

## Whatever Happened to Modernity

### *I. Introduction*

I want to thank the Program Committee and John Norquist for the high honor of addressing this plenary session of the Congress. I think this has happened because John has recently confronted full force a problem that has existed since the beginning of CNU. In the past it seemed like a minor distraction, but increasingly it seems like a serious impediment, partially of our own making, to the work and the mission of CNU. The success of New Urbanists, of Andres in particular, in seizing the initiative to repair the Hurricane Katrina devastation has made us the focus of a new barrage of hostility from our own professional colleagues, ranging from the seething reflexive anger of Deans Eric Owen Moss and Reed Kroloff, to a new, brilliantly nuanced and scholarly critique of New Urbanism by Michael Sorkin. It is not a small matter that so many people, so many influential people in the UK and here perceive us as a bunch of maudlin saps, aesthetic and political reactionaries whose ideas are discredited upon arrival because of the imagery in which they are clothed.

I have always argued that the Truman Show perception of New Urbanism was a malicious caricature, and that we only had to do a better job of communicating the true nature of our work and beliefs about the future of cities for everyone to accept and love us. I have come to understand that my optimism on this subject was stupid. I have a friend who says that an optimist is someone who is simply uninformed, and in this case he was right.

The set of ideas and practices we named New Urbanism have a history that long predates our movement. Our ideas about the relationship of urban land to hinterland, of the city to its transportation infrastructure, the city to its own history and the role of public space in the culture of the city came together long ago. In their earlier incarnations they were resisted and ultimately crushed by the collision of the same rigid orthodoxies - modernist and revivalist - that threaten New Urbanism today.

This talk is a stew that began to cook a few months ago with the simultaneous presentations a few blocks apart of two strange museum exhibitions. One was the Guggenheim Museum's mess of a show called *Russia!*, a weird mélange of miscellany held together only by the common thread that these were works of art that happened to be executed in Russia sometime in the last nine hundred

art that happened to be executed in Russia sometime in the last nine hundred years. The other was a beautiful and much more focused exhibition of women's fashion at the Metropolitan Museum entitled *Chanel*, curated, designed and sponsored by the current director of the House of Chanel, Karl Lagerfeld.

I was struck by the juxtaposition of these unrelated exhibitions because both dealt powerfully with the question of modernity, the relationship of modernism to a long cultural legacy that predated it. These two exhibitions brought into focus for me the most perplexing questions about CNU, about the stunning successes we have had as a movement and our equally stunning failures, about the future of CNU and about my own relationship to it.

I will come back to the beautiful clothes and the amazing life of Coco Chanel, which I truly think contain the seeds of our salvation, but let me begin with *Russia!*

If you arrange a bunch of things chronologically on the great spiral of the Guggenheim, the space itself and the procession of one thing after another creates its own narrative, whether or not those who selected the objects had any narrative in mind at all. Normally, Guggenheim exhibitions are organized so you can take the elevator to the top of the building and then view the exhibition as you walk down the ramp. I suppose because it would be just too depressing to portray the journey from prehistory to post-modernity as the descent of a downward spiral, the *Russia!* show began at the bottom and to get the chronology straight you had to walk up the six story ramp.

The story begins with magnificent medieval Russian Orthodox icons -oriental, indigenous and different from Western European art of the same time. After a couple of laps around the ramp, you get to the court of the Tsars, and a culture that is increasingly Frenchified and neo-classical. Then in the middle of the nineteenth century, starts an equally Frenchified focus on realism and the lives of peasants and common people. You see the emergence of a modern political sensibility, the stirrings of revolution and artistic movements that support it.

Then after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the turmoil of revolution churns, avante gardist modern art bursts with incredible inventiveness and energy, even eclipsing the modernist explosion in France and elsewhere: Tatlin, Malevich,

eclipsing the modernist explosion in France and elsewhere: Tatlin, Malevich, Chernikov, El Lizitsky, the whole crowd.

Then, abruptly in 1928, with Stalin's purge of Trotsky, modernism and the revolution part company and Stalin institutes the era of Socialist Realism, a new neo-classicism as political art. After Stalin's annulment of the of the brief marriage of modernist aesthetics and the socialist revolution, avante gardism was like the eight-year-old protagonist of the movie *Home Alone*, a rootless, untethered energy left alone to actualize whatever fantastic whims it could conceive. Malevitch's famous Black Square was the spiritual grandfather for generations of conceptual art. In many ways, that is where we still are today, on our tenth or twelfth sequel to *Home Alone*. Just check out this year's Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art or the last six months of *Architecture* magazine. The protagonist is an *old* little boy and for many the formula for the script grew tiresome several sequels ago.

