

The Ideology of Architecture

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i. Architecture and Ideology

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It has become official RIBA policy (following Robert Adam's proposal (*p.8, AJ 5th June 2003*)), to have architecture schools 'either declare their ideological position or accept a wide range of architectural approaches'. This means that the professional body now openly recognises the connection between architecture and ideology. The idea that the dominant architectural movement of the present, that of Modernism, has a distinct ideology and that by promoting this architecture its ideology, however that may be defined, is also promoted has now received official blessing. But more than that, the new policy states that unless a prejudice is stated, *stylistic* preference cannot be used as a criterion for assessment and so there is also here a presumed equivalence between ideology and style.

In my opinion if traditionalists are to make headway in challenging the hegemony of Modernism, assuming that is what they want to do, a line of attack is going to have to found that can question the essential tenets of Modernism, and in this the connection between architecture and ideology, and style and ideology, will be the chief area for exploration, for it is here that the weakness of the Modernist position can most readily be exposed and a new radical theory of traditionalism best be formulated.

Towards the end of the last century Modern architecture, in its most unfettered extremist style, became more entrenched as the dominant style than ever before. Previous vacillations such as the shallow Post-Modernist style, which had at least made a gesture to history, had been expunged in favour of an increasingly hardcore Modernism. When reductive Modernist, David Chipperfield, acted as a jurist for the Mies van der Rohe Award in 2003, he noted in declaring ultra-Modern, neo-Brutalist, Zaha Hadid, the winner that the choice was 'safe'. (Fig 1) He thus he drew attention to how extreme the climate has become.



I believe that the strength of the Modernist position is that the style is backed up by a persuasive ideology and it is this ideology that cements the dominance of Modernism in our society - in the architectural press, the architectural schools, the professional bodies and the establishment in general. Of course, Modernists have never been successful in appealing to the public at large, but an essential aspect of the movement, which was present from the outset, is its *elitism* and so it will never attempt to survive by an appeal to populism.

*Right: Fig 1. Rosenthal Centre for Contemporary Art, Cincinnati, Architect Zaha Hadid 2003
Image provided by Mary Ann Sullivan at Bluffton College, 280 W College Ave Bluffton, Ohio 45817-1196 <http://www.bluffton.edu>*

It is likely that its current ascendancy is intrinsically connected to the increasing metropolitanisation and globalisation of the culture for these are regimes that Modernism finds congenial. To understand how this elitist movement continues to prosper we need to start by analysing the exact nature of its binding ideology.

But before embarking on this analysis, two general principles must be stated. Firstly, Modernism may have an ideology but our aim must never be simply to construct or evoke an alternative ideology to set up against it, so that we can have a "battle of the ideologies". That would be the road to an unsavoury and ultimately meaningless conflict. Nor should we merely attempt to "deconstruct" the Modernist ideology leaving us with a hopeless kit of ideas

cast onto a Post-Modern (in the philosophical sense) landscape lacking any reference points or usable methodological tools. And neither should we cop out by advocating pluralism which would allow equal value to all claimants. We need an approach that is at the same time both subtler and broader, and that goes beyond ideology to allow us a keener and more open perspective on different ideological claims. We must, above all, avoid the trap that Modernists, amongst others, have wilfully embraced – that of being *prescriptive*. If the position we arrived at laid down in a defined way exactly how we should build and design, then we would have achieved little advance on the present situation.

Secondly, when we speak of ideology it is not that of the familiar left and right, for our take on ideology must go both deeper and wider than the banal political categories. However, if we are going to discuss ideologies we must describe them relative to each other, and that must mean categorising them in some way. An important part of the task ahead is therefore to formulate at least some kind of broad classification of ideologies as a way of contrasting one against another throwing each into perspective and this will enable us to reinvent the vocabulary and articulate new insights.

To students of comparative ideologies or belief systems, the theories upon which Modern architecture is founded can be described as *metaphysical idealism*. This can also be termed *conceptual* or *abstract* idealism. There were two chief Modern theorists; they wrote in the first half of the last century and their ideas still represent the bedrock of the Modernist ideology, which has not changed significantly since its inception. Both of these theorists were Swiss, one German speaking, the other French speaking. The German speaker wrote out of the tradition of nineteenth century German metaphysical idealism that, if not begun by, had its first heavyweight philosopher in G.W.F.Hegel (1770-1831). The French speaker wrote out of the more ancient tradition of Mediterranean based idealism that we commonly regard as springing from the pen of Plato. If Hegel is never specifically cited in Siegfried Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* his presence can be felt on practically every one of its key pages (passing over the interminably long and turgid later sections). In Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture* Plato is cited and likewise the strong influence of Platonic idealism can be felt on every page. Thus the Modernist ideology is founded on two quite different philosophers, each representing a different strand of metaphysical idealism.

You might ask at this point: would the average jobbing (or even signature!) Modern architect be able to tell you with any precision what Hegel or Plato said? And so you might question whether they still exert any real influence. The answer to this is that certain key ideas of both philosophers have become so ingrained in the present day thinking (not only in architecture but in many intellectual fields) that they have become the almost invisible assumptions people make in tackling many tasks. These need to be unravelled if we are to make any progress in characterising contemporary culture, and contemporary architecture in particular, and exposing its failings. The words of John Maynard Keynes are relevant here when he said of the field of political economics: "The ideas of economists and political philosophers ... are more powerful than commonly supposed. Practical men who believe themselves to be quite

exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist". So this can be applied to architects who have been handed down and have accepted, through Modernist ideology, the Hegelian world view and the idealism of Plato, probably without being in any sense aware of the fact.

