

The Unfinished Modern Project at the End of Modernity: Tectonic Form and the Space of Appearance

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This title already suggests the self-imposed difficulty of combining an excursus into the ontology of building with an appraisal of that which are among the most significant architectural works achieved over the last half-century, with the implication that the one is the vindication of the other and vice versa. This juxtaposition of theory and practice was already latent in three essays that I wrote during the first two decades of my academic career in the States. Each of these essays were somehow motivated by my nostalgia for a Modern Movement in architecture that had flourished in Europe and Southern California between the World Wars; a movement which could now no longer be pursued with the same conviction as when the modern project was oriented not only towards the creation of a liberative architecture but also towards the modernization of the society as a whole, so as to realize the welfare state as a normative condition. This social democratic vision, first fully articulated perhaps in Gunnar Asplund's Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 (1) has since been totally undermined by the commodifying drive of Neoliberalism.

The first of these essays, entitled "Labor, Work and Architecture" was published in 1968 in Charles Jencks and George Baird's semiotic anthology, Meaning in Architecture. With a passing reference to Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* of 1941, this title was derived from Hannah Arendt's unusual distinctions between labor and work as these appear in her *magnum opus* The Human Condition of 1958. The connotations of her distinctions in this regard are to be best appreciated by citing her directly:

Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life of process by labor. The human condition of labor is life itself. Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not embedded in, and whose morality is not compensated by, the species' ever-recurring life cycle. Work provides an 'artificial' world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings. Within its borders

each individual life is housed, while this world itself is mean to outlast and transcend them all. The human condition of work is worldliness.¹

An architect can hardly overlook the correspondence between these definitions and the countervailing attributes of architecture as these are set forth in the Oxford English Dictionary, namely, first, “the art and science of constructing edifices for human use” and second, “the action and process of building.” Since the same dictionary goes on to define the word edifice as “a large and stately building such as a church, a palace or a fortress,” one can readily see how architecture may be associated with Arendt’s definition of work, whereas the second definition may be assimilated under the rubric of labor in as much as it alludes to the inherently processal character of building. At the same time the work aspect of architecture is amplified by the fact that, according to the same dictionary, the verb to edify, means not only to build but also “to educate, strengthen and instruct,” thereby alluding by association to the work aspect of construction. The ambiguous nature of architecture is also suggested by the term architect, deriving as it does from the ancient Greek word *tekton*, signifying carpenter and thus the *archi-tekton* is a master carpenter or a master builder; the Homo Faber par excellence in medieval Europe prior to the Renaissance. The same evolution from builder to architect also applies in Asia and the Far East, where, up to the beginning of the 20th century, the architectural profession did not exist.

The first of my three essays, ‘Labor, Work and Architecture’ coincided with the 1968 student revolt, epitomized by the rebellious *les evenements du mai* that took place in Paris in that year. The second essay of 1983, “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance” happened to coincide with the theoretical articulation of Postmodernism in Jean Francois Lyottard’s The Postmodern Condition, first published in French in 1979, and written one should note by a former associate of Louis Althusser’s radical faction *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. It is disturbing that Lyottard’s thesis predicated, on the divided nature of our specialized language games should bring him to welcome the inevitability of a future

¹ Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago, Illinois. The University of Chicago Press, 1958) p. 7

dominated by techno-science. This philosophical postmodernity would find its cultural echo in the stylistic postmodernism of the first full architectural biennale, staged in Venice in 1980. This exhibition was curated by the Italian architect Paolo Portoghesi under the eclectic slogan “The End of Prohibition and the Presence of the Past.” It is telling that the center piece of this exhibition, the so called Strada Novissima, comprised a sequence of shop facades designed by a rising generation of star architects, modelled after the sophistry of Robert Venturi’s “decorated shed” as first advanced in his Complexity and Contradiction essay of 1961. It is surely significant that this ‘new street’ would be erected by the scene builders of the Italian film industry.

