Postmodernism in the city: architecture and urban design

In the field of architecture and urban design, I take postmodernism broadly to signify a break with the modernist idea that planning and development should focus on large-scale, metropolitan-wide, technologically rational and efficient urban plans, backed by absolutely no-frills architecture (the austere 'functionalist' surfaces of 'international style' modernism). Postmodernism cultivates, instead, a conception of the urban fabric as necessarily fragmented, a 'palimpsest' of past forms superimposed upon each other, and a 'collage' of current uses, many of which may be ephemeral. Since the metropolis is impossible to command except in bits and pieces, urban design (and note that postmodernists design rather than plan) simply aims to be sensitive to vernacular traditions, local histories, particular wants, needs, and fancies, thus generating specialized, even highly customized architectural forms that may range from intimate, personalized spaces, through traditional monumentalities, to the gaiety of spectacle. All of this can flourish by appeal to a remarkable eclecticism of architectural styles.

Above all, postmodernists depart radically from modernist conceptions of how to regard space. Whereas the modernists see space as something to be shaped for social purposes and therefore always subservient to the construction of a social project, the postmodernists see space as something independent and autonomous, to be shaped according to aesthetic aims and principles which have nothing necessarily to do with any overarching social objective, save, perhaps, the achievement of timeless and 'disinterested' beauty as an objective in itself.

It is useful to consider the meaning of such a shift for a variety of reasons. To begin with, the built environment constitutes one element in a complex of urban experience that has long been a vital crucible for the forging of new cultural sensibilities. How a city looks and how its spaces are organized forms a material base upon which a range of possible sensations and social practices can be thought about, evaluated, and achieved. One dimension of Raban's Soft city can be rendered more or less hard by the way the built environment is shaped. Conversely, architecture and urban design have been the focus of considerable polemical debate concerning the ways in which aesthetic judgements can or should be incorporated in spatially-fixed form, and with what effects on daily life. If we experience architecture as communication, if, as Barthes (1975, 92) insists, 'the city is discourse and this discourse is truly a language,' then we ought to pay close attention to what is being said, particularly since we typically absorb such messages in the midst of all the other manifold distractions of urban life.

Prince Charles's 'kitchen cabinet' of advisers on matters to do with architecture and urban design includes the architect Leon Krier. Krier's complaints against modernism, as published (long-hand for special effect) in 1987 in Architectural Design Profile (no. 65) are of direct interest since they now inform public debate in Britain at both the highest and the most general level. The central problem for Krier is that modernist urban planning works mainly through monofunctional zoning. As a result, circulation of people between zones by way of artificial arteries becomes the central preoccupation of the planner, generating an urban pattern that is, in Krier's judgement, 'anti-ecological' because it is wasteful of time, energy, and land:

The symbolic poverty of current architecture and townscape is a direct result and expression of functionalist monotony as legislated by functional zoning practices. The principal modern building types and planning models such as the Skyscraper, the Groundscraper, the Central Business District, the Commercial Strip, the Office Park, the Residential Suburb, etc. are invariably horizontal or vertical overconcentrations of single uses in one urban zone, in one building programme, or under one roof.

Krier contrasts this situation with the 'good city' (by its nature ecological) in which 'the totality of urban functions' are provided within 'compatible and pleasant walking distances.' Recognizing that such an urban form 'cannot grow by extension in width and height but only through multiplication,' Krier seeks a city form made up of 'complete and finite urban communities,' each constituting an independent urban quarter within a large family of urban quarters, that in turn make up 'cities within a city.' Only under such conditions will it be possible to recuperate the 'symbolic richness' of traditional urban forms based on 'the propinquity and dialogue of the greatest
possible variety and hence on the expression of true variety as evidenced by the meaningful and truthful articulation of public spaces, urban fabric, and skyline.¹

Krier, like some other European postmodernists, seeks the active restoration and re-creation of traditional 'classical' urban values. This means either restoration of an older urban fabric and its rehabilitation to new uses, or the creation of new spaces that express the traditional visions with all the cunning that modern technologies and materials will allow. While Krier's project is only one out of many possible directions that postmodernists could cultivate - quite at odds, for example, with Venturi's admiration for Disneyland, the Las Vegas strip, and suburban ornamentation - it does harp upon a certain conception of modernism as its reactive beginning point. It is useful, therefore, to consider to what degree and why the sort of modernism Krier decries became so dominant a feature of postwar urban organization.