ii. The Theory of Modernism

To consider Giedion first, the important idea from Hegel that Giedion incorporated into his theory of architecture was Hegel's view of history. Hegel is generally seen as the first philosopher to use history as a central element of philosophy (although his interpretation can be related to earlier ideas by Herder and Fichte). Hegel notably gave us the notion of the *zeitgeist* (the *time spirit -spirit of the time*). Crudely this idea is that each age, however 'age' might be defined, has associated with it an underlying force that determines, or at least influences, everything that happens or is produced by that age. From the examples that Hegel gave it is clear he meant that a *zeitgeist* should be defined by both time and place, not just time, and like many words from philosophy that have passed into common usage, the idea of the *zeitgeist* has an essential reasonableness. If we look at products of a certain 'age', say, the Italian Renaissance, Europe in the Middle Ages, we can see a kind of commonality. So tangible is this sense of items belonging to a particular place and time that if we look at a photograph of, say, an unidentified building we can usually assign to it a rough date and location. There is clearly something in this idea, therefore. The problem is that in the hands of a skilled German metaphysician a fairly simple, commonsense notion is turned into a powerful instrument of persuasion and a building block for a prescriptive ideology.

Hegel was far too subtle a thinker to let the ramifications and the problematic nature of the notion of *zeitgeist* pass without addressing them (and typically turning the difficulties into virtues) but Giedion, with whom we are primarily concerned, was not such a subtle thinker. Supposing we accept, with Giedion and Hegel, the idea of the *zeitgeist* – the spirit of the time. The question then is what are we going to do with it. Heinrich Wölfflin, the nineteenth century German architectural theorist (whom Giedion acknowledged as his great influence) had used the notion in regarding periods of history and seeing a consequential unity, Giedion, however, used it to talk, not only about history, but also about the present and the immediate past. He used it to formulate a view, not just of *why* people built as they did in the past, but of *how* they should be building now. The result of this, as with all Hegel-inspired ideas, is that there is practically no room for manoeuvre. Giedion asserted that his historical and contemporary analysis could show us what the current *zeitgeist* exactly *was*. This is questionable enough, but he then went on to take a next logical step that confirms him as a fundamentally metaphysical idealist thinker. Having defined the *zeitgeist* as he saw it, he then said that *we must obey it*.

The immediate obvious question, that this view gives us, is to ask: where can free will coexist with all of this? If we must design in a certain way, what has happened to imagination and personal preference? The same question confronts the other great Hegel-derived ideology, Marxism, to which Modernism in architecture can claim to be only second in influence and

effect. Hegel, himself, dealt with this problem, as he dealt with all difficulties, by confronting it head on – in this case, with his theory of "alienation" (which we need not go into) - but his followers, in Marx and Giedion, do not face up to this problem.

This brings us an important consequence of the idealism of Giedion's influential modernist theory – its prescriptive, intolerant nature. This has ensured that it has become not merely one interpretation among several but a whole orthodox ideology, and like all ideologies is unable to allow disaffecting views. This is why the architectural establishment is so vehemently opposed to any building that presents an alternative to the Modernist orthodoxy and probably why they increasingly favour the most extreme modernist buildings, as they deem these as best serving the promotional needs of their preferred ideology. This tendency exists with many belief systems based on metaphysical theories for what their proponents seek to do is to invoke a single higher force that dictates our actions for us. In this case this higher force is represented by the spirit of the times, what Giedion in sinister fashion also calls the "anonymous aims of the period" (or what Marxists call the "historical imperative").

Giedion's argument would not have had much influence if he had not gone on to attempt to characterise the nature of the influence on contemporary architecture of this obedience to the zeitgeist. For this he had to first characterise the zeitgeist. He could no doubt have picked any number of aspects of society to do this but the one he chose was technology. He made the simple claim that, because there was a general shift from craft based manufacture to machine manufacture, the machine was the key to characterising our age and so it was the machine that should provide the inspiration for the new architecture. Machines are by their nature "functional" and unyielding and it was these qualities that should be imported into the look and design method of buildings, and above all they should form a substitute for the stylistic elements that had always been a part of architecture up until then.

But there was an important further aspect to the new architecture and for this we need to turn to le Corbusier's Platonic tract, and see how this architect sought to realise the supposedly eternal truths in Plato's idealism through his buildings. Corb, early on, states his millennial pronouncements: "A great epoch begun. There exists a new spirit..." which would have been equally at home in Giedion's great work, and then goes on to make it clear that for him this should be expressed through pure mathematics and geometry. He says;" ...cubes, cones, spheres, cylinders or pyramids are the great forms ... these are *beautiful forms, the most beautiful forms*" and that "Architecture is the art above all others which achieves a state of Platonic grandeur, mathematical order". Le Corbusier takes it for granted that there is great merit in the Platonic doctrine of ideal forms for it is this that underpins his theory. But what exactly does it say?

The concept of ideal forms, which we associate with Plato, and that has been so influential in variable measure down the ages since its inception, holds up, what is, on the face of it, a fairly unlikely principle. We normally understand the world as a collection of particulars which we are able, through our habit of generalisation by means of language, to group according to

certain concepts. So, for instance, I have the table in my sitting room and the table in my kitchen and I have no difficulty in seeing them as two quite distinct and different objects that I conveniently link with the simple notion signified by the word "table". The concept of a table is thus secondary to the particular tables that we meet. Plato, however, is not satisfied with this scenario and seeks to turn it on its head by giving primacy to the *concept* of the table over the *particular* versions of it. In doing so he introduces a notion that has reverberated down through the history of western ideas, and this is that this concept corresponds to an "ideal" version of a table, of which the particular ones are inferior copies. This is the familiar "Platonic ideal".

