

Sometimes a Colonnade Is Just a Porch: Concerning a Facade in Pittsburgh

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Fig. 1. CMU Purnell Arts Center, 1999, Michael Dennis Associates. Photo Schumacher

The history of modern architecture in the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first, is periodically concerned with the questions: who is Modern, what is Modern, what is Modern enough, and what does Modern mean in social and political terms? In a practical sense, the ideological battles between the “Moderns” and the “Ancients” over the past century have resembled the politics of a banana republic. You are either a communist or a fascist, and neither side will admit that there is any position in between, or outside the line between those poles. Likewise, both Modernists and Classicists have attempted to associate their ideas and styles with politically acceptable motives, and their enemy’s ideas and styles with politically suspect movements. It’s not enough to call your adversary’s building stupid,

ugly, unfunctional, out of context, or irrelevant. It must be Communist or Fascist; or worse, Nazi.

The new Purnell Arts Center at Carnegie-Mellon University has been condemned for allegedly resembling the architecture of Albert Speer. The building, designed by Michael Dennis and Associates,¹ [Fig. 1] was the venue for a political “demonstration.”

Four architecture majors and a drama major...thought the university’s new arts center was reminiscent of oppressive buildings of the Third Reich. So they applied for a \$500 grant and presented an art exhibit in protest: They bathed the building in red light and projected images of Adolf Hitler, Nazi buildings, and goose-stepping German soldiers onto

the building’s facade. The project wasn’t about glorifying Hitler, said one of the students, “The use of the images was more of a medium to show the negative connotations the building conveyed.”

Thus began an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, a publication of the AAUP. The *Chronicle* piece concentrated on the sanctions that these five students faced when their little charade was taken for racist propaganda, explaining, “...some passersby didn’t get it...Jewish students, in particular, thought it was tasteless—or worse, a glorification of Nazism.”

The Purnell Center is part of a campus-wide master plan by Dennis’s firm. This building presents a repetitive brick-colonnaded facade to a quadrangle, and faces an almost equal loggia, also designed by Dennis. The protesters limited themselves to the facade of the Purnell Center, not its internal organization or spaces, which presumably do not remind them of Nazi rituals and practices. Despite the fact that the building possesses no detail stylistic similarities to the classicism of Albert Speer—it is patently Modern in style and detail—our student protesters obviously thought that the very presence of a certain number of repetitive bays, along with open loggias of a particular vertical proportion, were enough to link the building to fascist/nazi architecture.

Coupling contemporary architecture to the evils of Adolf Hitler is a devastating condemnation. Were it limited to this sound-and-light show this could be seen as an unfortunate incident, but soon afterwards a group of architecture professors at CMU chimed in with their opinions, and some concurred with the demonstrators’ evaluation.³ Quite simply, our students and their mentors have misread both the *how* as well as the *what* of architectural symbolism. This essay is intended to explain and contextualize these opinions and evaluations. I will first trace a particular mind-set of contemporary American architects that leads them to mistakenly associate some very general architectural forms with very particular political orientations. Second, I will briefly criticize some of the critics’ further evaluations of the building.

In our nation’s capital we find fasces carvings on Memorial Bridge and the Lincoln Memorial. In the United States Senate, the Marshall brings out a fasces at the beginning of important legislative events. Pick up a pre-Roosevelt dime, and you’ll find a fasces on the *verso*. The fasces was an ancient Roman emblem (which is why it could be used on American architecture), but it was also the symbol of the Italian Fascist Party. It is banned in Italy, the same way the swastika is banned in Germany. Aside from visiting Italians, only those Americans who know Italian history even

take notice of the fasci on our buildings. Had the student protesters at CMU projected a fasces instead of a swastika, passersby would not have stopped. Yet all these emblems are much less abstract than Michael Dennis's facades in Pittsburgh. What is it about our students' sensibilities and education that encourages comparison with Speer, and would most likely lead them ignore the fasces on the Lincoln Memorial?

The Purnell Center is indeed reminiscent of some of the architecture of the first half of the twentieth century. With its long colonnades, pilasters, and moldings, the building refers back to the period of academic and traditional architecture, the styles which graced many of our famous college campuses. To grasp why some architects, and only architects, might object to this we must rummage the historiography of modern architecture that was the underpinning of post-war architectural training.

