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The Significance of the Aesthetic in Postmodern Architectural Theory

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Recent postmodern suspicion of truth, objectivity, and rationality has radically transformed our understanding of architecture and its relationship to politics. In this paper, I draw upon Hilary Putnam (1981), Nelson Goodman (1968), and Satya Mohanty (1997), who propose a sophisticated account of objectivity by reexamining the "hard" sciences, and by interpreting them as complex social practices. Building upon these writers, I argue that our subjective experiences of architecture are rational. As an alternative to both modern essentialism and postmodern skepticism, this paper defends a theory of objectivity that explains the relationship of architecture to political power without abandoning rational thought.

JEREMY BENTHAM'S PANOPTICON AND FOUCAULT'S NOTIONS OF SURveillance are familiar themes postmodern architectural theorists invoke when they deal with questions of space, power, and subjectivity.[1] They do so to problematize architecture's relationship to politics. Postmodernists argue that modernism has concerned itself exclusively with the formal and visual aspects of architecture and has ignored architecture's role in furthering political agendas. Thus, instead of following "visible" and explicitly political symbols of power, they seek the invisible means by which buildings embody power relationships.

This interest in invisible politics has coincided with the dissemination of postmodern "theory" through journals such as *Assemblage* and *ANY* as well as through numerous books and anthologies. Postmodernism in theory, however, has a different connotation from postmodernism in practice. In architectural practice, the term "postmodernism" has come to denote the pseudo-historical revival of the 1980s. Robert Venturi introduced this populist rhetoric in architectural practice through his publications, *Complexity and Contradiction* (1966) and *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972); later, the terms "postmodern" and "PoMo" entered common discourse when they were popularized by Charles Jencks in *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977). On the other hand, in architectural theory, postmodernism represents a critique of the pseudo-revival of postmodern architecture. Postmodern theory emerged in art, aesthetics, and architecture with the publication of Hal Foster's *The Anti-Aesthetic* (1983). This theory questions the categories of aesthetics, truth, and rationality and aligns itself with structuralist and poststructuralist theories in philosophy and literary criticism. In architectural history and theory, this shift in thinking coincided with the translation of Manfredo Tafuri's influential *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* (1980). Tafuri criti-

cized modernism for its complicity with capitalism and for the operative role "theory" played in legitimizing the modern agendas of architects. His questioning of the easy translation of modernist "theory" into practice undermined the credence of theory produced by practicing architects.[2] Since the 1980s, architectural theory has been produced more often by architectural theorists than by practicing architects.[3]

More recently, a number of books, most particularly those written by feminists and deconstructivist theorists, have introduced a rich and provocative debate by giving space to issues as diverse as sexuality, power, representation, gender, politics, and domesticity.[4] They argue that architecture constructs and is constructed by politics, pointing out how the metaphor of "fashion" is repressed in the construction of the modern movement, how the idea of a "pure" modern space conceals and fetishizes sexuality, and how ideas for a feminist architecture affect architectural practice. Perhaps it is unfair to generalize about such a diversity of essayists and theorists as the "postmodernists" because most of them argue from particular subject positions and hold differing viewpoints. Yet they share claims about the relevance of truth, rationality, and objectivity in their writings, and these call for a closer examination.

The advent of postmodernism has brought about a shift in emphasis from object to subject, revealing unintended political motivations in the constitution of knowledge. In rejecting an understanding of architecture as object, postmodern critics argue that "architecture is not simply a platform that accommodates the viewing subject, but rather a viewing mechanism that produces the subject."[5] Beatrice Colomina, in her essay entitled, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," analyzes photographs and drawings of the interiors of houses designed by Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos. Colomina shows how the images of idealized, pure utopian spaces conceal and enable the domestication that occurs inside. She illustrates her claim that buildings participate in producing domesticated subjects by showing how they reinforce images of female subjects as vulnerable, mysterious, and desirable sexual objects. Similarly, in another essay entitled "Untitled: The Housing of Gender" Mark Wigley discusses the complicity of spatial order with the patriarchal authority described in Alberti's writings. Wigley argues that "place is not simply a mechanism for controlling sexuality. Rather, it is the control of sexuality by systems of representation that produces place."[6] According to Wigley, representation has specific ideological functions. He states that, "the effect of the mask is that space appears to precede representation and therefore assumes a specific ideological function."[7] He also questions the concept of "rationality" as a construct of knowing. In criticizing "rationality"

and "order" he claims that "the building masquerades as order. Order itself becomes a mask. This mask of order uses figures of rationality to conceal the irrationality of both individuals and society." According to Wigley, "rationality is literally added to the building as the representation of an effacement of representation."[8]

Such theoretical arguments have not only destabilized architecture; they have completely unsettled the way we experience buildings and urban spaces. While it is important that traditional "essentialist" ideas of architecture and space be problematized, it is equally crucial to examine the methodologies at play in the investigation. Herein, I examine postmodern methodologies and argue that both recognition of the cognitive role of our experience of architecture and understanding of objectivity are critical to the modern–postmodern debate.[9] My aim here is to contest the postmodern critiques leveled against objectivity and show how broader notions of rationality are fundamental to architectural theory.

