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Canada's Urban History in Architecture, Part Three*

Alan Gowans

Introduction/Avant-propos

“Architecture is politics in three dimensions.” That is a useful principle to keep in mind when you walk around any town or city, or drive through the countryside in Canada. It means that the kind of buildings people put on a landscape do more than merely reflect prevailing political or social views or economic conditions. They also play a large part in shaping those political and social views. Through architecture, establishments make the most dramatic statement of things officially believed in and hoped for. Architecture requires too much money and time ever to be a private art, ever to represent personal musings about life or sensibility to environment. Paintings or poems may be produced in garrets with little or no resources or commitment to an audience, but never buildings. They are always involved in community life to some degree and if they are of any size, they may affect that life for centuries. Because of these relationships between it and society, architecture makes the most lasting statements about history that can ever be made — history made visible for those who know how to see, history speaking to those who know how to listen.

Buildings function as historical documents in at least two distinct ways. Traditionally, the art of architecture was concerned with making visual metaphors, that is, with creating shapes or combinations of forms which had associations with the kinds of ideas on which the institutions of society — all societies, everywhere — are necessarily founded. The greater the impact of a building's shape and the more appealing its combination of mass, void and decoration, the more it was recognized as possessing Great or High Architecture. In our century, such aesthetic effects have tended to be isolated, separated from other and earlier kinds of functions. Designers have concentrated on them as ends in themselves. The result has been that instead of visual metaphors consciously associated with political and social ideas, modern buildings reveal the kind of society that created them by the way they are built — by their use of exposed steel cage, for example, or huge sheets of glass (sometimes

«L'architecture, c'est la politique en trois dimensions.» Il est bon de se rappeler cette formule lorsqu'on se promène dans les rues d'une ville ou sur les routes de la campagne canadienne. Elle signifie que le genre de bâtiments que les gens font construire sont plus qu'un simple *reflet* des idées politiques et sociales de leur époque ou des conditions économiques. En effet, ils contribuent dans une large mesure à *façonner* ces idées politiques et sociales. C'est par l'architecture que les classes dirigeantes expriment avec le plus de force leurs convictions et leurs aspirations. Au vrai, l'architecture demande tellement de temps et d'argent qu'elle ne pourra jamais devenir un art privé, traduire les réflexions d'un individu sur l'existence ou sa sensibilité à l'environnement. On peut peindre un tableau ou écrire un poème dans une mansarde avec un minimum de ressources et sans obligation à l'égard du public, mais il n'en va pas de même pour la construction des bâtiments. Ceux-ci participent toujours dans une plus ou moins large mesure à la vie collective. Pour peu qu'ils aient certaines dimensions, les bâtiments peuvent influencer des siècles durant sur la vie collective. Parce qu'elle entretient ces rapports avec la société, l'architecture constitue le témoignage historique le plus durable; elle est l'histoire rendue visible à ceux qui savent voir, l'histoire qui parle à ceux qui savent écouter.

Les bâtiments font office de documents historiques au moins de deux façons différentes. Depuis toujours, l'architecture s'est attachée à créer des métaphores visuelles, c'est-à-dire à créer des formes ou des combinaisons de formes associées aux idées qui sous-tendent nécessairement les institutions de toute société. Plus ces formes produisent de l'effet et plus l'ornementation et la combinaison d'espaces pleins et d'espaces vides sont séduisantes, plus un édifice est reconnu comme appartenant à la grande architecture. Au XX^e siècle, on a tendance à isoler ces effets esthétiques des autres fonctions souvent plus anciennes. Les architectes en font une fin en soi. De là vient que les bâtiments modernes ont cessé d'être des métaphores visuelles consciemment asso-

* *Editor's Note:* Previous articles in this three-part series appeared in the October 1982 and February 1983 issues.

* *N.D.L.R :* Les articles précédents de cette série ont paru dans les numéros d'octobre 1982 et de février 1983.

clear, sometimes opaque), or “brutal” masses of almost raw concrete. All these in their several ways proclaim faith in society being transformed through the powers of a technology capable of producing such things, but at the same time they paradoxically allude to a vision of happiness achievable by a return to some primitive state of a hypothetical natural man.

Once you understand how to read architecture in this way, you will never find yourself in a community without interesting buildings. For all buildings can be read as history. Whether you live in the far northwest of Canada where settlement goes back only a generation or two, or in the St. Lawrence valley where Europeans first arrived three and a half centuries ago, you will be surrounded by buildings whose forms can be traced into a remote past. If one were able to learn the origins of the words he speaks, he would master history, so if one learns the “language” of architecture, he confronts the past.

ciées aux idées politiques et sociales pour devenir les révélateurs du type de société qui les a conçus; par exemple, une ossature d’acier à découvert ou d’immenses surfaces vitrées (parfois transparentes, parfois opaques) ou de masses “brutales” de béton presque brut. Tous ces éléments proclament, chacun à sa façon, la foi en une société en cours de transformation sous l’effet d’une technologie capable de telles réalisations. Mais en même temps, ils évoquent paradoxalement l’aspiration à une forme de bonheur réalisable par le retour à un hypothétique état naturel primitif.

Une fois que vous aurez appris à interpréter l’architecture de cette façon, vous trouverez dans toutes les agglomérations des bâtiments dignes d’intérêt. Car vus de cette façon, *tous* les bâtiments sont des témoins de l’histoire. Que vous viviez dans les régions éloignées du nord-ouest du Canada où les établissements ne remontent qu’à une génération ou deux, ou dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent où les Européens arrivèrent il y a trois siècles et demi, vous serez entouré de bâtiments dont les formes remontent à un passé lointain. En fait, le langage de l’architecture se compare à n’importe quelle langue. Ainsi, si l’origine des mots peut nous permettre de comprendre l’histoire, le langage de l’architecture peut nous faire mieux connaître le passé.

Thornton Fell House, Victoria, B.C.



Thornton Fell House, in the Rockland area of Victoria, B.C., designed by Samuel Maclure (1869-1929) and built 1909.