The popular histories of twentieth century architecture were written in the 1930s and 1940s. The single most influential book to have been published in English was Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture*, first issued in 1940, with succeeding editions through 1967. This book and most of those that followed were propaganda tracts for the International Style. The authors condemned any trace of traditional form and style in architecture, whether

it stemmed from the Classical or the Medieval. Architects who didn't totally embrace the most extreme directives and forms of the International Style (e.g., Robert Mallet-Stevens and W.M. Dudok) were relegated to a second-class category.⁴ Others (e.g., Peter Behrens and Auguste Perret), who appeared to be "almost-modern" were depicted as "transitional figures." Doubtless, these architects never thought of themselves as "transitional," but as the saying goes, "the propaganda of the victor becomes the history of the vanquished."

A small sampling of the eclectic classical architecture that wasn't deemed proto-modern was also included in the histories of Modern architecture. It was presented as counterfeit and dangerous. They were the bad guys (e.g., McKim, Meade & White and Richard Morris Hunt). This was in contrast to the equally derivative (albeit neo-Medieval) work of H.H. Richardson, which was presented as proto-Modern. Louis Sullivan, Richardson's heir in the apostolic succession to Frank Lloyd Wright and beyond, had claimed in 1893 that the Classicism of the Chicago Columbian Exposition would set back the course of architecture by fifty years. And so, for fifty years and beyond, Sullivan's prophecy was self-fulfilled by later authors, and those architects who replicated the classicism of the Columbian Exposition were excluded from the histories of architecture.

Fast forward to the inter-war period: the style battles between the World Wars for the hearts and minds of the general public and the power elite were waged in Europe, not America. The European Modern movement came to America with Mies van der Rohe and Gropius just before World War II, and was wholeheartedly embraced by American architects only after that war. Any association with anti-fascist and anti-totalitarian politics that the European Modern movement architects assumed for themselves was irrelevant in America. Hence, it was unnecessary to contrast the modernists with the traditionalists on this side of the Atlantic vis-à-vis political orientation. None of the Americans who practiced traditional architecture after World War I was even examined. As famous as they were in their own day, they became non-persons by the 1950s. American architects educated after 1945 knew who the bad guys of the 1930s were in Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union, but knew nothing of Americans whose architecture was stylistically similar to that of Marcello Piacentini, Boris Iofan, Paul Ludwig Troost, and Albert Speer. Names like Paul Cret, Bertram Goodhue, Ralph Adams Cram, Arthur Brown, and John Russell Pope were unknown to the generations educated in the wake of the Bauhaus takeover of the educational system in America that began in the 1940s.

So much the worse, not only for these putative "retardataire" masters of the

early twentieth century, but also for those architects who, through Giedion's lens, began to view even American governmental architecture of the 1930s as "fascistic" (small 'f'). This was because the Jazz Age/Depression Era architecture of the nation's capital, along with various train stations, courthouses, and numerous post offices across the land, looked vaguely like the only twentieth century non-International Style buildings these post-World War II architects knew. The public, of course, has always considered Washingtonian neo-Classicism the very quintessence of democracy, some of it even built under the ultra-liberal Works Progress Administration.

In the 1950s and 1960s, when the "New Monumentality" of Edward Durrell Stone, Minuro Yamasaki, Harrison and Abramovitz, and others was in vogue in the United States, some architects thought they saw a resemblance to the totalitarian design of the thirties. A few critics even imagined that they could discern the generic salient characteristics of a "fascistic" (small 'f') architecture: lack of "human scale" (whatever that means), rhetorical columns or piers, vast unadorned surfaces. Again, their fears were not shared by the general public, and while many of these buildings are ugly, it is hardly necessary to tar them with a fascist brush to establish that fact. But such name-calling is easy, and can be effective in indoctrinating architecture students.

Charles Jencks began his 1973 essay, “Recent American Architecture: Camp-Non Camp,” with the following caution:

*There is...one aspect of [recent American Architecture] which is all too clearly comprehensible and that is the official architecture of American corporations and the government [sic]. Its resemblance to Fascist architecture of the thirties is, alas, all too great. One only has to compare Mussolini's Third Rome with Ed Stone's Perpetual Savings and Loan Association, 1961, or any number of cultural centres appearing across the United States with the architecture of the Third Reich to be convinced of this.*⁵

Looking back at the illustrations that Jencks used to establish his comparison—Lincoln Center in New York and Speer's Zeppelinfeld in Nürnberg—one is truly baffled by the lack of any significant resemblance. [Fig. 2] Jencks could have chosen any number of Washington buildings, like the Department of the Interior Building, 1935, by Waddy B. Wood, [Fig. 3] Paul Cret's Federal Reserve of 1937, [Fig. 4] or the U.S. Health and Human Services Building (1939–41; Office of the Supervising Architect). [Fig. 5] These buildings actually look like Speer's Zeppelinfeld. But they didn't fit his argument.