This scenographic *tour de force* prompted my second essay, “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance” first published in 1983, in Hal Foster’s anthology The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture. Apart from Arendt and the ethos of the Frankfurt School, as embodied in Herbert Marcuse’s Eros and Civilization of 1955, the main inspiration behind my polemic was Paul Ricoeur’s essay, “Universal Civilization and National Cultures,” of 1961 wherein he identified universal civilization as the wholesale implementation of Western technology, while envisaging culture as the ethical and mythical nucleus of mankind. Ricoeur was of the opinion that techno-scientific instrumentality often demands nothing less than the total abandonment of the past and he concluded that: “It is a fact every culture cannot sustain and absorb the shock of modern civilization. There is the paradox how to become modern and return to the sources...”²

The term ‘critical regionalism’ came from Alex Tzonis and Liliane Lefaivre’s 1981 text “The Grid and the Pathway,” in which they made a comparative critique of the two most prominent Greek architects of the 50s, comparing the trabeated forms of Aris Konstantinidis to the tactile topography of Dimitri Pikionis, particularly as this appeared in 1959 in the undulating landscape of the Philopappu hill, built

² Paul Ricoeur “Whichever Civilization and National Cultures” (1961) in History and Truth, trans Chas. A. Kelbley (Evaston: Northwestern University Press, 1965) pp 276-7

adjacent to the Atehnian Acropolis. (2) (3) Influenced by Tzonis and Lefaivre I developed my regionalist manifesto as a stratagem with which to offset the impact of universal civilization by stressing the crucial importance of the place-form as a “space of public appearance,” of which Arendt wrote in The Human Condition:

Power preserves the public realm and the space of appearance, and as such it is also the life-blood of the human artifice, which, unless it is the scene of action and speech, of the web of human affairs and relationships and the stories engendered by them, lacks its ultimate raison d’etre. Without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things to which each isolated individual was at liberty to add one more object; without the human artifice to house them, human affairs would be as floating, as futile and vain, as the wandering of nomad tribes.³

The fifth resistant point of my 1983 polemic, given under the heading Culture Versus Nature, emphasized the inflection of architectural form, by topography, climate, light, and, finally, by the tectonic of a building, designed not only to resist gravity but also the passage of time.

My third essay, “Rappel à l’Ordre: The Case for the Tectonic,” published in 1990, amplified the concept of the tectonic by alluding to the initial coinage of the term in both Gottfried Semper’s “Four Elements of Architecture” of 1851 and Karl Botticher’s Die Tektonik der Hellen of virtually the same date. Botticher regarded the joint as the primary element that not only guaranteed the building’s material presence but also enabled it to be perceived as a symbolic form. The most felicitous aspect of Botticher’s vision of the tectonic was his idea of the core form (Kernform) versus the art form (Kunstform), as per his analysis of the Doric column, wherein the column initially seen as the superimposition of tapered, cylindrical, stone blocks only comes to be perceptible as a column through the art form of the fluting out into its shaft. This idea is related to the Semperian concept of *the Bekleidung* in that the cladding of a building may simultaneously both reveal and conceal its basic structure.

³ op.cit The The Human Condition p. 204

In his essay, Semper identified the “Four Elements of Architecture” as first, the earthwork elevating the hut above the ground; second, the hearth recessed into the earthwork; third, the framework and roof and fourth, the ‘woven’ infill wall, providing the basic enclosure. All of these elements were present in the Caribbean hut which Semper first witnessed in the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851. (4) With regard to my appraisal of the presence of the tectonic and the space of appearance in canonical works from the last half century, it is didactically effective to reduce Semper’s four elements into the earthwork versus the roofwork; a dialectic which assumes a particular pertinence in the light of Vittorio Gregotti’s provocative notion that it is ground itself rather than the hut which is the ultimate origin of architecture. As he would put it in 1983:

The origin of architecture is not the primitive hut or the cave of the mythical Adam’s ‘House in Paradise’. Before transforming a support into a column, a roof into a tympanum, before placing a stone on a stone, man placed a stone on the ground to recognize the site in the midst of an unknown universe, in order to take account of it and modify it.⁴

In my view the earthwork and/or its extension into the landscape embodies a cosmogonic transformation of the site, one which has the potential today of constituting the core of a resistant architecture, capable of mediating our compulsive commodification of the environment. This it achieves by rooting a building into its site rather than merely proliferating yet another free-standing aesthetic object unrelated to either the site or to other buildings in the vicinity.