Experience of Architecture and Cognition

Postmodernists criticize the modern theorization of the experience of architecture. They argue that positivist epistemology has reduced our experience of architecture to facts and properties, by discounting its emotional, moral, and ethical content. In the positivist object–subject split, the experience of architecture has been narrowly determined by functional coordinates and accepted as a source of objective knowledge.[10] This is because its objectivity and its truth can be logically deduced or empirically verified. On the other hand, our emotional responses to architecture and our preference for certain aesthetic values have come to represent a purely subjective domain that cannot be grounded in reason. Subjective preferences, for this reason, have not been accepted as a legitimate source of knowledge.[11] In the modernist object–subject split, the full cognitive potential of our experience of architecture has remained unrecognized, and it has been perceived narrowly as pure, visual, and abstract, devoid of any subjective dimension. Robert Venturi's famous observation that modernism has reduced the Vitruvian triad to "commodity plus fitness equals delight" clearly exemplifies the instrumental definitions of knowledge associated with modernism.[12]

Furthermore, the separation of experience from its moral and ethical content and the separation of architecture from its social, political, and cultural context have created an autonomous space for architecture. Postmodernists contend that a visionary and autonomous image of modern architecture has been achieved by a complex maneuver. The object is first decontextualized from the specificity of its social, political, cultural, and physical context, and then recontextualized as a "visual representation" to be judged on specifically aesthetic and formalist terms.[13] The iconic image of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye as representing modern ideas of space is one such example of how an image of autonomous architectural form has been created and legitimized by a variety of mechanisms.

This reduction of architecture to an image has allowed such aesthetic properties as formal unity, truth, and emphasis on space to be achieved through rational means, which thereby have been perceived to have international application to effect social change. Such an easy conflation of the rationality of the autonomous architectural form with utopian social agendas, postmodernists contend, has helped mask the operation of ideological forces, such as those of capitalism and colonialism. For example, the manner in which the Crystal Palace conflated the values of technical rationality with the utopian ideals of a social and democratic space shows how autonomous architectural forms have been projected to embody social ideals. The fact that the Crystal Palace not only fostered commodification, but was an artful player in the British colonial enterprise as well, also points to how such conflation has been used to mask ideological operations.[14]

Although, to a degree, the postmodern criticism of modernism is justified, it could also be argued that postmodern epistemology also denies a legitimate role to the experience of architecture. This is not because theorists consider it to be subjective or emotional, but because they argue that our aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgments are "disguised constructions" that reproduce asymmetries of power. More importantly, postmodern theorists ask: How are we to decide whose experience of architecture should be taken seriously, given that one's experience reflects a construction specific to one's subjectivity? For example, a public plaza could be perceived in many different ways. Is it a place for procession, celebration, or activism? Or is it an informal place for people to sit and enjoy the outdoors? Or is it a meeting place for mothers to socialize and for children to play? Or do these romantic ideas of openness and playing children in reality mask a space that is under constant surveillance? Postmodernists point to the diversity of such viewpoints. In emphasizing this diversity, they question the criteria by which we judge a particular reading to be more legitimate than another. They question what is held as valuable in a given context, by whom, and in whose political interests. Through such questioning, they have critiqued "aesthetic" and "beauty"—qualities perceived to be inherent and thus universally valid. In his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984), Pierre Bourdieu has shown how aesthetic discourse universalizes the ob-

ject of value by assuming that the aesthetic—a distinct category of human experience—is universally recognizable. This universality, in turn, establishes the universality of aesthetic judgments and values, thus guarding the value of that object. Bourdieu has characterized this vicious cycle as "the circular circulation of inter-legitimation."[15] He argues that patterns of taste are class specific and reinforce the political and economic domination of one class over another.

The problem, however, is not this uncovering of the complicity of class dominations with aesthetic tastes, but that postmodernists take the political complicity of values as a given, and abandon discussion of aesthetic judgments and objective evaluations.[16] Such thinking is also central to architectural criticism. Postmodernists demand that we wean ourselves from the fiction of "pure" space and revel instead in the possibilities opened up by impure, scopic, and controlled regimes. But if we agree with the postmodern view and suspend our judgment, can we still talk about more or less gender-responsive space? Can we compare and legitimately discuss how the political and ideological complicity of one space is better than another? To me, these questions reveal the relativism inherent in postmodern claims. Furthermore, it is ironic that, even though we are uncomfortable in our awareness of architecture's participation in politics, we continue to accept theoretical premises that do not allow a more responsive architecture.

More recently, critics have begun to question this easy acceptance of surveillance as a construct for understanding architectural space. Influenced by the notion of "everyday life" developed by French philosopher Henri Lefebvre and by cultural theorist Michel de Certeau, a number of theorists emphasize the role architecture plays in "real life," in the "here and now," and not in abstract truths. Lefebvre in *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1984), and de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), depict the disciplinary power of technology in society; in doing so, they also reveal how society resists technology even in the most ordinary spaces. For example, they argue that consumption is not just a negative force, but that it is also an arena of freedom, choice, creativity, and invention. Influenced by the ideas of Lefebvre and de Certeau, Mary McLeod has published an article entitled, "Everyday and 'Other' Spaces," in which she explores the freedoms, joys, and diversity of "the network of antidiscipline" in everyday spaces.[17] McLeod argues that the most influential critic to stress issues of the "everyday" in architecture was a nonarchitect, Jane Jacobs, whose book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) had a powerful impact on a whole generation of social and architectural critics. McLeod writes: "She [Jacobs] comes closest to realizing de Certeau's plea for an account of cities, not from the bird's-eye view, but from the experience of the pedes-

trian, the everyday user. And the terrain she describes is very different from that traversed by Baudelaire's *flaneurs*, from Foucault's prisons and brothels, or from Situationist bars and gypsy encampments. What is invoked in her description of New York City's West Village and Boston's North End is an informal public life: the world of the stoop, the neighborhood bakery, the dry cleaning establishment, and most importantly, the street; and with these come new subjects—mothers in the park, children, grocers, and newsstand attendants."[18]