The political, economic, and social problems that faced the advanced capitalist countries in the wake of World War II were as extensive as they were severe. International peace and prosperity had somehow to be built upon a programme that met the aspirations of peoples who had given massively of their lives and energies in a struggle generally depicted (and justified) as a struggle for a safer world, a better world, a better future. Whatever else that meant, it did not mean a return to the prewar conditions of slump and unemployment, of hunger marches and soup-kitchens, of deteriorating slums and penury, and to the social unrest and political instability to which such conditions could all too easily lend themselves. Postwar politics, if they were to remain democratic and capitalistic, had to address questions of full employment, decent housing, social provision, welfare, and broad-based opportunity to construct a better future (see Part II).

While the tactics and conditions differed from place to place (in, for example, the extent of war-time destruction, the acceptable degree of centralization in political control, or the level of commitment to state welfarism), the trend was everywhere to look to the war-time experience of mass production and planning as means to launch upon a vast programme of reconstruction and reorganization. It was almost as if a new and revivified version of the Enlightenment project sprang, phoenix-like, out of the death and destruction of global conflict. The reconstruction, re-shaping, and renewal of the urban fabric became an essential ingredient within this project. This was the context in which the ideas of the CIAM, of Le Corbusier, of

Mies van der Rohe, of Frank Lloyd Wright, and the like, could gain the kind of purchase they did, less as a controlling force of ideas over production than as a theoretical framework and justification for what practical-minded engineers, politicians, builders, and developers were in many cases engaged upon out of sheer social, economic, and political necessity.

Within this general framework all kinds of solutions were explored. Britain, for example, adopted quite stringent town and country planning legislation. The effect was to restrict suburbanization and to substitute planned new-town development (on the Ebenezer Howard model) or high-density infilling or renewal (on the Le Corbusier model) in its stead. Under the watchful eye and sometimes strong hand of the state, procedures were devised to eliminate slums, build modular housing, schools, hospitals, factories, etc. through the adoption of the industrialized construction systems and rational planning procedures that modernist architects had long proposed. And all this was framed by a deep concern, expressed again and again in legislation, for the rationalization of spatial patterns and of circulation systems so as to promote equality (at least of opportunity), social welfare, and economic growth.

While many other European countries pursued variants of the British solution, the United States pushed towards urban reconstruction of a rather different sort. Rapid and weakly controlled suburbanization (the answer to every demobilized soldier's dream, as the rhetoric of the time had it) was privately developed but heavily subsidized by government-backed housing finance and direct public investments in highway construction and other infrastructures. The deterioration of the inner cities consequent upon the flight outwards of both jobs and people then provoked a powerful and again government-subsidized strategy of urban renewal through massive clearance and reconstruction of older city centres. It was in this context that someone like Robert Moses - the 'power broker,' as Caro (1974) depicts him, of metropolitan redevelopment in New York - was able to insert himself in between the sources of public funds and the requirements of private developers to such powerful effect, and to reshape the whole New York metropolitan region through high-way construction, bridge building, park provision, and urban renewal. The US solution, though different in form, nevertheless also relied heavily upon mass production, industrialized construction systems, and a sweeping conception of how a rationalized urban space might emerge when linked, as Frank Lloyd Wright had envisaged in his Gropéahy project of the 1930s, through individualized means of transportation using publicly provided infrastructures.
It would, I think, be both erroneous and unjust to depict these 'modernist' solutions to the dilemmas of postwar urban development and redevelopment as unalloyed failures. War-torn cities were rapidly reconstructed, and populations housed under much better conditions than was the case in the inter-war years. Given the technologies available at the time and the obvious scarcity of resources, it is hard to see how much of that could have been achieved except through some variant of what was actually done. And while some solutions turned out to be much more successful (in the sense of yielding widespread public satisfaction, as did Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles) than others (and I note the postmodernist penchant for always and only citing the bad ones), the overall effort was reasonably successful in reconstituting the urban fabric in ways that helped preserve full employment, improve material social provision, contribute to welfare goals, and generally help preserve a capitalist social order that was plainly threatened in 1945. Nor is it true to say that modernist styles were hegemonic for purely ideological reasons. The standardization and assembly-line uniformity of which modernists were later to complain were as omnipresent in the Las Vegas strip and Levittown (hardly built to modernist specifications) as they were in Mies van der Rohe's buildings. Both labour and conservative governments pursued modernist projects in postwar Britain, though it is curious that the left is now largely blamed for them when it was the conservatives, by cutting corners on costs of low-income housing in particular, who perpetrated many of the worst examples of instant slums and alienated living conditions. The dictates of costs and efficiency (particularly important in relation to the less affluent populations served), coupled with organizational and technological constraints, surely played as important a role as ideological concern for style.