Perhaps the first intimation of the tectonic within the modern tradition is to be found in the work of Le Corbusier, where the roofwork/ earthwork relationship, appears in his, *Maison Week-End at St. Cloud* of 1935 where the earth is mounded up over the house so as to initiate the covering of its vaulted, shell-concrete roof with turf. (5)(6) Le Corbusier’s ingenious synthesis of vernacular form with modern, industrialized materials and techniques, such as, in this instance, rubble stone walling, with glass lenses,

⁴ Vittorio Gregotti, “Lecture at the New York Architectural League” Section A No:1, February, March 1983

steel-framed plate glass; a synthesis which is enriched on the interior with industrialized tile flooring, bent plywood soffits the whole mixed syntax being emphasized further by white-washed, rubble stone walling and a brick chimney having thick, irregular mortar joints. Le Corbusier followed this with his Pavilion des Temps Nouveaux of 1937, inspired by a reconstruction of the Hebrew temple in the wilderness. This daring roofwork was an inverted tent held in place by a wire-cable, suspension structure which was yet another hybrid, demonstrating the poetic potential of combining the vernacular with modern technique. (7)

The earthwork/roofwork emerges after the Second World War as a topographic, *tour de force* in Jorn Utzon and Tobias Faber's 1947 competition entry for the London Crystal Palace site, thereby epitomizing Utzon's life-long, preoccupation with his transcultural *pagoda/podium* paradigm which will attain its ultimate expression in his 1957 winning entry for the Sydney Opera House, a trope to which he will return more modestly in his Bagsvaerd Church completed outside Copenhagen, in 1976. (8)

An earthwork/ roofwork syndrome combined with a space of public appearance is evident in Alvar Aalto's Saynatsalo City Hall of 1948 where the earthwork is piled up to form a diminutive public place in the heart of the composition and where the roofwork is a brick-faced, concrete structure culminating in the mono-pitch roof of the council chamber, the honorific status of which is represented within by two elaborate timber-trusses supporting the roof. (9)

Surely one of the most monumental expressions of the earthwork/roofwork syndrome was the suspended wire-cable roofs of the gymnasias that Kenzo Tange designed for the National Gymnastic Center which was built for the Tokyo Olympic Games of 1964. Here the major and minor roofworks are accompanied by an elaborately terraced, and ramped staging ground extending well outside the footprint of the stadia. (10)

At virtually the same time, a more modest interplay of earthwork and roofwork is manifest in the first work of the Portuguese architect Alvaro Siza, the Boa Nova Teahouse built at Leça da Palmeira of

1963 wherein a restaurant is cradled under a pitched roof and poised on top of a stepped earthwork built on top of a natural rock-outcrop. (11) He will immediately follow this achievement with his Leça Swimming Facility (1961-66) in which one descends from the datum of a coastal road into a rocky esplanade set before the sea; a space within which there are two pools, one allocated to children and the other to the adults. The earthwork/ roofwork interplay is dramatized in this instance by a narrow break in the sea wall combined with a monopitch standing seam roof accommodating the changing facilities. (12)

A subtle play between earth and water is built into the Nordic Pavilion designed by the Norwegian architect Sverre Fehn in 1960 for the *giardini pubblici* in Venice. Here the roof comprises a reiteration of thin concrete purlins which carry translucent gutters making up a combined roofwork supported on a single, 25 meter long, reinforced concrete beam spanning onto a concrete pylon which eventually divides into short cantilevers extending on either side of an existing tree. (13) Of this, Fehn has written:

The pavilion carries the ingredients of Venice. The city belongs to the water from which came its inspiration. The areas of green contrast with the water. The park with its landscape of grass and trees is very precious and scarce. Even existing trees grow inside the building, finding a total freedom through the roof. The main tree is honored as the dominant structure by allowing for its participation; this is the place where the unity between nature and building is at its maximum. The translucent panels covering the roof pay homage to the rain. It is directed much like the water of the city and thereby provides sustenance for plants both inside and out, linking the pavilion with the cycle of the park... This honoring of sun and rain, in a place of the irreal, is the beginning of a search for higher order in architecture.⁵