## *II. The Modernist Canon*

In the decades since the 1920's modernity has taken many twists and turns. In America, the terms modernism, in relation to modern architecture and modern town planning has a more specific and prescribed meaning than it does in other places and other disciplines. There was something radical in the canon of modernism as it was initially applied to American architecture and town planning that modernist aesthetics in other pursuits did not share. The person most clearly identified with this radicalism was Walter Gropius, as Director of the Weimar Bauhaus and later in his role as head of Harvard's School of Architecture beginning in 1937. In the nearly seventy years that modern architecture has been taught at Harvard, variations on its curriculum became the norm at schools of architecture, and ideas hatched at Harvard became an almost universally shared and rarely questioned set of received opinions among American architects. In that seventy years there have been many people of extraordinary and diverse abilities who have taught in Harvard's GSD, and their individual accomplishments are indisputable. For the purpose of this talk, however, I want to focus not on the many fine achievements of people on the Harvard faculty, but on an influence of the school that has been pernicious. I want to make the case that the way in which modern architecture is introduced at Harvard is one important source of the debilitating style wars that now swirl around New Urbanism and threaten its mission.

Gropius' idea of education for modern architects represented a kind of revolution that shared its most basic idea with Mao Tse Tung's Cultural Revolution or the revolution of the Taliban. The idea is that young people need to be protected from the corrupting influence of knowledge. Gropius did everything he could to insulate young architects from architectural history and from the traditional mimetic and representational skills of the *Beaux Artes*. Following his lead, American architectural education became a widespread cult of unlearning.

Gropius tossed architectural history as it had traditionally been taught out of the professional curriculum, but at Harvard modernism needed some new theoretical grounding. To fill the bill, he launched his colleague Sigfried Gideon on the writing of two extraordinarily influential books, *Space, Time and Architecture* and *Mechanization Takes Command*. For my generation of architecture students, even 3000 miles from Harvard, *Space, Time and Architecture* occupied the position next to our bosoms that Mao's *Little Red Book* did for the Red Guards.

The thesis of *Space, Time and Architecture* goes something like this. The way people see and perceive things change with the times. As evidence, Gideon invokes the standard art-historical view of the relationship between Renaissance humanism and the discovery of the laws of perspective. He then claims a similar relationship among a series of modern phenomena including the theory of relativity, cubism, steel frame construction and high speed transportation. The term *space/time* is his shorthand for a modern revolution in the perception of architecture and cities, equivalent to the discovery of perspective.

In the sixty-nine years since the Gropius *anschluss* at Harvard, things have become more sophisticated without really changing. Architectural theory at the Harvard Graduate School of Design is taught by Professor Michael Hayes and his survey course is required for all first year students. The syllabi I have for this course begin with *Space, Time and Architecture*; even though it is safe to say that most architectural historians now regard it as an ingenious work of propaganda as pseudo-history. Perhaps to insulate his students from this heretical view, Professor Hayes tells his fledglings how to read Gideon by providing in the syllabus a handy "Premise for Interpreting Gideon."

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*...modern architecture plays a significant role in an ongoing cognitive revolution – that extended process of intellectual transformation whereby a society whose life habits and perceptual apparatuses were formed by other, now anachronistic, modes of production are effectively reprogrammed for life in the new industrialized world.*

If I may paraphrase Professor Hayes’ paraphrase of Gideon in other and simpler words, he is saying that, if people don’t like the mechanization and abstraction of our brand of modern architecture, don’t worry; it’s their fault. As a modern architect and an initiate into the true workings of historical process, you have an obligation not to listen to them.

In making this argument, Gideon and Gropius took a leaf from another great branch of 20<sup>th</sup> century modernist pseudo-science, Freudian psychoanalysis. Freudians constructed a system in which resistance to its claims were defined as illness. If you thought the idea that you wanted to kill your father and fornicate with your mother was nonsense, you were suffering from repression. Just lie down and open your check book and we can start to set you straight.

The infuriating smugness of these self-validating systems - psychoanalysis and the pedagogy of Gropius and Gideon - were bound over time to create merciless backlash, but more about that in a few minutes. I’m not talking about smugness as an unattractive personal habit, but smugness as a theory and a world view that enrages people like Berkeley’s great skeptic, Frederick Crews.

Right after Gideon in the syllabus, now into the second week of graduate school comes an introduction to the Frankfurt School for Social Research with special emphasis on Theodor Adorno and his *Philosophy of Modern Music*, published in its final form in 1949. If Gideon is the foundation for a system of ideas, Adorno is the keystone.

The thrust of this essay is to compare and contrast false modernity and true modernity, represented respectively by the music of Igor Stravinsky and that of Arnold Schoenberg. For Adorno, Stravinsky was the prisoner of historical sentiment, his music filled with references to folk tunes, marches and classical structure. Schoenberg, on the other hand, was the true adventurer in the

structure. Schoenberg, on the other hand, was the true adventurer in the modern spirit since his twelve tone system is a pure abstraction, an invention of the mind incapable of reference to anything outside itself.

What's more, Schoenberg's harsh dissonances are an appropriate art for the harsh, dissonant turmoil of modern life as opposed to Stravinsky's "neo-classical objectivism", a construct of what he called "premature harmonies, ignoring the persistence of social contradictions". May God spare first-year architecture students from suffering "premature harmonies".

