Architecture or Revolution?

'*Architecture ou Révolution*,' wrote Le Corbusier in 1922. 'It is the question of building which lies at the root of the social unrest of today; architecture or revolution.'[1]

Le Corbusier, in common with many architects of the Modern Movement, was convinced of the social role of architecture. In an era of great social and political change, Le Corbusier perceived architecture as a crucial instrument in addressing the ills of contemporary society. An appropriate architecture would combat social unrest. Architecture could prevent revolution.

While Le Corbusier saw architecture as a way of avoiding revolution, the architects of post-revolutionary Russia saw architecture as a way of supporting the aims and ideals of a Marxist revolution. Architectural theorists, such as Alexei Gan and Moisei Ginzburg, looked to architecture for a means of resolving the particular problems of post-revolutionary Marxist society. Buildings should not simply reflect passively changing social conditions; they should be active instruments of change. Thus for Gan and Ginzberg buildings themselves were to be 'revolutionary', and were to operate as active social condensers.[2]

On the face of it, Le Corbusier's position seems diametrically opposed to that of Gan and Ginzburg. Yet an alternative reading is possible, and it could be argued that Le Corbusier spoke of avoiding political 'revolution' not because he was opposed to the concept of revolution as such, but rather because he recognised in architecture the possibility of a 'revolution' that would go beyond the political. As Fredric Jameson has observed, 'he saw the construction and the constitution of new spaces as the most revolutionary act, and one that could 'replace' the narrowly political revolution of the mere seizure of power.'[3] Thus, far from being against revolution, Le Corbusier could be seen as a supporter of reform in its most radical and far-reaching sense. It is clear that both Le Corbusier and the architects of the new Russia recognised in architecture the same potential, the possibility of alleviating social problems and of creating a new and better world. Architecture for the

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[1]Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, Frederick Etchells (trans.), London: Butterworth Architecture, 1989, p. 269. '*Architecture ou Révolution*' was to be the original title of *Vers Une Architecture*.

[2]On this see: Catherine Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde: Theories of Art, Architecture and the City*, London: Academy Editions, 1995, p. 118.

[3]Fredric Jameson, 'Architecture and the Critique of Ideology', in Joan Ockman (ed.), *Architecture, Criticism, Ideology*, Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985, p. 71.

pioneers of the Modern Movement had a role as a democratic force within a democratic society. Architecture was to be a force of liberation, overtly political and emancipatory in its outlook.

At the beginning of the twentieth-first century, in the light of the recent 'revolutions' in Central and Eastern Europe the relationship between architecture and revolution deserves further consideration. Clearly, this relationship needs to be interrogated beyond the naive utopianism of the Modern Movement, and the term 'revolution' should not be taken lightly, nor treated uncritically. Too easily such a term may be appropriated to dress up shifts in political power, which, far from overturning a previous regime, simply replicate the *status quo* in an alternative formal variant. Too easily, also, such a term may be smuggled into empty slogans and adopted by the artistic avant-garde to refer to merely ephemeral changes in fashion.

Architecture and revolution: these terms need to reconsidered and their relationship rethought. What influence can architecture claim to have on the social and the political? What is the status of architecture as a force of social change? What is the link between aesthetics and politics? What relationship may there be between architecture and revolution? Can there be a 'revolutionary' architecture?

Aesthetics and Revolution

The argument for a link between aesthetics and revolution has been made most forcefully by Herbert Marcuse. For Marcuse the revolutionary may exist within the aesthetic. Although Marcuse addresses literature, the same situation, he claims, would apply to the visual arts. [4] Marcuse goes beyond traditional Marxist aesthetics which views art as an expression of social relations, to perceive art as a potential critique of social relations. It is precisely the aesthetic form of art which allows it to be autonomous from the given social relations. 'In its autonomy,' Marcuse claims, 'art both protests these relations, and at the same time transcends them. Art therefore subverts the dominant consciousness, the ordinary experience.'[5] From this Marcuse concludes that art can be revolutionary in the stylistic changes that it brings about, which disrupt accepted aesthetic conventions and reflect broader social changes. But beyond the domain of the technical, art can also be

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[4]Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, London: Macmillan Press, 1978, p. x.
[5]Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, p. ix.

revolutionary in a more direct fashion. Art can represent the 'prevailing unfreedom', and can therefore break through 'the mystified (and petrified) social reality'. Thus art can be liberational by opening up 'the horizon of change.'