Since the 1970s, a number of architects as well as architectural theorists have invoked the idea of everyday experience in order to critique modernism's functional determinism. Christian Norberg Schultz's phenomenological critique of modernism, Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi's polemic for a historicist populist architecture, Roger Scruton's argument for recognizing the cognitive role of the aesthetic, and the Independent Group's appreciation of commercial life as an alternative to both modernist abstraction and deprivations·of postwar Britain have all addressed the issue of the everyday experience of architecture. Indeed, these diverse attempts to embrace the small scale, the complex, the historical, the popular, the vernacular, the decorative, and the ordinary have provided powerful theoretical alternatives to modernism. But how does the invocation of the everyday help us in resolving the current problem of architecture's complicity with politics? McLeod addresses this issue and points out that "the ordinary can easily become a rationalization of market forces and passive consumption."[19] She cites postmodern architecture as an example and shows how it reduced the everyday to populist revival. But, to me, this reading also brings to surface the epistemological dilemma inherent in our current thinking. If the ordinary is so easily subsumed by market forces, then should we completely abandon discussing everyday experience of architecture? In other words, can we take experience seriously while being aware of architecture's tenuous relationship with politics?

In order to free ourselves from the present predicament we need to rethink our theorizing of architecture. I believe that aesthetic perception is not just socially or politically constructed experience, but is a mode of evaluation that is rational. I have developed my understanding by drawing upon the Realist account of knowledge developed by analytic philosophers and literary theorists such as Hilary Putnam, Nelson Goodman, and Satya P. Mohanty.[20] In their writings, they propose a sophisticated account of objectivity by reexamining the actual nature of the "hard" sciences, and by interpreting them as complex, coordinated social practices. In so doing, they provide an alternative to postmodern skepticism.

Hilary Putnam, in *Reason, Truth and History* (1981), questions the association of rational thinking with scientific thinking; in doing

so, he challenges the idea that science alone provides the true descriptions of reality. Putnam shows how scientific inquiry, much like the humanities, is holistic and relational relying on a number of preexisting assumptions. He develops a broader understanding of rationality and objectivity and shows how these are not only central to studies in ethics and value theory, but are also crucial to understanding inquiry in the sciences.[21] Satya Mohanty, in *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, MultiCultural Politics* (1997) builds on Putnam's ideas; more directly, he addresses the skeptical strands of postmodern thought and shows how they are both theoretically and politically inhibiting. He points out that the older, positivists' view of objectivity is fundamentally flawed because it establishes a false subject–object split in which subjectivity is diametrically opposed to objectivity. This reductive split does not recognize any cognitive value gained from subjective experiences. In his book, Mohanty develops a Realist account of knowledge as an alternative to postmodern skepticism and demonstrates the continuity between theory and subjective experience, and the larger relation between subjective experience and objective knowledge.[22] On the other hand, Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (1968) deals more directly with art and argues that aesthetics is a branch of epistemology. Goodman emphasizes that in this form of knowing—understanding a work of art is not a matter of appreciating it, or having an "aesthetic experience" of it, but is a matter of interpreting it correctly. According to Goodman, emotions function cognitively and play a central role in developing aesthetic awareness.[23]

Drawing upon these accounts of knowledge developed by Goodman, Mohanty, and Putnam, I argue that our experience of architecture involves a combination of aesthetic perception, evaluation, and cognition, and relies on the discernment of a dense particularity of human feeling not adequately theorized by the rational thought of positivism. Rationality herein is understood broadly; it is not opposed to passion. Both emotions and imagination are essential to rational choice as well as to many acts of aesthetic cognition. This broader understanding of rationality is closely related to the Aristotelian idea of practical reasoning. In contrast to deductive reasoning in which a conclusion follows necessarily from the stated premises, practical reasoning leads to action. In practical reasoning, one cannot proceed from stated premises to a conclusion, as there is no general positive premise of the form "Always do X."[24] For example, a statement such as "Always park your car in space number 10," cannot be taken as a starting point for reasoning what to do, unless this statement is hemmed in by particular clauses such as "if it is available" or "if it is a weekend or a holiday." Aristotle points out that such modifying clauses can be infinite. Practical reasoning

requires an imaginative construction of the whole from an indefinite number of particulars and this process of construction is active.

I use this understanding to argue that practical reasoning is inherent in experiencing architecture. Aesthetic experience, like an action, is the conclusion of an argument.[25] In contrast to sensations such as the beating of one's heart, our attitudes toward and our beliefs about architecture are intentional states of mind. Intentional states of mind have a direction; the inclination to do something is one subcategory of these states. Our experience of architecture is intentional because it includes a conception of the object on which it focuses. In claiming this intentionality, I want to stress that we have the capacity to justify and describe what our experience is about, and this involves an informal process of deliberation. We are not passive. We do not merely experience objects, which inhabit a separate realm as the familiar object–subject split suggests. We are active. Our aesthetic judgments involve "taking responsibility" for a justification of the acts, feelings, perceptions experienced and are open to transformation by rational criticism. More importantly, our judgments are crucial indices of our relationships with our world; and to stress their cognitive nature is to underscore that they can be susceptible to varying degrees of social constructions and yet can be the source of objective knowledge.

