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The search for objective canons of taste has often proved to be the enemy of aesthetic judgement. By pretending to an authority which cannot reasonably be claimed, this search provokes an original rebellion against the Father. Repudiating the dictatorship of one law, the rebellious offspring refuses to accept the advice of any other and opts for an aesthetic anarchy, rather than submit once again to a discipline which had become intolerable to him. At the same time he stands more in need of this discipline than ever; and the greater the rebellion, the more implacable the need.

The tale is familiar, and its lesson is one that man is destined not to learn, or to learn only when the price of disobedience has been paid. But let us, for all that, draw the lesson, since debates about modern architecture are futile otherwise. Just as we should not look for more objectivity in any study than can be obtained from it, so should we not be content with less. The substance of aesthetic judgement lies in feeling, imagination and taste. But this subjective matter is objectively formed: it is brought to the forum of discussion, and given the status and the structure of a rational preference. Hence there is both the possibility, and the necessity, of aesthetic education. The disaster of modern architecture stems from a misunderstanding of this education, and a disposition to discard the true disciplines of the eye and the heart in favour of a false discipline of the intellect.

Of course, the aesthetic preference, like any human faculty, may remain infantile and unexamined. In architecture, however, there is special reason to resist the pleasure principle. The person who builds imposes himself on others, and the sight of what he does is as legitimate an object of criticism as are his morals and his manners. It is not enough for an architect to say: I like it, or even: I and my educated colleagues like it. He has to justify its existence, and the question is whether he and his colleagues are right.

As I have argued elsewhere, the search for some kind of co-ordination of tastes is forced on us by our nature as social beings. This search may not lead to a single set of principles; nevertheless it involves a common pursuit of an
acceptable solution. It may seem strange to describe aesthetic values as solutions to a 'co-ordination problem'. In architecture, however, they are that, and more besides. Through aesthetic reflection we endeavour to create a world in which we are at home with others and with ourselves. That is why we care about aesthetic values, and live wretchedly in places where they have been brushed aside or trampled on. Man's 'estrangement' in the modern city is due to many causes besides modern architecture. But who can deny that modern architecture has played its own special part in producing it, by wilfully imposing forms, masses and proportions which bear no relation to our aesthetic expectations and which arrogantly defy the wisdom and achievement of the past?

What was primarily wrong with modernism was not its rigidity, its moralising, its puritanical zeal – although these were repulsive enough. Modernism's respect for discipline was its sole redeeming feature: but it was a discipline about the wrong things. It told us to be true to function, to social utility, to materials, to political principles. It told us to be 'of our time', while enlisting architecture in those insolent experiments for the re-fashioning of man which have threatened our civilisation with such disaster. At the same time, modernism threw away, as a worthless by-product of the past and a symbol of its oppressive rituals, the aesthetic discipline embodied in the classical tradition. It had no use for that kind of discipline, and no patience towards the few brave critics who defended it as the only discipline that counts.

Postmodernism is a reaction to modernist censoriousness. It 'plays' with the classical and gothic details which were forbidden it by its stern parent, and so empties them of their last vestiges of meaning. This is not the rediscovery of history, but its dissolution. Modernism had the decency to stand condemned by
history. Postmodernism wishes to stand condemned by nothing, and also to condemn nothing. The details with which it plays are not the ornaments it takes them for: their significance is that of an order which lies crystallised within them, and to use them in defiance of that order is to undo the work of centuries. Such a practice marks a new departure of the nihilistic spirit which is foreshadowed in modernism, and which there takes the belligerent form of a doctrine. Instead of the unbending rectitude of modernism, we are given the self-service lifestyles of the moral playground. But the effect of this transgression is no less destructive than the paternal interdiction which inspired it. We are now even further from the discipline-in-freedom that we need.