Another great Berkeley scholar, Martin Jay has observed that most of the Marxist intellectuals of the Frankfurt School, like Karl Marx himself, were Jewish. Though they were assimilated and secular, they retained an element of Jewishness in their thinking, and they freely appropriated the Jewish doctrine of the Messiah, giving it a new name – The Revolution. Until the revolution came, society would remain in a fundamental state of disorder. The function of art is to reify or give expression to this state of disorder and thereby raise social consciousness and hasten the revolution. Therefore all worthy art must have an element of negativism or dissonance about it. Art that does not suffers from "premature harmonies". Sorry everyone, no joy allowed until after the revolution.

One of the forms of "premature harmony" that Adorno attacked most viciously was American jazz, which he pronounced "yatz", and associated with the German word "hatz", a perjorative for the baying of a bloodhound. He wrote the long vituperative essay *On Jazz* in 1933, never having heard any jazz in live performance, but continued revising it and making it even nastier after he came to this country in 1940. In jazz, he saw American Negroes as complicit in their own oppression. He dismissed the jazz of the 1950's as watered down Delius and Debussy – try telling that to Dave Brubeck or John Lewis – but he found one thing positive ( that is in Marxist terms – negative) in the lead instrument of the bebop of the 1950's - the saxophone. He observed that the saxophone is a metal horn played like a woodwind. It therefore has a kind of sexual ambiguity or *Zwischengeschechlichkeit*, and since this androgyny represents a critical challenge to the established sexual order of society, the saxophone is OK.

Newly minted graduate students in architecture at Harvard are taken in their second week on this through-the-looking-glass journey into the topsy-turvy world of Marxist aesthetic theory, where positive is negative, negative is positive and the redeeming quality of a saxophone is its androgyny. In fairness to Professor Hayes, his course goes on to present other contending points of view, and some, like those of Robert Venturi and Colin Rowe, more congenial to New Urbanism. But these later readings are a bit like comparative religion as taught at Notre Dame, unlikely to win large numbers of converts to Islam or Buddhism.

The institution has a point of view and Professor Hayes' message to fledgling architects at Harvard, and to those unfortunate enough to be elsewhere, is clear enough: populist hostility to an abstract modernism is a philistine ignorance to be ignored; references to vernacular building, the imperatives of place or classicism are inadmissible and dissonance not harmony is the order of the day. By the second week of school, the seeds of hostility to New Urbanism are well sown at Harvard.

If Michael Hayes' tune has a familiar ring to it, it is because you cannot listen to a Charlie Rose interview of a star architect without hearing echoes of it. These ideas are completely pervasive in architectural culture whether or not those who believe in them have any idea of their source. From the studiously unpretentious language of Frank Gehry to its opposite in the many big words of Peter Eisenman, what unites the purveyors of the blobs to those of the wiggles and the shards is a set of ideas that comes from Sigfried Gideon and Theodor Adorno out of Michael Hayes.

#### *V. The Oppositional Present :Neo Neo Classicism*

The Hegelian view of history that says revolutions breed counterrevolutions of equal and opposite force. If this is true, it explains why after seventy years of the Gropius curriculum in schools of architecture, an institution like the Institute for Classical Architecture should suddenly appear on the scene and flourish with such remarkable vitality.

There is no question that the ICA, many of its members and the architecture department at Notre Dame are doing something important and desperately needed after the modern academy's seventy year assault on architectural knowledge. Recovery of the knowledge that helped make the world civil for

knowledge. Recovery of the knowledge that helped make the world civil for centuries is unquestionably a good thing. But the ICA is tinted in a way – notice I said “tinted”, not “tainted” or “stained” – but tinted in a way that sets it apart, I think a long way apart, from the intentions and values of the CNU.

I receive announcements for ICA events all the time and the subject matter is usually something about a fabulous collection of Dresden porcelain or a tour of a 200 room mansion owned by Doris Duke or someone like her on a thousand acre estate in Santa Barbara or Newport somewhere similar. Last year, I found myself by fluke, at the annual Driehaus Awards dinner in Chicago, surrounded by ICA members at the event sponsored by Notre Dame.

The room, way up in a high-rise was, thanks to American building technology of the 1920's, was the largest perpendicular Gothic interior I've ever seen, next to Westminster Abbey. Twice the size of any similar room at Cambridge or Oxford. There was a sprinkling of people I knew from CNU and elsewhere, but mostly it was a big crowd of surprisingly young strangers. I later learned that the youngest of the young were actually Notre Dames architecture students attending on assignment. The young women - whatever their talents, accomplishments and politics - were absolutely radiant with a fragrant, pre-Raphaelite innocence that I thought had been expunged from the world forever by Coco Chanel and her generation twenty years before I was born. Astonishingly for an architectural gathering, there was not an unstructured black jacket in sight. Except for the conspicuously frumpy presence of the CNU Board, the hundreds of mostly young men seemed to frequent the same excellent tailor as Prince Charles. Where in the world, I wondered, do these people *shop*?