For example, it would be meaningless to claim that "I agree that a walk through Louis Kahn's Salk Institute is like walking in a monastic cloister, but I don't experience it that way." This shows that, in order for one to agree with an aesthetic judgment, one must experience the (art) object in accordance with that judgment. Furthermore, a judgment like "Louis Kahn's Salk Institute is, metaphorically, a monastic cloister" distinguishes itself from mere explanation in that it has an ability to change experience through arguments grounded in particulars. By the time we come to perceive the Salk Institute in this way, we have already deliberated about it. The serenity of the Salk Institute, the repetitive vocabulary of the building, the courtyard with a central channel of water, the concrete frame and teak cubicles, and even, perhaps, the idea of a religious experience in a monastic complex—all contribute to our "reading" of the Institute. Such an interpretation of the Salk Institute highlights the fact that our judgments are not abstract statements directly complicit with politics, as argued by the postmodernists. Our judgments, on the contrary, are grounded in particulars. Our ability to change our judgments and to alter others' by arguments grounded in particulars underscores the rational nature of judgments and their potential to resist politics. The relationship of the aesthetic to the political thus cannot be theorized by "antiaestheticizing," as the postmodernists suggest. Instead, an under-

standing of the broader role the aesthetic plays in our social, moral, and political lives is crucial.

To explain this idea let us sketch a scenario in which we directly address the question of objective knowledge and architecture's relationship to politics. Let us assume two agents who claim very different experiences of the Crystal Palace. In this scenario, the agents' knowledge and experience of the building is derived solely from representations, drawings, and documents. For agent A, it represents a technologically advanced building for its time, with a rational and innovative use of materials and methods of production enabling the construction of a weightless and flowing form. Let us also suppose that A associates the physical qualities of the building such as transparency and blurring of the boundaries between the exterior and interior with ideals of being socially open and democratic. For agent B, on the other hand, the seemingly innocent and pure expression of the Crystal Palace is deceptive because the building fosters commodification with a remarkable mastery of capitalist ideals. For B to show A that there is another way to experience and form a judgment about the Crystal Palace would require that B draw A's attention to the particulars—the way in which transparency both empowers the viewer to see through the structure, and disempowers the viewer by not allowing escape from being viewed; the way in which the palace's alternating reflective and transparent state transform the viewer into a *voyeur* whose eye has the power of appropriation without purchase. And the very idea of an experience limited to looking through a transparent surface conceals the fact that one can see but not touch, see but not hear, see but not speak, and so forth.[26]

In this process of deliberation (which is "practical reasoning" in Aristotelian terms), the end is *not* an abstract conclusion derived from deductive reasoning, but is a transformatory experience in which A comes to recognize and read the Crystal Palace differently; that is, it involves a reconstruction of the Crystal Palace in A's mind from an "infinite" number of particulars.[27] B's pointing out the particulars, such as the illusory operation of a transparent surface, does not necessarily imply that there is a logical connection between transparency and the judgment it supports. Rather it is a form of practical reasoning in which one can sift through particulars without committing oneself to abstract general concepts. Furthermore, the fact that A comes to agree with B's judgment does not in any way assume that B's judgment represents the truth that is deductively inferred. Rather B's judgment represents a truth that can only be imaginatively perceived, and thus the judgment remains open to modification through rational deliberation.

A's coming to read the Crystal Palace differently also suggests an enhancement in A's sensibility and imagination—a realization

about the invisible tactics of capitalism, ways in which physical forms can be used for manipulative ends, and how a reading of an architectural form in purely aesthetic, formal, or technical terms does not adequately represent the full engagement of architecture in our social and political lives. Hence, one could argue that the process by which A has come to read the Crystal Palace as an artful player of capitalist ideals is rational. This does not imply that such experience is dispassionate, but that it occurs because of and through emotions and imagination. Furthermore, that the Crystal Palace no longer exists reinforces the point that what counts as "real" does not rest solely on the physical and experiential attributes of a real object, but upon how our experience of reality is continuously informed and transformed by our theoretical, cultural, and political knowledge.

I use this scenario to illustrate the larger argument of this paper that such personal conflicts and arguments bring to the surface the rational character of our experience of architecture.[28] Our experiences of architecture do not simply describe a fully independent "real" object with a fixed degree of evidence, but attempt to articulate what is initially disordered or largely unintelligible. To perceive architecture in its full context, in its replete particularity, one requires imagination to construct the whole.[29] Imagination, herein, plays a central role in the acts of cognition and rational choice and contrasts with the concept of imagination as a flight of fancy. In fact, imagination focuses more on reality than on fancy. Our experiences of this reality are evaluations; they reflect what we hold important, worthy, or fulfilling. Therefore, in all acts of imaginative reconstruction that are mediated by our social, theoretical, and political knowledge, we make architecture accessible and/or inaccessible in new ways. As a result, our experiences can be more or less correct, and can be subject to normative claims. Furthermore, since our perceptions of architecture represent a form of practical reasoning, these perceptions are rational and evaluative in a manner that leaves room for re-evaluation. The Realist conception of knowledge proposed here, while taking into account postmodern claims about the constructed nature of our experience of architecture—that is, experiences change with increased knowledge as well as political or social context—argues that constructedness does *not* ipso facto make it arbitrary or unstable, and stresses the cognitive and evaluative nature of our experience of architecture.