Had Jencks looked closely at Fascist Architecture in Italy he might have compared Philip Johnson's New York State Theater at Lincoln Center to a building it actually looks like: Giuseppe Terragni's competition project for the Palazzo dei Congressi in Rome, 1939.⁶ [Fig. 6] While I doubt that Jencks picked on Philip Johnson because of Johnson's association with the Nazis in the 1930s, like most other critics he would surely have overlooked Terragni's membership in the Italian Fascist Party, as well as the fact that Terragni's most famous building was a local Fascist Party headquarters.

Like so many modern critics, Jencks was unable to separate politics from his preconceptions of style, even if he could separate politics from the stylistically acceptable architect. An equally narrow viewpoint made it possible for a band of vigilante censors to force the cancellation of an exhibition of the work of Armando Brasini at Columbia University in the 1980s. Brasini's work was unacceptable at Columbia because he was “Mussolini's architect.” Yet Brasini the classicist was no more Fascist than the modernist Giuseppe Pagano. I can't imagine anyone objecting to Pagano's work being on display at Columbia, or any other American architecture school. A complete understanding of history certainly would be missed, however, as photos of Pagano in his black shirt, chatting with Mussolini, would have to be omitted.

As late as the mid-1980s, Heinrich Klotz, like Jencks, denounced the most abstract, benign, and remote resemblances to traditional configuration in contemporary architecture, implying a totalitarian (if not specifically Nazi) affiliation:

*The moment when trees are planted in rows like marching soldiers and columns fall in step to make colonnades, when houses are built embodying hierarchy and symmetrically repeating all their features... then the great backward fall... is complete.*⁷

Colonnades are the symbols of totalitarian oppression? Tell that to the residents of Paris, Bologna, or Torino. [Fig. 7] Comparing trees planted in rows to marching soldiers is not only a cheap metaphor, it calls into question any allée of trees planted anywhere, at any time. [Fig. 8] The origin of planting trees in rows is in agriculture, not political pageantry. I won't even touch the symmetry question.⁸

An architectural psychiatrist might diagnose Klotz's attitude as the

transference of anxiety concerning monumentality. That is, since the only twentieth-century monumental architecture that the architect has experienced is totalitarian, a phobia against all monumental architecture thereby ensues.

Fascist architecture (capital ‘F’) is Italian architecture under the Fascist regime, no more and no less. It is represented by both modernist and traditionalist buildings. Thankfully, the post-World War II demonization of the traditionalists, and the mythologizing of the modernists as anti-Fascist or at least politically neutral, finally has been demystified. Through serious scholarship we now understand that the Italian modernists were at least as Fascist as the classicists.⁹ Perhaps more so. It seems perfectly logical that this be the case, since most of the modernists were still attending architecture school when Mussolini hijacked the Italian government in 1922. They were much more impressionable than the older classically oriented architects, who were the children of a bourgeois *Risorgimento*.

About twenty years ago I was driving with an Italian friend through Rome. He is a painter, not an architect, born in the late 1930s. As we passed Adalberto Libera's Aventine Post Office (1934) Giuseppe remarked, “I hate that Art-Deco Fascist style.” [Fig. 9] I kept silent, thinking that we architects did not directly link the Fascist Regime with Libera's style, but rather with Marcello Piacentini, a so-called “Monumentalist.” As we drove up Piacentini's *Via della Conciliazione* toward Saint Peter's Basilica and then turned up the Janiculum Hill, Giuseppe was silent. I asked him why he made no similar comment about Piacentini's street, which was built to commemorate the Lateran Pact signed in 1929 by the Pope and the *Duce*. [Fig. 10] He said, “Oh, that; it wasn't finished until 1950 [seven years after Fascism fell]. It's not Fascist.” I



Fig. 2. Lincoln Center and Zeppelinfeld, from Jencks, C., *Modern Movements in Architecture*, p.184