The highlight of the evening was the awarding of the Driehaus prize to the English neo-classical architect Quinlan Terry. He accepted the award and said the following:

*We must build in the manner of our forefather, in brick and lime masonry. If we do so the natural orders of architecture will re-emerge: the Doric, the Ionic and the Corinthian.*

He said this with a straight face to enthusiastic applause while standing on the 22<sup>nd</sup> floor of a high rise surrounded by the architectural treasures of Chicago



22<sup>nd</sup> floor of a high rise surrounded by the architectural treasures of Chicago loop from William Lebaron Jenny and Louis Sullivan to Frank Gehry's Pritzker Pavilion across the street, surely one of the great public spaces in America. That this skillful and intelligent architect, Quinlan Terry, neither saw nor acknowledged any of that was clearly a matter of choice. It is the same choice to resist assimilation into the larger culture for the sake of traditional values that the Hassidic Jews of Brooklyn make. It is a choice that is perfectly OK for an architect, like a musician joining an early music consort, but it is not a choice for New Urbanists. New Urbanism is engaged with the history of the city and the gears of history, like a good bicycle, have many speeds forward, but like a bicycle no reverse.

Many people of outside New Urbanism think that we are all just like Quinlan Terry, trying to ride our bicycle backwards and like him, unwilling to engage with what is around us. What *is* around us are the forces of technological change, of population pressure, of environmental degradation, of global warming, of hegemonic urban sprawl. The Driehaus Awards dinner was a gathering of a committed sub-culture, which is attractive to some young people, but I think not very many.

Where do the others go and why?

Most of them do not choose to decontextualize their own lives, in fact they regard being *with it* and plugged in to the way things are going as a high virtue. We can thank Rem Koolhaas newest book *Content* for defining the very look of *with it* and for contextualizing the work of town planners and architects in current events more vividly than any New Urbanist has done. At the same time he portrays the dark side of globalization in a more terrifying way than anything I have seen but one. That single exception was the extraordinary program on *Frontline* on the scale of what can only be called slave labor in China under the ironic name of Communism. Rem understands and actually diagrams how China's sweat shop economy has sucked the economic life out of Europe and the US and he knows the enormous social consequences.

Rem puts his dark insights about the world and his own work right on the cover of the book – *Big Brother Skyscraper, Sweat Shop Economy*. To me it is simply amazing the gleefulness with which he casts himself in the role of Prince of Darkness, according to his own vision of hell. He records for our

Prince of Darkness, according to his own vision of hell. He records for our amusement some light-hearted banter with Prada *fashionistas* about the desperate poverty of Lagos, and he sneaks in some Larry Flynt style photographs of female genitalia. Naughty, naughty, I guess is the point.

His design for the CCTV Building in Beijing is not only a dazzling symbol of oppression; it is the very instrument of oppression. CCTV's control of information is vaster and more insidious than its co-conspirator *Google*, who eradicated the existence of Tank Man from the internet as accessed from China.

Imagine a situation in which 97% of the residential fabric of New York and Chicago including the most vibrant neighborhoods were demolished in ten years and the population was forcibly relocated to sterile new suburbs through a massively corrupt system of expropriation. Imagine that occurring with the television, press and an internet police force forbidding any murmur of protest. Without any exaggeration, that is exactly the case in Shanghai and Beijing today and it is what Rem's building celebrates.

To achieve the symbolic and terrifying about-to-topple cantilever of the CCTV Building, Koolhaas enlisted ARUP Engineers. In a little essay he calls "Post-Modern Engineering", he discusses how ARUP used the computational might of their computers to analyze the indeterminate redundancies and concentrations of loads on the exposed truss-work that hold up the monstrous cantilever and derive the irregular patterns of the trusses. He wonders about what happened to the scientific rationalism that would have been revolted by the exercise and he asks wistfully, "Why don't they just say NO?"

The cadences of Winston Churchill during the fearful days of 1940 come to mind ..... *a new dark age made more protracted and sinister by the likes of perverted science.*

So, from its early days as the cultural arm of Bolshevism, avante gardism, after almost eighty years wandering in the wilderness has found steady employment as an agent of the dark side of globalization. Do not think for a minute that Rem Koolhaas CCTV is an aberrant exception in this regard.

This is social housing as celebrated by the Museum of Modern Art in 2006 in an exhibition entitled *On-Site*, celebrating what curator Terrance Reilly considers the vitality of new architecture in Spain. This is where the Spanish put their Algerians, Turks, Africans and Arabs. This is the daycare play space for the next generation of train bombers.

The social housing in *On Site* is exactly the opposite of what we New Urbanists were able to accomplish through HUD's HOPE VI program, where immigrant populations and our own poor were integrated into classic American neighborhoods. HOPE VI is where the aesthetically conservative strain of New Urbanism found a high social purpose.