Where, then, should we look? In what laws or principles should the aesthetic choice be grounded, and how can those laws and principles be justified
to the person who does not share them? I have argued in favour of certain traditional principles of design. However, the practice of good architecture depends upon the presence of a motive, and that motive is not given by the philosophy which recommends it. It comes to us through culture - in other words, through a habit of discourse, submission and agreement which is more easily lost than won, and which is not detachable, in the last analysis, from piety. If Ruskin is to be esteemed above all other critics of architecture it is not for his judgements (many of which were wrong, and all of which were eccentric), but for his elaboration of that truth. It is partly the failure to read Ruskin which explains the widespread conviction that the materials, the forms and the work of the builder can be understood by anyone, whatever the condition of his soul.

Nevertheless, all is not lost. It is possible for a civilisation to 'mark time' in the absence of the spirit which engendered it. It is by learning to 'mark time' that Western civilisation has endured so successfully since the Enlightenment, and reproduced that agreeable simulacrum of itself in which the life of the mind goes on. Our civilisation continues to produce forms which are acceptable to us, because it succeeded in enshrining its truth in education. An astonishing effort took place in nineteenth-century Europe and America to transcribe the values of our culture into a secular body of knowledge, and to hand on that knowledge from generation to generation without the benefit of the pulpit or the pilgrimage.

Nowhere was this process more successful than in the field of architecture. All the busy treatises of the Beaux-Arts, of the Gothic, Greek and Classical revivalists, of the critics and disciplinarians of the syncretic styles, had one over-riding and urgent concern: to ensure that a precious body of knowledge is not lost, that meaning is handed down and perpetuated by generations who have been severed from the inner impulse of a justifying faith. And, looking at the

Figure 1.4
Buildings in the market square, Richmond, Yorkshire.
Photo: Andrew Ballantyne.
nineteenth-century architecture of Europe and America, who can doubt the success of their endeavour?

The most important change initiated by the modern movement was to wage unconditional war on this educational tradition. Certain things were no longer to be studied, not because they had been examined and found wanting, but because the knowledge contained in them was too great a rebuke to the impatient ignorance of the day. Architects were deliberately diseducated, with the result that most who have risen to fame or notoriety since the Second World War have been without the knowledge necessary to their trade. Architects now emerge from schools of ‘architecture’ unable to draw (either the human figure, on the perception of which all sense of visual order depends, or even the forms of building); they are, as a rule, ignorant of the Orders of classical architecture, with no conception of light and shade, or of the function of mouldings in articulating them, and without any idea of a building as something other than an engineering solution to a problem stated in a plan. That result is a natural consequence of the programme of ‘re-education’ instituted by Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus. We should not be surprised, therefore, if the efforts of the re-educated architect are so seldom attended with success.

I wish to record and endorse some of the principles which informed the education of the nineteenth-century architect, and which I have defended elsewhere, in the course of which they have acquired more nuances than I need here repeat. My procedure will be to lay down eleven fundamental principles, and then to throw down a challenge to those who would reject them. Finally, I shall add eleven more specific principles, whose authority is less obvious.

1. Architecture is a human gesture in a human world, and, like every human gesture it is judged in terms of its meaning.
2. The human world is governed by the principle of ‘the priority of appearance’. What is hidden from us has no meaning. (Thus a blush has a meaning, but not the flux of blood which causes it.) To know how to build, therefore, you must first understand appearances.
3. Architecture is useful only if it is not absorbed in being useful. Human purposes change from epoch to epoch, from decade to decade, from year to year. Buildings must therefore obey the law of the ‘mutability of function’. If they cannot change their use – from warehouse to garage, to church, to apartment block – then they make room for other buildings which can. The capacity of a building to survive such changes is one proof of its merit: one proof that it answers to something deeper in us than the transient function which required it. (This idea gives grounds for hope, for it implies a ‘natural selection of the beautiful’.)
4. Architecture plays a major part in creating the ‘public realm’: the place in which we associate with strangers. Its meaning and posture embody and contribute to a ‘civic experience’, and it is against the expectations created by that experience that a building must be judged. Of all architectural ensembles, therefore, it is the street that is the most important.
5. Architecture must respect the constraints which are imposed on it by human nature. Those constraints are of two kinds—the animal and the personal. As animals, we orient ourselves visually, move and live in an upright position, and are vulnerable to injury. As persons we live and fulfil ourselves through morality, law, religion, learning, commerce and politics. The reality and validity of those personal concerns can be either affirmed or denied by the architecture that surrounds us, just as our animal needs may be either fulfilled or thwarted. Buildings must respect both the animal and the personal sides of our nature. They must be 'persons suited to the public realm'. If not, they define no place for our habitation.