Objectivity and Political Complicity

The important question that follows from the above discussion is this: Can we criticize the Crystal Palace (which has been seen as complicit with capitalist and colonial practices) without abandon-

ing a claim to objective knowledge? Is the Crystal Palace's technique of management bad in itself, or because of the political ends it served? In the Realist view of knowledge proposed here, the analyses and observations that reveal the complicity of the Crystal Palace with the dominant political power (such as B's observations) in fact represent attempts at providing a more objective explanation of architecture's relationship with politics. For alternative strategies to resist power, we must often depend upon observations such as B's as well as the knowledge created by conflicts, such as the one between A and B. Such conflicts also help to highlight the dependence of our judgments and our experiences on our respective subjectivities. That is, how our subjectivities enable us to read the world by both facilitating and inhibiting knowledge in specific ways. For instance, a critique of the Crystal Palace that argues that subjects in the Palace were under constant surveillance because they could not escape the condition of being viewed will sound less abstract, and less inimical, when we acknowledge the historical accounts of the everyday lives of the subjects, and see how they resisted this surveillance. This knowledge—subjects' different experiences of the building, the possible resistance through the creation of sheltered enclaves to the all-embracing transparency, and the patterns of movement that may have resisted the building's linear organization—could provide designing strategies to resist power.

But can we deduce objective knowledge uncritically from the "lived experience" of a subject? Is this emphasis on the lived experience a sentimental response? Mohanty, who has emphasized the continuity between subjective experience and objective knowledge, argues that the lived experience may be sincerely felt by a subject, but whether we consider it legitimate or illusory depends on the examination of the specifics of the context.[30] Let us, once again, consider A's reading of the Crystal Palace from the previous example. Given our current theoretical perspective about the complicity of the Crystal Palace with capitalism and colonialism, we may evaluate A's observations that the flowing transparent forms of the Crystal Palace represent morally correct ideals of open and democratic space as an illusion (despite our sympathy with A's social and political views). The illusory as well as the cognitive components are open to analysis and evaluation on the basis of empirical research and theoretical accounts of our current social and political arrangements.[31] Thus, acknowledging that we have the capacity to evaluate our aesthetic experiences (including emotions) is not a romantic or a sentimental response to the problem of architecture's relation to politics. Instead, it is a pragmatic recognition of the political significance of the experience of architecture.

Another point is that changes in theoretical language reflect knowledge acquisition.[32] Let us once again consider the rational ex-

change that has occurred between A and B. Assuming that A did come to agree with B's judgment, if A is asked to justify her experience of the Crystal Palace, A is likely to describe these particulars: technically advanced for its time; an innovative use of materials and methods of production; a weightless and flowing form; and a remarkable mastery of capitalist ideals. A's knowledge of the Crystal Palace has been enhanced and enlarged by this rational exchange, and this understanding of politics has enabled a more objective viewpoint. Moreover, this analysis underscores that B's justifications have not functioned merely as linguistic generalizations; they have contributed to knowledge much the same way as new empirical hypotheses and evidence do. Here one may also see the parallels in the exchange between A and B and the shift in our perceptions from "abstract" and "autonomous" to postmodern notions of "culturally constructed" and "politically complicit" buildings. When one sees this shift as a process of theory change through which particulars have been added, and a more objective viewpoint has been acquired, the postmodern interest in politics then does not appear to be as radical a revolution in thinking as its polemics make it out to be.

Historiography of the Crystal Place: An Epistemological Enterprise

In order to illustrate this argument, I will briefly review how the Crystal Palace was initially accepted and categorized by critics and architectural historians and how changes in the theoretical perception of the definition of architecture have informed its history. James Fergusson, in *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* (1873) cites the Crystal Palace as one of the sources of the "Modern Styles." His entire discussion, however, revolves around the controversy it inspired: Was the Crystal Palace a work of architecture or of engineering? Fergusson claims that, "As first proposed, the Hyde Park Crystal Palace, though an admirable piece of Civil Engineering, had no claim to be considered as architectural design. Use, and use only, pervaded every arrangement, and it was not ornamented to such an extent as to elevate it into the class of Fine Arts. The subsequent introduction of the arched transept, with the consequent arrangements at each end and on each side, did much to bring it within that category."[33] In Fergusson's opinion, the re-erected building at Sydenham, on the other hand, "has a far greater claim to rank among the important architectural objects of the world." Its huge scale, its truthful construction, and its ornamental arrangement qualify it to be architecture with a capital, "A." He argues that while the Crystal Palace possesses these three "great ele-

ments of architectural design, it is deficient in two others." One is an "insufficient amount of decoration" which does not allow the Palace to be altogether taken "out of the category of first-class engineering, and to make it entirely an object of Fine Art." But its greatest defect, Fergusson maintains, is "that it wants solidity, and that appearance of permanence and durability indispensable to make it really architectural in the strict meaning of the word."[34]

It is only much later in Nikolaus Pevsner's P*ioneers of Modern Movement: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1937), that the Crystal Palace is accepted as much as a feat of engineering as it is an "outstanding work of architecture."[35] Pevsner recognizes that "the progress of engineering during the nineteenth century has passed unappreciated," a progress, which he claims, is "as consistent and grandiose as that of Romanesque and Gothic architecture."[36] In the revised edition of *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1964), Pevsner includes a more extended description of the Crystal Palace. This description, full of modifiers, is carefully reasoned and justified. For example, Paxton is described as an "outsider," and the Crystal Palace as a "temporary" structure. Furthermore, Pevsner considers it important to explain that an "outsider" would not have dared such an "unprecedented design" had it not been for the temporary nature of the building. Nevertheless, Pevsner acknowledges that the Crystal palace is an outstanding building. In Pevsner's own words:

> What makes Paxton's building the outstanding example of mid-nineteenth-century iron and glass architecture was rather its enormous size—1851 feet long, that is, much longer than the palace of Versailles—the absence of any other materials, and the use of an ingenious system of prefabrication for the iron and glass parts, based on a twenty-four-foot grid adopted throughout. Only by means of prefabrication could a building of such size be erected in the miraculously short time of ten months. It is quite likely that even Paxton, the outsider, would not have dared such an unprecedented procedure and such an unprecedented design, if he had not worked for a temporary building. However, the fact that the Crystal Palace was re-erected in 1854 at Sydenham near London for a more permanent purpose proves that the new beauty of metal and glass had caught the fancy of progressive Victorians and of the public at large.[37]