But New Urbanism finds itself in a loony situation. On one hand there is a powerful modernist establishment comprised of the best universities, museums throughout the world, the professional architectural press and most newspaper and magazine critics. For them town building and architecture are history-less and a-political subjects. Reference to anything prior to the modern period is culturally inadmissible and belief in social purpose is just not hip. There are of course exceptions to this - Yale as a school and architects from Lou Kahn, to Rafael Moneo - but the exceptions are just that - exceptions to the juggernaut of modernist right-think. On the other hand, opposing the juggernaut is this now thriving revivalist movement, even within our midst, that does little to dispel the impression that it is willfully oblivious to the technical, demographic and political changes that distinguish our time from other times.

We New Urbanists have our own agenda about the city which seems barely connected to this cultural debate, but we find ourselves in the cross-fire of an intolerant modernity on one hand and a revival of classical knowledge that has so far failed to separate itself from a longing for the *riding-to-the-hounds* society that was eradicated in World War I.

I would like to focus for a few minutes on a little list of my own cultural heroes who seem to me to point the way around the cultural schism that threatens New Urbanism as a movement.

I'll begin with Coco Chanel

Let's consider a quintessential modernist object – the supremely beautiful, elegant and unchanging sixty-year-old design for the bottle of Chanel #5. At first glance this design appears to confirm Adorno's conception of the modern, its abstraction and rejection of narrative reference. Before Chanel #5, perfumes all had names like *Night in China*, *Harem Musk* or *Dark Fantasy*. The Chanel #5 bottle rejects all that in favor of an abstraction, a bit of pseudo-science implying the formulation and testing of Chanel's 1 through 4, which of course never existed, and also love of the beautiful form of the Helvetica # 5. But Chanel was not selling perfume bottles; she was selling perfume. Perfume is all about sexuality, and smell - the most animal of the senses, packaged in a bottle. It is the abstraction of the bottle that makes the sensuality of the contents all the more vivid and meaningful.

The bottle of Chanel #5 is like her clothing and like her life, a splendid contradiction and a seamless synthesis of opposites. Chanel was not only the most original, gifted and prolific designer of her generation; she was a business genius on the scale of an Andrew Carnegie. She started in a foundling home, absolutely penniless and she built an industrial empire, all of her own conception, the first and probably history's most powerful woman CEO. But she never concealed or was in the least embarrassed by the fact that she began her career as a demimondaine whose rich lovers competed for her sexual favors with gobs of money to back her first ventures.

Karl Lagerfeld says "Chanel was a mystery and a paradox. Reality is bearable only if it is made up of such things."

In her cosmos it was inconceivable that femininity and feminism could be considered different ideas. She wanted to dress a woman so that she could enter a room on equal terms with the general, the bishop and the head of state, as confident and reassured by her dress as they. Her version of femininity was simultaneously egalitarian and aristocratic, simultaneously athletic and erotic.

She dressed a woman to go to the opening of the Paris Opera in a way that you knew she was capable of climbing a tree. She believed in physical ease as the predicated condition for elegance.

She referred to classical antiquity in clothing made of industrial mass produced fabrics like jersey, and she absolutely mastered the traditional crafts of the

fabrics like jersey, and she absolutely mastered the traditional crafts of the milliner and the tailor. The October 1926 Vogue called her classic “little black dress” the “Chanel Ford, the frock that all the world will wear.”

Chanel’s two main ideas - her conception of women and her idea of the relationship of abstraction to life are completely congruent with those of a friend of and collaborator of hers, George Balanchine, the second and perhaps the biggest figure on my list. It is not overstating the case to say that Balanchine’s choreography united a classical tradition and modernism with more originality, more force and more enduring success than any other artist in any discipline. In this regard, his work, his contribution and his life story are one and the same. If one tries to draw some lessons from the synthesis he brought about, it is worth knowing how Balanchine became Balanchine, because his story is as rich with contradictions as Chanel’s.

His career began at the age of ten when he was accepted into the Imperial Ballet School in St Petersburg, a part of the court of Tsar Nicholas II. In the Frenchified court of the Tsars, classical ballet which evolved from fencing exercises in the court of Louis XIV, was preserved and perfected. Balanchine was raised at court, often appearing in the fabled Maryinsky Theater with its greatest stars.

After the tumult of WWI and the Revolution, he found himself, age 21, undernourished and unemployed in Paris. Then fatefully, the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s greatest genius at recognizing genius, Serge Diaghelev, invited him to audition. Diaghelev audaciously made this superbly trained classical dancer and the most supremely elegant of all 21-year-olds the Ballet Master of his world famous Ballet Russe. His first assignment was to collaborate with Igor Stravinsky and Henri Matisse, no less, on reworking of the ballet, *Le Chant de Rossignol*. Matisse did the sets, the costumes and the make-up and arranged red and white chrysanthemums in the hair of the principal ballerina, Alicia Markarova. Coco Chanel hosted the cast party after the opening and Stravinsky played the piano at the party.