'In this sense, every authentic work of art would be revolutionary, i.e. subversive of perception and understanding, an indictment of the established reality, the appearance of the image of liberation.'[6]

For Marcuse art was necessarily abstracted from the given social reality by a process of sublimation. The material was thereby reshaped according to the rules of aesthetic form. Art therefore came both to re-present reality and to challenge it, by shattering the 'reified objectivity of established social relations'.[7] Art was for Marcuse a re-interpretation of reality transported to the realm of the aesthetic. It is precisely in its aesthetic form that art can function as a critical force in the struggle for liberation, not through some empty notion of pure form, but by virtue of its content having become form.

Marcuse is quite categorical, then, in his support for a revolutionary aesthetics. Yet his position amounts to a deeply utopian one, and can be challenged on several accounts. In contrast to mainstream Marxist aesthetics, art for Marcuse was not proletarian. Marcuse remained deeply suspicious of the mass media which he would see as the 'principal agent of an engineered social consensus that denied real human interests'.[8] In common with Theodor Adorno he could be accused of promoting an elitist notion of art — a 'high' art. Adorno himself presents a more recondite elaboration of the question of the role of art, and draws a distinction between the unifying and pacifying nature of the 'culture industry' and art proper. Although a distinction could be made between Adorno's more pessimistic 'negative dialectics' — his 'romanticism of despair' — , and Marcuse's optimistic utopian 'romanticism of revolt', there are clear parallels between the two positions. As with Marcuse, so too with Adorno art establishes an autonomy from the concrete world of social relations, and it is through this critical distance that it can maintain its critique of that world. Thus an apparent distinction is drawn between art proper as 'high' and the culture industry as 'low' art. Postmodern thinkers would argue that Adorno's treatment of the 'culture industry' is overly simplistic and monolithic, and that it does not allow for

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[6]Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, p. xi

[7]Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, p.7.

[8]For Marcuse on mass culture see C A Rootes, 'Mass Culture' in William Outhwaite and Tom Bottomore (eds.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought*, London: Blackwell, 1993, pp. 369-370.

resistance within popular culture itself.[9] This criticism of Adorno could equally be levelled at Marcuse, whose celebration of an autonomous art fails to recognise the critical capacity of more popular forms of cultural expression.

Marcuse's position is also questionable on other accounts. Even accepting a view of art as autonomous, it could be argued that any attempt to politicise art must be compromised in its very nature. It is as though an effective opposition can be detected between politics and art. Walter Benjamin exposed the problem in his essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.[10] Benjamin explored the problem of how Fascism used aesthetics to celebrate war. The aestheticisation of war by the Futurists, in particular, succeeded in redressing the ethics of war, by transporting them into the realm of aesthetics. In effect it could be extrapolated from Benjamin's argument that aesthetics brings about an anaesthetisation of the political, and this applied not only to Fascism but to any form of politics.[11] Yet, almost paradoxically, Benjamin concludes the article with the comment, 'This is the situation in politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.'[12] As Susan Buck-Morss has pointed out, according to Benjamin's own argument, the term 'aesthetic' must completely change its orientation if it is to retain some political content. If the aesthetic might be employed to disguise the political and to render it acceptable by transporting it into an aestheticized realm, a realm where ethics have been eclipsed and artistic 'licence' prevails, then clearly the aesthetic might be seen in opposition to the political.[13] The aesthetic might be perceived — somewhat paradoxically — as inducing an anaesthetizing effect, in that the overstimulation of sensory perception induced by the aesthetic moment has the effect of numbing the senses, creating a form of aesthetic cocoon, thereby isolating the individual from the harsh reality of politics. According to such an argument, the aesthetic reduces and subsumes political content. It counters and absorbs the political, rendering it impotent. But does this mean that the aesthetic is apolitical? Precisely not. Aesthetics, according to this argument, must be seen along the same axis as politics. Yet its role is assiduously negative. Its masking of the political remains an intensely political act.