This philosophy is fraught with problematic implications, that philosophers have been able to argue about ever since, but what concerns us here is perhaps the most obvious one and this is: If these ideals exist, where are they? Plato, like the great philosopher that he is, does not duck this question, and to answer it accepts the only logical conclusion. He places these ideal forms not within the strictly material world that we know but within an altogether different realm – what came to be known as the "metaphysical" realm. What, or where, is the metaphysical realm? Well, it is not like the supernatural realm, which exists on some kind of higher plane, it exists more as system of hidden forces and laws influencing and controlling the world we see. We saw how the metaphysical forces that Hegel imagined worked on the historical changes we experience. In Plato metaphysics shapes the physical world we see. And in both there is the strong implication that the metaphysical has primacy over the physical.

Le Corbusier tells us: "It is necessary to press on towards the establishment of *standards* in order to face the problems of *perfection*" and he sees the machine as central to this end for the machine is based on engineering and so is uncontaminated by human interference and so achieves purity and perfection. In emphasising the machine he is in agreement with Giedion, but his Platonic idealism adds in another element that becomes a primary element in his earliest most revolutionary buildings. This is the desire to reduce all the building components and the very vocabulary of architecture to the most minimal elements almost as if they were merely graphical representations.



If we view his "International Style" buildings of the thirties (such as the Villa Savoie, near Paris, Fig 2) we see buildings expunged of all references to, for instance, the physical reality of weather, for there are no, or virtually no, drips, eaves, overhangs, recessed windows or any other device that traditionally have equipped a building in Europe to deal with the exigencies of weather.

Fig 2. Villa Savoye. Poissy near Paris. Architect le Corbusier. 1929

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But not only is the reality of weather denied, the innate sense of structure, that informs our reading of a building, is challenged for, instead of a clear sense of window openings in a solid masonry wall, we have "ribbon" windows drawn onto a white canvas of wall, so attempting to reverse our sense of how buildings enclose. The ultimate aim of all this contrivance is far from the rationality of the machine that both Giedion and le Corbusier admired, for the functional demands of climate and structure are ignored. No the real aim here is to express the pure world of geometry and mathematics that is conjured up by Plato's metaphysics that le Corbusier was so fascinated by. The building no longer needs to dwell in the real world with its practical needs. It is displaced to a metaphysical reality where only the ideal forms need exist. It evokes an abstract higher plane where we can contemplate the new era untrammelled by the baggage of past culture and the mundane demands of physicality.

The preceding has attempted to briefly characterise the modern movement ideology in respect of certain of its basis principles, but, if we are going to truly understand this ideology, we will need to place it in relation to ideas in other fields contemporary with it and also suggest the larger historical context in which its underlying philosophical precepts lie. The ideas of Hegel and Plato that inspired our modern theorists, whilst, as indicated earlier, contributed certain concepts that nowadays are so widespread within certain fields as to be almost invisible, have endured a rocky ride in the past. Hegel's quasi-religious philosophy ran counter to pragmatic thinkers like John Stuart Mill in England and Dewey in the United States in the nineteenth century, and Plato, whilst still respected well into the late Roman Empire, lost favour in Mediaeval Europe with the rediscovery of the far more plausible Aristotle, through contact with the Islamic world which had preserved his recorded ideas. Plato's ideas are always haunted by their association with the Pythagorean cult and the Occult in general to which indeed they are close, and it is worth noting in passing that the Platonism in Corb's first major book gave way to a full blown numerology in the later Modulor which reflected the great architect's well-attested strong interest in the Kabbalah and other forms of esotericism. Modern architecture was not born in a vacuum and to understand its ideology it would be helpful to have an overall view of certain trends in ideas during the last century. Although I believe that the Modernist ideology has much in common with other dogmas that came to the

fore in that century within the context of this essay I have space to consider only one. And this is the one that Modernism shares its philosophical roots.

iii. Gnostic Ideologies

I will discuss Marxism, because it shares its Hegelian roots with Modernist ideology and so relates to some of what has already been said. It is perhaps an easy target because it is generally regarded as being discredited pretty well worldwide, although this loss of faith occurred in the west later than some other parts. (People from Russia, for instance, visiting the west in the nineteen fifties and sixties were generally astonished to find people who believed in Marxist ideology, for there were none left in the country from which they had come.) It is not worth dwelling on the failure of the Marxist socio-economic experiment for this is too familiar, but what I would wish to emphasise is the way in which Marx adapted Hegel's world historical view to what he called a "materialist" view of history. One of the most outlandish ideas in Hegel, but one that is absolutely central to his thinking, is the idea that all history is tending towards a condition of "Absolute Mind" or "Absolute Spirit", and that every event, good or bad, that we see happening, is a part of this overarching process. It is because of his belief in this idea of Absolute Mind or Spirit that Hegel is always regarded as a supremely metaphysical thinker for, under Hegel's system, events we experience in the real world become subordinate to this grand concept. In the same way our individual lives become subordinate to the greater abstract processes that he constructs.

Marx had no need for this quasi-religious aspect of Hegel and in place of the Absolute Spirit he constructed his socialist utopia as the ultimate goal of history. He went on from this to claim to have discovered the "scientific" principles which govern the march of history and which make the realisation of this utopia "inevitable". In fact, his description of the mechanism by which history proceeded from one stage to the next was simply lifted from Hegel, but the details of this we need not go into.

What is important to the present discussion is the nature of Marx's utopian ideal, because it is this that has such a close relationship to Modernist theory. In fact, one of the interesting points about the latter is that together with Marxism it forms the duumvirate of highly influential ideologies that are derived from Hegel. But influential is hardly a strong enough word for these two belief systems, one of which transformed the political and economic lives of countless millions of people and the other of which transformed our cities forever. The discredited social "utopias" that Marxism produced almost exactly parallel the architectural "utopias" that the Modern movement promoted and in many cases executed. Both were prepared to sacrifice the needs and aspirations of individuals for the sake of higher goals and both, thanks to the Hegelian base of their ideology, retained with absolute certainty that what they wanted to achieve was not just desirable, but inevitable. This rejection of the liberal, humanist legacy of western culture was there fully formed in Hegel's Counter-Enlightenment metaphysical dream. The Marxist style of demotion of the individual may have fallen by the wayside but Modernism has not yet suffered this demise.