Comments

When the railroad promised by Confederation finally united British Columbia with the eastern provinces, it came out not at a point far enough north on the coast to terminate at Victoria via bridges and islands, but far south, a few miles from the American border, at a place called Gastown, hastily renamed Vancouver. Industrial and commercial power inevitably began flowing to the new boom town. Just as inevitably, the old capital was left behind with its memories and its money, made on transshipping and land speculation, accumulated over half a century. For Victoria's leading families by no means left *en masse* for Vancouver. Far from it; many of them made a deliberate choice to stay behind and live on their investments. Together with the large colony of British immigrants living on retirement and pensions, and personnel from the British Royal Navy then with its principal Pacific base at Esquimalt, they formed a unique kind of rentier capitalist society over the three or four decades from 1890 to around 1930.

Linked to the mainland (or as they would have said, with the mainland linked to it) only by one boat a week, Victoria was made into one of the nearest approximations to a never-never lotus land in history, a kind of paradisaical environment where work was unknown (or at least went on unseen). In this curious, cocoon-like atmosphere lived and thrived courtly Samuel Maclure (1869-1929), in retrospective appraisal surely Canada's leading residential architect of the day. "As a domestic designer, Maclure was easily the peer of Maybeck or the Brothers Green in California," authority Leonard Eaton wrote of him in Segger and Franklin's *Victoria: A Primer for Regional History in Architecture*. For wealthy families living on inherited or dividend income Maclure designed one grandly proportioned, cross-axial home after another in his distinctive Tudor-Gothic Arts-and-Crafts style, set them in generous grounds (usually a couple of acres in Rockland, Sir James Douglas' old lands) surrounded by their own tennis courts, gardens, and orchards, with porte-cocheres and

sweeping balconies commanding sweeping vistas of mountains and sea. One of the finest is this home at the corner of McNeil and Foul Bay Roads — now, like so many others, broken up into half-a-dozen apartments. Enough of its original grounds remain to give some idea of how Maclure intended it to be seen. No two of Maclure's houses are the same; in this one, elements from Voysey houses like "The Pastures" in Rutlandshire predominate.

Like all great architects, including Maclure's early correspondent Frank Lloyd Wright, Maclure had an exquisite sense for proportion that became his signature and makes houses designed by him instantly recognizable even though they often stand amidst dozens of near-imitations, some deliberate, others just products of the common Arts-and-Crafts matrix of the age. That is true of Rockland in Victoria, and the Shaughnessy district of Vancouver, where Maclure and his Vancouver partner Fox also did some work. Every major city in Canada in the early twentieth century had comparable districts — Mount Royal in Calgary, Rosedale in Toronto are but two other examples.

Further reference

Leonard K. Eaton, *The Architecture of Samuel Maclure* (Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1970).

Legislative Building, Winnipeg, Manitoba



Provincial Legislative Building, seen from northeast and northwest angles, showing statues erected to honour poets Robert Burns (by G.A. Lawson, 1936, sponsored by Burns Club #197), and Taras Shevchenko (by Andrij Darahan of New York, 1961, sponsored by the Ukrainian Canadian Committee). The dome of the Legislative Building is capped by the "Golden Boy," by Charles Gardet of Paris. The architect of the Legislative Building was Frank Worthington Simon (1863-1933) of Liverpool. Excavation began in 1913 and the building was completed in 1919.



Comments

Until quite recently, Winnipeg was the largest city in Western Canada; Manitoba was earliest of the three prairie provinces to join Confederation, and its leaders determined to have a legislative building on a scale appropriate to these distinctions. Sixty-six firms competed for a commission “open to British subjects only.” The style was pre-determined too. From the mid-1880s on, the British Empire had become increasingly self-conscious. Where once a large part of the British population had been indifferent or even hostile to the idea of Europe, now music halls blared out jingoistic songs and orators orated about Britain’s having an empire on which the sun never set; poets bumbled of the “white man’s burden” (meaning, an Anglo-American mission to bring “civilization to the backward of this earth”) and how — most significantly for architectural taste — Rome’s old empire was far surpassed in scope and riches by Britain’s new one. For such a realm, Victorian Gothic seemed an inadequate expression. It had become too closely associated with Christianity (at its outset the Gothic Revival had been nationalistic and secular, so that Parliament in approving restoration of Westminster Abbey in 1805 had done so for a national monument more than a Christian church; but now Gothic was increasingly thought of as a “religious” style). Also, all variants of Victorian picturesqueness (including things like Winnipeg’s Old City Hall) were starting to look intolerably fussy. Far nobler, far more majestic, far more suitable to express Imperial aspirations, therefore, were Roman monuments like the Pantheon in Rome, reconstructions of the baths of Caracalla or the Basilica of Maxentius. To such a taste there were objections, obvious and ominous. Most “Imperial Roman,” especially the kind taught at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris where Simon studied, was in fact filtered through copies and adaptations made by the princes and prelates of Renaissance and Baroque Italy. Worse, the originals were products of an era just before the Roman Empire’s collapse, when its citizens ceased to defend it and rival German armies, some in Roman pay and some on their own, fought each other for the spoils of its decadence. No matter for the moment; grand Roman buildings with colossal columns, gleaming domes, sculpture-crammed pediments and colonnades of marble sprang up all over the British Empire in the early years of the twentieth century. It was inevitable that each of the prairie provinces would get one. The construction of Manitoba’s, ironically, went on during the years of that Great War whose terrible losses ultimately brought the Empire it celebrated to an end.

The symbolic nature of such a building like this, with its iconic shapes drawn from earlier architecture to make a specific statement, seems obvious. Less so is the continuing life of such a building, through additions — in this case, portraits on the walls, plaques and mementoes in the halls, above all, statues on the grounds. Queen Victoria, taken from somewhere else, was set in front of the main (north) steps, looking up Memorial Boulevard towards Winnipeg’s Cenotaph and monument to Women of World War II. On the east side stands “Rabbie Bairns,” as the Scottish community who erected this statue would call him; he asserts the Scots’ importance in Manitoba history. There is a statue of Burns in almost every Canadian city; Fredericton has a near-duplicate of this one, for instance, and so has Halifax. Few other cities have a statue to Icelandic hero Jon Sigurdsson, however (this one is by Jensen Brunsestober); nor one to Ukrainian heroic poet Taras Shevchenko — these are, by eastern Canadian standards, exotic ethnic strains, whose contribution to Manitoba is here proclaimed. George-Etienne Cartier’s bust on a pedestal (by Montreal sculptor George W. Hill) recalls the French connection. And behind the Legislative Building there is also a statue to Louis Riel. Another one, easier to find, stands in front of St. Boniface Cathedral across the Red River. Amerinds in Manitoba are championed, somewhat incongruously, by a Kwakiutl totem from British Columbia.

