



**JERUSALEM SEMINAR IN ARCHITECTURE
THE PUBLIC BUILDING : FORM AND INFLUENCE
NOVEMBER 1992**

1. Thank you. Good evening.
2. My task is to introduce our two speakers this evening. Before I do so, I'd like, if I may, to say a few words about this meeting that has brought us together in Jerusalem.
3. Firstly. As has been said, it would not have been possible had it not been for the Yad Hanadiv's deep commitment to education. This seminar -- and I hope it is the first of many more -- is, above all, an occasion for the sharing of ideas, for teaching and learning about an important aspect of our cultural life -- the way we give physical shape to our public experience. The international community of architects needs such occasions.
4. We should also thank all of you in the audience for coming to share this event. The response to this seminar has been truly extraordinary. I am told that we could have had over 2000 attendees had we had the space. I'm not sure we would have had this enthusiasm in many American cities. You show us again how remarkable your community's commitment is to the world of ideas. I have always loved Amos Elon's description of Jerusalem as a "metropolis of the mind." Your presence here confirms the accuracy of Amos' phrase.
5. I must thank also the ten architects who travelled to be here this week. They are a very distinguished group indeed. As you will see from the program book, between them they have gathered most of the honors architects can. Their contribution to education may not be quite as evident: yet, half of them are or were heads of some of the world's most important schools of architecture.
6. Only one person who we invited, could not come. The British architect, Jim Stirling, had made a previous commitment to be in California at this time. Very sadly, Jim died in the early summer this year. It is fitting that we acknowledge him tonight. He used the lovely paradox, "monumentally informal," to describe his Staatsgalerei in Stuttgart, a great public building which has so amplified the public life of that German city.
7. I'd like now to say a few words about the theme of this seminar. From these thoughts may emerge some topics for discussion over the next 3 days.

There are probably 3 ways in which we can address our seminar theme: the public building:

- a. We can consider public buildings as individual pieces of architecture and discuss them somewhat autonomously, or
- b. We can regard them as pieces of an extended web, which is made up of other public buildings, streets, plazas, monuments, and gardens, which we might call the spatial public domain, or
- c. We can enlarge our discussions even further. We might, for instance, include other, more private, parts of the built city within the spatial public domain. Or we may wish to consider the public domain not only as a spatial system, but include in it notions about politics or public life in general.

Any of these ways is legitimate, and I am sure our speakers will choose one or more of these to establish their ideas. In the end the most interesting parts of the discussion may well be the claims each will make for a particular way of seeing the public building.

I'd like to say a few words about the structure of the seminar. A seminar, I am told, is a discussion among equals. Such a discussion requires an orientation, a context, a theme. Our speakers have a difficult task: They have to present their work, and they have to show their work within a context; in this case, the context is the public building. We will follow their evening representations the next morning with discussions: in this way we hope to create the lively continuity and spontaneity of a good conversation among friends after a good meal.

8. Defining exactly what a public building is, is both fascinating and frustrating. If you use categories such as ownership, use, control and meaning to test the publicness of a building, you find a complex and subtle variety of patterns, as we will see from some of the following examples.

1. Those buildings which come to mind as being most public, are buildings which house important public institutions, like Parliament buildings, or High courts of law, or Great museums. These buildings symbolize our common allegiance to these institutions, even if our belief is only very tacit. Cedric Price's "Pop-up parliaments" notwithstanding, we expect such buildings, in their siting, form and imagery, to connect us to a larger and more enduring order than we expect of other buildings. Here issues of monumentality, not necessarily of size, but of presence, permanence and memory, come powerfully into play. You will be intrigued, I am sure, on Tuesday morning, to hear Stanford Anderson's analysis of Louis Kahn's search for the fundamentals of institutions.

2. But public architecture also includes the many schools, hospitals and libraries that daily perform essential public functions. We endow such buildings with much less awe than we do those of the great institutions. Sometimes such buildings are even privately owned and operated for profit - yet in some sense we still regard them as public buildings.

3. If we do not expect monumentality from our schools and hospitals, we expect even less from a third class of public architecture, that which we these days call infrastructure. Infrastructure includes not only roads, bridges and railway lines, but power stations, toll booths, control towers; perhaps even army camps. In Boston, where I live, arguably the most extensive piece of public architecture now being built, is a depressed freeway through the center of the city at a cost of some 3 billion dollars. It is interesting to note, in the United States at the moment, how the state of physical infrastructure is seen as attached to a decline in our national economy. "To build a 21st Century economy", Bill Clinton has said, "America must revive a 19th Century habit," -- namely, building infrastructure.

4. As citizens we own power stations, control towers and army camps. Yet we do not expect to have access to them. We would probably not feel particularly public, even if we did enter them. We feel much more public - in the sense of being connected to other people - in good restaurants and department stores. In such places, we share with others a congenial space and a common activity, no matter how mundane. In High courts of law, on the other hand, we share a common identity primarily through the weight of the institution and its architecture.

9. Department stores and restaurants are privately owned and controlled, yet at times such private institutions perform important social tasks which cannot be done in public.

A good example is the coffee house, an institution which grew up in cities like London and Paris during the late 17th and early 18th century. Coffee houses became centers for the passing on of information. You paid to enter these privately owned establishments and were obliged to sit at tables with whomever else was there, no matter how different your social rank might have been from that of your table mates. Outside, on the public street, such social interaction could not take place. On the street, social status separated you from others, if by nothing else, by the clothes you wore. From such a coffee house - one given to talk about ships and navigation - arose the world's largest insurance company, Lloyds, whose new headquarters one of tonight's speakers, Sir Richard Rogers, has recently built.