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[9]See, for example, the comments of J A Bernstein in: Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, J M Bernstein (ed.), London: Routledge, 1991.

[10]Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, Harry Zohn (trans.), London: Fontana Press, 1973, pp. 211-235.

[11]The link between aesthetics and anaesthetics has been explored by Susan Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered', *October*, 62, Fall 1992, pp. 3-41.

[12]Benjamin*, Illuminations*, p. 235.

[13]One is reminded here of the deeply aestheticised Nazi Nuremburg rallies, and of crimes committed in the name of art, such as the infamous murder of a bourgeois doctor by Italian Futurists.

Alternatively, it could also be argued that even a so-called 'critical aesthetics' does indeed remain political (although perhaps not in the manner which might have been intended) by subscribing, albeit unwittingly, to a 'politics of acquiescence'. In its 'claims' to political agency — 'claims' that prove inevitably to be exaggerated — 'critical aesthetics' is diverting attention away from the primary *locus* of politics which must be seen as *praxis* itself, in that significant political gestures are less likely to take place in art galleries than in the streets outside. Through this diversionary strategy, a 'critical aesthetics', it could be argued, '*acquiesces in*' — rather than *resists* — the dominant political condition.

Beyond this, there are further problems over the question of political content in a work of art. Where art is not being used in a directly communicative manner — as slogans, advertising, and so on — the nature of its engagement with its audience is mediated by the very abstraction of its aesthetic form, and its capacity to communicate 'political content' is therefore compromised. Nor should it be assumed that the reception of that content on the part of the reader is unproblematic, unless one is to resort to a hermeneutics of reading. Yet the shortcomings of hermeneutics — and indeed the whole project of phenomenolgy — have been all too often exposed. Hermeneutics is based on the premise of collapsing of the subject into the object, so that the agency of the reader is somehow overlooked and the reader is therefore deemed to have direct and unmediated access to the work of art. Furthermore, this approach does not entertain any sense of 'difference', such as cultural or gender difference. The reader in this context is treated as an essentialised, universal, ahistorical *persona*. Phenomenology presupposes the existence of a pre-given human body — an essentialised human body — which, in the context of architecture, acts as the standard unit by which to 'experience' space. Phenomenology, in this sense, may prove as universalising as any structuralist account of the world. In short, the reading of any work of art is problematic, and although there have been attempts by Habermas and others to overcome 'death of the author' arguments by introducing a notion of intersubjective communication, the bare fact remains that there can be no one privileged reading of a work of art.

At best we might account for readings of a work of art through some form of 'symbolic meaning', thereby bringing the whole debate down to a 'politics of the individual'. Symbolic meaning — like beauty — lies in the eye of the beholder, although it is no less real for that. Yet symbolic meaning, as Fredric Jameson has observed, is 'as volatile as the

arbitrariness of the sign'.[14] It is as though one reading may too easily invert into its opposite. Noah's nakedness might mean respect or disrespect.[15] The holocaust may be taken as the logical consequence of rationality or the inevitable result of irrationality. This is not to sanction relativism, so much as to highlight the need to acknowledge the agency of the interpreter and the perspective within which an interpretation is made.