All this, of course, without mentioning the array of sculptured worthies in the Legislative Building itself, most by Gardet, sculptor too of the Manitoba bison which guard the main interior staircase. On entering their halls, legislators pass lifesize figures of Wolfe and Dufferin, Selkirk and La Vérendrye; in their chamber, Lycurgus and Moses, Solon and Confucius, Alfred, and Manu gaze down upon them. Spurred on by such exemplars past and present, how could they go wrong?

Further reference

Diana Bodnar, “The Three Prairie Legislative Buildings,” *Prairie Forum*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 1980), pp. 143-157; William Thompson and Henry Kalen, *Winnipeg Architecture* (Winnipeg: Queenston House, 1977).

Memorial to the Great War of 1914-1918



The Monument to the Fallen which stands in front of the courthouse of Fernie, B.C. Sculptor: Emmanuel Hahn. Erected: 1923. This is one of a series of similar figures by Hahn erected across the country.



The Next-of-Kin Monument on the Legislative Building Grounds, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Comments

It was membership in the British Empire that gave English-Canadians their sense of distinct identity, especially distinctness from the United States. Since the collapse of that Empire in the 1950s, they have floundered, trying to identify themselves. In August 1914 they had no such doubts. When Britain declared war on Germany, Canada was at war; and few English-Canadians then would have had it any other way. Memorials to that spirit are among the most characteristic of all sights in Canadian cities.

In American cities, it's the Civil War monument that dominates. Britain, France and Germany have memorials to all sorts of wars. But for Canada, 1914-18 was *the* Great War. Memorials to it stand in public squares and odd lost corners, in front of Legion Halls and banks, on main streets and in parks, cairns and columns and shafts and bases bearing statues of soldiers stiff and proud, fierce and pensive and mournful, with long lists of names commemorating lives "laid down in defence of the Empire" at Ypres, Courcellette, Passchendaele, Canal du Nord, Cambrai, Vimy. . . Vimy — always Vimy Ridge, Canada's greatest victory of the Great War, in April 1917, when Field Marshall Haig sent special congratulations, after the Commander said, "that hill cost us eight thousand of the best sons a mother ever had. . ." Sixty thousand dead, the Great War total — highest proportion of any combatant. Whole areas of the country, and the West especially, stopped growing. To this day you can find traces of frontier settlements aborted by the War, where only decaying orchards and ruined foundations overrun in brambles recall pruners and tillers gone off to France, forever.

The Great War decisively affected Canadian politics. Because the Conservatives pushed conscription upon Quebec, their party became anathema to this day there, like Republicans in the American south until very recent times. They have, for all intents and purposes, hardly won an election since. Because William Lyon Mackenzie King was the only one of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's English-speaking cabinet members to support him in opposing conscription in 1917, he was the only acceptable candidate for leadership of the Liberal party after Sir Wilfrid's death. And so this diffident, unprepos-

sessing, fat, short man, this poor public speaker and colorless public personality, this enormously clever parliamentarian and infinitely subtle politician, became prime minister and served in office longer than any other prime minister of the whole British Empire — ruling many of those years with the aid of ghosts consulted via mediums — Sir Wilfrid's, King's mother's, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's. . .

The Winnipeg memorial illustrated here recalls the hysteria of those Great War years in Canada. For it is not Winnipeg's official memorial. That is the Cenotaph which stands on Memorial Boulevard a quarter-mile away. It is so insignificant people often miss it — like Toronto's equally insignificant Cenotaph in front of Lennox Hall. Why such insipid monuments to such mighty sacrifices? Because the winner of competitions to design both of them was Emmanuel Hahn. Hahn was far and away Canada's finest sculptor. But he had a German name. Though he came to Canada as a child, he had in fact been born in Germany. So, when his identity was known, his prize — the commission — was revoked. Winnipeg held a second competition. This time the winner was not "E.H." but "E.W.W." Alas, when identities were revealed this time it turned out the winner was Elizabeth Wyn Wood — Hahn's sometime pupil, now wife. So the commission was revoked a second time. So two of Canada's major cities were deprived of the kind of magnificent public sculpture Hahn provided (often through a "host" himself, the monuments bearing only an attribution to "Thompson Granite Company," not Hahn's own name) for places as diverse as Fernie (illustrated here), Westville, Nova Scotia (site of the original bronze of the statue at Fernie) and ones like those at Petrolia, Bolton and Princeville in Ontario, as well as others at Moncton, Summerside, and elsewhere.

Hahn's most characteristic figure is the one represented by Fernie's monument, not the aggressive gung-ho knight-on-horseback pre-1914 sort you find in the Next-of-Kin monument at Winnipeg, or at Victoria, but a pensive soldier, breathing an air of infinite melancholy, pondering the meaning (if any) of all this sacrifice. Hahn, by the way, still hardly figures in histories of Canadian art. By the time his reputation could be revived, what passed for public sculpture in Canada had become largely private art set up in some public place — not at all the same thing. But Hahn's time will come. *Ars longa, vita brevis*— the hysterical passions of 1914-18 that tore Canada apart are passing slowly into history and recalled, when at all, by such monuments as this; the greatness of Hahn's art remains.

Further reference

Amazing though it may seem — and amazing is really the word for it — the standard printed work on Canada's Great War memorials remains a 1923 fugitive piece on war memorials then built or under construction, now for all practical purposes unobtainable (the Toronto Reference Library has what seems to be the one copy in existence). Several Canada Council grants have been given for work in this field, without tangible result. The author has a book on this subject in mind, but it isn't done either. We can look for an *embarras de riches* in a few years. Meanwhile, the only "data" are books on the Great War, like John Swettenham's *Canada and the First World War* (Toronto, 1969), which at least tell you what happened at the places you find carved on Canada's memorials. Several useful books on Canadian war art exist, however. Public sculpture just doesn't seem to be important to writers of Canadian art history — but perhaps an *embarrass de riches* awaits us here also, in due time.

City Hall, Vancouver, B.C.



City Hall, Vancouver, B.C., designed by the firm of Townley and Matheson, 1935. Perhaps Canada's most distinguished example of the Art Deco style of the 1930s. Townley, Matheson and partners designed an annex to the north in 1968.