Fig. 3. Dept. Interior, Washington, DC, Waddy Wood, 1935. Photo Schumacher



Fig. 4. Federal Reserve Bank, Washington, DC, Paul Cret, 1937. Photo Schumacher



Fig. 5. Office of the Supervising Architect, HHS Building Washington, DC, 1939-41



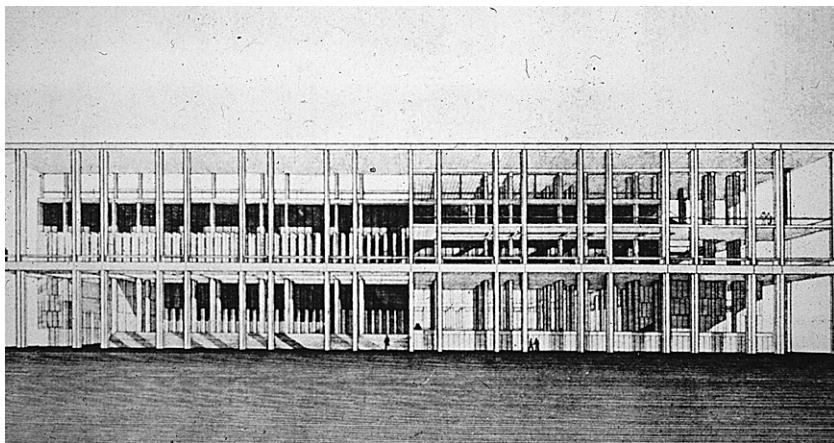


Fig. 6. Terragni, *Pal dei Congressi*, Rome 1939, unexecuted. Fondazione Giuseppe Terragni, Como



Fig. 10. Marcello Piacentini, *Via Dell Conciliazione*, Rome, 1927–50. Courtesy University of Maryland School of Architecture Slide Library



Fig. 7. Amadeo Castellamonte, *Via Po*, Torino, sixteenth/seventeenth centuries. Photo Schumacher



Fig. 8. Montepulciano, *Madonna di San Biaggio*, allée. Photo Schumacher



Fig. 9. Aventine Post Office, Rome, 1934, Adalberto Libera. Photo Schumacher

think it was then and there that I lost all belief in the existence of “fascist” (small ‘f’) architecture.

Of course, the Fascists and Nazis also adored *gemütlich kitsch* townscape and intimately-scaled vernacular *volkarchitektur*; but then so do people in democratic societies. Why isn’t this brand of sham vernacular associated with Nazism?

It is also interesting to recognize that, for the International Style architects of the 1920s and 1930s and their post-war apologists, architecture was somehow determined by history and sociology when it was modernist, and determined by geography and politics when it was traditionalist. For reasons that have always been opaque to me, Farkas Molnar in Hungary, Antonin Raymond in Japan, Werner Moser in Switzerland, Walter Gropius in Germany, and Le Corbusier in France were all operating in concert with an all-pervasive socially progressive *Zeitgeist*; they were “International.” Sir Edwin Lutyens in England, Arnaldo Foschini in Italy, and John Russell Pope in the United States ostensibly were out of synch with the *Zeitgeist* and mired in regionally retardataire nationalisms. In reality, there was as much family resemblance amongst the work of Classical architects in various countries in the 1930s—whether democratic or totalitarian—as there was amongst that of the modernists.

Any attempt to establish the fixed elements of a “fascist” (small ‘f’) architecture through an analysis of abstract formal characteristics will inevitably descend to the level of the famous Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who typed criminal behavior. Lombroso’s study of the physiognomy of criminals—slitty eyes, strong jaw, crooked or flat nose, and even left-handedness—produced a convenient cinematic stereotype, but did nothing to apprehend real

law-breakers.¹⁰ Like Lombroso’s pseudo-science, the link between architectural typologies and politics is a chimera at best, and at worst leads to an aesthetic McCarthyism. All connections between politics and architectural form are historically specific, and vary with actual events. The Russians blew the swastika off the Brandenburg Gate. They didn’t blow up the gate. As any linguist will argue, the signifier is always arbitrary.