The other Ballet Russe artists that young Balanchine was thrown in with included Picasso, Prokoviev, Tchelichev, Jean Cocteau, Kurt Weil, Lotte Lenya - an unbelievable list. He went from the court of the Tsar to Diaghelev’s court of modernism at its absolute pinnacle of excellence.

Diaghilev's court of modernism at its absolute pinnacle of excellence.

Michael Hayes begins the education of architects with Adorno's sour diatribe against Stravinsky, and it is revealing that Stravinsky found his natural collaborator, George Balanchine, in the most sensual of the arts – ballet. Just like the bottle of Chanel # 5, the most characteristic and famous of the Stravinsky/Balanchine ballets strip away all narrative reference: no story telling and no sets, costumes that refer only to the dancer's bodies. There is nothing on the stage but the life force of the music and the geometries he makes of the dancers themselves. And Balanchine's dancers were better schooled in classical dance, more disciplined than any dance company had been before. Balanchine's grand abstractions demanded more from the *corps de ballet* than had ever been asked of it before - more athleticism, more musicality, more speed. When his vision exceeded what even his own superbly trained *corps* could do, he would arrange his soloists in formation and use them like a chess master attacking with his bishops. Balanchine was a modernist who extended the tradition of classicism he inherited. He was also a modernist who was not a slave to modernity. He carried the whole history of ballet in his head and did all kinds of things with it. – narrative story ballets, huge spectacle ballets, Broadway musical comedy which he revolutionized, movies.

Over their long careers, Stravinsky and Balanchine managed a trick that architects and town planners should be able to do and one that is strictly forbidden in the dictat of Harvard aesthetic theory. They were able to engage popular culture in its own terms, excel within it, and never compromise their own standards. The joy they had while doing it is captured in this publicity photograph for the ballet *Card Game*. They were having too much fun to remember to face their cards in the right direction.

When things got slow in 1941, Balanchine even took a job with Ringling Bros choreographing elephants. He asked Stravinsky to collaborate with him, and Stravinsky had only one question, "Would the elephants be young?" Balanchine assured him that they would be young and beautiful and the collaboration proceeded.

I thought the third of my heroes would be Wynton Marsalis. I love all the music he plays and the way he shifts from Hayden to Jelly Role Morton to John Coltrane with the same authority and fluency as Balanchine. His Jazz at

John Coltrane with the same authority and fluency as Balanchine. His Jazz at Lincoln Center is surely one of America's great cultural institutions, thank you to Jonathan Rose if you are here.

I called my very learned jazz musician and composer friend Pat Gleeson to ask him what he thought this. He said, "No, no, no not Wynton. He's a very good musician, he's a really good composer, he's a great teacher, but he is absolutely not the Balanchine of jazz. Duke Ellington is the Balanchine of jazz. Wynton is a giant, but he is a conservative and divisive force in American music. For him Ornette Coleman doesn't exist, Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock are apostates and Rock and Roll and Hip Hop are worthless junk. He is to jazz what that friend of yours in Florida is to New Urbanism. Let me write you some notes about Duke Ellington."

I didn't quite agree with all this, but I understood his point.

The next day I received a brilliant e-mailed text in praise of Duke Ellington - much too long, too dense and too technical to paraphrase here. It included references to rhythmic structures and chromatics, to Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky, to Blues, W.C. Handy, Ethyl Waters, European royalty, to a gut-bucket novelty tune called Ducky Whackey, to movie scores, Harlem drug addicts, Scriabin and Milhaud, to low-life, high-life and everything in between. Pat convinced me that Duke Ellington should be my hero number three.

These three people were such complete masters of their disciplines that they could draw upon its entire history as situations demanded. None was ever prevented from doing anything that interested them by an ideology or an aesthetic canon that made some things off limits. I think it is interesting to compare famous photographs of Adorno, Schoenberg and Gropius to comparably famous photographs of each of these three. I think I know which crowd I would choose to hang with.

#### *IV. Proto-Modernism*

A question to ask then, is were there ever people in the world of urbanism and architecture who were as cosmopolitan, as eclectic, as simultaneously modern and as embracing of history as Chanel, Balanchine and Ellington?

The fact is that modernity as a driving force in architecture and town planning predates Harvard modernism by half a century at least. During that long span of time there were classically trained architects in many places fascinated by implications of new technologies and the problems and possibilities of the new industrial city. Cities and city dwellers suffered in many ways from the 1850's through the 1920's, but one thing cities and city dwellers did not suffer from during those years was the systematic unlearning of their historic craft by architects and builders. That came later.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonies or the frontier of the American west there was an expected level of architectural literacy in ordinary building. However brutal the treatment of indigenous peoples by European colonists or American settlers may have been, they treated their own kind with remarkable civility, even in the remotest corners of the globe. This is San Francisco fifteen years into its history. Compare a 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial garrison town in India to today's vast, utterly grim settlements of American suburbia that Haliburton has built for US forces in Iraq. Inside each air-conditioned prefab - frozen pizza, 37 flavors of ice cream and video games, with a precast concrete bomb guard outside— American culture and the American city in its perfect, idealized type-form.