Comments

Since the later Middle Ages, town and city halls have proclaimed through their architecture what urban communities thought of themselves, their present, and their future. In modern times, emphasis has been mostly upon the future. Winnipeg's Old City Hall attempted by its style to dramatize how much wealth and culture had been accumulated on what had been empty prairie only a few decades before; but Vancouver's, which could have done the same thing, was intended to show by its up-to-dateness how the city was moving confidently ahead into a future getting "every day in every way better and better." For such a purpose, some dramatically up-to-date style was necessary — Art Deco (named from the Paris exposition that introduced it, in the 1920s).

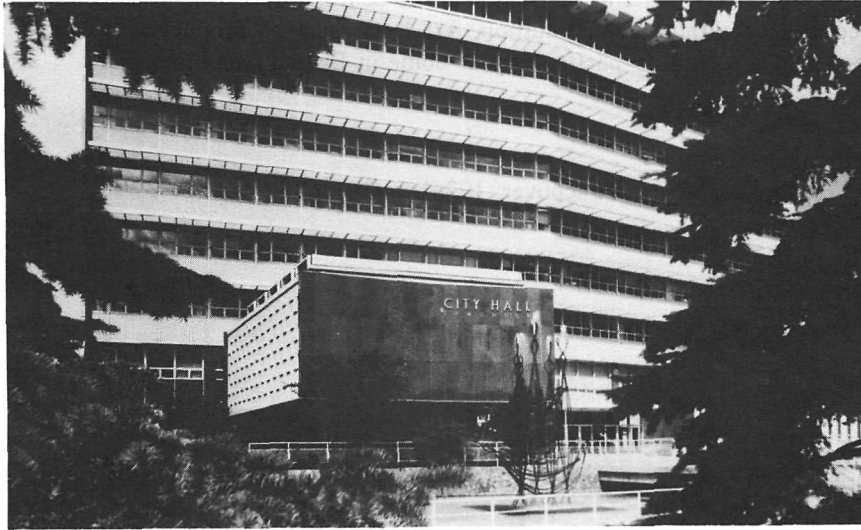
For architectural historians, Art Deco has a peculiar interest. It is the last of the historical styles in any High Architecture; after it, Modern architecture took over schools of architectural design and historical reference became an almost exclusive prerogative of Popular/Commercial builders, until the so-called Post-Modern movement of the late 1970s. With the advent of Modernism, the proper business of architects was no longer considered to be discovery of appropriate visual metaphors in past architecture, but success in expressing themselves or their times directly through handling of materials and structure. Essentially, these are two irreconcilable concepts of what the art of architecture is about. Yet Art Deco was an attempt to make just this kind of compromise. Fundamentally, a building like this town hall is an expression of the nature of the times as understood by its fashionable designers — an age of industry and technology, of scientific order, expressed through disciplined use of steel, glass, and concrete; yet preserving withal eclectic details of various kinds, appropriately "streamlined" and otherwise refined to fit in with the sleek, scientific expression of the building as a whole. Attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable as it did, Art Deco often seems a silly, shallow, and futile way of building. It is not good architecture either in the traditional sense, nor in the modern sense, nor yet competent Popular/Commercial building. But as an historical document, this kind of building in this kind of style is very significant. For it is the visual metaphor of precisely the kind of compromise which a whole generation of people educated to liberal opinions and dedicated to social progress were trying to make in the 1930s. Convinced that the bungling and profiteering of World War I, plus the economic fiasco of 1929, had been caused by too much individual freedom, they were fond of praising and promoting the claims of various socialist and communist proposals for reorganizing society along supposedly more scientific lines.

But they were unwilling to do away with the old freedoms altogether. Could it not be possible, they thought, to get a better ordered society which still somehow preserved the individual freedom of action they so much enjoyed? Parlor Pinks, opponents on both sides called them — intellectuals who lacked courage to see the consequences of their own convictions, demanding a regimented society without regimentation. Art Deco was the product of a corresponding mentality in the art world of the 1930s — and a mentality particularly at home in British Columbia.

Further reference

Harold Kalman, *Exploring Vancouver* (Vancouver, 1974), p. 161.

City Hall, Edmonton, Alberta



Edmonton City Hall was opened May 31, 1957, after a two-year building programme. The architects were Maxwell C. Dewar, Kelvin C. Stanley, John Stevenson, and Hugh W. Seton; consulting and supervising architects were Robert F. Duke and William P. Pasternak.

Comments

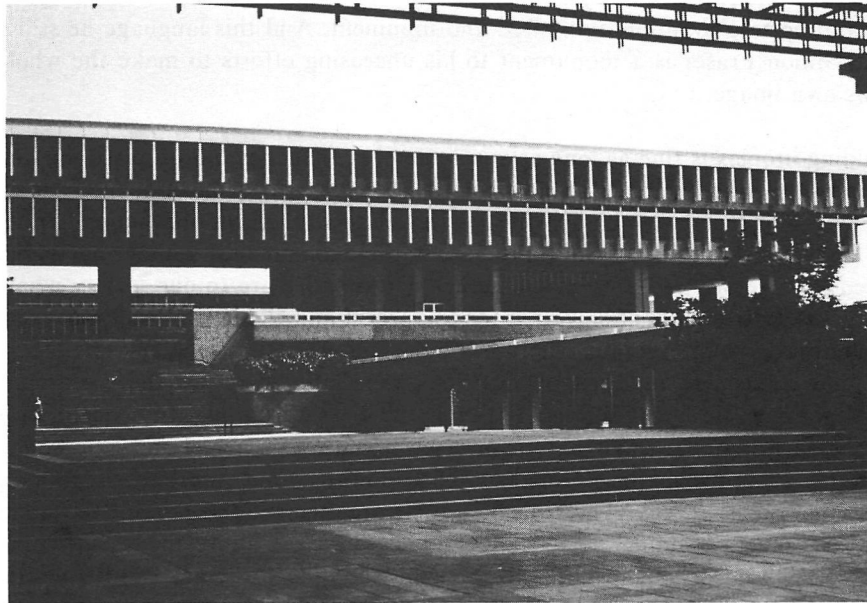
International Style Modernism as a symbol of civic progress and enlightenment is dramatically manifest in dozens of new buildings erected in Canadian cities through the 1950s and 1960s. Thanks to much publicity and an international competition, Toronto's new City Hall was perhaps the best-known of them; but Edmonton's new City Hall is perhaps the most revealing. It was unabashedly meant to state Edmonton's claim, based on wheat and oil and minerals untold, to surpass Winnipeg, and ultimately Toronto, as a progressive, wealthy, industrial city. What makes this building significant is its emphasis on light and lightness, as contrasted to the Toronto building's emphasis on big sculptural forms.