It continues to promote an architecture that sees technological power and abstract aesthetics as emblematic of a new world leaving little place for any individual sense of what is practical or beautiful.

Marxism and Modernism are typical of the types of ideology that Frederick Crews was referring to when writing in the New York Review of Books in September 9, 1996. In his article he spoke of the notion of "gnosticism" which he defined as follows: "Gnosticism, broadly, conceived is the intuitive apprehension of deep truth without a felt need for corroborating evidence." (To be clear Crews was referring here to gnosticism with a small "g" and not the specific Gnosticism we associate with various religion sects and movements that have existed at different times down the centuries.) Crews's meaning of "gnosticism" can be understood by opposing it to the more familiar term "agnosticism". I believe that gnosticism is common to many ideologies that were important in the twentieth century and Marxism and Modernism are no exceptions.

It is within the context of the overriding gnostic ideologies of the twentieth century that Modernism can be understood. The certainties expressed by its major theorists, Siegfried Giedion and le Corbusier, and repeated many times by its protagonists in spite of its manifest proven failure to provide satisfactory environments, mark it out as a gnostic movement. The intolerance towards dissenting voices displayed by the architectural professional bodies, the architectural press, the architectural schools and architects themselves is typical of those who are wedded with absolute certainty to an unprovable hypothesis, those who have in Crews's words accepted a "deep truth without a felt need for corroborating evidence".

I wish now to try to show how the ideas, that came to the fore in the last century, did so as a result of a process of change that can be traced back in historical time. Often people talk of the "triumph" of Modernism as if it is the victor in a battle that had to be won and I believe that this interpretation is not so far from the truth. We need to try to understand the struggle that led to its dominance in order to see more clearly what it represents and moreover what the "vanquished" opponents represent.

iv. Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment



Fig 3. British Museum. Architect Robert Smirke. 1857

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What Modern architecture defeated must be the same thing as it displaced, and what it displaced we may quite simply describe as traditional architecture. I think we know more or less what modern architecture is but how can we describe traditional architecture? We know it comes in different styles and forms but how can these be classified? In the first place, we should distinguish between styled traditional and vernacular traditional architecture. Styled architecture, such as classical (Fig. 3) or gothic, takes an established set of architectural forms, we might call a canon, and imitates and adapts these to create the new building. However much the new building may improvise on the style, the latter nevertheless remains present in the final design and is essential to its rhetorical power.



Authentic vernacular buildings (Fig. 4) do not imitate in this way but derive their design elements from a functional use of the materials and working practice available, and these evolve into something that is visually harmonious. A vernacular tradition may ossify into something approaching a style but if enough functional integrity is preserved the artifice associated with a truly styled architecture will be not be present.

Fig. 4. Hope Cottages, Devon, England

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The interesting thing about *styled* traditional architecture, as opposed to *vernacular*, is that, up until the late nineteenth century, the style *always* derives from religious architecture, and this is true not only of our home-grown European styles of Classical and Gothic but also of traditional styles throughout the globe.



The nineteenth century exceptions to this rule are the widespread late "*regionalist*" styles such as Arts and Crafts in England (Fig. 5), Modernista in North Eastern Spain (Fig. 6), the Prairie School in America's mid-west (Fig. 7), and so on, but all of these to a greater or lesser degree were founded on local vernacular architecture and on the local environment, for it was in this way that they established the *regionalist* credentials they sought. By contrast reference to the religion-inspired Classical or Gothic imply a degree of *universality* for this was contained in the original religions and mythologies that inspired these styles - even if the way each interpreted that *universality* was different.

Fig 5 The Barn Hotel, Exmouth, Devon, England. Architect Edward Prior. Designed 1896

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The diversity of traditional architecture is essential to it, for this is one of the aspects that ensures that it does not embrace a partisan ideology. But, more fundamentally, it does not need any ideology for it seeks its foundations in what went before. Rather than come up with a grand theory to determine how to build, it pragmatically draws from what went before to build upon it.

This approach is the converse of the avant-gardism of the Modernist outlook which places all virtue in achieving a rupture with the past. It may at first sight seem paradoxical, but this feature of traditional architecture does not mean it is backward looking, in fact, by its nature it has a surer eye on the future and the excitements it contains than Modernism could ever have and this for one simple reason.



The Modernist ethos is, at base, a rehash of reactionary principles that have surfaced from time to time throughout the history of western culture. These have always served the same purpose and set out to achieve the same aims, and this is to annul the advance of, what I would broadly term, humanist principles whether these be of a *universalist* nature seeking to find the commonality that exist between all humans or of a *regionalist* nature seeking to articulate and express the particularities that make up the planet we inhabit. I would argue that the last great flowering of universalising humanism can be equated with what we generally call the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and the last flowering of

regionalism was spawned by the Enlightenment becoming the Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century which it turn lead onto the powerful regionalist movements that reached their heyday just before the dawn of the twentieth century. To understand how Modernism managed to supplant both the Enlightenment and regionalist legacies so completely, we need to understand the natural antagonism that exists between pro- and counter-Enlightenment.