Nevertheless, it did indeed become fashionable in the 1950s to laud the virtues of the international style, to vaunt its capacities to create a new species of human being, to view it as the expressive arm of an interventionist bureaucratic state apparatus that, in conjunction with corporate capital, was reckoned to be the guardian of all further advances in human welfare. Some of the ideological claims were grandiose. But the radical transformations in the social and physical landscapes of capitalist cities often had little to do with such claims.

Low income projects that become worse centers of delinquency, vandalism and general social hopelessness than the slums they were supposed to replace. Middle income housing projects which are truly marvels of dullness and regimentation, sealed against any buoyancy or vitality of city life. Luxury housing projects that mitigate their inanity, or try to, with vapid vulgarity. Cultural centers that are unable to support a good bookstore. Civic centers that are avoided by everyone but bums, who have fewer choices of loitering place than others. Commercial centers that are lackluster imitations of standardized suburban chainstore shopping. Promenades that go from no place to nowhere and have no promenaders. Expressways that eviscerate great
cities. This is not the rebuilding of cities. This is the sacking of cities.

This 'Great Blight of Dullness' (see plate 1.14) arose in her judgement, from a profound misunderstanding of what cities are about. 'Processes are of the essence,' she argued, and it is upon the social processes of interaction that we should focus. And when we look at these on the ground, in 'healthy' city environments, we find an intricate system of organized rather than disorganized complexity, a vitality and energy of social interaction that depend crucially upon diversity, intricacy, and the capacity to handle the unexpected in controlled but creative ways. 'Once one thinks about city processes, it follows that one must think of catalysts of these processes, and this too is of the essence.' There were, she noted, some market processes at work which tended to counter a 'natural' human affinity for
diversity and produce a stifling conformity of land uses. But that problem was seriously compounded by the way planners declared themselves enemies of diversity, fearing chaos and complexity because they saw it as disorganized, ugly, and hopelessly irrational. 'It is curious,' she complained, 'that city planning neither respects spontaneous self-diversification among city populations nor contrives to provide for it. It is curious that city designers seem neither to recognize this force of self-diversification nor to be attracted by the esthetic problems of expressing it.'

On the surface, at least, it would seem that postmodernism is precisely about finding ways to express such an aesthetics of diversity. But it is important to consider how it does so. In that way we can uncover the deep limitations (which the more reflective postmodernists recognize) as well as the superficial advantages of many postmodernist efforts.

Jencks (1984), for example, argues that postmodern architecture has its roots in two significant technological shifts. First, contemporary communications have collapsed the 'usual space and time boundaries' and produced both a new internationalism and strong internal differentiations within cities and societies based on place, function, and social interest. This 'produced fragmentation' exists in a context of transport and communications technologies that have the capacity to handle social interaction across space in a highly differentiated manner. Architecture and urban design have therefore been presented with new and more wide-ranging opportunities to
be devised that meets the needs of rich and poor alike. This presupposes, however, a series of well-knit and cohesive urban communities as its starting point in an urban world that is always in flux and transition.

This problem is compounded by the degree to which the different ‘taste cultures’ and communities express their desires through differentiated political influence and market power. Jencks concedes, for example, that postmodernism in architecture and urban design tends to be shamelessly market-oriented because that is the primary language of communication in our society. Although market integration plainly carries with it the danger of pandering to the rich and the private consumer rather than to the poor and to public needs, that is the end, Jencks holds, a situation the architect is powerless to change.

Such a cavalier response to lop-sided market power scarcely favours an outcome that meets Jacobs’s objections. To begin with, it is just as likely to replace the planner’s zoning with a market-produced zoning of ability to pay, an allocation of land to uses based on the principles of land rent rather than the kind of principles of urban design that someone like Krier plainly has in mind. In the short run, a transition from planned to market mechanisms may temporarily mix up uses into interesting configurations, but the speed of gentrification and the monotony of the result (see plate 1.15) suggests that in many instances the short run is very short indeed. Market and land-rent allocation of this kind have already re-shaped many urban landscapes into new patterns of conformity. Free-market populism, for example, puts the middle classes into the enclosed and protected spaces of shopping malls (plate 1.16) and atria (plate 1.17), but it does nothing for the poor except to eject them into a new and quite nightmarish postmodern landscape of homelessness (see plate 1.18).