One can only imagine the results of extending such symbolic proscriptions into other design disciplines. We might eliminate leather overcoats because the SS wore leather coats. The color combination red and black, also a Nazi scheme, would be unacceptable. And let’s ban the Volkswagon Beetle. It was, after all, designed by Ferdinand Porsche for the Führer.¹¹

Some of the architecture professors at CMU obviously share the attitudes limned above; indeed, a few would appear to subscribe to the doctrine of “fascist” (small ‘f’) architecture. With a disarming disinterest, Omer Akin portrays the Purnell Art Center facades as “perhaps just a little Nazi, *ma non troppo*.” And he accepts that others might interpret the buildings in some other ways, if we please. “Oh, yes, I see the Speer connection, and I see other connections, too, but the Speer connection must be there; after all, I see it.”

I will not address all the criticisms of Purnell offered by the CMU faculty, but rather I’ll concentrate here on a small cluster of assertions, mainly those in Professor Akin’s essay. He states the following:

The pomp part is the one that gets it closer to Speer. The loggia...is of gigantic proportions (fit for a 25-foot tall person), relentlessly repetitive (the most that the Beaux

*Arts style allows is 11 columns on a facade) and oppressively monumental.*¹²

Let us take these assertions one by one:

1. “The pomp part is the one that gets it closer to Speer.” “Pomp,” which is, “...dignified or ostentatious display,”¹³ is apparent in any space used for any ceremony, from my aunt Ella’s living room, to an ancient Mythraeum (found typically in a cellar), to graduation ceremonies at Carnegie-Mellon University, to the Mall in Washington. The assumption that pomp leads straight to Nazi architecture is absurd. But, Akin hasn’t even established that the Purnell Center is pompous. He simply states it.

2. “The loggia is of gigantic proportions...” Proportion in architecture, as in anything else, is unrelated to size. The proportions of the Corinthian columns on the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome are the same as the Corinthian columns on a wedding cake (or so they should be). To speak of “gigantic proportions” is an oxymoron.

3. “...fit for a 25-foot tall person....and oppressively monumental.” Scale in architecture is a function of the size relationship between a person and a building. If a building that we would expect to be “residential” were to have windows quadruple in size to our expectations, then we might imagine a 25-foot tall person should inhabit such an edifice. But, because grand houses also have grand windows, a specific contextual comparison would then be needed to establish that the building is “out of scale.” One cannot in the same breath call a building “oppressively monumental” and then tell us we are too small for it. The very essence of monumental architecture is to exhibit elements which we understand to be large. The Parthenon, with far fewer scale clues than Purnell, does not require a 25-foot tall person.

I take professor Akin’s implication to mean that Purnell lacks “human scale.” But because scale, like proportion, is relational and not absolute, it would be irrational to speak of “human” scale per se; we may speak of “intimate,” or “residential,” scale, or of “grand,” or “public,” scale, and it is indeed possible for a building to be “out of scale” with its surroundings, program, or social purpose. Whether Purnell is, or is not, must be specifically argued. It was not. On the contrary, the buildings are quite well-scaled to the original Hornbostel campus. The “giant” orders on the colonnades are a way of bringing the scale of smaller and lower buildings up to that of the older, taller ones. In these terms, and in terms of the dimensions of the outdoor spaces that Dennis has made, the scale of Purnell and its neighbors is perfect, something many architects as well as “lay” Pittbrughians have noted.

4. Professor Akin also quotes a famous architectural historian, the late Spiro Kostof, who argued that American “State Architecture” (like the United States Mint in San Francisco) resembled the architecture of totalitarian regimes of the 1930s. Akin adds that similar buildings are to found very close to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. In fact, the one illustrated here is directly across the street from the Holocaust Memorial Museum. [Fig. 11]

Kostof (quoted by Akin) called Fascist architecture “starved classicism”:

*It [starved classicism] worked with large expanses of blank wall and rows of shallow unframed window openings. Ornament was simplified into angular accents that receded into the masonry. This public architecture of America...looks very much like the public architecture of the 30s in Hitler’s Germany, Mussolini’s Italy and Stalin’s Russia.*¹⁴

Akin neglects to include the rest of Kostof’s description, in which he contextualizes his criticism:

It is in fact a widely current official style that has left its heavy imprint from Madrid and Paris to Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo. Once again, as so often in the past, a convention of forms serves as a receptacle into which states can pour their very different ideologies.

Classical architecture had two distinct advantages: recognition and universality. It was the most familiar of architectural conventions, and it had the ability to transcend narrow symbolism, to mean different things to different users.¹⁵

Professor Akin quoted Kostof out of context for obvious reasons.