Fehn's experience in Venice brought him into contact with the Venetian architect, Carlo Scarpa whose influence is evident in his subsequent work, above all in his restoration of an ancient farmstead in Hamar dating from 1967, along with its conversion into a museum of agricultural equipment. What is exceptionally sensitive about this work is the way in which the timber roofwork of the new building is inserted into the walls of the original ruin. Perhaps the most enigmatic feature of this work is the way in which the public is conducted through the museum by a *promenade architecturale* in the form of a

⁵ Sverre Fehn. The Thought of Construction edited by Per Olaf Fjeld. (New York, Rizzoli, 1983)

concrete *passerelle* that carries the visitors from one exhibit to the next, while they remain suspended above the ruined earthwork covered with rubble. (14)

Fehn's later museums are all invariably conceived as earthworks however, there is perhaps nothing more representative of the earthwork/roofwork syndrome in his work than his 1978 entry for the Trondheim National Library competition where a conceptual sketch, echoes the roofform in a witty reference to the Egyptian cosmos. (15)

A European architect whose work is equally topographic is that of the Spanish architect Rafael Moneo where one of his most compelling early works was inspired by the archaeological substrate of his design for the National Museum of Roman Art, realized in Merida in 1985, wherein a reinforced concrete wall system, clad in brick tiles of Roman proportions, is inserted into the archaeological remains of a Roman city, in such a way as to evoke not only the antique past but also the ruined past of the mediaeval city built on top of the imperial ruins. This more recent past seems to be alluded to in the top-lit brick faced warehouse housing the collection. This last, reinforced by brick buttresses evoking the Gothic comprises a brick-tiled, arcuated, labyrinth of concrete cross walls which descend via brick-faced concrete piers into the sacrosanct remains of the subterranean Roman city. Here visitors, immersed in an antique undercroft, pick their way through the Roman footings to exit via a tunnel into the nearby open-air remains of a Roman stadium and theatre. (16)

Moneo will demonstrate his feeling for urban grain in two subsequent works of comparable power. In the first instance, his 800 meter long, brick-faced, L'Illa block of 1992, designed for Barcelona in collaboration with the Catalan urbanist, the late Manuel de Sola-Morales. This work is a stepped, megastructural office block paralleled by a space of public appearance in the form of a top-lit galleria running beside the Avenida Diagonal (17), and, in the second the major/ minor curtain-walled auditoria of a congress center which he designed for the seafront in San Sebastian at around the same time. (18)

These twin auditoria are housed by, double-skinned, steel-framed envelopes of translucent glass and the skewed at different angles towards the ocean, as if affected by the force of an adjacent river discharging into the sea. They are by definition spaces of public appearance and as such they recall Utzon's Sydney Opera House of 1957 on which Moneo worked in as a young assistant in the late 50s. Moneo is hardly alone in Spain for his feeling for the topographic integration of a building into its site as is evident from the best of Spanish architecture over the past 50 years as we may judge by the Val d' Hebron velodrome, designed by Bonell and Rius and set down in 1984 amid the chaotic inner suburbs of Barcelona (19) or the necropolis of the Igualada Cemetery fashioned out of a disused quarry in 1994 to the designs of Eric Miralles and Carme Pinos.