While Pevsner recognizes the Crystal Palace as one of the many English contributions to the modern movement, it is Henry Russell Hitchcock, who, in his 1937 MoMA show "Modern Architecture in England," describes Paxton's project as "the most prophetic monu-ment of the mid-nineteenth century, a monument often hailed with pardonable exaggeration as the first modern building."[38] Hitchcock's main concern is to mark the lineage of Modern design and he sees the Crystal Palace as a direct ancestor of modern architecture. In subsequent histories of modern architecture, the prefabrication of its interchangeable parts is recognized as the most important contribution of the Crystal Palace. As Ralph Lieberman points out, the construction process of the Crystal Palace symbolized a modernity in which we were "as far as we can [sic] be from the jealously guarded knowledge of medieval masons; the modern age was to replace secret techniques with building methods as publicly known as and as universally reproducible as a scientific experiment."[39]

The significance of the Crystal Place as a metaphor exemplifying modernity is later taken up as a central theme in Marshall Berman's *All that Is Solid Melts into Air* (1988). For Berman the role of Crystal Palace as a metaphor for fancy, a metaphor for an "unreal" reality, and a metaphor for a dark and dismal modernity, is crucial. His analysis reveals the role the building has played—both literal and metaphorical—in literature, fiction, and history. In Berman's book, the tendency of solid material to decompose and melt is argued to be the basic fact of modern life and the Crystal Palace emerges as its quintessential representation.[40] Berman's discussion of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* reveals how the fantasy of the Crystal Palace was more dismal than its reality. Citing Dostoevsky's fantasy of the Crystal Place, Berman points out that, wherever the process of modernization has not emerged from within, modernism takes on a fantastic character. According to Berman, Dostoevsky's fantasy of the Crystal Palace as representing western mechanical view of the world was more dismal than the creative ingenuity of its design and conception. Written at a time when modernism was being radically questioned, Berman's discussion of Dosteovsky's Underground Man's fear becomes very relevant. The Underground Man's suspicion of the building's pure crystalline form is expressed most clearly in the following passage: "You believe in the crystal edifice indestructible for all eternity, the kind that you could never stick your tongue out at on the sly or thumb your nose at secretly. Well, perhaps the reason I am afraid of that edifice is that it is crystal and indestructible for all eternity and one can't even stick one's tongue out at it on the sly."[41]

In her article entitled, "The Invisible Mask," Andrea Kahn focuses on this fear and explores the "invisible" ways by which the Crystal Palace controls and disciplines space. Kahn compares the Crystal Palace to Jeremy Bentham's panopticon and argues that both constitute "an apparatus of covert control based on the manipulation of lines of sight." Kahn points a number of ways by which the Crystal Palace manipulates and legitimizes control: how it allies the act

of shopping with the act of observing nature, how its power derives from diffusion rather than constraint, how the opportunity to see and be seen provides the masses with a false sense of power that obscures and legitimizes their economic powerlessness, and so forth.[42]

From the above discussion, it is clear that changes in our knowledge of the Crystal Place have been informed by theoretical shifts in the definition of architecture. For Fergusson, architecture belonged to the realm of Fine Arts and his most important task was to justify the building as architecture with a capital "A." For Pevsner and Hitchcock, the importance of the building lay in tracing its lineage within Modernism; their most important task was to show the contribution of English nineteenth-century engineering. In subsequent histories, written during the second half of the twentieth-century, the building continued to be mentioned for its unique process of prefabrication. In fact, its method of construction became more important to architectural history than its design or its relation to ideology and colonialism. In Marshall Berman's writing, the Palace is transformed into the quintessential metaphor for modernity, including its darker aspects. But it is Andrea Kahn's interpretation of the Crystal Palace determined by her postmodern thesis that, "architecture is the disciplinization of space, and that perceptions in architecture exert a covert control" that enables us to read the building as an insidious player of capitalism. In the above example, new theories of architecture have contributed to our understanding of the Crystal Palace the same way as new empirical evidence. This brings to the surface the fundamental disciplinary divide that exists between architectural history and architectural theory. Postmodern theorists have rightly pointed to the constructed nature of knowledge, enabling us not to take historical facts at face value, but to understand them with respect to their theoretical interpretation. However, while pointing out that truth, rationality, aesthetics, and objectivity are social and cultural constructions, they also deny their role in knowledge acquisition. Because of such skepticism, postmodern theory has ceased to play a cognitive role. The problem today is not that history with a capital "H" is considered the only source of knowledge, but that theory with a capital "T" teaches us to be skeptical of all forms of knowing. It is important to recognize that new theoretical justifications and judgments inform knowledge; however, these judgments need to be grounded in particulars of its object—its experience, its emotional and cognitive aspects.

Afterword

Ever since postmodernism made us aware of how our aesthetic judgments can be politically complicit, we have become extremely skeptical of any discussion of values, evaluations, and judgments. Such an attitude overlooks the basic evaluations inherent in our capacity to notice things, to make comparisons, to posit connections, and to see architectural forms as intelligible wholes. As suggested by the analysis of the Crystal Palace, some evaluations, from vaguely felt aesthetic and ethical judgments to developed normative theories of right and wrong, will not only enable us to distinguish between the varying degrees architecture has been complicit with politics, they will also empower us to imagine and conceive of alternative strategies outside the regime of surveillance and control. Furthermore, the fact that objective explanations, in the Realist view of knowledge, are concomitant with struggles against political complicity underscores how and why objective knowledge should not be allowed to sunder the realm of "hard facts" from the realm of values. In a similar vein, aesthetic experience also should not be theorized by separating it from its role in moral cognition.