By the mid-1950s, strip windows had become a mandatory cliché for any builder wanting to be thought modern at all. Here they have become bands running the full width of the building. Only the slenderest of metal sticks seems to separate one floor from another (actually, of course, the steel case is behind). The result is a building that seems to have no weight at all. (Perhaps it is fanciful, perhaps not, to see in this structure an unwitting reminiscence of Gothic Revival buildings, with their verticality and crenellated rooflines). It looks like a kind of soufflé; one touch and it crumbles. The effect of such a construction at night is lightness of another kind. Then it becomes the crystal palace, that most persistent of all Modern metaphorical images — and, to be fanciful again, a pillar of light such as guided the ancient Hebrews through the wilderness.

It's hard to remember that this sight, so common nowadays, was the rarest of rareties to our ancestors. Once in a lifetime, perhaps, they might see all the windows in the prince's palace glowing like this; now and again at high feasts of the church, every window might glow from the radiance within. We take such spectacles for granted and think nothing of it. Nor do we reflect on the contrast which a civic building like this makes with earlier architecture, not only Winnipeg's Old City Hall, but Vancouver's too. The whole effect is different. Those older buildings were designed to look as if they would last forever. The new one looks as if it could vanish if somebody pulled a switch.

Designers of a building like this, insofar as they consciously expressed anything beyond the bare nature of glass and steel, were exulting in technological powers. The decade of the 1960s was in North America one of extraordinary affluence. Resources and potential for material benefits to all were still assumed by most people to be limitless, just as in the 1880s. But this conviction was now expressed in a different way. Now intellectuals maintained that if people were poor, it must be because they were somehow oppressed, deliberately denied access to abundant resources. Buildings like this intrinsically supported such claims, by conspicuous wastes of energy. What was once effected by occupants simply opening and closing windows, now must be done by prodigious expenditures of energy to run heating plants in the winter and cooling plants in the summer, and air-conditioning all the year round. Symbolic effect justifies it.

Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C.



General view of the central space of Simon Fraser University, begun in 1963 on the plans of Arthur Erickson, winner of a B.C. competition. The first students were admitted in the fall of 1965.

Comments

Peter Newman chose “the Simon Fraser episode” to epitomize the Vancouver branch of *The Canadian Establishment*:

Everybody talks about the same thing. A few years ago it was the miracle of Simon Fraser University. How beautiful it all was, because it had been built by Arthur Erickson, B.C.’s very own architect, forced into unheard-of quick production by B.C.’s own Gordon Shrum (and fashioned out of cement from B.C.’s own cartel). Now everybody talks about Dave Barrett’s most recent indiscretion, Arthur Erickson’s new government building . . . (Toronto, rev. ed., 1979, p. 276).

Yes, Erickson *is* a phenomenon. In the *New York Times* for June, 1982, Prime Minister Trudeau was quoted as defending his personal selection of Arthur Erickson as architect for the new Canadian embassy in Washington, over the heads of seven judges of the government competition to choose its architect (who unaccountably did not pick Erickson) in these words: “The Government considers it fitting that such a project be entrusted to a Canadian architect who stands out most clearly on the Canadian architectural scene as expressing Canadian architectural concepts.” One member of Parliament, recalling the architectural proclivities of another, earlier, leader, called Erickson Trudeau’s Albert Speer. But one can see how Erickson might get a reputation as *the* expression of Canadian aspirations. He is the Unreconstructed Utopian, last of the great Form-Givers of the earlier twentieth century — Wright, Gropius, Bruno Taut, Corbusier, Sant’Elia — coming along late, to be sure, but still in time to impress Pierre Trudeau, himself another belated Utopian, not only by buildings but even more by golden words, sweet in the ear of one so like in mind.

Trudeau apparently perceived Erickson’s architecture in the way Erickson did, as images of a very special land where problems plaguing the wretched of this earth since time began now plague no more, a land like no other ever. That conviction rampaged through the whole country in the 1960s years of Trudeaumania, when Pierre won his first election. It was born out of Canada’s unique geographical position. Unlike Britain, say, or Mexico, Canada’s area was vast, her resources without apparent limit. Unlike the United States, Canada carried no huge burden of arms for defense, so that the security America’s arsenal provided could easily be mistaken for some state of eternal peace on earth. Unlike Germany, Canada had no war-ravaged cities to rebuild and no deadly enemy stalking her borders — at least overtly. All across the country utopian enthusiasms abounded in the 1960s — whoever could forget the euphoria of Expo ‘67, celebration of

God's Chosen People? But they peaked in Canada's westernmost province of British Columbia. There, cut off from the rest of Canada, not to mention the rest of the world, visionary expectation and reality could be fused, or confused, near totally. And there, in B.C.'s metropolitan city of Vancouver, was born Arthur Erickson. There he grew up, learned a language and lifestyle appropriate to utopia unlimited and imminent. And this language he still speaks, apparently; this lifestyle he still affects. Simon Fraser is a monument to his unceasing efforts to make the whole of Canada, if not the world, over into this his own image.