The pursuit of the consumption dollars of the rich has led, however, to much greater emphasis upon product differentiation in urban design. By exploring the realms of differentiated tastes and aesthetic preferences (and doing whatever they could to stimulate those tasks), architects and urban designers have re-emphasized a powerful aspect of capital accumulation: the production and consumption of what Bourdieu (1977; 1984) calls ‘symbolic capital.’ The latter can be defined as ‘the collection of luxury goods attesting the taste and distinction of the owner.’ Such capital is, of course, transformed money capital which ‘produces its proper effect inasmuch, and only inasmuch, as it conceals the fact that it originates in “material” forms of capital.’ The fetishism (direct concern with surface appearances that conceal underlying meanings) is obvious, but it is here deployed
deliberately to conceal, through the realms of culture and taste, the real basis of economic distinctions. Since 'the most successful ideological effects are those which have no words, and ask no more than complicitous silence,' the production of symbolic capital serves ideological functions because the mechanisms through which it contributes

"to the reproduction of the established order and the perpetuation of domination remain hidden."

It is instructive to put Krier's search for symbolic richness in the context of Bourdieu's theses. The search to communicate social distinctions through the acquisition of all manner of symbols of status has long been a central facet of urban life. Simmel produced some brilliant analyses of this phenomenon at the turn of the century, and a whole series of researchers (such as Firey in 1945 and Jager in
Plate 1.17 This atrium in the IBM building on Madison Avenue, New York, attempts a garden atmosphere within a secure space sealed off from a dangerous, heavily built-up and polluted city outside.

1986) have returned again and again to consideration of it. But I think it is fair to say that the modernist push, partly for practical, technical, and economic, but also for ideological reasons, did go out of its way to repress the significance of symbolic capital in urban life. The inconsistency of such a forced democratization and egalitarianism of taste with the social distinctions typical of what, after all, remained a class-bound capitalist society, undoubtedly created a climate of repressed demand if not repressed desire (some of which was expressed in the cultural movements of the 1960s). This repressed desire pro-
bably did play an important role in stimulating the market for more diversified urban environments and architectural styles. This is the desire, of course, that many postmodernists seek to satisfy, if not titillate shamelessly. "For the middle class suburbanite," Venturi et al. observe, 'living not in an ante-bellum mansion, but in a smaller version lost in a large space, identity must come through symbolic treatment of the form of the house, either by styling provided by the developer (for instance, split-level Colonial) or through a variety of symbolic ornaments applied thereafter by the owner.'

The trouble here is that taste is a far from static category. Symbolic capital remains capital only to the degree that the whims of fashion sustain it. Struggles exist among the taste makers, as Zukin shows in an excellent work on *Loft living*, which examines the roles of 'capital and culture in urban change' by way of a study of the evolution of a real-estate market in the Soho district of New York. Powerful forces, she shows, established new criteria of taste in art as well as in urban living, and profited well off both. Conjoining the idea of symbolic capital with the search to market Krier's symbolic richness has much to tell us, therefore, about such urban phenomena as gentrification, the production of community (real, imagined, or simply packaged for sale by producers), the rehabilitation of urban landscapes, and the recuperation of history (again, real, imagined, or simply reproduced as pastiche). It also helps us to comprehend the present fascination with embellishment, ornamentation, and decoration as so many codes and symbols of social distinction. I am not at all sure that this is what Jane Jacobs had in mind when she launched her criticism of modernist urban planning.

1 Paying attention to the needs of the 'heterogeneity of urban villagers and taste cultures,' however, takes architecture away from the ideal of some unified meta-language and breaks it down into highly differentiated discourses. The "langue" (total set of communicational sources) is so heterogeneous and diverse that any singular "parole" (individual selection) will reflect this. Although he does not use the phrase, Jencks could easily have said that the language of architecture dissolves into highly specialized language games, each appropriate in its own way to a quite different interpretative community.

The result is fragmentation, often consciously embraced. The Office for Metropolitan Architecture group is described in the *Postmodern visions* catalogue (Klotz, 1985), for example, as understanding 'the perceptions and experiences of the present as symbolic and associative, a fragmentary collage, with the Big City providing the ultimate metaphor.' The group produces graphic and architectural work 'characterized by the collage of fragments of reality and splinters of experience enriched by historical references.' The metropolis is conceived of as 'a system of anarchic and archaic signs and symbols that is constantly and independently self-renewing.' Other architects strive to cultivate the labyrinthine qualities of urban environments by interweaving interiors and exteriors (as in the ground plan of the new skyscrapers between Fifth and Sixth Avenues in Mid-Town Manhattan or the AT & T and IBM complex on Madison Avenue - see plate 1.17), or simply through the creation of an interior sense of inescapable complexity, an interior maze like that of the museum in the re-shaped Gare d'Orsay in Paris, the new Lloyds Building in London, or the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles, the confusions of which have been dissected by Jameson (1984b). Postmodern built environments typically seek out and deliberately replicate themes that Raban so strongly emphasized in *Soft city: an emporium of styles, an encyclopaedia, a 'maniacal scrap-book filled with colourful entries.'