6. The primary need of the person is for values, and for a world in which his values are publicly recognised. The public realm must permit and endorse either a recognised public morality, or at least the common pursuit of one.

7. The aesthetic experience is not an optional addition to our mental equipment. On the contrary, it is the inevitable consequence of our interest in appearances. I see things, but I also see the meaning of things, and the meaning may saturate the experience. Hence appearance becomes the resting place of contemplation and self-discovery.

8. The aesthetics of everyday life consists in a constant process of adjustment between the appearances of objects, and the values of the people who create and observe them. Since the common pursuit of a public morality is essential to our happiness, we have an overriding reason to engage in the common pursuit of a public taste. The aesthetic understanding ought to act as a shaping hand in all our public endeavours, adapting the world to our emotions and our emotions to the world, so as to overcome what is savage, beyond us, unheimlich. We must never cease, therefore, to seek for the forms that display, as a visible meaning, the moral co-ordination of the community.

9. A beautiful object is not beautiful in relation to this or that desire. It pleases us because it reminds us of the fullness of human life, aiming beyond desire, to a state of satisfaction. It accompanies us, so to speak, on our spiritual journey, and we are united with it by the same sense of community that is implied in the moral life.

10. Taste, judgement and criticism are therefore immovable components of the aesthetic understanding. To look at the world in this way, so as to find meaning in appearance itself, is at the same time to demand public recognition for what we see. It is to stand in the forum of rational argument, demanding the acceptance and the sympathy of our kind.

11. All serious architecture must therefore give purchase to the claims of taste. It must offer a public language of form, through which people can criticise and justify their buildings, come to an agreement over the right and the wrong appearance, and so construct a public realm in the image of their social nature.

Here I shall pause to take stock. There have been many opponents of aesthetic
value in architecture – utilitarians, constructivists, marxisants, philistines. I have affirmed that the aesthetic understanding cannot in fact be eliminated from our lives. But my eleven points constitute no proof of such a view. Moreover, what I have said can be defended only by defending a whole culture, and the way of life that has grown within it. To those who despise that culture, or who have lost all sense of its validity, I can make no appeal. Yet, if they have lost the culture of their forefathers, the onus is on them to replace it, and not on me to persuade them that they are wrong. It is an onus that the critics of civilisation have never discharged. The great discourses of architecture – from Alberti, Serlio, Palladio, Ruskin – were written from a standpoint within the culture to which we are heirs. The discourses of the iconoclasts – Le Corbusier, Hannes Meyer, Gropius – express not some other culture, or some higher set of values, but a disorientation, a ‘decultivation’ which – however it may be fortified by theory – has no authority against the tradition which it strives to disestablish. The same is true of those styles of criticism which try to undermine our certainties, by calling on some ‘science’ which ‘explains’ them. The Marxist theory, which allocates taste to ideology, may undermine my self-confidence. But it is not, for all that, an argument against my tastes. Taste is necessary to the rational being, and its assessments are – like the assessments of morality – internal to itself, neither confirmed nor denied by the ‘science’ which explains them. The arguments of the structuralists, post-structuralists, deconstructionists, post-deconstructionists, post-post-structuralist-deconstructionists etc., are worthless for a similar reason. Even if true they are of no aesthetic consequence: they constitute a massive ignoratio elenchi whose charm is that they promise power over a given study without the price of understanding it. But it is a spurious power: the power of the magician, whose spell is broken just as soon as you cease to believe in it.

