a particularly adaptable situational personality.

One more note in this concoction of regionalism: Eliel Saarinen created the prototype of the American skyscraper, the Chicago Tribune Tower, in the wood of southern Finland; his painter friend Gallen-Kall started his illustrations of *Greater Kalevala*, the Finnish folk epic, in Chicago. “Only in the desert of Chicago did my father’s imagination burst into bloom,” wrote the painter’s daughter.

Constituents of Style

Architecture is not an expression of knowledge and certainty, but of existence and faith and a perpetual search for reconciliation.

An architectural style is defined, both on individual and collective levels, by a combination of certain mental orientations. Stylistic evolution seems to take place in a pendulum fashion as priorities shift from one polarity to the other. The orientations are exemplified by the opposite notions like those in the table.

<u>universal</u>	<u>situational</u>
<u>collective</u>	<u>individual</u>
<u>standardized</u>	<u>unique</u>
<u>conscious</u>	<u>subconscious</u>
<u>future-oriented</u>	<u>history-oriented</u>
<u>idealistic</u>	<u>realistic</u>
<u>structure-oriented</u>	<u>form-oriented</u>
<u>rational</u>	<u>emotional</u>
<u>absolutist</u>	<u>relativist</u>
<u>theoretical, orthodox</u>	<u>pragmatic</u>
<u>exclusive</u>	<u>inclusive</u>

The first set of orientations clustered together in the main stream of International Style, whereas the second set of orientations have characterized Nordic architecture through the century. Today there seems to be a rather universal shift towards the latter orientations, away from the mental construction of the International Style. Consequently, a culture-specific trend is gaining strength universally and one could foresee a renewed interest in Nordic architecture.

Without wanting to expand the vague terminology of architectural debate, I would argue that Modernity has progressed to a new phase during the past two decades. I would like to speak of a “First” and a “Second” Modernity. This implies a change in external stylistic features, but, above all, in mental factors and a new understanding of culture.

In his thought-provoking book *Art of the Novel* Milan Kundera declares that Modernity has transformed to kitsch:

The aesthetics of mass media are by necessity the aesthetics of kitsch; as the mass media gradually extend and penetrate into every aspect of our life, kitsch becomes our everyday aesthetics and morality. Only some time ago Modernism implied a non-conformist rebellion against received thought and kitsch. Nowadays Modernity blends into the immense vitality of mass media and to be modern means a fierce attempt to keep up with time and adapt, to be even more adaptive than the most adaptive. Modernity had pulled the robe of kitsch on its shoulders.³

There is no reason to deny Kundera's severe verdict, but I think that only the Modernist dialectical relation to history, culture, and society can emancipate architecture from kitsch. And I am convinced that the New Modernism that is taking shape now is again shaking the robe of kitsch off its shoulders.

The Two Modernisms

The First Modernism was a utopian, idealistic, purist, and demagogic movement, which drew its artistic strength from an innocent faith in a future brought about by new architecture and art. It was a fighting movement with impetus and polemic. It believed in the possibility of cultural expansion and radical change, which could quickly lead to a humane, healthy, and sane world.

The Second Modernism is a realistic view of culture unblinded by illusions. It has lost innocent faith in an immediate victory of humanism and it sees its potential merely as a strategy of cultural resistance in slowing down undesirable anti-human development.

Stylistic change has been equally multi-faceted. The First Modernism aspired to immaterial and weightless movement, whereas the Second frequently expresses gravity and stability and a sense of materiality and earth. The return of earth and gravity as expressive means of architecture has more than metaphoric meaning; after its arrogant and utopian journey, architecture has returned to the safety of Mother Earth, back to the sources of rebirth and creativity.

In its aspiration for pure plastic expression, the First Modernism avoided symbolism, allusion, and metaphor, which have become an essential part of the expression of the Second. As the first phase aimed at an impression of timelessness, new Modernism seeks an experience of time through material, memory, and metaphor. The First Modernism admired perfection and finiteness, while unfinishedness, process, and imperfection are part of the new expression. The First Modernism aimed at perpetual innovation, the Second consciously uses stylistic borrowings. I want to stress, however, that the contemporary use of quotation takes place in two directions in history, and it gives the past a new meaning as opposed to the one-directional appropriation of eclecticism. There is always an air of necrophilia in eclectic art because of its inability to resurrect the dead.