The heroic Brazilian tectonic tradition in reinforced concrete begins with the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro designed by Affonso Reidy and it is this work that exerts a decisive influence on the emerging tectonic form of the Paulista School of which the Joao Villanova Artigas and Paulo Mendes da Rocha were the leading figures. One may readily detect the influence of Reidy's museum on Artigas' FAU School, Sao Paulo of 1961, with its monumental top-lit atrium which may be seen as the ultimate space of appearance, (20) with zero bending-hinged supports at grade as in Reidy's museum. Something similar obtains, in Mendez da Rocha's Athletico stadium in Sao Paulo of 1958 which combines a suspended wire-cable roofwork with a cantilevered reinforced concrete earthwork. Here we have a typically Brazilian space of appearance, located in downtown Sao Paulo, open on its perimeter so as to encourage the infiltration of passersby. Here, one is struck not only by the elegant ingenuity and clarity of the structure but also by its inherent economy. Something similar will obtain in the architect's own house built in the Butanta a suburb of Sao Paulo in 1960. (21) Here apart from the earthwork/roofwork paradigm the house is, at the same time, a family dwelling conceived as a 'space of appearance'. This is surely most the striking aspect of its plan, where top-lit bedrooms are bracketed by an entry foyer on one side and living/ dining volume on the other; a demonstration, as it were, of Mendes da Rocha's polemic that 'a house is a public

building'. Herein down stand beams carrying both the floor and the roof are each cantilevered off only four supports in both directions. In this way the house is economically suspended above the earthwork, bounded by a berm and a concrete wall within which automobiles are parked under the house.

Mendes da Rocha's feeling for the vast scale of Latin America is evident in two exceptional projects, the first being his plan for the river port of Tiete (22) and second being his remarkably economic proposition for restructuring the existing bay of Montevideo. (23) This last would have entailed simple engineering operations to regularize the confines of the bay, an order which would have been perceivable from a ferry passing from one side of the bay to the other. Mendes da Rocha's text testifies to the elegiac character of his vision.

Transformed into a city square on water, 3 kilometers across between Cerrito Hill and the harbor and lying between different city districts and centers, the bay bustles with light passenger ferry traffic and makes of a sophisticated point in the bay, a tiny island transformed into a theater, after the manner of the Venetians. Perhaps one night, an inexpressibly haunting melody from its shores linger over the city. In could even be Villa-Lobo's *Amazonica*.⁶

Much the same territorial imagination is evident in the megaform that Mendes da Rocha projected for Paris in 2008 as an athletic campus to be built on the outskirts of the city as part of a French bid for the Olympic Games of 2012. This intervention was conceived as a gigantic podium implanted within the chaos which surrounds the capital. This earthwork, crowned by stadia would have been perceivable as a major landmark within the megalopolis surrounding the city on every side.

Three equally arresting megastructures were realized by Mendes da Rocha in Sao Paulo in the late 90's, one of which is the 300 meter galleria of the Poupotempo complex raised on concrete blade walls adjacent to the Itaquera metro stop and designed to accommodate everyday transactions between the municipality and its citizenry. (24) The second is the Arc of Patriarch situated in the old business district (25) and, finally, third, the Dom Pedro II Park bus station completed in 2001. It is typical of Mendes da

⁶ Annette Spiro Paulo Mendez da Rocha Works and Projects (Zurich, Niggli, 2002) p. 162

Rocha's technological versatility that all three of these interventions would be built largely of welded steel rather than concrete.

The rhetorical roofwork may also be found in the work of the Anglo/ Italian hi-tech architects, namely, Richard Rogers, Renzo Piano and Norman Foster, above all in their designs for of airport terminals. In the case of Rogers, it is his Barajas Terminal completed outside Madrid in 2006, a work which, in my view, is the master work of the office. In the case of Piano the roofwork is the megaform, the of Kansai airport dating from 1989, where the earthwork is an artificial island audaciously created by the Japanese, where the bearing of its tubular steel supports of the roof have to be constantly adjusted by jacks, due to continual land settlement. Finally there is the brilliant example of Stanstead airport (1981-1991), designed by Foster Associates in as the Third London airport, a design predicated on the invention of mobile departure lounges, as pioneered by Eero Saarinen in his Dulles Airport, Washington D.C. of 1958. Stanstead Airport was conceived as a roofwork-cum-mat-building built on top of an earthwork within which was incorporated a rail-head with a direct link by train to the capital city. (26) The simplicity and horizontal gestalt of the welded, tubular steel, umbrella roofwork at Stanstead was crucial to Norman Foster's ambition of creating a monumental space of public appearance, comparable to the great rail termini of the 19th century, wherein, as in these termini, departing and arriving passengers would pass through the same honorific volume; an ambition which was unfortunately thwarted by the paranoid security obsessed bureaucrats of our late modern era who, while having to accept the spatial continuity of the design, insisted on separating the two classes of passengers by a partition wall. The horizontal panoramic profile of the modular umbrella roof at Stanstead is poised on the earthwork/landscape like a classical villa with its tubular steel peristyle, overlooking a parterre of parking.

