fashion

Today's avant-gardist architects congratulate themselves on how "cutting-edge" their buildings are. Their architecture expressed their faith in technology, in lieu of culture and humanity. The avant-gardist architects strain to create novel design object forms, but have no social ideal to give these forms meaning.

Their philosophy of the cutting-edge, is all about fashion. In fashion the adjective "architectural" is an asset, a positive term that applies to a design with distinctively strong structure, form and longevity. The term "fashionable" in architecture is pejorative, suggesting a fleeting trend with no lasting worth. Architecture's aspiration to permanence is a product not only of the high investment required to build, but also of its commitment to lasting values. Fashion, by contrast, is driven by the manic desire to constantly refresh. The lifespan of a trend is a season, not a century. That things go out of fashion has given the avant-gardist the opportunity to create and cash-in on ever more new fashions. They derive their status to keep up the pretense of perpetually surfing that "cutting-edge".

The stark minimalist emptiness of modernism (both new and original), the intimidating concrete bunkers of brutalism, the over-animated chintz of postmodernism, the absurd and erratic hyper-complications of deconstructivism, just to mention a few of the recent avant-gardist styles, are relatively short lived, compared to traditional design values. In that buildings tend to last a long time; we need buildings that don't go out of style so quickly. Although it drives avant-gardists crazy, the overwhelming desire for traditional houses has been established beyond doubt. In the wider world, traditional languages are alive and well, and their longevity proves people still want traditional buildings.

The avant-gardists propagate fallacies about traditional styles, as being irrelevant and unauthentic to justify the hostility they receive from the liberal progressive self-appointed "thinking class" of the profession. They frequently attacked traditional architecture as being "ridiculously expensive", "pastiches" or "not of our time". Some are so desperate that they condemn certain traditional styles as representing southern plantation slave owners, and of the authoritarianism of Hitler and Stalin.

Traditional architectural styles employ structural devices that allow buildings to stand up: lintels, arches, columns, colonnades. These are replicable in modules or bays along scales from small to large. These devices honestly express the tectonic sturdiness of a building within the realities of gravity. Additionally, traditional design is based on the three-part representation of the human figure: the whole and all the parts within it exist in nested hierarchies of base-shaft-and-head. This is true of columns with capitols set on a base, of windows with their sills, sashes, and lintels, and the whole building from base to middle to roof. Traditional architecture uses archetypal models that are functionally identifiable and people recognize, understand and can relate to. Furthermore, traditional design follows proportioning systems universally found in nature, such as the Golden Section and Fibonacci series of ratios, which are seen in everything from the self-assembly of seashells, to the growth of tree branches, to the proportioning of the human face. Traditional architecture links us to nature and to our own humanity. Traditional ornamentation — the moldings, entablatures, cartouches, corbels, festoons, and what-have-you; are not mandatory, but, of course, they also provide a way of expressing our place in nature, which is a pathway to expressing truth and beauty.

The buildings designed by the avant-gardists don't care about truth and beauty; they care about publicity and fashion. Many people detect that dynamic, and that is one reason they loathe contemporary buildings. The result is a denatured architecture of the machine and an animus against what it means to be human. We're probably not going back to traditional architectural styles in the near future, but sooner or later we will have to get back to an architecture that is based on humanity.

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