By calling this style “starved” Kostof makes it clear he doesn’t particularly like it. (Most critics call the style “Stripped Classicism,” a less loaded term.) Kostof declines to explain why this architecture is any more “starved” than Etienne Boullée’s or Claude Nicholas Ledoux’s late eighteenth-century Classicism, a style that is often cited as leading to the Modern movement. The large expanses of blank unadorned wall on Boullée’s project for a French National Assembly (1792) are colossal compared to the unrelieved facades of John Russell Pope’s National Gallery of Art in Washington (1937). And both of these buildings display far bigger empty expanses than Michael Dennis’s buildings at CMU, which are replete with intricately patterned brickwork, recesses, voids, pilasters, mouldings and cornices, all of which bring down the scale. If a “State-scaled” architecture were needed here, Purnell would fall far short of expectations.

Moreover, while Kostof and Akin are perfectly correct in noticing some formal similarities between Speer’s

and some Washington buildings, the very fact that those buildings—especially those so close to the Holocaust Museum—are not widely perceived by the public as in any way Fascist or Nazi is itself *prima facie* evidence for the vacuous oversimplification of coupling these abstract formal properties to symbolic meaning. If visitors to the Holocaust Museum make no such connection, then why should visitors to the Purnell Center make one?

Further, any implication that “stripped” or “starved” classicism was the exclusive, even the preferred, international choice for State architecture is misleading. “State” values have just as often been embodied in highly decorated and intricate classicism, such as Ulisse Stacchini’s Milan Train Station 1931, or the United States Library of Congress, 1886–92, by Smithmeyer and Pelz. In fact, the oscillations between highly decorated classicism and “stripped,” or more planar (and plainer) classicism, are just that: oscillations of taste. And sometimes simplicity and planarity go with the “archeologically correct” composition and proportions of the elements, whereas highly decorated surfaces are often less academically interpreted.

Likewise, the development of a taste for a stripped-down, volumetric, cubic, “pure” classical expression in nineteenth- and twentieth-century architecture is unrelated to political motives or State ratification. It follows a progression—if not an unbroken line—from Boullée and Ledoux through Schinkel and Labrouste to Cret and Goodhue, and beyond into the post-World War II era. [Fig. 12] The simplified style adorns residences as well as ministries, even Synagogues. The Adas Israel Synagogue in Washington, by Frank Grad and Sons, [Fig. 13] displays many of the characteristics that Kostof attributed to “starved classicism”: “...large expanses of blank wall and rows of shallow unframed window openings. Ornament...simplified into

angular accents that receded into the masonry.”¹⁶

Stripped Classicism did not die immediately with the close of World War II. One finds remarkable resemblances amongst buildings built between 1938 and 1948 in Italy, the United States and France. Like Adas Israel, the Engineering School at the University of Maryland was designed in the late 1940s, and fitted with porticoes that closely resemble the frontispieces of many 1930s public edifices, such as Cret’s Federal Reserve (illustrated above).¹⁷ [Fig 14]

Lastly on this point: Why isn’t a building that could easily serve as an aesthetic paradigm for “stripped classicism”—Palladio’s Villa Poiana—considered “stripped” or “starved” classicism? [Fig. 15]

Criticisms that are related to, but do not directly support the claim of Nazi association, are also prominent in essays in this issue of *Focus*. Ratcheting down a notch, Akin argues that the Purnell Center’s bays are, “...relentlessly repetitive (the most that the Beaux Arts style allows is 11 columns on a facade)” Purnell has fourteen bays, three more than Professor Akin’s “Beaux Arts” limit.¹⁸ But whose limit is this, anyway?¹⁹ While it is certain that many teachers at the École des Beaux Arts (and at American schools under its influence) limited the allowable number of equal bays to eleven, they didn’t all do that. The Department of Commerce Building (1932) has twenty-seven bays (I think that’s it, I may have lost count). [Fig. 16] This building is very the quintessence of “Beaux Arts.”²⁰

But why confine ourselves to the École des Beaux Arts, when we can go directly to the source of the Beaux Arts? It might be useful to cite some more “original” and “authentic” buildings. Vignola’s Loggia dei Banchi in Bologna, sixteenth century: 15 bays. Rue de Rivoli, Paris, Percier and Fontaine,