Right:

Fig 6. Can Rei, Carrer Bolseria, Palma, Mallorca.. Circa 1900. Photo Peter Kellow

The Enlightenment was importantly anti-metaphysical. It is often remarked that it produced no great original philosophers. But this is for a very good reason. It was not interested in philosophy, for philosophy in its western form always means metaphysics to a greater or lesser degree. The Enlightenment, like the Humanist tradition of the Italian Renaissance before it, was more interested in the pragmatic issues of law and government and the guiding principles of morality. Even Bertrand Russell, who in many ways can be considered a late Enlightenment figure with his determination to address down-to-earth issues with plain language, wrote that throughout his philosophical development he tried unsuccessfully to free himself from Pythagoreanism. That is to say he understood how the ghost of metaphysics always haunts endeavour in the field of western philosophy.



Of course, the problem of discussing the Enlightenment is that it may mean many different things to different people, to the extent that some may question whether is it even a valid term at all. I believe the best interpretation of the Enlightenment is as an essentially Humanist movement that sought to place reason above superstition, morality above retribution, and put betterment of conditions in this life before betterment of those in the next.

Right:

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It was above all a secular movement and it represents an attempt to suggest how humans can organise their affairs free of religious dictate. It was also pragmatic and down-to-earth and this is why metaphysics was not amenable to it. The new "physics-simple" on the other hand was amenable to it, for it rested, following Newton, on empirical observations. I think part of

the confusion of what the Enlightenment represents arises from sometimes including in it certain figures that are difficult to locate in the humanist tradition. If we limit the Enlightenment to significant figures such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, Jefferson, and others we bring it altogether more clearly into focus and can appreciate more easily what were its lasting contributions and its lasting benefits. One advantage that follows from this view is that it brings into sharper focus the real nature of the Counter-Enlightenment that followed it and just as it helps to define the Counter-Enlightenment so the nature of the Counter-Enlightenment throws light on the achievements of the Enlightenment.

I realise, of course, that many people would take issue with this benign view of the Enlightenment and prefer to blame the Enlightenment for exactly the tendency to abstraction and to over-rationalisation that I have criticised. This is the view of Post-Modern philosophers such as Michel Foucault and others. The emphasis I have adopted is suggested in the writings of Robert Darnton (See George Washington's False Teeth: An Unconventional Guide to the Eighteenth Century. Robert Darnton. (2003)) and in a broader way in the writings of Sir Isaiah Berlin.)

Whereas the origin of the Enlightenment we may think of as being French the origin of the Counter-Enlightenment was German. Although he was preceded by other thinkers that presented challenges to the basic tenets of the Enlightenment, it was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who first proposed a complete philosophy that was diametrically opposed to everything the Enlightenment stood for. Not only did he make claims that firmly belonged to the metaphysical realm, that Voltaire and Jefferson would have derided, he aligned these claims with a fervent nationalism for the Prussian state that was anathema to the sense of common humanity that the Enlightenment embraced. Why would he wish to do this and why should his ideas gain such currency as they did? I think the only way to understand this is to understand the fear that Enlightenment created, for the open democratic and secular ideals that it implied were felt to be threatening. The Counter-Enlightenment ideals of Hegel, as I mentioned earlier, provided an argument against free will, as the impositions of the zeitgeist became primary over all others. So, it is possible to view the nineteenth century as a struggle between those who tried to build on the achievements of the Enlightenment and those who wished to counter it with a return to a rigid way of thinking that gave its adherents the reassuring certainty that only a closed ideology can deliver. But to understand this struggle we need to consider another key figure of the German Counter-Enlightenment whose contribution to metaphysics has particular relevance to a trend in Modernist architecture that seems to be gaining a predominance even as we enter the twenty-first century: Friedrich Nietzsche.

As I have said before, metaphysical systems can be understood according to where they place the ultimate and most important force or forces that determine the nature of our existence. This is equally true of all types of belief systems, and so for instance in the case of a religion such as Islam the most important force is in God. In the myths of the ancient Greeks the fundamental forces reside in a collection of gods and god-like personages. The Romantic poet, like Wordsworth, will see Nature as containing the most basic impetus in the world. In

the metaphysics of Hegel the fundamental force governing all our lives is the force of history and its directness towards the Absolute Spirit. At any particular point in time the *zeitgeist* decides everything in favour of this onward movement. The revival of metaphysics was intrinsic to the Counter-Enlightenment of the nineteenth century but this wasn't only the metaphysics of Hegel.

Nietzsche proposed a quite different metaphysical universe but a metaphysical universe nevertheless. Whereas Hegel had described a force that lay outside and beyond the individual, Nietzsche put all force and power within the individual. But his concern for the individual had nothing to do with the Enlightenment concern for individual rights and how they should be balanced and accommodated, he invested a metaphysical power in the particular individual that then transcended any power in others. To do this he evoked one particular aspect of any individual – not their emotions, not their morality, not their spirituality, not their creativity. He invoked the pure and primal force of their *will*. He used the idea of the will to describe his so-called "*Übermensch*" - the *superman*. This superman and his will thus became dominant in the lives of all and arbiter of them and with this vision Nietzsche was able to jettison much of the baggage of our Christian culture, which he despised, going beyond any sense of morality and dispensing with any of the familiar humanist concerns about the way society should best be organised for the good of all. The parallels with Fascism are obvious and apologists of Nietzsche are always hard-pressed to deny them and, as we know, the Nazis eagerly co-opted Nietzsche as a fellow spirit and precursor.

Nietzsche may at first sight seem to the opposite of Hegel but in reality they are two sides of the same coin. Hegel presages Marxism and Nietzsche presages Nazism. Hegel saw his metaphysical force standing above any particular individual, whereas Nietzsche investing his in the will of an individual. But they are similar just as Marxism and Nazism have similarities in that they both represent challenges to the humanist legacy of the Enlightenment and so together they can be seen as making up the German Counter-Enlightenment. We saw how the figure of Hegel is fundamental to the ideology of Modernism but the influence of Nietzsche has also become important in the Modernist ethos and just as he and Hegel represent two sides of the same coin of nineteenth century German philosophy so the ideas of these two correspond to two sides of the Modernist coin. But to appreciate this fully we need to appreciate how the character of so much of the culture of the twentieth century is that of the Counter Enlightenment – how the twentieth century succeeded in driving out the humanist gains that the eighteenth century Enlightenment promised to guaranty. To do this we must look a little more closely at the struggle for western culture that took place in the nineteenth century throughout practically the whole of Europe.