Moreover, we do not just evaluate. In reality, we are also capable of reflecting upon our larger values, say, about our moral or political world.[43] This capacity—for a self-conscious reflection and evaluation of our actions and desires—underlies basic human rationality. Our aesthetic values are forms of practical reasoning and our responses, when we are called upon to justify them, can be deeply emotional and rational.[44] But it is not enough to recognize that our values are arguable. What is more important to recognize is that what we perceive as the real world depends upon our values. Our values are characterized by their depth and by the extent to which they bring order to our experience. In dealing with ways our values influence our experiences and are mediated by social and political constructions, we are dealing with subjective aspects of objectivity. The objectivity that we seek is not the familiar disinterested theoretical inquiry. It is a reasonable hope for objective knowledge that stems from particular kinds of social practices.[45] Once we ground our judgments in the "real" world of architecture (scale, proportions, and rhythms of buildings and urban spaces) as well as in historical and theoretical accounts, the political significance of architecture will have meaning not only for architectural theorists, but for architects as well.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. A number of contemporary theorists have invoked Bentham's panopticon in their writings. For an interesting analysis, see Andrea Kahn, "The Invisible Mask," Andrea Kahn, ed., *Drawing Building Text* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), pp. 85–106. Also see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

2. Theory's relevance to practice has been questioned ever since Tafuri criticized the operative role theory played in legitimizing the "modern" agenda of architects. A number of other books such as *Architecture Criticism Ideology* (1985), *Architectureproduction* (1988), *Drawing Building Text* (1991), *Out of Site: A Social Criticism of Architecture* (1991), *Strategies in Architectural Thinking* (1992), *and Rethinking Architectural Theory* (1988) have contributed to the debate about theory's relationship to practice.

3. Tafuri's famous claim that "architects should do architecture and historians should do history" exemplifies how theory and practice in architecture have come to occupy separate realms. In a similar vein, Jeffrey Kipnis argues that "all architectural theories and histories always also operate, beneath their veil of objectivity and aside from their announced intent, in the service of a design agenda, despite their frequent protestations to the contrary." See Jeffrey Kipnis, "Forms of Irrationality," in John Whiteman, Jeffrey Kipnis, Richard Burdett, eds., *Strategies in Architectural Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 149. For positions that criticize the current split between theory and practice in architecture, see Michael Hays, "On Turning Thirty," in *Assemblage no. 30* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 6–11; and Diane Ghirardo's review of "Space, Place and Gender" and "Architecture and Feminism" in *Harvard Design Magazine* (Cambridge, MA: Graduate School of Design, 1997), pp. 76–77.

4. See Nana Ellin, ed., *Architecture of Fear* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997); Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, and Carol Henderson, eds., *Architecture and Feminism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996); Christopher Reed, ed., *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture,* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway, and Leslie Kanes Weisman, eds., *The Sex of Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996); Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995); Beatrice Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994); Deborah Fausch, Paulette Shingley, Rudolphe el-Khoury, Zvi Efrat eds., *Architecture: In Fashion* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Beatrice Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).

5. "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," in Beatrice Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), p. 83.

6. Wigley, "Untitled: The Housing of Gender," in Beatrice Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space,* p. 350.

7. Ibid., p. 387. In a similar vein, Catherine Ingraham critiques the epistemological and representational dependence of architecture on orthogonality. She argues that it is in the space of the line, the wall, that the architectural drama between sexuality and spatiality begins to play out. The wall, which always dreams of itself as the sexless geometric line, is where, Ingraham claims, "the differences of sexuality begin to be homologized as material differences, albeit in complex ways." See Catherine Ingraham, "Initial Proprieties: Architecture and the Space of the Line," in *Sexuality and Space,* p. 266.

8. Wigley, "Untitled: The Housing of Gender," p. 379.

9. Here my use of the term modern–postmodern may appear to be simplistic. Clearly these classifications do not adequately represent the richness and complexity of the debate. I have used them only to make clear how discursive formations distinguish themselves through polemics. Moreover, my critique of postmodernism is directed at those theorists who take a position of extreme relativism.

10. Stanford Anderson in "The Fiction of Function" criticizes the postmodernists for equating modernism with functionalism. He argues that few modernist architects have endorsed the narrow functionalism—the "utility"-focused design methodologies—that postmodernists criticize. Anderson focuses on the role of function in the modern movement since the 1932 exhibition on the International Style by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson. A review of architectural theory from roughly 1750 to 1932, however, reveals not only a richer notion of function but also a less instrumental relationship between theory and practice. See Stanford Anderson, "The Fiction of Function," in *Assemblage no. 2* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 19–31.

11. The fact–value distinction is bound up with the rise of science in the seventeenth century in Western thought. Facts came to be associated with objective knowledge that was absolute and unchanging, while values came to occupy a subjective realm. The dissociation of facts and values conjured up problems such as: How can a person function both as a knower of facts and a chooser of values? How can one be at home with a reality that is supposed to be experienced neutrally, without emotion?

12. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), p. 90.

13. Miriam Gusevich, "The Architecture of Criticism: A Question of Autonomy," in Andrea Kahn, ed., *Drawing Building Text* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), p. 9.

14. Built in 1851 in London to house the first International Great Exhibition, the Crystal Palace was moved from city to country in pieces and reconstructed at Sydenham where it remained until it burned down in 1937.

15. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste,* Richard Nice, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 11–96.

16. For a skeptical reading of value judgments and normative theories of evaluation see Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Truth/Value," *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 85–124.

17. Mary McLeod, "Everyday and 'Other' Spaces," in *Architecture and Feminism,* pp. 1–37.

18. McLeod points to the limitations of relying solely on empirical observation. She acknowledges that Jacob's focus on everyday life—on how space is actually used—does not offer satisfactory answers to questions related to the tacit operations of power. Ibid., 23.

19. Ibid., 25.

20. See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1968); Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

21. See Putnam, "Fact and Value," and "Two Concepts of Rationality," in *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 127–149.

22. See Mohanty, "Introduction: Criticism as Politics," "On Situating Objective Knowledge," and "Identity, MultiCulturalism, Justice," in *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 1–24, 149–197, and 198–252.

23. See Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1968). Also see Mark Jarzombek, "Describing the Language of Looking: Wolfflin and the History of Aesthetic Experientialism" in *Assemblage no. 23* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, April 1994), pp. 28–69.

24. In order to understand the distinction between practical reasoning and deductive reasoning, let us review, G.E.M. Anscombe's imitation of a classroom example of Aristotle, published in *Intention* (1966). For instance, let us imagine that a person is reasoning along these lines:

> Vitamin Z is good for all men over 60.
> Pigs' tripes are full of Vitamin Z.
> I am a man over 60.
> Here are some pigs' tripes.

Now we are likely to believe that this individual will conclude from the above premises that "I should have some pigs' tripes." Anscombe points out that if we look at this example carefully, we will see that the only logical conclusion that this person can draw is "What's here is good for me." But "What's here is good for me" is far from meaning "I should have some." Furthermore, the reason why we cannot draw "I should have some" from the above premises is because we cannot construct sane premises that yield this conclusion. Suppose we alter the universal premise slightly. "It is necessary for all men over 60 to eat all the food containing Vitamin Z that they ever come across." In this case, the individual can conclude, "I should have some." The only problem is that the above universal premise is an insane one. In this Aristotelian counterexample, Anscombe shows that in reasoning that leads to action one cannot proceed from stated premises to a conclusion as there is no general positive premise of the form "Always do X." For more on Aristotle's notions of practical reason, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 1147a, 27–28; G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966) Sec 33, pp. 57–63; and Martha C. Nussbaum "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality" in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 54–105.

25. See Roger Scruton, "Experiencing Architecture," and "Judging Architecture," *The Aesthetics of Architecture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 71–134. In his book, *The Aesthetics of Architecture,* Roger Scruton proposed that an Aristotelian conception of practical reasoning is central to the aesthetics and architecture of everyday life. American academic circles do not acknowledge Scruton's critique of modern architecture as major; they dismiss it as reflecting English "New Right" conservatism of the 1980s. Although his promotion of classical forms based on his own personal taste undermines his own claims for judgments open to evaluation, Scruton's argument for objectivity in philosophical aesthetics deserves greater recognition.

26. For these observations, I am indebted to Andrea Kahn's critique of the Crystal Palace in "The Invisible Mask," *Drawing Building Text*, pp. 85–106.

27. In an essay entitled "Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," Frank Sibley argues that justification of aesthetic experience is not a matter of demonstration but of perceptual proof, bringing someone to see something. See Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," *The Philosophical Review,* vol. 74 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1965): 135–159.

28. This example also illustrates that our experiences are not fully rational. It is not easy to distinguish between an illusion and cognition. The sifting of information and reinterpretation of the whole from the particular can happen suddenly, slowly, or in retrospect, and is mediated by the social and political theories. The most important consideration is on what epistemic foundation we base our judgments and evaluations and how do we distinguish between an illusion and cognition. For more on this, see Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, pp. 202–216.

29. Iris Murdoch defines imagination as "a spontaneous intuitive capacity to put together what is presented to us so as to form a coherent spatio-temporal experience which is intellectually ordered and sensuously based." On the role imagination plays in perceiving truth, see Iris Murdoch, "Imagination," *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 308–348.

30. Mohanty argues that experience, properly interpreted, can be as much a source of knowledge, as it can be of mystification. Experiences can be evaluated as justified or unjustified in relation to the subject and her world. See Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, p. 205.

31. In fact, Mohanty argues that we should see our experiences as complex theories about (and explanations of) the social world. The only way to evaluate such theories is to look at how well they work as explanations. Ibid., p. 238.

32. See Michael Hays, "Theory-Constitutive Conventions and Theory Change," in *Assemblage no.1* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 117–128.

33. James Fergusson, *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1873), p. 556.

34. Ibid., 557.

35. Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1937), p. 42.

36. Ibid., p. 125.

37. Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964), p. 133.

38. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr. "The British Nineteenth Century and Modern Architecture," in *Modern Architecture in England* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1937), p. 10.

39. Ralph Lieberman, "The Crystal Palace," in *AA Files* 12 (London: Architectural Association, 1976), p. 55.

40. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 235–248.

41. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground,* Serge Shishkoff, trans. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1969), p. 34.

42. Andrea Kahn, "The Invisible Mask," pp. 85–106.

43. See Charles Taylor, "Responsibility for Self," in Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, ed., *The Identities of Persons* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), pp. 281–299; Harry Frankfurt, in *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), pp. 80–94; Satya P. Mohanty in *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, pp. 139–142.

44. On the relationship between deeply emotional experience and rationality, and states of freedom, see Harry Frankfurt, in *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays*, pp. 89–90.

45. Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, xii.