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The Architecture of Charisma:

Successor to Modernism

Thomas L. Clark, A.I.A.

It is no accident that the precepts of Modern Architecture advanced coincidentally with the development of the assembly line. The ideal of the machine was singleminded purpose: the focus of intention. Its goal was the replacement of the accidental and the inadvertent with the intentional. In the mathematical structure of its order, and the exclusivity of its content, modern architecture was an appliance.

Linearity, causality, and visual connection became synonymous with truth. The architect's obligation was to determine the consecution of productivity and aesthetics. And, by the middle of the twentieth century, the nidus of function was completely interiorized by the design fraternity as well as by the public in general. Architecture as an extension of Man, as corporate skin, was recognized as a tool long before Marshal McLuhan identified the hammer as an environment.¹ This fusion of aesthetic intention and programmatic content was a synthetic system which inextricably joined the principles for the creation of works of art with the pragmatic necessities for constructing buildings. Modernism was topologically acceptable to the artist and educator, and practical for the client.

One of the consequences of Modernism's moral imperative for the exterior visual expression of interior project functions was *de facto*, the visual disintegration of the very environment architects professed to admire. The building was conceived

as a product, but Nature and often the urban environment or context, was excluded from the hypothesis. Whilom, what was an Aristotelian manifestation of the "natural" relationship between the flow diagram and visual unity began to disintegrate — as much from an epistemological inability to include Nature's disjunctivity as from the inherent visual limitations of its own predictability and choicelessness.

By 1981 the automobile is well advanced in its transformation into an art form; and, the microchip has become the new environment. Television is its icon. The *machines for living* have broken down, and lie rusting in the junkyards that were intended to be *the ideal city*. When function followed form down the garden path, Nature was excluded. Suburbia was the message of the medium, and Holiday Inn became the international style.

Architecture is no longer a tool. The product has been consumed. Function is obsolete. If it works; it's antiquated. Modernism is antediluvian in the age of electricity. Just as old forms reveal new meanings, and new situations invalidate time-honored explanations; men are changing, but Man remains constant. This is the inauguration of eclecticism, again. There is no unity in Content. The pattern that reveals itself with the speed of light, is Structure.

Rationally trained, visually-oriented architects are suspicious of, and often frustrated by, the disintegra-

tion of concatenation and the architecture of image. But, the new era introduces new potential with new responsibilities. The freedom to explore implies the responsibility to be principled in exploration. There may be no Truth, but there is correctness. Art is omnipresent; *tout le monde* is an artist. And, in The Global Village, everyone is an architect. The architect becomes the archeologist of the present, examining relationships and patterns for meaning.

Architecture is no longer defineable. The score replaces the definition. Potentiality is equal to Being. Architecture consists of essential elements and potential relationships. But, the elements vary, and the relationships change. Unity and meaning become indeterminate. This is the age of randomness within order. Architecture becomes pure information, and the built environment is no longer within the cycle of means and ends. It becomes personality, the extension of Man's unconscious. This is the Architecture of Charisma: the successor to Modernism.

The exclusive, unified image of the industrial era disintegrated, revealing in its place, a ruin. As the television image is to the photograph, Charismatic architecture is to Modernism. Nineteenth century Rationalism yields to the structure of Relativity, rather than the content of Relativity. The architecture of concatenation succumbs to the architecture of experience. Design, and

problem solving mature into orchestration. Order replaces Image. Charismatic Architecture is depth-centered, and experience-based.

The visually connected, image-oriented thesis transforms into a rhythmically ordered, depth-centered ensemble. This is the architecture of process, not product. Electronic technology divides image from true character, just as it reveals structure as separate from content. The result is a revised comprehension of program.

Charismatic Architecture is not involved in the heroics of self expression for its own sake. It is focused on becoming, not being. It is incomplete, but secure. Its structural paradigm is a process, not an object. Unlike Modern Architecture, which fused structure and content, and separated structure from intention, Charismatic Architecture binds structure and intention in process. Therefore, one of the tests of Charismatic Architecture is its capacity to accommodate both purpose and anomaly. It is resolute in its intentions, but flexible and adaptive in its content. It accepts the disjunctive and the unexpected without either complete enframing, or the total disintegration of order. Resolution yields to accommodation in an architecture of balance.

Modern Architecture defined Nature as context, and articulated the difference. Charismatic Architecture respects convention. It is an archi-

ecture at once familiar to the non-sighted, but often mystifying to Literate Man. Its unity of structure and context, and its respect for existing patterns, emerges at varying scales and frequencies, as the project merges with the order of the environment. Wholeness becomes apparent through experience, as the body's senses internalize the rhythms that are too visually disconnected for the eye to perceive from a single point of view. In structure, content, and intention, it is an architecture of participation.

The flexibility and humility of Charismatic Architecture accommodates transformation through time. Rather than express the singular omneity of neology, Charismatic Architecture reinforces and strengthens preexisting patterns and conventions, and transforms them only as necessary to accommodate new program and circumstances. The syncretism of the totality, emersed in its context, takes precedence over the expression of neoterism. A Charismatic updating of an existing environment will be sympathetic to existing concepts of scale, proportion, order, balance and unity; and, other important pattern relationships, as well as existing elements and devices. This definition of significance generates a less frenetic character in the urban scene than did Modernism. The spaces between buildings become as important as the massing qualities of the building themselves. The pattern is as important as the elements within it.