The multivalency of architecture which results, in turn generates a tension that renders it 'radically schizophrenic by necessity.' It is interesting to see how Jencks, the chief chronicler of the postmodern movement in architecture, invokes the schizophrenia that many others identify as a general characteristic of the postmodern mind-set. Architecture, he argues, must embody a double coding, 'a popular traditional one which like spoken language is slow-changing, full of clichés and rooted in family life; and a modern one rooted in a 'fast-changing society, with its new functional tasks, new materials, new technologies and ideologies' as well as quick-changing art and fashion. We here encounter Baudelaire's formulation but in a new historicist guise. Postmodernism abandons the modernist search for inner meaning in the midst of present turmoil, and asserts a broader base for the eternal in a constructed vision of historical continuity and collective memory. Again, it is important to see exactly how this is done.

Krier, as we have seen, seeks to recuperate classical urban values directly. The Italian architect Aldo Rossi puts a different argument:

Destruction and demolition, expropriation and rapid changes in use as a result of speculation and obsolescence, are the most recognizable signs of urban dynamics. But beyond all else, the images suggest the interrupted destiny of the individual, of his often sad and difficult participation in the destiny of the collective. This vision in its entirety seems to be reflected with a quality of permanence in urban monuments. Monuments, signs of the collective will as expressed through the principles of architecture, offer themselves as primary elements, fixed points in the urban dynamic. (Rossi, 1982, 22)
Here we encounter the tragedy of modernity once more, but this time stabilized by the fixed points of monuments that incorporate and preserve a 'mysterious' sense of collective memory. The preservation of myth through ritual 'constitutes a key to understanding the meaning of monuments and, moreover, the implications of the founding of cities and of the transmission of ideas in an urban context.' The task of the architect, in Rossi's view, is to participate 'freely' in the production of 'monuments' expressive of collective memory, while also recognizing that what constitutes a monument is itself a mystery which is 'above all to be found in the secret and ceaseless will of its collective manifestations.' Rossi grounds his understanding of that in the concept of 'genre de vie' — that relatively permanent way of life that ordinary people construct for themselves under certain ecological, technological, and social conditions. This concept, drawn from the work of the French geographer Vidal de la Blache, provides Rossi with a sense of what collective memory represents. The fact that Vidal found the concept of genre de vie appropriate to interpret relatively slow-changing peasant societies, but began, towards the end of his life, to doubt its applicability to the rapidly changing landscapes of capitalist industrialization (see his Geographie de l'Est published in 1916), escapes Rossi's attention. The problem, under conditions of rapidly unfolding industrial change, is to prevent his theoretical posture lapsing into the aesthetic production of myth through architecture, and thereby falling into the very trap that 'heroic' modernism encountered in the 1930s. Not surprisingly, Rossi's architecture has been heavily criticized. Umberto Eco describes it as 'frightening', while others point to what they see as its fascist overtones (plate 1.20).

Rossi at least has the virtue of taking the problem of historical reference seriously. Other postmodernists simply make gestures towards historical legitimacy by extensive and often eclectic quotation of past styles. Through films, television, books, and the like, history and past experience are turned into a seemingly vast archive 'instantly retrievable and capable of being consumed over and over again at the push of a button.' If, as Taylor (1987, 105) puts it, history can be seen 'as an endless reserve of equal events,' then architects and urban designers can feel free to quote them in any kind of order they wish. The postmodern penchant for jumbling together all manner of references to past styles is one of its more pervasive characteristics. Reality, it seems, is being shaped to mimic media images.

But the outcome of inserting such a practice into the contemporary socio-economic and political context is more than a little quirky. Since around 1972, for example, what Hewison (1987) calls 'the
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Plate 1.20 Aldo Rossi's design for student accommodation in Chieti yields a very different sort of impression within the eclecticism of postmodern architecture.

heritage industry' has suddenly become big business in Britain. Museums, country houses, reconstructed and rehabilitated urban landscapes that echo past forms, directly produced copies of past urban infrastructures, have become part and parcel of a vast transformation of the British landscape to the point where, in Hewison's judgement, Britain is rapidly turning from the manufacture of goods to the manufacturing of heritage as its principal industry. Hewison explains the impulse behind it all in terms a bit reminiscent of Rossi:

The impulse to preserve the past is part of the impulse to preserve the self. Without knowing where we have been, it is difficult to know where we are going. The past is the foundation of individual and collective identity, objects from the past are the source of significance as cultural symbols. Continuity between past and present creates a sense of sequence out of aleatory chaos and, since change is inevitable, a stable system of ordered meaning enables us to cope with both innovation and decay. The nostalgic impulse is an important agency in adjustment to crisis, it is a social emollient and reinforces national identity when confidence is weakened or threatened.