The problem is, building utopias is fine as long as you remember that they *are* utopias, and don't expect them to work in the real world. An art gallery like Erickson's Anthropology Museum in Vancouver or the East Building of Washington's National Gallery opposite which his new embassy will sit, can violate all the laws of practicality, be built first and foremost to please the exquisite aesthetic sensibility of the white gods in their compounds, without hurting anybody else — because nobody has to go there. A university is different altogether. Universities are to our society what cathedrals were to the middle ages — they are *our* instruments of salvation for this world and the next. Every city has to have at least one, to be a real city. Everybody that wants to get anywhere has to attend at least one. So it's no place to build a dream world. Yet all too many Canadian university buildings of the 1960s, especially, were just that — dream worlds coming hot off the top of architects' steaming little heads. Simon Fraser is the classic example. In concept, noble — an instrument to bring about, by moulding the kiddies within, that Just Society Trudeau preached and Erickson so firmly believed in. In practice a complex like this — *and* Erickson's University of Lethbridge, *and* Andrews' Scarborough College, and ever so many like them — doesn't work that way. The reason is, their architects didn't consult the wishes and needs of faculty and students who might use such a building. They endlessly recited the old litany about consummating that perfect world whose rule would be: "to each according to need, from each according to ability." But they themselves decided what would constitute need. They themselves decided what abilities were to be prized, and which downgraded. They thus in effect created metaphors of the kind of grotesque parody of old-style socialism which marked the Soviet bloc — microworlds whose inhabitants were supposed (because the Architect had so dictated) to enjoy living in a six-story raw concrete bathtub (as at Scarborough), or inside a piano, with somebody playing Rachmaninoff (because that was Erickson's notion of communal space). SFU's narrow cramped corridors, raw interior finishes, and unruly student body of a jejeune radical sort, soon became legendary, and remained so. Margaret Trudeau was an SFU graduate and (by her own account) a fairly typical one. That, one supposes, should have given Pierre some pause for thought.

Further reference

Arthur Erickson, *Arthur Erickson* (Vancouver, 1975); Carol Moore Ede, *Canadian Architecture, 1960-1970* (Toronto, 1970); and Edith Iglauer, *Seven Stones* (Seattle, 1981).

Ontario Science Centre, Toronto (Don Mills), Ontario



The Ontario Science Centre was begun in 1965 and completed in 1969 on designs of Raymond Moriyama at a cost of \$23,000,000.

Comments

Besides a spanking new university and city hall, every respectable Canadian urban center in the 1960s and 1970s had to have at least one new art gallery (to show how unbourgeois its Establishment was, dedicated to Culture no matter how unintelligible), and even more imperatively, a new museum, or better perhaps, shrine to Science. For, from the 1960s on this truth was plain: Science had become not only the *de facto* but also now the *de jure* religion of the West. Its primacy was nowhere disputed. Science had its apostolic succession of saints from Galileo through Newton and Darwin to Freud and Einstein; its martyrs from Bruno to Oppenheimer; its prophets from Francis Bacon to H.G. Wells and Carl Sagan; its great catholic church centered in modern universities, where the four scientific departments of Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Psychology customarily took more of every budget than all the other departments combined. And, of course, its places of pilgrimage, museums, where its miracles were publicized and its faithful exhorted to Higher Service.

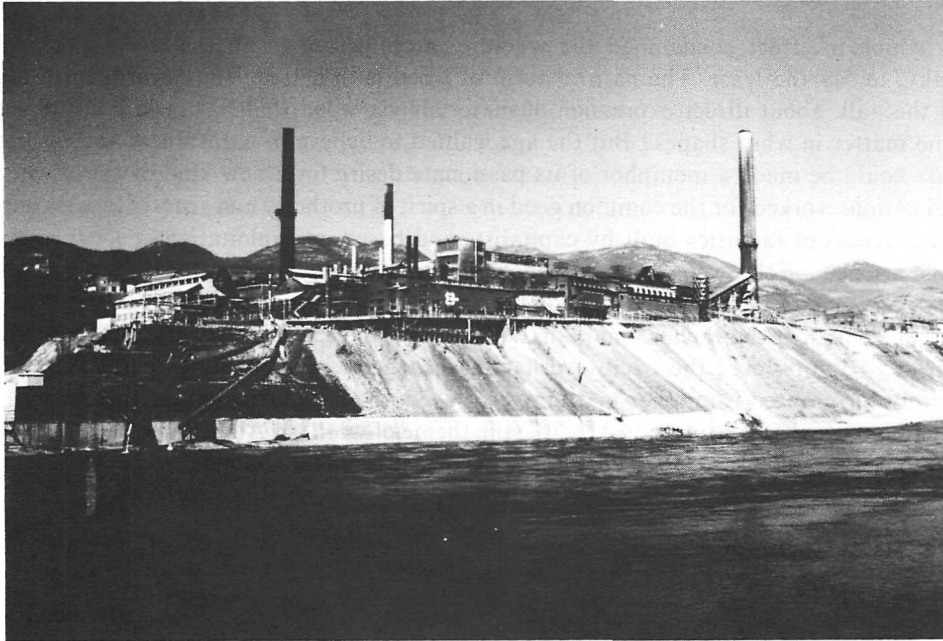
Every country had its own distinctive sets of Science pilgrimage places. The United States Space program spawned great numbers, from the Air and Space Museum in Washington, crowded every day of the year, to the Neil Armstrong Air and Space Museum in Wapakoneta, Ohio, built to look like his famous photograph of the Earth from the Moon (and succeeding in that extraordinarily well, especially on a winter's day with snow on the ground). Another small one stood in a hamlet of Schleswig-Holstein, whence one of Armstrong's great-grandfathers had come to America, seeking escape from military service and in the event leaving genes that one day went lunar.

Canada had no space program, and few Nobel prize winners in any branch of Science. But she shared the age's faith in Science all the more mystically for that. Canada's Science museums were educationally-oriented, not to say didactic.

It is typical that a Science Center, primarily oriented towards children and enlightenment of the Masses, should be Ontario's Confederation Centennial project.

Raymond Moriyama, one of Canada's most versatile and interesting architects (though for some reason never getting recognition as such, let alone the iconic status of an Erickson, or the Australian John Andrews when he was a "Canadian architect"), created a building of corridors coming off a central space so as to present, through a series of sequential (not formally, but ideationally) exhibits, the essential principle that Science Can Solve All Your Problems. It could have been a stark and monumental building, like Erickson's Anthropology Museum in Vancouver, all concrete and sheets of glass and staring ceilings; but it's warmer, hung with flags and posters and other evidences of the life of this world and time. The design had people's real, as contrasted to their utopian, needs in mind — which is to say, Moriyama is a Form-Finder, able to find the forms that suit a building's social function. Another demonstration of this ability is his Holiday Inn on Eglinton East, just a few exits down the Don Valley Parkway from the Science Center — a very different building but with the same awareness of and sensitivity to human reactions.

Cominco, Inc. Plant on Columbia River Near Trail, B.C.



