

CIVIC ARCHITECTURE

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Congress
for the
New
Urbanism

BIO: .

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Good morning, and thank you for this opportunity to share some thoughts, and images of our work in making civic architecture. In preparation for this morning, I have been giving thought to this question: what is Civic Architecture? *

Civic architecture is the architecture in a community that is made for and belongs to its citizens. And citizens are members of a community who have privileges in, *and responsibilities for*, that community. *

Aristotle said: "Every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always acts in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the city... which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good..." And what did Aristotle mean was the highest good? Establishing and increasing the common well being, the common wealth. * Civic architecture gives form and shape to those institutions in cities that promote and sustain the common wealth and the common well being.

And listen to other words, the words of Bill Westfall, Dean of the School of Architecture at Notre Dame: "A building is not an isolated entity and it is not an object of mere aesthetic interest. * It is part of a civil structure open to judgements which consider beauty as the symbol of morality."

We live in a time when we are encouraged by our culture to think that only something new (architecture, technology, material goods, social and political thought) has any value. We are taught as makers of physical culture that we must always reinvent and rethink in order to find the perfectly new and perfectly fit. We are told to devalue the old and value the unknown and untried because that is where the seeds of the future are sown. * We are told to innovate, to constantly remake the world in the hopes that something we do will be judged as progress, and genius.

I would have thought that from our perspective at the end of an extraordinarily nasty and brutal century, one that has seen so much that is new and supposedly innovative do so much destruction, we might begin to come to our senses. We might begin to question whether the new and innovative, and a misguided advocacy of progress through constant reinvention, can alone lead us to highest goods. Evidence tells us this has not happened. A rage for the new at the expense of more critical questions will not make a better life for us, and for our cities.

Aren't these the real questions? *

- What should be the ends to which our progress is directed?
- Can we overcome the idea that architecture is autonomous, and that judgements about it must refer solely to its intrinsic and self-referential formal qualities, exclusive of its impact on the formal order of the city?
- Can we again believe that cities and architecture are present for reasons of an increase in civility and common well being, in addition to being utilitarian entities governed by market forces?

I believe that when we first made our cities, and peopled them with architecture, there was a more widely understood sense of the purposes that cities, and architecture, should serve. This is not to say that these earlier times were untroubled by misery, greed or injustice. It is to say, however, that questions of purpose were asked, and answered, in the then more coherent and widely understandable fabric * of our cities. Civic institutions of common purpose, the church, the city hall, * the library, the great park, * the war memorial, were positioned in the city, and given their form and appearance, as most significant. Public places came next, and were made of an architecture that was related to civic structures, but were less prominent in rendition, scale and location. Finally there were the private matters of the city, homes and shops clustered to form neighborhoods, with these structures deferring in their architecture to the public realm, and the hierarchy of civic, public and private.

But over the last decades we have seen this order overcome, damaged. Private buildings are the focus of the hierarchy of our cities, and in many cities the public realm has been abandoned. And to make the repair project even more difficult, the populations of our cities have atomized over the last half-century. This has not been progress.

So how shall we define progress? In contemporary American culture, progress is seen as infinitely expanding technology, from which we can expect salvation. Progress is seen as an infinitely expanding economy, from which we can expect riches. Progress is infinite speed, infinite mobility, infinite resources, infinite cleverness and wit, infinite individuality and autonomy. The facts of our real histories, however, powerfully betray these common understandings of progress.

Progress should begin with an acknowledgment of limits, the limits of resources and time and place that are real, limits that we continually try to ignore. Any revised definition of progress should offer real hope and real optimism about our best future. True progress is not about quantity: true progress is about quality. And I believe that a correct civic architecture is and must be central to achieving what progress should represent. These are some of the ideas that we have sought to explore and represent in our work.

SLIDES AND PROJECT DISCUSSION

INTRO SLIDES – THE 1909 PLAN OF CHICAGO

VILLAGE OF NORTHBROOK VILLAGE HALL – 6 SLIDES

Population change – a signal of enormous change

1960: 3,200

1990: 32,000

A community of shopping malls, office parks and dead-worm subdivisions

Our brief: build a civic icon, one that will last one hundred years

\$4,500,000

CONGRESS STREET BRIDGE AND BALBO STREET BRIDGE RESTORATION AND RECONSTRUCTION – 9 SLIDES

1957 interventions destroyed a former monumental stair, and plaza

10,000 pieces of Benedict Stone – precast 1920 concrete

Electrolier reconstruction – rebuilding the 1909 Boulevard Electrolier from scratch

The night of the dueling light meters

Tactical problems: four active railroad tracks

Balbo: demolition, reconstruction, and reopened to traffic - under 100 days

\$16,000,000

MICHIGAN AVENUE STREETScape – 6 SLIDES

6 globe Electrolier redux

Tactical problems: viaducts, vaults and parking garages

New features: accessory structures, plantings and landscape

\$8,000,000

ROOSEVELT ROAD BRIDGE – 7 SLIDES

The Dearborn Park neighbors revolt

No more Plain Vanilla Infrastructure!

Making contact with Chicago traditions in the civic realm

Teaching engineers how to make civic architecture

\$42,000,000

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