Hewison is, I think, here revealing something of great potential importance because it is indeed the case that the preoccupation with identity, with personal and collective roots, has become far more pervasive since the early 1970s because of widespread insecurity in labour markets, in technological mixes, credit systems, and the like (see Part II). The television series Roots, which traced the history of a black American family from African origins to the present day, sparked a wave of family history research and interest throughout the whole Western world.

It has, unfortunately, proved impossible to separate postmodernism's penchant for historical quotation and populism from the simple task of catering, if not pandering, to nostalgic impulses. Hewison sees a relation between the heritage industry and postmodernism. 'Both conspire to create a shallow screen that intervenes between our present lives, our history. We have no understanding of history in depth, but instead are offered a contemporary creation, more costume drama and re-enactment than critical discourse.'

The same judgement may be made of the way postmodernist architecture and design quotes the vast range of information and images of urban and architectural forms to be found in different parts of the world. We all of us, says Jencks, carry around with us a musée imaginaire in our minds, drawn from experience (often touristic) of other places, and knowledge culled from films, television, exhibitions, travel brochures, popular magazines, etc. It is inevitable, he says, that all of these get run together. And it is both exciting and healthy that this should be so. 'Why, if one can afford to live in different ages and cultures, restrict oneself to the present, the locale? Eclecticism is the natural evolution of a culture with choice.' Lyotard echoes that sentiment exactly. 'Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and 'retro' clothes in Hong Kong.'

The geography of differentiated tastes and cultures is turned into a pot-pourri of internationalism that is in many respects more startling, perhaps because more jumbled, than high internationalism ever was. When accompanied by strong migration streams (not only of labour but also of capital) this produces a plethora of 'Little' Italies, Havana, Tokyos, Koreas, Kingstons, and Karachis as well as Chinatowns, Latino barrios, Arab quarters, Turkish zones, and the like. Yet the effect, even in a city like San Francisco where minorities collectively make up the majority, is to draw a veil over real geography through construction of images and reconstructions, costume dramas, staged ethnic festivals, etc.
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The masking arises not only out of the postmodernist penchant for eclectic quotation, but also out of an evident fascination with surfaces. Jameson (1984b), for example, regards the reflecting glass surfaces of the Bonaventure Hotel as serving to 'repel the city outside' much as reflector sunglasses prevent the seer being seen, thus permitting the hotel 'a peculiar and placeless dissociation' from its neighbourhood. The contrived columns, ornamentation, extensive quotations from different styles (in time and space) give much of postmodern architecture that sense of 'contrived depthlessness' of which Jameson complains. But the masking nevertheless confines conflict between, for example, the historicism of being rooted in place and the internationalism of style drawn from the musée imaginaire, between function and fantasy, between the producer's aim to signify and the consumer's willingness to take the message.

Behind all this eclecticism (particularly of historical and geographical quotation) it is hard to spot any particular purposeful design. Yet there do seem to be effects which are themselves so purposeful and widespread that in retrospect it is hard not to attribute a simple set of orchestrating principles. Let me illustrate with one example.

'Bread and circuses' is an ancient and well-tried formula for social control. It has frequently been consciously deployed to pacify restless or discontented elements in a population. But spectacle can also be an essential aspect of revolutionary movement (see, for example, Ozoul's, 1988, study of festivals as a means to express revolutionary will in the French Revolution). Did not even Lenin, after all, refer to revolution as 'the festival of the people'? The spectacle has always been a potent political weapon. How has urban spectacle been deployed these last few years?

In US cities, urban spectacle in the 1960s was constituted out of the mass oppositional movements of the time. Civil rights demonstrations, street riots, and inner city uprisings, vast anti-war demonstrations, and counter-cultural events (rock concerts in particular) were grist for the seething mill of urban discontent that drifted around the base of modernist urban renewal and housing projects. But since around 1972, the spectacle has been captured by quite different forces, and been put to quite different uses. The evolution of urban spectacle in a city like Baltimore is both typical and instructive.