Metallurgical complex of Cominco, Inc., on the Columbia River at Trail, B.C., is a collection of buildings from various dates, beginning in 1895 and including additions in 1912, the 1930s and 1950s.

Comments

No survey of Canada's history in architecture would be complete without some notice of those mining towns that are scattered all over the country, wherever there are minerals — and that's just about everywhere. Trail is typical — a huge sprawling industrial complex with a town attached. Most of the money made in these places usually goes to nourish big cities somewhere and this exploitation was (and to some extent still is) savagely evident all across the face of Canada: great gashes gouged from the furry velvet of treed slopes that is the lower Canadian Rockies, torn across the patchwork of sapphire lakes and scarlet woodlands that is the Canadian Shield.

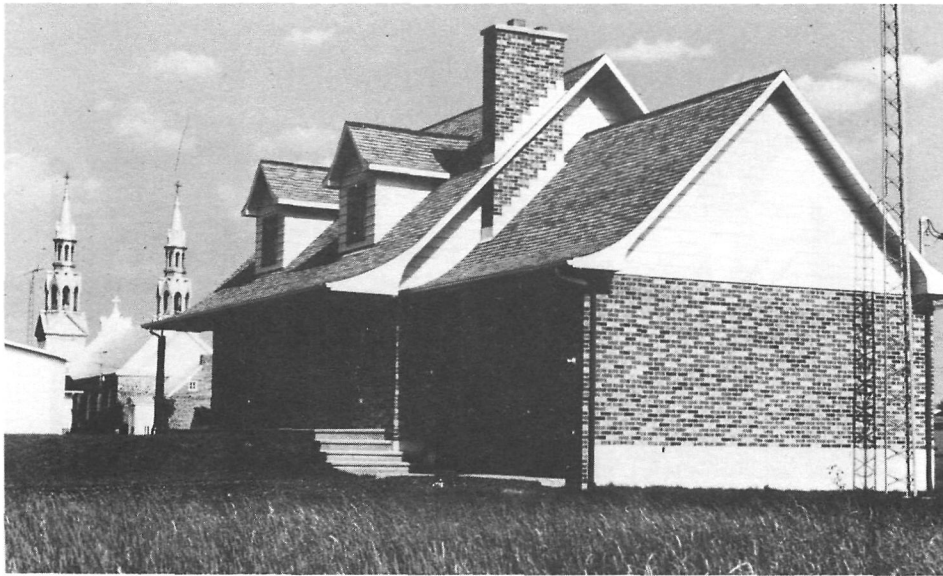
Most Canadians cherish an *idée fixe* that they are different from Americans in being somehow attuned to Great Wildernesses at their doors. That is what makes the landscapes of the Group of Seven so typically Canadian — and also explains in part why in Canadian art history (*vide* the McMichael Gallery at Kleinburg, Ontario) what comes after A.Y. Jackson, Lismer, Tom Thomson *et cetera* is Amerind and Inuit art. (Also it's because the next generation of Canadian painters after the Group sought originality by imitating the *cenacles* of New York and thereby produced an art indistinguishable in its originality from anywhere else on the planet, so that Amerind and Inuit arts were the only thing left to represent Canada. Paradoxically, of course, "native" arts never reached that status in the United States; there they remained "native" and the tag "American" was given to the New York abstractionists whom the Canadians imitated. Well, anyway, you see how important it is to be Original.) For in fact Canada really is largely wilderness, even if few Canadians live there. That's why a scene like this is so typical.

What happened in and to Canadian painting happened in and to Canadian architecture also — and in one sense that too is illustrated by a plant like this. Long ignored as beneath architectural notice, such factories began to have tremendous appeal for avant-garde architects from the early twentieth century on. Back in 1911 Walter Gropius, the Silver Prince of the Bauhaus, was writing about Canadian grain elevators (in Montreal, as it happened), comparing them to the pyramids of Egypt for grandeur and bold massing. You may be sure few architects in Canada saw them that way at the time. By the 1960s things were very different. Then the doctrine of the Bauhaus and its allies had become *de rigueur* for any progressive architectural school (McGill and Toronto got it first, via Harvard graduates; Winnipeg got it via Toronto

graduates; they in turn colonized Halifax and Calgary; finally it got to Vancouver. . . again you see the Importance of Originality even if it takes 20 or 30 years to get from Boston to British Columbia). Style should derive from honest use of materials and direct expressions of structure alone. Every problem starts from zero, from musings on utilitarian materials.

This doctrine — which in effect condemned the whole of architecture in all the world except simplest vernacular building — was shaky, to say the least. The natural form of wood is in a tree. The natural form of concrete is sand in the ground. What's this talk about direct expression of materials via wood that has been cut and shaped, concrete that has been moulded, no matter in what shapes? But the age wanted to believe in naturalness and directness, to believe that somehow architecture could be made a metaphor of its passionate desire for a new kind of world wherein covenants were openly arrived at and nations worked for the common good in a spirit of brotherly and sisterly love. Whence — paradoxically — the extreme attractiveness of factories built by capitalists and based on exploitation of local resources for the benefit of urban corporations; whence too the even greater paradox of these strutted barns — for that is what they are — becoming models for university halls (*vide* Simon Fraser, not too far away!), law courts (in Vancouver, for instance!), concert halls and what not. That began first in the Soviet Union, naturally (*vide* the 1922 University of Minsk, for example) to show the virtuous proletariat's triumph over the backward-looking bourgeois mind. Why Canadian universities by the 1970s took such forms entirely for granted is another matter — too deep, too paradoxical altogether to get into here. But if you read German, try Chapter Five, "Das Motif der Arbeit" (the theme of work) in Adolf Max Vogt's *Revolutions-architektur 1917/1789* ("Revolutionary architecture, 1917/1789," Russian and French; Cologne, 1974).

New Development Houses, Yamaska Est, Quebec



Popular/commercial development houses on Leveille Street in Yamaska Est, Quebec, seen from Mgr. Parizeau Avenue. In the background is the church of St.-André Yamaska, with the typical twin towers of later eighteenth and nineteenth century Québécois churches in the South Shore/Richelieu region.