With that I shall move from my eleven abstract principles to the eleven derivative principles which would form the basis of a pattern book in the Kingdom of Ends.

12. The problem of architecture is a question of manners, not art. In no way does it resemble the problem which confronted Wagner in composing Tristan, or that which confronted Manet and Courbet when they endeavoured to paint the modern world as it really seems. Such artistic problems faced by people of genius demand upheavals, overthrowings, a repudiation or reworking of traditional forms. For this very reason the resulting stylistic ventures should not be taken as prescriptions by those lesser mortals whose role is simply to decorate and humanise the world. The problem of architecture is addressed to those lesser mortals – among whom we must count the majority of architects. For such people to model their actions on an idea of ‘creativity’ taken from the great triumphs of modern art is not only a supreme arrogance: it constitutes a public danger against which we should be prepared to legislate. Our problem is this: by what discipline can an architect of modest ability learn the aesthetic
decencies? The answer is to be found in aesthetic ‘constants’, whose value can be understood by whomever should choose to build.

13. The first constant is that of scale. To stand in a personal relation to a building, I must comprehend it visually, without strain, and without feeling dwarfed or terrorised by its presence. Only in special circumstances do we take pleasure in buildings of vast undifferentiated mass (like the pyramids of Egypt), or of surpassing height. The spires of a Gothic cathedral, the competing towers of Manhattan: these clusters of stone and glass in flight, which start away from us like enormous birds, are rare achievements, in one case designed, in the other arising by an invisible hand from the pursuit of commerce. They delight us by defying our normal expectations. If the cathedral does not frighten us, it is because it is an act of worship: an offering to God, and an attempt to reach up to him with incorruptible fingers of stone. But that which thrills us in Manhattan also disturbs us: the sense of man over-reaching himself, of recklessly extending his resources and his aims. And the massive weight of the pyramids strikes us with awe: time stands still in these blocks of stone, trapped in an airless coffin beneath a terrifying monolith.

Such constructions cannot serve as models for the ordinary builder, in the circumstances of daily life. His first concern must be the viewpoint of the man in the street. A building must face the passer-by, who should not be forced to look up in awe, or to cringe in humility, beset by a sense of his own littleness.

14. Buildings must therefore have façades, able to stand before us as we stand before them. It is in the façades that the aesthetic effect is concentrated. In addition to destroying old-fashioned decencies of scale, modernism also abolished the very concept of the ‘face’ in building. The modernist building has no orientation, no privileged approach, no induction into its ambit. It faces nothing, welcomes nothing, smiles and nods to no-one. Is it surprising that we are alienated?

15. It follows that the first principles of composition concern the ordering of façades. But to establish such principles we must break with the tyranny of the plan.

The ‘diseducated’ architect is not, as a rule, sent out into the world to study its appearance. He is put before a drawing board and told to plan. By the use of axonometrics he can then project his plans into three dimensions. The result is the ‘horizontal style’; the style, or lack of it, which emerges from composing in two-dimensional layers. This style has generated the major building types of modernism.

Its bad manners can be attributed to four causes, all of them resulting from the tyranny exerted by the ground-plan. First, an unnatural regularity of outline. Second, and consequently, the need for a site that will fit the plan, and therefore for a barbarous work of clearance. Third, the absence of an intelligible façade. Fourth, the denial (implicit in those foregoing qualities) of the street. Such buildings either stand behind a little clearing, refusing to align
themselves; or else they shuffle forwards and stare blankly and meaninglessly into space. They appear in our ancient towns like expressionless psychopaths, hungry for power, and careless of all the decencies that would merit it.

16. Composition requires detail, and the principles of composition depend upon the sense of detail. Here, too, matters have not been unaffected by modernist diseducation. The hostility to ‘ornament’ led to a corresponding neglect of detail, and to an emphasis on line and form as the main variables of composition. It came to seem as if architecture could be understood simply through the study of geometry; buildings were conceived as though cast in moulds out of some pliable fluid. (And, in due course, this is exactly how modernist buildings were made.)