Within the context of the whole aesthetics and politics debate, the relationship between an ideology of the aesthetic and a more general ideology needs to be considered. What underpinned much Modernist art was the attempt to challenge existing conventions. In this sense Modernist art was 'revolutionary'. Yet there is a danger in conflating the aesthetic with the social. An aesthetic 'revolution' which challenges the values and norms of the world of art should be distinguished from a social revolution which challenges the existing power structures within a broader political context. The confusion which seems to have beset much Modernist art in its claims to be 'revolutionary' beyond the realm of the aesthetic has been to equate the aesthetic with the social. In effect there has been an elision — a sleight of hand — which attempts to legitimate a connection which ought to be seen as no more than allegorical. Yet this is not to deny that the two realms — the aesthetic and the social — may intersect on occasion, so that the aesthetic revolution may engage directly with the social revolution under a specific constellation of circumstances. The possibility of such an event is perhaps greater in the context of architecture, where the involvement with the social is more direct than in other forms of aesthetic expression.

Architecture and Politics

Architecture poses a special question. Architecture is deeply embedded within economic and other structures of power, and its capacity to operate as a critical force of change is therefore compromised. The architect, furthermore, is no free agent, and can act only vicariously on behalf of the client. If any authorial position is sought, therefore, we should perhaps look to the client rather than to the architect. At the same time, architecture has its own special siginificance as the most public of all the arts, and the one which may most acutely influences the social. This distinguishes architecture from other arts, in that its capacity to act autonomously — in Marcuse's terms — , as a critical commentary on the

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[14]Fredric Jameson, 'Is Space Political?', in Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 258.

[15]Jameson, 'Is Space Political?', in Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture*, p. 258.

realm of the real, is compromised by its instantiation within the realm of the real. The very presence of architecture gives it a social impact, so that any 'negativity', any critical capacity within architecture, is all but cancelled by the 'positivity' of its presence. The very physicality of architecture always threatens to install a new *status quo*, and undermines its capacity to be 'subversive'.

Yet the problem of a revolutionary architecture has to be addressed ultimately within the context of the more general question of architecture and its influence on the social. Within the popular imagination there has been little doubt about architecture's capacity to condition a response within the user. Indeed the common view seems to be encapsulated in Georges Bataille's 'definition' of architecture. For Georges Bataille architecture — especially monumental architecture — not only reflects the politics of an epoch, but also has a marked influence on the social.

'Architecture is the expression of the true nature of society, as physiognomy is the expression of the nature of the individuals. However, this comparison is applicable, above all, to the physiognomy of officials (prelates, magistrates, admirals). In fact, only society's ideal nature — that of authoritative command and prohibition — expresses itself in actual architectural constructions. Thus great monuments rise up like dams, opposing a logic of majesty and authority on all unquiet elements; it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces that the church and state speak to and impose silence upon the crowds.'[16]

Such a view, however, must not go unchallenged. The interaction between architecture and the political deserves to be interrogated further. This is not to deny, of course, the status of architecture as a political act. Certainly, if we are to believe Stanley Fish, every act — and this includes the architectural — is inscribed within some ideological position.[17] There is no platform, according to Fish, which is not constrained by some ideological imperative. Indeed there needs to be an ideological content in that this is precisely what gives an act its force. This may not be obvious because ideology remains largely invisible, yet it is through its very invisibility that ideology derives its potential. Ideology constitutes a form of background level of consciousness which influences all our actions.

A distinction must be made, however, between the act of building itself and subsequent semantic 'readings' of that building. The political content of the act of building is perhaps

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[16]Georges Bataille, 'Architecture', in Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture*, p. 21.
[17]Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech — And It's a Good Thing Too*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

the more obvious, but it is likewise the more often overlooked and forgotten. In the case of the Stalinallee in Berlin, for example, the act of building was deeply political and was marked by considerable social unrest. Demonstrations over the low level of pay for building workers on the project erupted on 16 June 1953, and spread the following day to other parts of the city.[18] As could be expected the demonstrations were brutally suppressed, and about a dozen demonstrators were killed. Yet what dominates discussion of the Stalinallee is not this all but forgotten moment in its construction, but the question of whether the project can be read semantically as 'totalitarian'.[19]