Comments

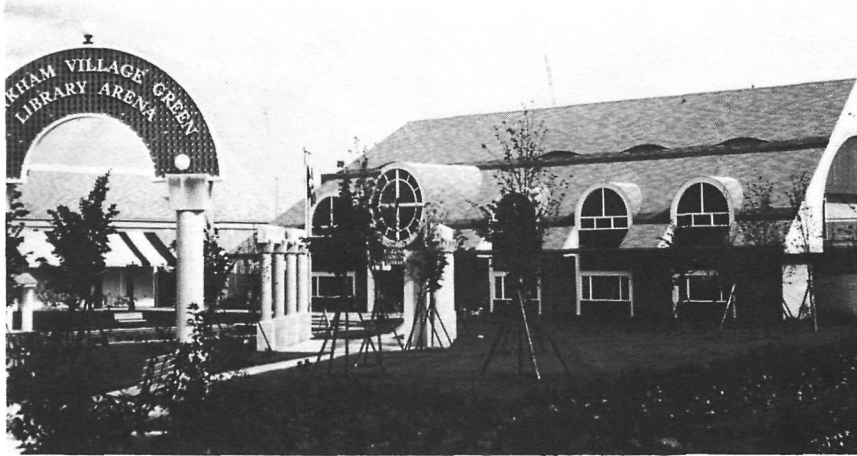
While population growth in the Province of Quebec has slowed over recent decades, urbanization has accelerated, so that Quebec's old towns and cities are ringed by suburbs as elsewhere in North America. As elsewhere, too, most of those suburbs are built by developers. Overwhelmingly, when developers build, they build in traditional, regional styles. That is not because they are necessarily ignorant of Modern styles. It's because the houses they build must sell for them to make a living, and people want traditional regional styles. And that, in turn, is not necessarily because the population at large has never heard of Modern, either. It's because people instinctively want architecture to provide visual metaphors of the things and institutions they care about. If what is officially called "Architecture" is so preoccupied with theorizing or Great Form Giving that it cannot or will not provide such metaphors, then they will be produced by other means. So here, speculatively built suburban houses like these "Maisons du Patriote," following the lines of seventeenth and eighteenth century traditional Québécois types, are the most direct descendants of traditional folk building, preserving not only many historic forms and proportions (quite deliberately,) but also (all unconsciously) preserving the ancient social functions of the art of architecture as understood for millennia past. People want to have roots. They want to feel themselves part of a tradition. Such wants are just as natural, normal, and self-evident aspects of being human — of what the old philosophers called Natural Law — as concern for utopian futures. Continuing national life depends upon concern for parents and ancestors and the past quite as much as upon concern for children and posterity and humanity's broad future. If the art of architecture neglects this balance, and concerns itself only with the future, then other arts will do it. Whence the enormous popularity of old Québécois house-types like this in Quebec; whence the continuing popularity of brick Georgian for development houses in Ontario; whence—it's the same all over the continent. And that is why popular/commercial building must be considered along with *avant-garde* in any broad study of Canada's architectural history.

This caption was, for all intents and purposes, written several years ago. What it then predicted and proposed has in fact begun to come to pass. High (*avant-garde*) architecture, and popular/commercial building have begun to come together. They promise to give us a richer architecture than before. A few examples, like the illustration on the next page, have already appeared in Canada.

Future reference

Alan Gowans, "Notes Toward a Humane Environment: A Defense of History in Architecture," *RACAR (Revue d'art Canadienne/Canadian Art Review)*, Vol. III, No. 1 (1976), p. 51f.

Village Green and Community Library, Markham, Ontario



Built on the designs of Phillip H. Carter, this complex was opened in August, 1981. This view looks southwest, showing the entrance arch, reflecting pool, gazebo, cenotaph, and library. To the left, out of the picture, is a remodelled hockey rink.

Comments

Phillip Carter's statement (in his 1982 "Project Description") of rationale behind this plan begins:

The Town of Markham is a newly formed regional municipality on the outskirts of Toronto. The municipality was formed in 1970 and consists of what were previously a series of villages. One of these villages was the Village of Markham, the location of this project. The municipality is growing rapidly and this rapid suburban growth threatens the existing historical character of the area. One of the goals of this development was to reinforce that historic character while responding to the demands of growth in a modern community.

“. . . Reinforce historic character. . .” It's been a long time since Canadian architects, other than Popular/Commercial builders, expressed that sort of goal.

Markham Village Green is a monument to that change in attitude towards an awareness of the social function of architecture, which goes under the general title "Post-Modernism." No longer are architects supposed to be the Great Form-Givers who trot about saving the world whether it needs salvation by architecture or not. Architects concerned to "reinforce historic character" (not all "Post-Modernists" are; some just play private games) have resumed one of the great historic functions of this art: to create a humane environment, one that provides roots for a community. They try to design buildings whose details recall past architecture to this time and in this place. They try to reinforce community patterns rather than (as *via* Simon Fraser) to revolutionize them. A dramatic case in point is the new cenotaph Carter designed for the Markham Library complex. The old — or more exactly, former — Library (it was only built in 1967, as a Centennial project, but Toronto's expansion made it already far too small) had a war memorial also. But it had been made late enough (1967) as to be typically Modern in concept — not an expression of the clients' (i.e., war veterans' and their families') wants and feelings, but the sculptress' own: a private sculpture in a public place, which is not the definition of a monument. Carter's cenotaph simulates, but does not copy, the effect of traditional Canadian Great War monuments. Furthermore, it is typical of the whole basic concept here, which is the precise opposite of the Great Form-Givers' aim of imposing an Architectural Creation; all elements are to be part of one whole, and that whole is to have a character dictated by what already stands in its surroundings — the architect's job is to find forms there, and adapt those to current needs and times, not invent new ones. So the principal building here, the Library, "comes out of a search for the appropriate image for a public library building." How different from John Andrews' statement twenty years earlier, explaining why his Scarborough College was a six-story raw concrete bathtub:

In Architecture, it is safer, more profitable, and less nerve-wracking to accept someone else's answer, to repeat what has been done before. But to do this will not solve the problems that architects face in the coming decades. Architecture must rid itself of the emphasis on exterior aesthetics.

Translation: Just to put up a school that looks like a school and is comfortable to be in, would not feed an architect's ego. He must create his own personal form, and convince clients it's good for them.

It would be nice to say that such attitudes are now gone and forgotten in Canada. Alas, that would hardly be true. But in designs like Carter's there is hope that in Canada, too, architecture may soon resume its historic function of providing a humane home for Man.