1855: 18 bays (on each block). Henri Labrouste’s Bibliotheque St. Genevieve, Paris, 1850: 19 bays. Jacopo Sansovino’s Library of St. Mark, Venice, 1553, 21 bays. Mauro Codussi’s Procuratie Vecchie in Venice, circa 1500: 50 bays. The South Stoa at Corinth (circa 325 B.C.): 70 bays. The Royal Crescent at Bath, John Wood, eighteenth-century: about 90 bays. And then there is Amadeo Castellamonte’s Via Po in Torino, seventeenth century (a small portion of which is pictured above, Fig. 8): a kilometer and a half of who-knows-how-many equal bays.

In another faculty critique published in *Focus*, Ulrich Fleming derides what he implies is the inauthenticity of Purnell’s structure, arguing, “...support elements [are] technical fakes: each contains inside a slender steel column that does all the load-bearing...”²¹ This is perfectly true, as we see from a construction photo. [Fig. 17] In fact, the broad piers do not reach the soffit; they are not established as structural members, but as modern equivalents of pilasters, which any architect worth his salt would realize, and therefore would not be fooled.²² This is a convention, a fiction, not an exact description of the steel structural members. Fleming’s is a common critique laid at the feet of architects who choose to interpret structure as rhetorical form. He assumes that a “truthful” projection of the structural dimension onto the facade is the proper way to express the structure. Only architects would notice this, but then only architects would care about it. Why these critics never seem to criticize the opposite condition, i.e., the “masking” of a steel or concrete column with a mullion of a more slender profile (as in much of Mies’s work), has always been a wonder to me. In the Seagram Building in New York, Mies made it look like all the mullions are structure, (or, alternately, that none are structure). It’s okay to “fake it” by going thin, but not thick?



Fig. 11. U.S. Printing Office, Washington, DC, Louis Simon, 1936. Photo Schumacher



Fig. 12. K.F. Schinkel, Schauspielhaus, Berlin, 1821



Fig. 14. Skidmore Owings and Merrill, School of Engineering, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, 1948–52. Photo Schumacher

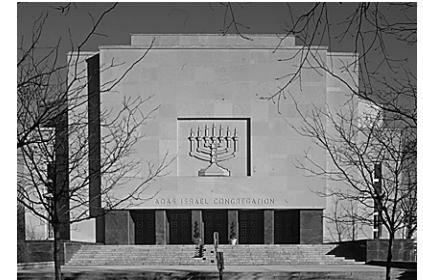


Fig. 13. Adas Israel Synagogue, Washington, DC, 1950, Frank Grad and Sons



Fig. 15. Palladio, Villa Poiana, Poiana Maggiore, 1556. Photo Schumacher



Fig. 16. York and Sawyer, Department of Commerce, Washington, DC, 1932. Photo Schumacher

I do agree with the critics on one point, however: the new quadrangle could use some trees (preferably planted in rows, like at the University of Virginia or Cornell); also, some more street lights (maybe like those in the Tuileries?); street furniture, pathways through the grass, etc. Perhaps a monument or a fountain. Presumably, it will ultimately be fitted with these urban accouterments, against which the repetitive rhythms of the almost matching facades will provide a most rhythmic *continuo*.

This essay was prompted not by a criticism of a building I happen to like, designed by an architect I consider talented (both of which are true). It’s one thing to write harsh criticisms about a building. One can legitimately make negative comments concerning the appropriateness of a given work. Calling it Nazi-like is another matter.

The continuing influence of the orthodox histories of Modern architecture, coupled with the myopia of mod-

ernism's extreme ideology, denies our CMU students an appreciation of works like the Purnell Arts Center. [Fig. 18] Dennis's buildings at CMU are prec-edented by many sources, including Asplund's Stockholm Public Library, Michelangelo's Campidoglio, Giacomo della Porta's Università della Sapienza, Vasari's Uffizi, and his Loggia in Arezzo. [Fig. 19] The cognoscenti will see these and other inspirations.