The nineteenth century, in contrast to the twentieth, was, at least in Europe, an era largely of peace. Following the end of the Napoleonic wars, the "Metternich settlement", established at the Congresses of Vienna of 1814-15, guaranteed the form of the power structures and spheres

of influence in Europe that broadly would survive until the First World War, although some changes did take place, and these would be crucial to the development of the twentieth century wars. What it is important to note about the map of Europe during the nineteenth century is that it shows an arrangement of empires rather than nation states. The heart of Europe (we in the west tend to refer to it as "Eastern Europe") was occupied by the Austrian Empire. The other German-speaking lands to the west and north of this were known as the German Confederation, which corresponded roughly to the old Holy Roman Empire. To the east were the Russian Empire, which included the Kingdom of Poland, and the Ottoman Empire which had reached the limits of its expansion westwards. To the south the land that was to become the nation of Italy, was a loose federation known as the Papal States. Only in the west did you find what we would recognise as "conventional" nation-states in the Netherlands, France, Spain, Portugal and the Kingdom of Great Britain. The last was, of course, also an imperial state but had no substantial possessions on the European mainland. France and Spain whilst having centralised state structures were large enough to have important regions within them and these regions were recognised to a greater or lesser extent in the political arrangements. Along with the predominantly imperial nature of nineteenth century Europe, it is this regional nature that I would also wish to stress.

It may seem paradoxical but regions and empires often go hand in hand. (Incidentally, it has often been pointed out that in our own time there has been a return to regionalism in Europe thanks to the EC. The EC is not an empire but it provides the same kind of *supranational* political structure that favours regionalist tendencies.) Only where the empire is run on extreme autocratic lines do regions and empires not easily co-exist. Of the European empires I am discussing only the Russian Empire could really be said to belong to that category, for it was in the nature of the others to seek accommodation with regionalist tendencies to a greater or lesser degree. The result was a flowering of regionalism and a flowering of culture and self-determination in general, and we are still the beneficiaries of this legacy even if we do not always prize it perhaps as highly as we should. Also the legacy of the Enlightenment was very much alive in the politics of the era and this led to increased educational prospects, better sanitation and health care, more political emancipation, the provision of public services and so on and so on, in many, if not all, parts of Europe. Great strides were made in the physical and medical sciences and these helped to underpin economic growth. The relative freedom from war enabled commerce to develop and this in turn led to dynamic regional economies that were usually centred around a growing regional capital. But there was a black cloud on the horizon. This was *nationalism*, and it is with the mention of nationalism that we return to our theme of the struggle between pro-Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment forces.

The Enlightenment principles of recognising our common humanity, whilst simultaneously taking into account individual aspirations, sat easily with the political realities of the Metternich settlement.

The acceptance of the rights of others to self-determination guaranteed by imperial structures might on the face of it have led to several centuries of harmonious development

instead of just the one. As I hope I have shown, it was the rejection of humanist pragmatism and the return to metaphysical idealism that was the chief driver against our profiting from the liberation in our thought that the eighteenth century had produced. Once we began to abandon and reject the Enlightenment the door was again open for fear and irrationalism to return. In political terms, as the nineteenth century progressed, this fear, this irrationality, coalesced on the one hand around the kind of strong unquestionable nation state that Hegel favoured and on the other on unquestionable subservience to the will of a single individual that Nietzsche had favoured. In broader terms, the appeal to metaphysical forces more and more stamped itself on the character of our intellectual culture. The name of science became corrupted by pseudo-sciences such as Marxism, Darwinism, and Freudianism. As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth the heady mix of futurist progress provided by Hegelianism and Darwinism led to the notion of the avant-garde in art and architecture whereby tradition was jettisoned as having no value, no relevance.

With the coming of the twentieth century the victory of the Counter-Enlightenment held sway over events. In political terms, Germany had transformed itself from a loose assemblage of independent principalities into a unified modern state, the Papal States had disappeared in favour of a unified Italy and the old empires of Austro-Hungary and Russian had suffered the stresses and strains of their dissipated power structures. Nationalism of a particularly jingoistic variety had taken hold in practically every part of Europe. Regionalism, once the source of economic and cultural dynamism, was seen as merely a threat to national unity. Enlightenment ideals, concerning the commonality that all humans share, had little place in this universe of fear and distrust and they were almost completely burnt up in the ensuing conflagration. It might have been expected that the First World War would have prompted a return to the core European values, but this was not to be, for the sense of dislocation with the old world was so total that people were more inclined to put faith in what seemed to them to be new and invigorating. The problem was that these ideas, that were thought of as being new, were in reality ideas that had been around for years. They may not have been occupying fully the centre stage, for, during the nineteenth century, they had comprised only one side of the argument but when they fully surfaced they did so dressed in new clothing fit for the new century.

It was in this way that Modernism entered into the lifeblood of western civilisation. Its surface was bright and shiny. It seemed to beckon a world where only Mediterranean sunlight was possible and where humans would shed their customary desires and foibles in favour of a brave new world of order and mechanisation. Few people bothered to notice that the Modernist utopia had no positive rhetoric of its own but relied for its content on a negative rejection of what went before. It was not a new tradition but simply the absence of the old one. It founded its reactionary ideology on other already existing reactionary ideologies. Its vision of an abstract world was supported theoretically by the anti-humanism of Hegel and Nietzsche and the quasi-occultism of Plato.