Charismatic Architecture has inner peace. It willingly assumes modest profiles, simple shapes and background qualities. Its awareness of its own value and special qualities is interally complete. It feels no obligation to express its individuality or demonstrate visual distinction as a totality articulated in its context as an element in a field, as an *a priori* principle.

Charismatic Architecture proceeds from the intuitive. It embraces the disjunctive, the subjective and the

surreal. This is dereistic visual composition. It substitutes choicefulness for the ratiocination of Modernism. Its values are internalized; and it recognizes that Order, and Beauty, are relative. It is an architecture that lends esteem and value to others. Its presence and strength is independent of materials or budgets.

Charismatic Architecture is disciplined. It eschews the formula solution. Its strength is in its ability to make do, to perservere. It accommodates rather than resolves the unique, the unusual, and the anomolous. Modernist conceptual enframement, and the exclusion which accompanies it, transforms into a philosophy of relativity and inclusion. Charismatic Architecture is the expression of confidence, and humility rather than ego.

It is the affirmation of the joyfulness of today rather than a search for the ideal tomorrow that will never come. It is a faith in potentiality rather than a digust with what is. It is an acceptance of incompleteness and a respect for the participation of others. It is a diminishing of the control over unity as a fair exchange for new definitions of quality that emerge from caring. It captures the best available at the moment and transforms Now into An Era.

In structure and intention, as well as design process, Charismatic Architectural epistemology is perfectly coincidental with the program for the architecture of retailing. Post Industrial society becomes the age of retail architecture as a mature art form. Charismatic retail architecture avoids the concept of the retailing environment as a *selling machine*. It is not completely efficient, nor does it strive for complete efficiency. It provides redundant visual and functional orders, and experiential opportunities. It collages the fragments of many orders; and, the eutaxy of its flow diagram is obscure, rather than articulate. It thrives on choicefulness and perceptual participation. At a minimum, choice is present in

the content of retail architecture: the shops and the variety of merchandise within them. But, the concepts of perceptual choice and participant decision-making, experience rather than speculation, are essential to the retail architectural environment itself. It must be charismatic, to survive in the economic competition of the television age.

In the age of pattern recognition, we are bored with predictability, and avoid the inevitability of the flow chart as the basis for human experience. The imperative for the architect transcends the creation of a predetermined functional heirarchy. Architectural order transforms from simple, discursive logic into complex non-discursive indeterminism. The importance of the plan diminishes as a generator of form. The relationship of plan to section and elevation reasserts its significance. Perspective, the single point of view, is no longer sufficient to explain the concept.

As linearity transforms into simultaneity, the masterplan substitutes a system for a vision. At the urban scale, the architect's role completely transforms. Urban design merges with politics, economics, and other specialist disciplines. Management becomes leadership; planning becomes orchestration and, definition becomes probability. The specialist and the generalist merge into the role of producer.

The producer of Charismatic architecture is concerned with apparent order. He is not seeking the ideal unity, but apparent and relative wholeness. The basis for aesthetic decision-making is a recognition and acknowledgement of existing values and conventions, and culturally important patterns of form, evident in the immediate context of the site, and the larger environment as a whole. Architectural form-giving, the deployment of a universally appropriate set of forms, transforms into the accommodation of circumstance. The visual systems of the project become paradoxical, incomplete, and inclusive. The producer

brings into being a collage of overlapping fragments, which relate to each other, and to their context.

Incompletion in Charismatic architecture generates Intrigue. Paradox obscures any single concept of static totality. Each participant defines his own meaning. As a producer, the architect relinquishes control over Truth, Beauty, and Unity. The user is transformed into a participant. Responsibility diminishes as objectivity increases. Charismatic Architecture is enigmatic rather than dictatorial. This is an architecture of potential. It is never accomplished. It is becoming.

Charismatic Architecture is not narcissistic because it has true humility. Its strength is inherent in its order, not its elements. It is neither independent nor dependent on its context; it is interdependent. It contributes to the completion of its environment, and the relationship is mutually beneficial.

The Architecture of Charisma transcends Post-Modernism. This is the architecture of a new age, the electronic society. Ultimately, it will accommodate new technologies, new social order, major changes in our institutions, new city forms, and new aesthetic ideals. It is consistent with new roles for architects, new definitions of clients and programs, massive changes in the construction industry, emerging economic patterns, and new life styles. It reintroduces concepts of quality, diversity, choicefulness, and richness which were economic patterns, and new life styles. It reintroduces concepts of quality, diversity, choicefulness, and richness which were discarded in the machine age. It embraces architectural motifs and concepts of balance and order from the past, but ultimately, it will yield new forms and new aesthetic orders. As a movement, it is in its infancy, and its potential lies before us.

NOTES

1. Marshal McLuhan. *Understanding Media*, 1964.