

it, on the other hand, be part of a broader reevaluation of the past, a dialectical recovery of certain values that represent a genuine move towards a post-Modern culture (Knesl, 1984)? According to Knesl, architecture represents an important catalyst for cultural change because of its ability to connect the 'life-praxis' of the world of everyday action to the realm of ideas, ideology and aesthetics. The embryo post-Modern condition, argues Knesl, is distracted, not yet fixed to a specific cultural framework and therefore open to the integration of life-praxis and ideas in a variety of ways. Among these, Knesl suggests, the emerging elements of post-Modern architecture represent, collectively, an answer to the distraction, ennui, hostility and powerlessness of contemporary urban society. Thus, for example, the revival of classicist spatial order offers 'comforting formal stability', contextualist architecture offers 'a spatial cloak of identity and predictability', and the use of metaphor and ironic reference offers a flexible, 'multisuggestive' imagery (Knesl, 1984, 16).

## Architecture as politics

Just as architecture can be seen as a product of culture, so it can be seen, in parallel, as the product of politics. What gets built is strongly conditioned by the structure and dynamics of political power in society; how and where it gets built is subject to a host of laws, codes, standards and regulations that reflect the interests of political powers and pressure groups (see, for example, Perin, 1977). Architecture can also be seen as a product of politics in a more dramatic sense. Paris provides a good example, the politics of the built environment being acted out among the legacies of some celebrated examples of the manipulation of public architecture for political purposes during the nineteenth century (Evenson, 1979; Harvey, 1979; 1985). In Gaullist Paris, forced modernization took the form of forced Modernism, reaching a climax with the *urbanisme* of the *grands ensembles* of Sarcelles, Pompidou's Musée Beaubourg, and the proposal to develop Les Halles as the hub of a new regional Metro, dominated by a world trade centre. In the new political and socio-economic climate of the mid-1970s, Giscard d'Estaing was able to dramatize his commitment to the new politics of environmental concern by cancelling the Les Halles project and replacing it with a green space to be designed by the contextualist Ricardo Bofill. Before this could materialize, however, Jacques Chirac had seized upon *l'affaire des Halles* to score

points in the mayoral elections; he, in turn, cancelled the half-built green space and replaced it with a pastiche of commercial and residential developments in the style of an amusement park. Meanwhile, the burden of defining and monumentalizing Mitterand's socialism in the capital has fallen to the new 'popular opera', to be built, symbolically, at the Place de la Bastille (Trilling, 1985).

At a more general level, Knesl (1984) argues that architecture has an important *potential* role to play in the politics of advanced capitalism. The emergence of factionalized, grass-roots social movements, he suggests, calls for an architectural syntax to foster 'innovative forms of life-praxis' that would, in turn, foster self-determination and 'help to keep larger-scale political organs responsive to local situations' (p.11). This seems a dangerously close parallel to the idealistic and determinist philosophy of the Modernists; perhaps it is no coincidence that Knesl's only example draws on the work of Van Eyck, whose work is more functionalist than anything else (Prak, 1984). Nevertheless, as Gutman (1985) points out, the transition to an advanced capitalist society will inevitably affect architecture as politics at the level of public policy 'because there are so many issues of cultural, social and economic policy in advanced industrial societies that impinge on architectural ideas and practice' (p. 86). Gutman cites issues such as whether there should be increased funding for landmark preservation programmes; what government policy should be with respect to allocating funds between 'high culture' and 'popular culture' projects; and the design requirements of the increasing numbers of marginal and atypical households.

## Architecture as zeitgeist

The general idea of the built environment as a product of the *zeitgeist*, or spirit of the age, has a long history in urban studies. Lewis Mumford's fundamental argument was that:

*in the state of building at any period one may discover, in legible script, the complicated processes and changes that are taking place within civilization itself (1938, 403).*

Ruth Glass (1968, 48) described the city in terms of 'a mirror . . . of history, class structure and culture'; while Ray Pahl's Weberian approach was set in the context of a built environment that emerges as