As we enter the twenty first century it would appear that the Nietzschean metaphysics of the will has, if only temporarily, overtaken the Hegelian/Giedion metaphysics of the technological zeitgeist, for increasingly wilful outlandish buildings are taking centre stage in the fashion stakes of contemporary architecture.

Right: Fig 8 Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao. Architect Frank Gehry, 1997.

Image provided by Mary Ann Sullivan at Bluffton College, 280 W College Ave Bluffton, Ohio 45817-1196 <http://www.bluffton.edu>

It was Sir Herbert Read who observed in the nineteen thirties that Modern art had two distinct types: the formal and the expressive.



The same distinction has always existed in Modern architecture. In spite of the apparent gulf between say a Frank Gehry building (Fig. 8) and a Norman Foster building (Fig. 9) (ignoring his recent excursions into zoomorphology) we feel intuitively that they are singing from essentially the same hymn book and, indeed, buildings as disparate as these exist happily side-by-side on the pages of the architectural magazines. The reason for this is that, as we have seen, both promote the metaphysical agenda. They may be different types of attempts to

impose on us abstract forces at a remove from our intuitive sense of beauty and reason but they have the same base ideology.

Fig 9 Law Faculty Building, Sidgwick Site, Cambridge University. Architect Norman Foster 1995. Image provided by Mary Ann Sullivan at Bluffton College, 280 W College Ave Bluffton, Ohio 45817-1196 <http://www.bluffton.edu>

v. Traditionalism and Humanism

It is a theme of this essay that the manner or style in which we build is associated with and underpinned by a way of thinking. In the case of twentieth century modernism this was an ideological worldview which was founded on pre-existing metaphysical theories, but the way of thinking does not have to be this type, or any type, of ideology. Indeed, ideologies because of their overarching nature do not sit easily with ways of building that are more open and less theoretical than modernism. In particular what we would broadly describe as traditionalism has no need of a grand ideology from which to work from, for by its nature it refers to experience, rather than theory, in making aesthetic and practical decisions. Traditionalism may work from certain principles of design and construction but these do not have to be fitted into any overall framework. However, there is a sense in which I believe traditionalism in architecture can be aligned with a tradition of thought in western society that goes back explicitly to Roman times and implicitly back to ancient Greek. This is the tradition of what can broadly be described as "humanism". As I have shown Modernism formed part of the denial of the humanist legacy of the eighteenth century Enlightenment and the counter-Enlightenment is, in my view, the key to understanding the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Humanism has formed a strand of western civilisation ever since the latter's inception and whether we recognise it or not it still is a principle governor of our practice of governance, morality, legality and education. We owe its main articulated formulations to three ages – the late Roman republic (Cicero et al), the Italian renaissance (Petrarch et al) and the eighteenth century Enlightenment (Voltaire et al). As I have already said, humanism is naturally anti-ideology and anti-metaphysics, for it places all the emphasis on practice. It recognises the imperfections of the human spirit and its conduct and seeks to devise societal structures that can accommodate these and to a degree reconcile them. Unlike Marxism it is avowedly non-Utopian and knows only too well that society will always be bound by conflicts and strife and that the hearts of individuals will always contain a miscreant element as well as a noble one. The Marxist project of "perfecting" the individual would always be alien to the humanist one.

Humanism may be largely secular but it is not against religion in any sense for indeed societies founded on its principles have always been tolerant of religion. It is simply that humanism is not very interested in religion for the obvious reason that religion cannot by its nature be encompassed within the pragmatic programme that it wishes to implement. But then there are other things that humanism is not very interested in, as, for instance, one of the criticisms often laid at its door is that it is too anthropocentric and that it ignores, even

exploits, nature and so is anti-ecological. I think the humanist response to this must be along the lines that just because the humanist agenda does not embrace nature this does not imply that nature is unimportant. Humanism is not an overarching ideology. The narrowness of its compass can be seen as a virtue. In this I think humanism can be seen as the antithesis of what philosophers call "naturalism" and by understanding the meaning of this term we can better locate the humanist position.

In the Encyclopaedia Britannica naturalism is defined as "a theory... affirming that all beings and events in the universe (whatever their inherent character may be) are natural. Consequently all knowledge of the universe falls within the pale of scientific investigation." The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought draws the conclusion as to how naturalism regards human beings and states that it "sees mind as dependent upon, included within, or emergent from, material nature, and not as being prior to or in some way more real than it." The counter-view (anti-naturalism) "assumes that human beings are so different from the subject matter of the natural sciences that quite different approaches are needed for their study. Thus, in studying human beings, one can communicate with them, and attempt to understand the meanings of their words and deeds, whereas a physicist cannot in the same way communicate with the physical substances and mechanisms that he or she studies. A related view is that human behaviour and mental processes cannot be explained in terms of the physical and chemical, or physiological processes in the human body and that no amount of the study of the structure of the human brain and the processes that occur in it can explain the way people think, decide, act, feel, etc."

To put this another way, for naturalists there is a continuity between the physical world and the human world whereas for anti-naturalists there is a radical discontinuity. Darwinism is an important example of naturalism, for by stating that evolution took place *gradually* it implies that humans must have evolved *gradually* from apes or other animals and so claims a continuity between humanity and nature in general.

If evolution is gradual in the way Darwin and his twentieth century followers claim then it follows that humans are continuing to evolve. In other words human beings, as we speak, are modifying themselves or are being modified. This view of the modifiable human being is implicit in the avant-garde conception of art and architecture – how many times have we been told that even if people do not like this or that latest Modernist creation now they will come to in a few decades, or perhaps centuries, as if we might biologically change our eyes or our brains to suit the new order. It is also implicit in the Marxist model where the individual is seen as endlessly mouldable and Soviet Russia explicitly sought the creation of a new individual suited to the new utopian state. Whether in the scientific sense humans do really change in this way (and there is no evidence that they do any more than there is evidence for the gradual evolution of species in general that Darwin postulated) for humanists is almost beside the point, as the naturalist view of humanity contains one enormous difficulty for them - it must dispense entirely with morality.