The fact is, however, that words like ‘form’, ‘proportion’, ‘order’, and ‘harmony’ can be applied to buildings only if they have significant parts. Harmony is a harmony among parts; proportion is a relation between perceivable divisions, and so on. The form of a building is perceivable only where there are details which divide and articulate its walls.

17. The true discipline of style consists, therefore, in the disposition of details. Hence the basis of everyday construction must lie in the pattern book: the catalogue of details which can be readily conjured, so as to form intelligible unities. All serious systems of architecture have produced such books (even if they have existed in the heads and hands of builders, rather than on the printed page). They offer us detachable parts, rules of composition, and a vocabulary of form. By means of them, an architect can negotiate corners, build in confined spaces, match wall to window, and window to door, and in general ensure an effect of harmony, in all the varying circumstances imposed on him by the site and the street which borders it.

18. The art of combination relies for its effect on regularity and repetition. The useful details are the ones that can be repeated, the ones which satisfy our demand for rhythm, sameness and symmetry. To invent such details, and at the same time to endow them with character and life, is not given to every architect at every period. On the contrary, it is here that the great discoveries of architecture reside. The value of the classical tradition is crystallised in the theory of the Orders, in which beauty is transfigured into a daily discipline, and the discoveries of true artists made available to those ordinary mortals for whom work and application must take the place of genius.

19. As the Orders make clear, the true discipline of form emphasises the vertical, rather than the horizontal line. The art of design is the art of vertical accumulation, of placing one thing above another, so as to create an order which can be spread rhythmically from side to side. It is by virtue of such an order that buildings come to stand before us as we before them, and to wear the human face that pleases us.

20. To endow a façade with vertical order, it is necessary to exploit light, shade and climate, to divide the wall space, and to emphasise apertures. In other words, it is necessary to use mouldings.
The abolition of mouldings was a visual calamity, the effects of which can be clearly witnessed in the modern American city. The real ugliness came not with the skyscraper, but when the skyscraper was stripped of all those lines, shadows and curlicues which were the source of its life and gaiety. Without mouldings, no space is articulate. Edges become blades; buildings lose their crowns; and walls their direction (since movement sideways has the same visual emphasis as movement up and down). Windows and doors cease to be aedicules and become mere holes in the wall. Nothing ‘fits’, no part is framed, marked off, emphasised or softened. Everything is sheer, stark, uncompromising, cold. In a nutshell, mouldings are the sine qua non of decency, and the source of our mastery over light and shade.

21. The building of a human face in architecture depends not only on details, but also on materials. These should be pleasant to the touch, welcoming to the eye and accommodating to our movements. They should also take a patina, so that their permanence has the appearance of softening and age. The duration of a building must, like the building itself, be marked by life: it must show itself as mortality, finitude, sadness, experience and decay. Hence concrete, even if it lends itself to massive aesthetic effects like the dome of the Pantheon, is not a suitable material for the ordinary builder.

22. The discipline of such a builder consists in the ability to perceive, to draw, to compare and to criticise details; and thereafter to combine those details in regular and harmonious forms, whatever the shape of the site in which he works, and without doing violence to the surrounding order.

Those twenty-two points do not dictate a style, but only the form of a style. But of course, they are in keeping with the tradition of Western architecture as it existed until the First World War, and they are enacted in the Classical and Gothic pattern books of the nineteenth century. But it is not enough to study a pattern book. Education is needed before you can apply it, and the question remains what form that education should take. I am inclined to say that the aspiring architect should go into the world and use his eyes. He should study the great treatises of architecture and learn to see with the eyes of others. He should learn to draw the shadows that fall on a Corinthian order, cast by the lines, mouldings and ornaments of a whole vertical cross-section. Then, perhaps, he will be ready for his first project: to design a façade between two existing buildings, in such a way that nobody will be forced against his will to notice it.

But such an education requires mental effort, and spiritual humility. And whatever things are taught in schools of architecture, those two qualities are not among them.