

this inability to compose very large building facades, has led to the ultimate formalism of buildings becoming wildly expressive sculpture, gesticulating at the space which they stir and agitate rather than anchor and articulate. The MOMA Deconstructivist show and the 'Grand Buildings' competition were good examples of the genre. Exciting as this may be, is it architecture? Most architecture, after all—even the greatest—has consisted of mainly rectilinear spaces within simple rectilinear volumes crowned by prisms of roof—and the occasional hemisphere. The difference between good and bad architecture in large degree was publicly judged by the composition of the facade.

In its dual role, the facade imparts character to the rooms within as well as to the spaces without. Inside, it does this by admitting and modulating light and by editing and framing views out. Windows and doorways not only permit inhabitants to look and leave, but also to display themselves appropriately framed. The facade, then, is a mediating element, shaping the character of spaces inside and out and serving almost as an active joint between them. It often does this most effectively through itself being an ordered collection of smaller intermediary places. Within, these places may be window seats, deep-revealed windows or bay windows that are also expressed externally. Without, they include porticos, balconies, the aedicules that frame each window as a separate and special inhabitable place, and the columns or pilasters that frame space, if only millimetres thick, against the wall.

The articulation of these external elements, and their size and relationship to each other, largely determine the character of a facade and how effectively it commands the space it confronts. For a facade to anchor fluid space and contribute to a sense of rooted place, it must arrest the eye and also the space that would otherwise slip by. A facade of clearly articulated places obviously has immense advantages over any taut skin. Composition is critical too: visual rhythms that hold the attention played against proportions that create repose; a commanding central focus played against end pieces that stop the composition from dissipating away.

A sense of mass and materiality are important too: tangible mass roots a building and the spaces within and around; material with grain and texture offers a visual porosity that applies a certain friction to slow the eye and space. Also critical is the expression of statics and construction to allow an empathetic appreciation of how forces resolve themselves down into the ground and, in counterpoint, how

the various elements are supported and secured in position.

Search for a contemporary language

Together, all these factors in facade composition encourage the viewer not to just notice, but in various ways to engage (to subliminally interact in the imagination) with the facade. Of course, all these expressive complexities are difficult to realise in the increasingly prevalent fiscal facade. And they are especially difficult to realise when everybody knows that behind the facade are simply vast open areas of interminably altering lightweight partitions. A pastiche traditional facade (which some may think the argument so far was advocating) will be obviously phoney. The solution can only be sought in a contemporary language, which will, probably nevertheless (like that of Le Corbusier and Aalto) allude to and play with that of history and convention.

The search for richness

A historical facade may pull the ground up into a reticulated base and meet the sky with an entablature, above which are statuary and such symbolic elements as domes and pediments. Between base and cornice, floors and rooms are arranged in strict hierarchy. Expressed is a connection between heaven and earth and associated cosmic and social hierarchies. However much we may appreciate such historic facades, we—apart from Quinlan Terry and his cronies—no longer subscribe to the belief systems and so cannot convincingly make them. This is why modern architecture, no matter how tall, no longer connects ground and sky but severs the connections with pilotis below and plant rooms above. Instead, its identical and often roomless floors reach out to the horizon at which they stare in a perfect expression of a rational, non-hierarchic democracy. With each implying a relation only to the horizon (or sun, space and greenery, rather than the complexities of heaven and earth, street and neighbours), such buildings are fundamentally anti-urban and literally deracinated, and alienating. A more deeply satisfying and sustaining architecture needs to be predicated on a richer belief system (or at least conceptual system). These are available to us, both in the humanism manifest in the best Modern architecture and now in the 'myths' of leading edges of