Two hundred years later, the saloons of Chicago and Boston, again private establishments, helped America's immigrants mix. And today, in the shebeens of South African townships -- shebeens are private houses where people gather to drink illegally -- political activity is nurtured which would be too dangerous in the more public, state-owned, native beer halls. In South Africa, under apartheid, private stores were never segregated, while public park benches were.

Today one suspects much less mixing in the commercial shopping malls, glass atria and historically preserved markets of American cities. As the grain of these cities has grown coarser, so have these places become more specialized and localized.

10. A few words about the public and private domains. In the private domain, our obligations are primarily to ourselves and our families. On our own territory, we have rights. No one may park their car on our land without our permission. In the public domain, on the other hand, our obligations include obligations to others. Here we have privileges, not rights. We may park in public parking places, but if they are all taken, we may not demand someone leave on our behalf.

Reflecting on the disjointed, often unsafe, unattractive and segregated public domain of our cities, we often long for truly public meeting places. At such times, we either become nostalgic for the plazas of possibly idealized classical cities, where involved citizens would meet to take part in active political life, or our ambitions might be more modest: simply wishing for beautiful public spaces where people might gather, not as active political beings, but simply to be comfortably gregarious.

11. The relative absence of such public space has often - at least, in the United States - been laid at the feet of electronic substitutes for face-to-face communication. Two Californians, both highly regarded urbanists, indicate how differently face-to-face (or what one might call body-in-the-same-space) communication is valued. Christopher Alexander has argued that, to remain whole, everyone needs a minimum dose of daily contact. To promote community therefore, he designed a plan for maximizing such contact -- a residential sub-division in which each person's transparent living room would have to face onto the street and connect directly to the public domain. Melvin Webber, on the other hand, has argued that what distinguishes us from earlier times is our ability to communicate over larger distances, to live further apart and at lower densities, and yet to maintain our sense of community. ("Community without propinquity").

In this regard, it was fascinating to watch our recent American ritual, the electing of a president. Both Clinton and Bush spent a great deal of time in public crowds, shaking hands and kissing babies. I don't know whether the number of words spoken publicly is a good measure of the American public domain or of democracy, but it is estimated that

Clinton spoke some 40,000 words a day and over the year of the campaign, all the candidates used up some 47 million words. Like rock singers, Clinton and Gore, leaned over from their podiums into the space of the crowd, using the body language of engaged youth. Ross Perot, in very striking contrast, refused to place his body within the physical and public space of others. Instead, television relayed his messages from the privacy of his office to the privacy of his viewer's living rooms. Correctly perhaps, his private-to-private messages, were financed from his private fortune to the tune of 40 million dollars over a six-week period. Did Clinton, whose campaign was largely financed publicly, have an obligation to repay his tax-paying contributors by public immersion?

12. Let us return from the public/private arena of the U.S. elections, to our seminar theme, the public building.

We are interested, above all, this week in how contemporary architects design public buildings. We will want to see what, if any, distinctions they believe should be made between public and private buildings. We will hope to learn from the presentations and discussions how today's architects regard matters such as context, tradition or identity, be it regional or national or local identity. Is national identity, for instance, only relevant in the major buildings of developing countries such as in Papua New Guinea or Nigeria? And to what extent has the design of public buildings - for that matter all buildings - been affected by contemporary security and surveillance requirements?

What kinds of imagery are appropriate for the contemporary public building?

On the flight to Jerusalem, I read a small piece in the International Herald Tribune on the subject of sneakers. Apparently a certain Mr. Tinker Hatfield, the creative director of Nike, had designed the famous Air Jordan sneaker inspired by the "flame graphics on the noses of World War 2 bombers". Mr. Hatfield likens the design of Air Jordan to climbing the steps of the New York Public Library, that "Beaux Arts Citadel". As Mr. Hatfield explains, "You understand it's a civic building because they have designed romantic imagery into it. That's what we do with shoes." The newspaper concludes by adding: "Actually, Gothic imagery might be more appropriate: think of swooping shoe-straps as latter-day flying buttresses."

Black and red zigzags on the sidewalls of a High Court, anyone? Or should it be just tennis, anyone? Perhaps Charles Correa will help us understand the relative deep structures of sneakers and High Courts.

Another question we might wish to address: How well do architects perform when communities involve themselves in the architects' designing? Do architects believe their work to be diminished? Or conversely, is their work empowered? We might hear from Moshe Safdie's work in Vancouver in this regard.

And a final thought. Certain buildings are drawn into the public consciousness, whether they are public or not. Archetypally private buildings, like office skyscrapers, for instance, can be taken over by the public mind in a form of psychological ownership. In Boston, Harry Cobb's John Hancock Office Tower has, I think, reached a point where it seems to belong to the city. It is part of the city's life, much as the Boston Celtics, a commercial sports team, is. Is it the building's clear identity, or is it its intrinsic architectural quality that makes it become part of the city's patrimony, when an inferior new state office building, or even an older city hall in Boston, doesn't?

A footnote for Harry Cobb. You will notice in the program book a sketch of the new federal court house building in Boston, which he is now designing. I discovered the other

day that there is now a private court operating in one of Boston's office towers. Here private conflicts are settled out of the public court system, presided over by retired judges who are better paid than they were in their public court days. The parties even meet in a room that looks like a court room. My question: are we soon going to have private law court buildings, like we have private police forces.

I'm tempted to ask the other speakers rhetorical questions as well. Forgive me if I don't. Perhaps you can improvise your own.

Now Sir Richard Rogers....

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