

Nine Points on Monumentality

J. L. Sert, F. Léger, S. Giedion

Oue donneriez vous ma belle Pour revoir votre man? Je donnerai Versailles, Paris et Saint Denis a es tours de Notre Dame Et le clocher de mon pays Aupres de ma blonde Ou'd fait bon, fait bon, fait bon.

From an old French song, «Aupres de ma blonde»

1. Monuments are human landmarks, which men have created as symbols for their ideals, for their aims, and for their actions. They are intended to outlive the period, which originated them, and constitute a heritage for future generations. As such, they form a link between the past and the future.

2. Monuments are the expression of man's highest cultural needs. They have to satisfy the eternal demand of the people for translation of their collective force into symbols. The most vital monuments are those which express the feeling and thinking of this collective force - the people.

3. Every bygone period which shaped a real cultural life, had the power and the capacity to create these symbols. Monuments are, therefore, only possible in periods in which a unifying consciousness and unifying culture exists. Periods, which exist for the moment, have been unable to create lasting monuments.

4. The last hundred years have witnessed the devaluation of monumentality. This does not mean that there is any lack of formal monuments or architectural examples pretending to serve this purpose: but the so-called monuments of recent date have, with rare exceptions, become empty shells. They in no way represent the spirit or the collective feeling of modern times.

5. This decline and misuse of monumentality is the principal reason why modern architects have deliberately disregarded the monument and revolted against it. Modern architecture, like modern painting and sculpture, had to start the hard way. It began by tackling the simpler problems, the more utilitarian buildings like low rent housing, schools, office buildings, hospitals, and similar structures. Today modern architects know that buildings cannot be conceived as isolated units, that they have to be incorporated into the vaster urban schemes. There are no frontiers between architecture and town planning, **just as there are no frontiers between the city and the region.** Correlation between them is necessary. Monuments should constitute the most powerful accents in these vast schemes.

6. A new step lies ahead. Post-war changes in the whole economic structure of nations may bring with them the organization of community life in the city, which has been practically neglected, up to date.

7. The people want the buildings that represent their social and community life to give more than functional fulfilment. They want their aspiration for monumentality, joy, pride, and excitement to be satisfied. The fulfillment of this demand can be accomplished with the new means of expression at hand, though it is no easy task. The following conditions are essential for it. A monument being the integration of the work of the planner, architect, painter, sculptor, and landscapist demands close collaboration between all of them. This collaboration has failed in the last hundred years. Most modern architects have not been trained for this kind of integrated work. Monumental tasks have not been entrusted to them.

As a rule, those who govern and administer a people, brilliant as they may be in their special fields, represent the average man of our period in their artistic judgements. Like this average man, they experience a split between their methods of thinking and their methods of feeling. The feeling of those who govern and administer the countries is untrained and still imbued with the pseudo-ideals of the nineteenth century. This is the reason why they are not able to recognize the creative forces of our period, which alone could build the monuments or public buildings that should be integrated into new urban centres, which can form a true expression for our epoch.

8.- Sites for monuments must be planned. This will be possible once replanning is undertaken on a large scale, which will create vast open spaces in the now decaying areas of our cities. In these open spaces, monumental architecture will find its appropriate setting which now aces not exist.

Monumental buildings will then be able to stand in space, for, like trees or plants, monumental buildings cannot be crowded in upon any odd lot in any district. Only when this space is achieved can the new urban centres come to life.

9. Modern materials and new techniques are at hand: light metal structures; curved, laminated wooden arches: panels of different textures, colours, and sizes; light elements like ceilings which can be suspended from big trusses covering practically unlimited spans.

Mobile elements can constantly vary the aspect of the buildings. These **mobile elements, changing positions and casting different shadows when acted upon by wind or machinery**, can be the source of new architectural effects.

During night hours, colour and forms can be projected on vast surfaces. Such displays could be projected upon buildings for purposes of publicity or propaganda. These buildings would have large plane surfaces planned for this purpose, surfaces which are non-existent today. Such big animated surfaces with the use of colour and movement in a new spirit would offer unexplored fields to mural painters and sculptors.

Elements of nature, such as trees, plants, and water, would complete the picture. We could group all these elements in architectural ensembles: the stones, which have always been used, the new materials, which belong to our times, and colour in all its intensity which has long been forgotten. Man-made landscapes would be correlated with nature's landscapes and all elements combined in terms of the new and vast facade, sometimes extending for many miles, which has been revealed to us by the air view. This could be contemplated not only during a rapid flight but also from a helicopter stopping in mid-air. Monumental architecture will be something more than strictly functional. It will have regained its lyrical value. In such monumental layouts, architecture and city planning could attain a new freedom and develop new creative possibilities, such as those that have begun to be felt in the last decades in the fields of painting, sculpture, music, and poetry.