It is precisely in these semantic readings of architecture that the fragility of associations between architecture and the political become most apparent. In their discussion of 'democratic' architecture, Charles Jencks and Maggie Valentine recognise the subject as problematic. They observe that neither Frank Lloyd Wright nor Vincent Scully, both of whom had written on the subject of architecture and democracy, had managed to relate the politics to any typology or style of building.[20] Yet while they also note that Aldo Rossi and others had claimed that there was no direct link between style and politics, they themselves persist in an attempt to define an 'architecture of democracy'. Their approach relies on semantic readings. For Jencks and Valentine, as it transpires, the problem rests ultimately in the complex 'codes' which 'democratic architecture' adopts. It must avoid excessive uniformity ('An architecture of democracy that is uniform is as absurd as a democracy of identical citizens') yet equally it should avoid excessive variety ('an architecture where every building is in a different style is as privatised as a megalopolis of consumers.') 'Thus a democratic style,' they conclude, '. . is at once shared, abstract, individualised and disharmonious.'[21] Jencks and Valentine emphasise the aesthetic dimension, as though this has some direct bearing on the political. Yet their argument is undone by its own internal inconsistencies. How can classical architecture symbolise both Greek democracy and Italian fascism? Can there be any essential politics to a style of architecture? Can there ever be a 'democratic architecture'?

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[18]Bernard Newman, *Behind the Berlin Wall*, London: Robert Hale, 1964, pp.31-42.

[19]Tafuri, in contrast to other commentators, reads the project not from a political perspective, but strictly in terms of urban planning 'aesthetic' objectives. Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture*, New York: Abrams, 1979, pp. 322, 326.

[20]Charles Jencks and Maggie Valentine, 'The Architecture of Democracy: The Hidden Tradition,' *Architectural Design*, Profile 69, London: Academy Editions, 1987, pp. 8-25. For Vincent Scully on architecture and democracy see: Vincent Scully, *Modern Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy*, New York: George Braziller, 1974; for Frank Lloyd Wright on the subject see: Frank Lloyd Wright, An Organic Architecture: *The Architecture of Democracy*, London: Lund Humphries, 1939; *When Democracy Builds*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945.

[21]Jencks and Valentine, 'The Architecture of Democracy: The Hidden Tradition,*', p. 25.

Here we must recognise that political content in architecture must be seen as associative. Architecture can only be imbued with political content through a process of 'mapping'. Architecture achieves its political — and hence equally its gendered — status through semantic associations, which exist within a temporal framework and are inherently unstable. These semantic associations depend on an historical memory within the collective imagination. Once this memory fades the semantic associations will be lost, and the building may be re-appropriated according to new ideological imperatives. Thus the pyramids emblems, no doubt, of totalitarian rule to the slaves, who built them, have now shifted their symbolic content to icons of tourism. A similar process inevitably occurs when a building changes its use, from Victorian villa to academic department, from police station to brothel, from dictator's palace to casino. Unless the memory of its previous social use is retained, all earlier associations are erased. While a building through its associations might appear as deeply political, it must be understood that these politics are not an attribute of the architectural form itself. Political content does not reside in architectural form. It is merely grafted on to it by a process that is strictly allegorical. To perceive the political meaning one has to understand the allegorical system in which it is encoded. Yet this is not the allegorical system that one might identify, for example, with Renaissance painting, where allegory relies on a narrative of fixed symbols with which the painter works. The allegory to which I refer is an allegory of association. A closer comparison, therefore, might be the way in which abstract painting has been read as political, and promoted by the CIA — so the story goes — as a tool of post-war propaganda.