From the late 80s onwards the best of Foster's work will be realized outside the country, as will also be the case with the next generation, above all David Chipperfield who after beginning his independent practice with a series of small concrete buildings in Japan, such as his Gotoh Museum in

Chiba of 1991, returns to the British scene, so to speak, with his Japanese proportioned timber roofwork of his Rowing Museum, built at Henly-on-Thames in the same year. (27) Thereafter his best civic work will be realized largely in Europe and above all in Germany where he will design and build what will become his main office in Berlin. Germany will be the patron of his Literature Museum, built at Marbach-am-Neckar, close to Stuttgart, in 2006 and then, more recently, with the James Simon Galerie realized on Berlin's *Museumsinsel* of 2019. (28) This work, recently completed in Berlin, discretely establishes the public realm, as space of public appearance and as a threshold capable of unifying the various prestigious institutions that make the Museuminsel. Of Chipperfield's achievement in this regard Moneo has written:

With great care, a new autonomous building was avoided, and the alternative was something that blurs and merges with an enhances surrounding without at any moment losing its integrity and identity as a player on the urban stage... David Chipperfield and his team... resorted with finesse to the tools of contemporary architectural culture. This confirmed by... (the) fluid spaced expressing how people move through them, instead of the centered *partis* of the Neues Museum or the Pergamon Museum.⁷

Rising behind Schinkel's Altes Museum, the monumental staircase of James Simon Galerie leads up to the top of an earthwork which formally establishes a new datum for the Museuminsel, thereby consolidating its hitherto somewhat fragmented assembly. This last is also achieved through the honorific stone colonnade of the gallery itself, the stone revetment of which extends down, as a retaining wall into the waters of the Sprey canal.

As with Chipperfield, so with other talented British architects who have found their main opportunities in Europe, such as Tony Fretton whose civic work have been decidedly more European in character than British, particularly after being appointed professor in the TU, Delft in 1999. Fretton's most significant civic works have been mainly achieved in the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Poland, most notably through apartment blocks in Amsterdam, through the Deinze Town Hall in Belgium (29) and through the British Ambassadorial complex in Warsaw realized between 2003 and 2009. However, one of

⁷ *Arquitectura Viva* (?)

Fretton's most touching works to date has been his Fuglsang Museum, built at Lolland, in southern Denmark and encompassing within its form a seemingly infinite panorama of unspoiled agricultural land.

(30)(31) Fretton has written of this work in a way which, in my view, captures the full range of the cultural and political ramifications of the space of human appearance. Thus we read:

I am an advocate of social democratic society in a time when less well meaning ideologies have the upper hand. Consequently, I seek to create conditions for productive sociability and social awareness in the buildings that I design. When designing I look for configurations that are surprising and have a wide appeal in the basic ranges of pleasure, political dimensions that can be experienced bodily and the capacity to allow artistic exploration and the development of ideas. I find many of these qualities in buildings that already exist, in the physical changes that people make to them and the meaning they acquire through word of mouth, film, TV, and literature. In the Fuglsang Art Museum the entrance sequence brings strangers temporarily into contact before they disperse into the spaces for art. Among the galleries they find a room where they can come together again the appreciate the views of the surrounding agricultural landscape, which like the collection of art in the museum is an artefact but made anonymously by successive generations of local people.⁸