There is a long list of architects during this proto-modern period who were cosmopolitan eclectics in a way that seems appropriate as role models for New Urbanists. Of this list, the one who for me stands out as the most gifted and the most interesting is Otto Wagner, architect to Franz Joseph, the last Hapsburg emperor. He perhaps more than any other represented the contribution that architecture should make to urbanism and as teacher what architectural training should consist of, so that generations of architects can contribute to urbanism as the conditions of the city change.

Wagner was a schooled classicist who consciously placed himself in competition with Michelangelo, Palladio and Bernini, without copying them directly. But he considered it his mission as an architect and as a teacher to move from classicism to a modern *Nutzstil*, a classically based negation of revivalism that was directed at appropriate expression of the programs and building methods of the times. He was fascinated both by the spatial order of the traditional city and the new infrastructure of the industrial city.



Otto Wagner, architect to the emperor, died of starvation and influenza in 1818, seven weeks before the armistice. The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire brought about a completely new political and economic situation in Vienna, and it was Wagner's pupils, the *Wagnerschuler* who had exactly the right skills to adapt and to build magnificently in the new Marxist/Leninist Viennese Social Democracy that emerged in the ruins. Eva Blau's splendid book *The Architecture of Red Vienna* tells this amazing story.

After the war, the new socialist government which controlled only the historic city center and not its surrounding countryside, had an urgent need to house a dispossessed urban proletariat. And they had to be housed quickly and economically in the midst of the remaining glories of the baroque imperial city - but in a way that celebrated their status as the backbone of the new economy and the new political regime.

Who better than the *Wagnerschuler* to bring about this synthesis of new circumstance and the historic city? To this day, the social housing of Red Vienna is one of the glories of the world and it represents a synthesis, never equaled of classical architectural principles, urbanism and the modern spirit.

The architecture of Red Vienna put in a brief appearance in the United States. The 1920's garden apartment movement in New York, reached its apogee in a series of social housing projects in the Bronx, sponsored by garment workers unions for their members. The planning, programming and decorative language of these enduringly beautiful buildings are straight out of Red Vienna and even today, they are some of the most livable dwellings in the City. Abruptly, however, the garden apartment movement came to an end as another form of euro-modernism seized the stage in the early 1930's, and we all know the rest of that story.

Simultaneously the Architecture of Red Vienna itself came to an even more abrupt and symbolic end in 1934 with the routing of the socialist administration and the shelling of the most famous icon of Red Vienna, Karl Marx Hof, by rightwing militias called the *Heimwehr*.

It is significant that that the *Wagnerschule* ethos was eradicated by the same cultural forces that New Urbanism is battling today. In Europe it was wiped

cultural forces that New Urbanism is battling today. In Europe it was wiped out by the switch of neo-classicism from left in Russia to right in Germany and Austria and by the adoption of conservative vernacular in the form of *heimatstil* by the political right. In America the cultural wipe-out was at the hands of hegemonic modernism, emanating first from the new Museum of Modern Art and slightly later from Harvard.

What I have tried to show, is that at the same time this cultural wipe-out was occurring with respect to architecture and the city, the very same attitude that the *Wagnerschuler* embodied was flourishing in other art forms and is still flourishing to this day. That attitude consists of a fascination with what is new in the moment one is living through and simultaneous reverence for the historical past of ones discipline; simultaneous fidelity to the highest standards of excellence and an absence of dogma - a playful eclecticism that allows one to do many things and perform in many situations.

It is one thing to talk about the work of geniuses and another to imagine how one can take from their work something that applies to the ordinary tasks of building things. Let me conclude by trying to make this leap to show how the sublime can inform the ordinary in the version of workaday New Urbanism that my collaborators and I spend our days with.

I will very briefly show three current invited competition designs. Since each of these was commissioned by a private developer competing in a public RFP, this will constitute the hook that links this talk to the theme of the conference. We have won two of these competitions with our developer clients and are nervously awaiting the outcome of the third. Each of these three commissions has been an extraordinary opportunity to engage in some of the main themes that I believe New Urbanism should be about.

First and nearest to construction is the David Brower Center in Berkeley, named for the founding father of modern environmentalism, occupying a site where the ragged edge of the historic downtown meets the UC Campus.

The spectacularly complicated mixed-use program consists of a narrow floor plate, LEED Platinum (we hope) office building for environmental non-profits, an environmental conference center, 96 units of low income family housing, a restaurant, a Patagonia store, and a City parking garage for downtown

restaurant, a Patagonia store, and a City parking garage for downtown merchants.

The architecture combines a contextual piece of urban repair with something like green expressionism, if you will excuse such a horrible term for architecture that makes a big aesthetic deal out of the ways in which it is green.