Fredric Jameson highlights the problem of the allegorical nature of this 'mapping' of the political onto the architectural. Whatever political content might seem to be invested in architectural form may subsequently be erased or rewritten:

> I have come to think that no work of art or culture can set out to be political once and for all, no matter how ostentatiously it labels itself as such, for there can never be any guarantee that it will be used the way it demands. A great political art (Brecht) can be taken as a pure and apolitical art; art that seems to want to be merely aesthetic and decorative can be rewritten as political with energetic interpretation. The political rewriting or appropriation, then, the political use, must

be allegorical; you have to know that this is what it is supposed to be or mean — in itself it is inert.[22]

He further elaborates this in his incisive critique of Kenneth Frampton's essay on critical regionalism. What is crucial is the 'social ground' of architecture. When removed from its contextual situation, architectural form would be exposed for what it is. Architectural form, as Jameson notes, 'would lack all political and allegorical efficacy' once taken out of the social and cultural movements which lend it this force. This is not to deny that architecture may indeed have 'political and allegorical efficacy', but rather to recognise that it merely serves as a vehicle for this within a given 'social ground'. Thus, to return to our earlier quotations from Bataille, it is 'in the *form* of' — through the *medium* of — 'cathedrals and palaces that the church and state speak to and impose silence upon the crowds'. Remove the memory of the church and state, and the buildings would become empty vessels to be appropriated towards some other political end. Yet the point to be made here is that architecture is *always* contextualised within some social ground. It is therefore always appropriated towards some political end. But that political content is *not* a property of the architectural form itself. To view architectural form as inherently 'politicised' is, for Jameson, a misguided project:

> It was one of the signal errors of the artistic activism of the 1960s to suppose that there existed, in advance, forms that were in and of themselves endowed with a political, and even revolutionary, potential by virtue of their own intrinsic properties.[23]

Architecture, then, may be seen to be the product of political and social forces, yet, once built, any political reading of it must be allegorical. As such, we should take care to distinguish an aesthetic reading of form from a political reading of content, even though the aesthetic terminology — 'reactionary', 'totalitarian', etc. — may ape the political. Failure to recognise this distinction would allow the difference between the two to be elided, and the aesthetic to be read as necessarily political.

Indeed the shortcomings of any attempt to 'read' a politics into architectural form are brought out by the contradictions that may exist between such 'readings' and the practices that actually take place within the building. The importance of the consideration

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[22]Fredric Jameson, 'Is Space Political?', in Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture*, p. 258-9.
[23]Jameson, 'The Constraints of Postmodernism', in Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture*, p. 254.

of practice over semantic concerns has been highlighted by Adrian Rifkin in the context of Jean Nouvel's *Institut du Monde Arabe*.[24] This is a building which purports to celebrate arabness through the arabesque patterning of the facade. Yet if we focus less on semantic readings of the facade and more on to a politics of use of the building itself, we may discover that — far from celebrating arabness — the building replicates the cultural imperialism that is at play elsewhere in Paris. While the elegant Parisians eat their couscous in the restaurants, the arabs themselves may be seen working in the kitchens. In short, the building is supporting, rather than resisting, the dominant 'orientalizing', cultural impulse. All this begins to call into question not only the process of reading a politics into architectural form, but also the effect that any such political reading might have on the user.

The use of space can therefore be political, even if the aesthetic cannot be. Yet one might still argue that architecture — in its very physical form — must indeed be political, through the influence that it exerts on the users of a building. In other words there is an association to be made between the form of a space and the political *praxis* within that space. This prompts the further question as to whether architecture in its physical form may somehow influence the politics of use.

Space, Knowledge and Power

One of the central preoccupations for Michel Foucault is the relationship between power and space, and he throws some light on this issue in his discussion of Bentham's panopticon. In this now famous piece, Foucault explores the question of how architectural form may influence social behaviour. The panopticon is a plan for a prison. It has a central tower in which the guard sits, and the cells are arranged radially, so that from the tower the guard is afforded a view all around — as the name 'panopticon' implies — into each of the cells. Meanwhile, the openings in the tower itself, through blinds and other devices, prevent the inmates in the cells from knowing whether or not the guard is looking at them. Thus the inmates remain under the perpetual control of the gaze of the guard.[25] The principle which Foucault is trying to illustrate is that the architecture may become an

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[24]Lecture given to the MA in Architecture and Critical Theory, University of Nottingham, May 1995.