In the wake of the riots that erupted after the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968 (plate 1.21), a small group of influential politicians, professionals, and business leaders got together to see if there was some way to bring the city together. The urban renewal effort of the 1960s had created a highly functional and strongly modernist downtown of offices, plazas and occasionally spectacular architecture such as the Mies van der Rohe building of One Charles Center (plates 1.22 and 1.23). But the riots threatened the vitality of downtown and the viability of investments already made. The leaders sought a symbol around which to build the idea of the city as a community, a city which could believe in itself sufficiently to overcome the divisions and the siege mentality with which the common citizenry approached downtown and its public spaces. 'Spurred by the necessity to arrest the fear and disuse of downtown areas caused by the civic unrest in the late 1960s,' said a later Department of Housing and Urban Development report, 'the Baltimore City Fair was originated ... as way to promote urban redevelopment.' The fair set out to celebrate the neighbourhood and ethnic diversity in the city, even went out of its way to promote ethnic (as opposed to racial) identity. There were 340,000 visitors to the fair in the first year (1970), but by 1973 that number had swelled to nearly two million. Bigger, but step
by step inexorably less 'neighbourly' and more commercial (even the ethnic groups began to profit from the sale of ethnicity), the fair became the lead item in drawing larger and larger crowds to the downtown area on a regular basis, to see all manner of staged spectacles. It was a short step from that to an institutionalized commercialization of a more or less permanent spectacle in the construction of Harbor Place (a waterfront development reputed now to draw in more people than Disneyland), a Science Center, an Aquarium, a Convention Center, a marina, innumerable hotels, pleasure citadels of all kinds. Judged by many as an outstanding success (though the impact upon city poverty, homelessness, health care, education provision, has been negligible and perhaps even negative), such a form of development required a wholly different architecture from the austere modernism of the downtown renewal that

had dominated in the 1960s. An architecture of spectacle, with its sense of surface glitter and transitory participatory pleasure, of display and ephemerality, of jouissance, became essential to the success of a project of this sort (plates 1.24, 1.25, 1.26).

Baltimore was not alone in the construction of such new urban spaces. Boston's Faneuil Hall, San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf (with Ghirardelli Square), New York's South Street Seaport, San Antonio's Riverwalk, London's Covent Garden (soon to be followed by Docklands), Gateshead's Metrocentre, to say nothing of the fabled West Edmonton Mall, are just the fixed aspects of organized spectacles that include more transitory events such as the Los Angeles Olympic Games, the Liverpool Garden Festival, and the re-staging of almost every imaginable historical event (from the Battle of Hastings to that of Yorktown). Cities and places now, it seems, take
much more care to create a positive and high quality image of place, and have sought an architecture and forms of urban design that respond to such need. That they should be so pressured, and that the result should be a serial repetition of successful models (such as Baltimore’s Harbor Place), is understandable, given the grim history of deindustrialization and restructuring that left most major cities in the advanced capitalist world with few options except to compete with each other, mainly as financial, consumption, and entertainment centres. Imaging a city through the organization of spectacular urban spaces became a means to attract capital and people (of the right sort) in a period (since 1973) of intensified inter-urban competition and urban entrepreneurialism (see Harvey, 1989).

While we shall return to a closer examination of this phenomenon in Part III, it is important here to note how architecture and urban design have responded to these new-felt urban needs. The projection of a definite image of place blessed with certain qualities, the organization of spectacle and theatricality, have been achieved through an eclectic mix of styles, historical quotation, ornamentation, and the diversification of surfaces (in Baltimore, Scarlett Place exemplifies the idea in somewhat bizarre form, see plate 1.27). All of these tendencies are exhibited in Moore’s Piazza d’Italia in New Orleans. We here see the combination of many of the elements that have been so far described within one singular and quite spectacular project (plate 1.28). The description in the Post-modern visions catalogue (Klotz, 1985) is most revealing:

In an area of New Orleans requiring redevelopment Charles Moore has created the public Piazza d’Italia for the local Italian population. Its form and architectonic language have brought the social and communicative functions of a European and,
more specifically, Italian piazza to the southern United States.

Within the context of a new block of buildings covering a substantial area and featuring relatively regular, smooth, and angular windows, Moore has inserted a large circular piazza that represents a kind of negative form and is therefore all the more surprising when one enters through the barrier of the surrounding architecture. A small temple stands at the entrance and heralds the historical formal language of the piazza, which is framed by fragmented colonnades. At the center of the arrangement is a fountain basin, the "Mediterranean" bathing the boot of Italy, which extends down from the "Alps." The placement of Sicily at the center of the piazza pays tribute to the fact that the Italian population of the area is dominated by immigrants from that island.

The arcades, placed in front of the convex facades of the building around the piazza, make ironic reference to the five orders of classical column (Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, Tuscan, and Composite) by placing them in a subtly colored continuum, indebted somewhat to Pop Art. The bases of the fluted columns are formed like pieces of a fragmented architrave, more a negative form than a fully three-dimensional architectural detail. Their elevation is faced in marble, and their cross section is like a slice of cake. The columns are separated from their Corinthian capitals by rings of neon tubing, which give them colorful luminous necklaces at night. The arched arcade at the top of the Italian boot also has neon lights on its facade. Other capitals take on a precise, angular form and are placed like Art Deco brooches beneath the architrave, while other columns present further variations, their fluting created by jets of water.