The Brower Center wall sections south and north, with each piece performing a task related to daylight, thermal performance, the generation of electricity or structure. On the south, the cornice functions as a sunshade and as a rack for photo-voltaic panels. On the north where there is no need for a sunshade the cornice flips over, so the PV's still face south.

The elevations, south, east and north.

The main public face of the Brower building with its iconic flipping cornice.

Second, the competition for which we are still awaiting the outcome for a building that will become the centerpiece of Mayor Gavin Newsome's program to build permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless. The site is part of the repair San Francisco's now demolished Central Freeway Corridor. We were consultants to the SF Planning Department on the urban design for the repair of the freeway corridor, which included Alan Jacobs and Elizabeth MacDonald's fine Octavia Boulevard design, now completed. Our competition site is here, right in front of San Francisco's magnificent City Hall.

This also is a mixed-use program of social services in the form of medical and psychiatric care, nutrition and exercise programs and employment opportunities for residents in the form of workshops and a bakery café.

The café and other uses create active streetscapes.

The expression of the building grows from its green agenda which the City is completely committed to. Recessed and shaded bays on the west, light-catching protruding bays on the north, a trellised exercise deck and sunshades we call "solar flags" to mark the corner and frame the classic axial view of City Hall, and photovoltaic panels that serve as exuberant column capitals.

Third, is our winning competition entry for restoration of the historic center of the town of Santa Rosa in Sonoma County. This is the centerpiece of the Sonoma/Marin rail initiative, a sprawl fighting strategy that environmentalists in both counties with the help of Peter Calthorpe have been working to achieve for thirty years.

This is a dense mixed-use plan for 250 housing units and 60,000 sq ft of retail including a market hall for the Sonoma County Food and Wine Center. It is an extension of the historic grid, 4<sup>th</sup> Street which already has a thriving restaurant district and 5<sup>th</sup> Street which is ripe for revitalization. The plan creates two new public spaces, Railroad Promenade along the tracks and Railroad Plaza, the heart of the scheme. The Plaza contains (we hope) a historic water tower, as part of our water recycling system, and a termination of the 4<sup>th</sup> Street axis.

The daylight and passively cooled market hall opens to the plaza. The water tower is atop an open air light well through which pedestrians pass from the retail parking. These sections show the range of sustainable building strategies and their impact on the architecture.

Here is the ground plan with its array of uses.

The Charter for the New Urbanism and LEED-ND may get you to this plan, but then comes the terrifying moment when an urbanist or environmentalist has to become an architect. You look at the buildings that constitute this historic district, and you wonder what to do. You see these nice solid stone buildings with cheery red awnings at the center of the district and some beautifully detailed brick buildings all around them. Building codes, seismic considerations, cost, the availability of material and craftsmen all tell you that you cannot replicate the historic structures, even if you want to.

At this point you must leave the solid ground of dogma, principles and positivistic method and soar like my three heroes on the gossamer wings of skill, taste and the imagination or crash into the ground. At this breathless moment- soar or crash - the movie reintroduces its subplot, and while the fragile airship is struggling for flight, Quinlan Terry is locked in a death grip with an alligator – historic architecture versus normative construction technique. We've all seen the version of the movie in which the airship

technique. We've all seen the version of the movie in which the airship crumbles and the alligator wins – stone becomes Driv-it, thick becomes thin, wood becomes Hardy-Plank and a mortise and tenion joint becomes a Simpson Strong-Tie. The audience erupts in cat-calls: FAKE, KITSCH, DISNEY!

There is a universe of bad answers to the questions of how one should be an architect. One bad answer comes from modernist dogma that says *time* should always trump *place*. Another bad answer comes from revivalists who can't cope with the realities of time. New Urbanism is in jeopardy from both its enemies and its friends.

But here is our version of architecture for Railroad Square We have designed brick buildings with concrete bases, in the center grey brick with red sunshades and awnings like the grey stone historic buildings and red brick buildings around the edges, like the district is now. Details and proportions refer to the historic buildings, but don't try to replicate them and all the money goes to making things simple, solid and thick. We are braced for the hideous perils of "value engineering" (awful phrase) which will determine whether this time the airship flies and the alligator dies.

The subject of New Urbanism is place-making. It is about place-making in a complicated world in which many forces are unleashed to rob places of their distinctiveness. The infinite nuances of place demand from a maker of place suppleness, mastery of craft and adaptability that was systematically eliminated from architectural training by the modernist hegemony. It also demands alertness to what is going on in the world and ability to cope with its ruthless pressures. For New Urbanism to succeed and endure as Balanchine's influence has so brilliantly, it must embrace architectural literacy, but it cannot be an architectural style. To be a maker of place, one must climb trees and dress for the Opera, play the music of King Frederick the Great and King Oliver with equal fluency and be able to enjoy choreographing elephants. Otto Wagner did all those things just fine. We're trying our best.