In terms of architectural culture, Dublin has recently risen to the fore of late having been successively influenced over the last half century by such luminaries as Mies van der Rohe, Louis Kahn, Alvar Aalto and James Stirling and, more intimately, by the teaching in the 1970s of Ed Jones, Su Rogers and John Miller at the Royal College of Art. This heritage which was independently cultivated within the architectural faculty of University College Dublin under the charismatic leadership of Shane deBlacam, led to the emergence of Group 91, working on the restoration of the Temple Bar district in Dublin in the early 90s. The two most fertile practices to emerge from this experience are the currently rising practices of first, Sheila O'Donnel and John Tuomey and, second, Grafton Architects, as founded by Shelly McNAMara and Yvonne Farrell. This last came to international prominence after winning in 1990, a limited competition for the expansion of the leading Italian business school, the Bocconi University in Milan; a competition in which they were successful in part because they were the only entry who were able to meet the requirement of providing an *aula magna* that was positioned so as to be equally accessible to both the

⁸ Tony Fretton AEIOU: Articles, Essays, Interviews and Out-Takes (Jap Sam Books Heijningem, The Netherlands) p. 125

university and the city. This “space of public appearance” was the beginning of their penchant for using wide-span, cantilevered reinforced concrete construction in the design of which they would be invariably assisted, by Ove Arup and Partners.

After the Bocconi expansion, Grafton were able to build on their reputation of having a certain expertise in the design of business schools and this led over the years first to the design and realization of a brick-faced business school in Toulouse, France and now, currently, their Marshall Building situated on the LSE campus, on a prominent site, in terms of public access, at the South west corner of Lincoln’s Inn Fields (32) It is surely symptomatic of the current prowess of Irish architecture that this is the second work to be commissioned by the LSE from the Group 91 generation, the first being a small, student center built to the designs of O’Donnel and Toumey on a tight site at the southern end of the campus. By contrast the Marshall Building is the most major expansion to be undertaken by the LSE in its entire history and as such could hardly be a more appropriate vehicle for Arendt’s ‘space of public appearance’. Subject to the tectonic influence of the Paulista School, Grafton Architects have opted here, as elsewhere of recent date, for a tectonic *tour de force* in cantilevered reinforced concrete construction, combining in this instance a three story honorific threshold for the London School of Economics, with an ingeniously layered compact of teaching offices and lecture halls stacked above. Despite the laudable generosity of this public space, at grade, it is nonetheless a sign of the times that the LSE which was once a mecca for such egalitarian economists as E.J. Mishan and Erich Schumacher should have since become a technocratic citadel for imparting, among other skills, the profitable art of hi-speed trading. This being unavoidably the case in this period of history it is somehow reassuring to acknowledge that the most unequivocal “space of appearance” to be projected by Grafton Architects to date is their proposal for the National Library of Ireland, scheduled to be built behind a Georgian terrace facing onto Parnell Square in the center of Dublin. (33) Herein a heroically cantilevered reinforced concrete structure is projected as soaring above the

reading room in recognition of the one art, above all others, that embodies the essential spirit of this singular Celtic nation.

In all of the foregoing I have attempted to show how architecture despite its manifest incapacity to overcome the environmental nemesis of our time may still be pursued not only as a sustainable practice but also as the cultivation of a poetics of construction dedicated whenever possible to the realization of a space of appearance within which the society may still realize some measure of its potential sovereignty.

This vain attempt to posit a viable theory of architecture not only in terms of an ontology of building but also with regard to the best that tectonic expressivity has been able to achieve over the past half century brings to mind, as a coda, Sir John Summerson who, apart from being the illustrious curator of the Soane Museum and an exceptionally erudite and eloquent scholar, took upon himself the unenviable task of attempting to postulate a theory of modern architecture in a memorable lecture that given to the RIBA in 1953. In this presentation he argued that either programmatic *functionalism* or the syntactical legacy of *classicism* had to be the source of unity. In his exclusion of any hybrid between the two he seems not only to have expressed a certain disdain for the Arts and Crafts tradition but also a distaste for the cosmopolitanism of the British Modern Movement between the wars. With the possible exception of Le Corbusier and Viollet-le-Duc Summerson was largely disinterested in anything that lay beyond the confines of this island nation and it is, I suppose, in opposition to just such dated provincialism that this presentation has been ultimately addressed.