The student protesters' motivation is understandable. They have been taught that architecture exudes meaning, and they are anxious to infuse their own designs with the loftiest of sentiments. In their history of architecture courses they are being taught that allegorical and political symbolism can attach to edifices, that these constructions are not just assemblies of function, form, and structure. What they are not being taught, it seems, is that they and their professors do not decide public political symbolism. The people do. I can stand in front of the Lincoln Memorial and rant all day about the fasces. I can stand in front of a synagogue and tell the worshippers that the swastika I carry is just a neutral Indian sign (I doubt I would last the day). Or, I can stand in front of the Federal Reserve with a sign that says, "This Building Resembles Adolf Speer's Zeppelin-feld." My ravings will not change a single perception.

Professors are often rewarded and promoted for discovering meanings in architecture. Like the students they teach, sometimes they think that whatever they decide a building means is what the building means. And in the academic culture of Post-Structuralism, Deconstructionism, and Post-Modernism such a viewpoint is perfectly acceptable, even nurtured. Our CMU professors have affected a quiet air of disinterest in dealing with this matter. The affectation does not, however, insure objectivity.



Fig. 17. Purnell Center, CMU, Michael Dennis and Associates, construction photo. Photo Schumacher



Fig. 19. Arezzo, Vasari Loggia. Photo Schumacher



Fig. 18. CMU Arts Center

Notes

1. Michael Dennis & Associates. Damianos + Anthony, John Fisher Associates.
2. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 8, 1999, Vol. XLVI, Number 7, p. 12.
3. See *Focus*, a publication of the faculty and staff of Carnegie-Mellon University, Volume 20, No. 1., 1999.
4. As late as 1996 William Curtis places these two architects outside an “inner circle,” claiming, “The International Style had some adherents who only partly understood the underlying principles, and who adopted the forms as a new external dress...The work of the Dutch architect Willem Dudok supplies an example of this competent ‘stylism’; or in France, that of Robert Mallet-Stevens.” Curtis, W., *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, Upper Saddle River, Prentice-Hall, Third Edition, 1996, p. 266.
5. Jencks, Charles, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, Anchor Books, New York, 1973, p. 185.
6. I have no idea whether Johnson has ever seen Terragni’s project.
7. Heinrich Klotz, *The History of Postmodern Architecture*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1988, p. 2.
8. For the evils of symmetry in modernism, see Zevi, B., *The Modern Language of Architecture*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1987, p. 15–17.
9. See Ghirardo, Diane, “Italian Architects and Fascist Politics: An Evaluation of the Rationalist’s Role in Regime Building,” in *JSAH*, May 1980, pp. 109-127.
10. See Chorover, Stephan L., *From Genesis to Genocide, The Meaning of Human Nature and the Power of Mind Control*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1979, p. 179; see also Hersey, G., *The Evolution of Allure*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996, pp. 112–127. Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer didn’t fit the stereotype.
11. Amongst some Jewish families in the U.S., buying a German car was a political no-no until quite recently. In 1971, when my wealthy uncle bought a Mercedes 380 SL roadster, others in the family said, “Milton, you bought a German car?” His reply was, “If Israel can trade with them, Milton Upsher can trade with them!”
12. Akin, Omer, in *Focus*, op. cit., p. 4.
13. *American Heritage College Dictionary*.
14. Kostof, Spiro, *A History of Architecture, Settings and Rituals*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 719. Second edition, 1995, p. 716–717.
15. *ibid.*
16. NB. This Synagogue is also post-WWII, and therefore Post-Holocaust.
17. The Porticoes at the University of Maryland Engineering School were forced on the architect by the then president of the University. Nathaniel Owings of SOM refused to design the porticoes, and a local firm was given that part of the commission. Architect Harry Weese resigned from SOM over the flap, and started his own firm.
18. The University Center across the quad, also by Michael Dennis and Associates, has twenty-one bays which almost match Purnell. That building has been up for a couple of years. One wonders why the demonstrations took so long to materialize.
19. In Baroque Italy of the seventeenth century, nine equal bays was considered maximum. I wonder who’s “correct” on this one?
20. NB. Why the repetition of equal bays is a “problem” with classical architecture and not with, say, Eero Saarinen’s Dulles Airport or Mies’s King Library in Washington, DC, is yet another mystery. Incidentally, Michael Dennis has made no claim to being a Beaux Arts architect.
21. Ulrich Fleming, in *Focus*, op. cit., p. 5.
22. In the same manner, the dome of the Capitol in Washington, DC is not a dome per se. It is a truss structure in metal that is covered to resemble a masonry dome. Architects who know this fact divide into two groups: those who think the dome of the Capitol is sham and inauthentic, and those who don’t care.