Motifs of Change

The motive forces behind the change are alterations in consciousness that have taken place during the past two decades and which are more radical than most of us are willing to accept. The Third World, the energy crisis, the university revolution, the development of mass-communication and data-processing are all part of the mosaic of change as well as the whole Post-Modern debate. But also an awareness of the dangers implied by the technical development and a disappointment with the achievements of Western democracy lie behind the Second Modernity.

The transformation of Modernity did not happen at once. Even in the early phases of Modernism, expressionist, organic, and regionalist tendencies existed within the Movement. The momentum of the First Modernism began to run out in the '50s and the emerging change was revealed in the discussions of CIAM. Louis Kahn and Aldo van Eyck appeared as the most outspoken heralds of change. Kahn brought back the archaic and metaphysical dimensions, and van Eyck introduced an anthropological and structuralist view.

My view of continuous Modernity is based on a view of the dialectics of evolution, which is more explanatory and hopeful than the popular thought of a bankruptcy of Modernity. Fundamentally I see Modernity as a dialectic view of culture that perpetually challenges and resurrects the past.

The New Tradition

The touching and optimistic vitality of early Modernism arises from its origins at the confrontation of tradition and reform. Modernity lost its spiritual depth through the generations, which accepted the style as a ready-made aesthetic without its cultural background and the continuity of tradition implied by Modernism.

The interdependence of architecture and culture has not been sufficiently recognized. The international, consumerist architectural journalism of today violently detaches buildings from their cultural context and presents them in an arena of individual architectural showmanship.

The Second Modernity has to relearn a way of seeing architecture as part of cultural tradition as well as analyzing the timeless essence of architecture. It is also significant that the creators of First Modernism were themselves artists or collaborated closely with artists. The spiritual withering of Modernism is associated with the post-war generations that alienated themselves from the fine arts both through prevailing educational practice and shallow professionalism. The New Modernism of today seeks again inspiration from the soil of the arts.

Populism

The assumed failure of the mythical hero architect has given rise to a populism and a reverence for consensus or popular taste as the sole authority of design. This view denies the essential dynamism of cultural development, the dialogue and opposition between the creative individual and the convention.

In the epilogue to his novel *The Name of the Rose* (one of the literary successes in terms of popularity in recent years), Umberto Eco states that there are two types of writers, the ones that attempt to write what they expect their readers to want to read, and others that construct their ideal reader as they write. And only the latter type of writer is able to write significant literature. Only an architect who mentally constructs an ideal client and ultimately an ideal society as he designs can create memorable architecture. This view does not imply empty utopianism or a belief in a messianic mission of architecture. Simply, touching art is born from the reality of hope and idealization, a belief in a better future. The art of architecture turns into production of commodities for the consumer society when it loses its poetic and metaphysical content and sees as its duty the mere fulfillment of popular desire. "To caress a cat to death," is the wise warning of a Polish proverb.

In my view, architecture, like an art, is simultaneously autonomous and culture-bound. It is culture-bound in the sense that tradition, the cultural context, provides the basis for individual creativity, and it is autonomous in the sense that an authentic artistic expression is never an answer to prescribed expectation or definition. The fundamental existential mystery is the core of architecture, and the confrontation of this mystery is always unique and autonomous, totally independent of the specifications of the "social commission." A church and a cellulose factory do not differ at all as commissions for an architect.

The human task of architecture is not to beautify or to humanize the world of everyday facts, but to open up a view into the second dimension of our consciousness, the reality of images, memories, and dreams.

Quasi-Intellectualization

...

In our obsessive consumerist culture which gradually detaches objects and buildings from their use value and turns everything into marketable signs, the traditional Nordic functionalist morality, restraint, and asceticism acquire a wider cultural value. In a culture that tends to turn into a Sargasso Sea of too many goods, too much information, too many ideologies, too much of everything, the idea and aesthetics of noble poverty have a new moral value. As our materialist culture hysterically produces new marketable images and turns even crime, violence, and decadence into profit, the Norwegian tradition represents a philosophy of common sense and a poetry of the commonplace.

Regionalism in the industrial world cannot any longer be founded on a set of isolated and perfectly integrated conditions. Perhaps the most meaningful form of cultural survival that remains is a regionalism of the mind, the strategy of resistance, the subculture that believes in and searches for authenticity. Not authenticity on ethnographic grounds but that of human experience and interaction.

The mission of Nordic architecture lies in the continuous development of the tradition of socially concerned, responsive, and assimilative Modernity.

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Tradition & Modernity / Juhani Pallasmaa

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