All of this brings the dignified vocabulary of classical architecture up to date with Pop Art techniques, a post-modernist palette, and theatricality. It conceives of history as a continuum of portable accessories, reflecting the way the Italians themselves have been "transplanted" to the New World. It presents a nostalgic picture of Italy's renaissance and baroque palaces and its piazzas, but at the same time there is a sense of dislocation. After all, this is not realism, but a facade, a stage set, a fragment inserted into a new and modern context. The Piazza d'Italia is a
piece of architecture as well as a piece of theater. In the tradition of the Italian 'res publica,' it is a place for the public to gather; yet at the same time, it does not take itself too seriously, and it can be a place for games and amusement. The alienated features of the Italian homeland act as ambassadors in the New World, thus reaffirming the neighborhood population's identity in a district of New Orleans that threatens to become a slum. This piazza must count as one of the most important and striking examples of postmodernist building in the world. It has been the mistake of many publications to show the piazza in isolation; however, the model here shows the successful integration of this theatrical event into its context of modern buildings.

But if architecture is a form of communication, the city a discourse, then what can such a structure, inserted into the urban fabric of New Orleans, possibly say or mean? The postmodernists themselves will probably answer that it depends at least as much, if not more, on what is in the eye of the beholder, as it does on the thoughts of the producer. Yet there is a certain facile naiveté in such an answer. For there is much too much coherence between the imagery of city life laid out in books such as Raban's *Soft city* and the system of architectural production and urban design here described for there to be nothing in particular beneath the surface glitter. The example of spectacle suggests certain dimensions of social meaning, and Moore's Piazza d'Italia is hardly innocent in what it sets out to say and how it says it. We here see the penchant for fragmentation, the eclecticism of styles, the peculiar treatments of space and time ('history as a continuum of portable accessories'). There is alienation understood (shallowly) in terms of emigration and slum formation, that the architect tries to recuperate through construction of a place where identity might be reclaimed even in the midst of commercialism, pop art, and all the accoutrements of modern life. The theatricality of effect, the striving for *joissance* and schizophrenic effect (in Jencks' sense) are all consciously present. Above all, postmodern architecture and urban design of this sort convey a sense of some search for a fantasy world, the illusory 'high' that takes us beyond current realities into pure imagination. The matter of postmodernism, the catalogue to the *Post-modern visions* exhibition (Kloz, 1985) forthrightly declares, is 'not just function but fiction.'

Charles Moore represents only one strain of practice within the eclectic umbrella of postmodernism. The Piazza d'Italia would hardly earn the approval of Leon Krier, whose instincts for classical revival are so strong as sometimes to put him outside the postmodernist appellation altogether, and it looks very odd when juxtaposed with an Aldo Rossi design. Furthermore, the eclecticism and pop imagery that lie at the heart of the line of thinking that Moore represents have come in for strong criticism, precisely because of their lack of theoretical rigour and their populist conceptions. The strongest line of argument now comes from what is called 'deconstructivism.' In part of a reaction against the way that much of the postmodern movement had entered into the mainstream and generated a popularized architecture that is lush and indulgent, deconstructivism seeks to regain the high ground of elite and avant-garde architectural practice by active deconstruction of the modernism of the Russian constructivists of the 1930s. The movement in part acquires its interest because of its deliberate attempt to fuse the deconstructionist thinking from literary theory with postmodernist architectural practices that often seem to have developed according to a logic all their own. It shares with modernism a concern to explore pure form and space, but does so in such a way as to conceive of a building not as a
unified whole but as 'disparate “texts” and parts that remain distinct and unaligned, without achieving a sense of unity,' and which are, therefore, susceptible to 'several asymmetrical and irreconcilable' readings. What deconstructivism has in common with much of postmodernism, however, is its attempt to mirror 'an unruly world subject to caroeming moral, political and economic system.' But it does so in such a way as to be 'disorienting, even confusing' and so break down 'our habitual ways of perceiving form and space.' Fragmentation, chaos, disorder, even within seeming order, remain central themes (Goldberge, 1988; Giovannini, 1988).

Fiction, fragmentation, collage, and eclecticism, all suffused with a sense of ephemerality and chaos, are, perhaps, the themes that dominate in today's practices of architecture and urban design. And there is, evidently, much in common here with practices and thinking in many other realms such as art, literature, social theory, psychology, and philosophy. How is it, then, that the prevailing mood takes the form it does? To answer that question with any power requires that we first take stock of the mundane realities of capitalist modernity and postmodernity, and see what clues might lie there as to the possible functions of such fictions and fragmentations in the reproduction of social life.