[25]Although Bentham's panopticon was never built, the principle of the layout can be seen in numerous buildings, such as James Stirling's Seeley History Library, Cambridge. Here the control desk is positioned centrally, with all the desks and shelves are laid out radially around

apparatus for 'for creating and sustaining a power relationship independent of the person who operates it.'[26] In other words it is the architectural form of the panopticon which helps to engender a form of social control. Such an example would seem to suggest the possibility of architecture determining social behaviour.

Foucault revisits this question in a subsequent interview with Paul Rabinow, where he acknowledges that architects are not necessarily 'the masters of space' that they once were, or believed themselves to be.[27] Thus he appears to qualify this position on the capacity for architecture to determine social behaviour. On the question of whether there could be an architecture which would act as a force of either liberation or oppression, Foucault concludes that 'liberation' and 'oppression' are not mutually exclusive, and that even in that most oppressive of structures, some form of 'resistance' may be in operation. Liberty, for Foucault, is a practice, that cannot be 'established by the project itself'. 'The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them.'[28]

Architecture therefore cannot in itself be liberative or repressive. As Foucault comments, 'I think that it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom.'[29] Architectural form, Foucault concludes, cannot in itself resolve social problems. It is only politics that can address them, although architecture can contribute in some way, provided it is in league with the political. Thus Foucault concludes: 'I think that [architecture] can and does produce positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom.'[30] Foucault is therefore not contradicting but merely qualifying his earlier comments on the panopticon. It is not the form of the panopticon which controls the behaviour of the inmates. Rather it is the politics of use — the fact that the building is operating as a prison — which is ultimately determinant of behaviour, and the architecture is merely supporting that politics of use through its efficient layout.

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it, affording an unobstructed view and allowing the librarian to monitor the entire space. A more sophisticated form of panopticism operates with close circuit surveillance cameras.

[26]Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Alan Sheridan (trans.), London: Penguin, 1979, p. 201.

[27]Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 244

[28]Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, p. 245.

[29]Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, p. 245.

[30]Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, p. 246.

The position of Michel Foucault on this matter is clear. In opposition to the utopian visions of Marcuse and others, Foucault would emphasise the politics of everyday life over architectural form as the principle determinant of social behaviour. 'The architect,' he comments, 'has no power over me.'[31] According to such an approach, there could be no 'revolutionary' architecture in the Marcusian sense of an architecture that might constitute some critical force of change. Yet this is not to deny the capacity for architecture to 'produce positive effects' when it is in league with the practice of politics. Such an approach, of course, introduces an important temporal dimension into consideration. As political practice changes, so the efficacy of the architectural form to support that practice may itself be compromised.

Conclusion

Architecture is traditionally seen as built politics, yet the problem is considerably more complex than might first appear. Extrapolating from Foucault's argument we might conclude that there is nothing inherently political about any building or any style of architecture. It is a question rather of what political associations a building may have. Buildings, according to the logic of Foucault's argument would have no inherent politics, if by 'politics' we infer a capacity to influence the social. Rather a building may facilitate — to a greater or lesser extent — the practice of those politics through its very physical form. We may recognise, for example, the naivety of the Jeffersonian 'grid-iron' plan which was carpetted across the United States in an effort to promote democracy. The supposed democracy of an anti-hierarchical, uniform layout such as the grid, was of course challenged by the use of that form in the layout of that most anti-democratic of spaces, the concentration camp.

It is only perhaps if we are to understand architecture, along with the other visual arts, as offering a form of backdrop against which to forge some new political identity, that we might recognise a political role for architecture, albeit indirect. For this backdrop, although neutral in itself, will always have some political 'content' projected on to it. And it is as a 'political backdrop' — politicised, that is, in the eyes of the population — that the architecture can act as a form of screen 'reflecting' certain political values. As it is 'encoded' in this way, the building will be seen to embody that new national identity. And

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[31] Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, p. 247.

it is precisely through the population reading itself into this 'screen' as though it were a mirror that a new sense of national identity might be forged.

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