This point was well brought out by Charles Siegel in INTBAU essay volume 1, number 9, "An Architecture for Our Time" when discussing the "New Humanism" on page 8. He writes: "In moral philosophy, we need an ethics based on human nature. When a reductionist scientist like James Watson, one of the discoverers of DNA, says that we should use genetic engineering to improve the human race, we need to be able to answer that, as soon as he begins talking about changing human nature, he steps into a moral void where the word "improve" no longer has any meaning.". Integral to humanism is the idea of the *immutability* for human nature. For if human beings can change their nature then their morality changes with it and so we lose any sense of the very idea of morality and with morality cast aside we open the door to all forms of inhumanity possible. But to say this is not to suggest an unrealised abstract principle, for during the twentieth century the effect of embracing the possibility of modifying human beings was played out to its obscene and horrifying conclusions. The metaphysical doctrines of Marxism and Fascism taught people how to abandon their own sense of humanity for the sake of "higher" ideals and took them to depths of depravity and inhumanity that the world had not seen before.

But, as well as the abandonment of morality, there is a further element that is cast aside when we start to see human beings as mutable that is presumably of more direct relevance to architects – beauty. If we can change our nature and our morality, our sense of what is beautiful goes with it, and we have lost an essential way of bringing ourselves into touch with our own values and those of the community or civilisation in which we live. As Christopher Alexander wrote in *The Timeless Way of Building* (1979): "There is one timeless way of building. It is thousands of years old, and the same today as it has always been. The great traditional buildings of the past, the villages and tents and temples in which man feels at home, have always been made by people who were very close to the center of this way. ... this way will lead anyone who looks for it to buildings which are themselves as ancient in their form as the trees and hills, and as our faces are."

It is very rare that a Modernist architect will even use the word "beauty", for, when the criteria for assessment of quality are metaphysical, a word that evokes the human senses and individual appreciation is hardly appropriate. The vocabulary is rather that of "innovative", "cutting edge", "iconic" - words that distance us from our natural instinctive reaction to our environment. In relation to this, I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that the whole training of architects in our time is a training of how *not* to use our eyes, how *not* to be sensitive to beauty, in order to be able to focus absolutely on the importance of abstract concepts. And this must be the source of the split between non-architects and architects. The former use their eyes. The latter have been trained to be visually blind, as a glance at the buildings that are paraded as having merit in the architectural journals will confirm. The result of abandoning beauty in art and architecture is the same as the result of abandoning morality in politics and philosophy – inhumanity. And surely again the twentieth century achieved inhumanity in architecture and built environments that surpassed absolutely anything that had ever been seen before.

Of course, architects will always try to duck this accusation by saying that the Modernists principles have not been applied well enough yet and let us give them another go. Next time we will make Modernism work. This is exactly the argument that Marxists used to justify further social experiments and the creation of new factions of political parties. Ideologies are like that. They give the adherents no room for manoeuvre that would enable them to see that the base premise is fallacious. Gnosticism in all its forms gives its adherents no fear of the moral and aesthetic void.

vi. Backwards to a New Towards

The longest and broadest perspective on practically anything must be the truest. We know this from the story our own lives in that the more we become detached from an experience the more we see it accurately for what it is and what it means. And with historical events, the more time draws out, the more easily we can evaluate them and judge their importance. For this reason I have tried albeit it briefly in a short essay to stand back from Modernism and place it within its intellectual, artistic and historical context. I believe this approach can show it for what it really is and expose more acutely its failings.

Is the foregoing judgement on Modernism too harsh? Possibly, but the apologists of Modernism at the present time give no quarter to those who would wish to question its assumptions and Modern architecture is still invading our towns and cities and despoiling them and we all know of examples of this happening on our own doorstep. However, there may be traditionalists who feel it is unseemly to take on Modernism and that we should simply plough our own furrow.

Traditionalists should take heart from the fact that, although Modernism and the other "-ism's" which have been dominant in their particular fields in the twentieth century, there are plenty of areas where metaphysical dogmas have not encroached. The influence of the Counter-Enlightenment came to predominance above all in the *elitist* arts and it is perhaps in the *popular* arts that the true creative imagination of the twentieth century may lie. Most people today I would imagine enjoy being surrounded by twentieth century fashion, popular music, jazz and cinema and react to them in quite a different light from twentieth century architecture. The popular arts thanks to their spontaneity and commercialism have remained mercifully metaphysics free zones. And the enormous contrast between the elitist and popular arts demonstrates, if it be necessary, the nonsense of the idea of a twentieth century zeitgeist. Also true science and technology must surely rank as primary and lasting twentieth century achievements.

As we move away from the last century it is time to get rid of the idea that modernism is a forward-looking, progressive movement. It is a reactionary movement, as any broad perspective view of the history of ideas shows. It is time to get rid of the idea that modernism can be aligned with openness and freedom. Its gnostic heart is an affront to the popular, democratic age in which we live. It is time to get rid of the idea that modernism is dynamic and able to deliver wealth and prosperity. Its impoverished abstract vocabulary is an

impediment to a rich environment and a quality of life for all. Its dysfunctional buildings demean our working and our leisure environments and insult our sensibilities.

The only really exciting future lies with the new traditionalism, and the associated new humanism, with its great store of human history and imagination waiting to be unleashed. Modernists tried to confine us to the dustbin of history. But the bin was never collected. It only waits to be seen the many marvels still waiting be rediscovered inside.

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