

william j. r. curtis

modern  
architecture

since  
1900

PHAIDON

**modern architecture since 1900** is now well established as the standard work on twentieth-century architecture. Truly worldwide in scope, it combines a general outline of the growth of a modern tradition with a masterly analysis and interpretation of individual buildings. The author adopts an integrated approach blending practical, aesthetic and social dimensions – yet the stress is on the formal and symbolic aspects of the art. The book deals with the expression of ideas in architectural terms.

For this new edition the text has been radically revised and expanded, incorporating much new knowledge and a fresh appreciation of the range and complexity of modern architecture. Seven chapters have been added, three of them at the end in a section on recent world developments. This avoids fashionable rhetoric and places contemporary architecture in a historical and cultural perspective. There are many new illustrations in colour as well as black and white, and a wealth of plans and drawings. The bibliography and notes have been extended and brought up to date.

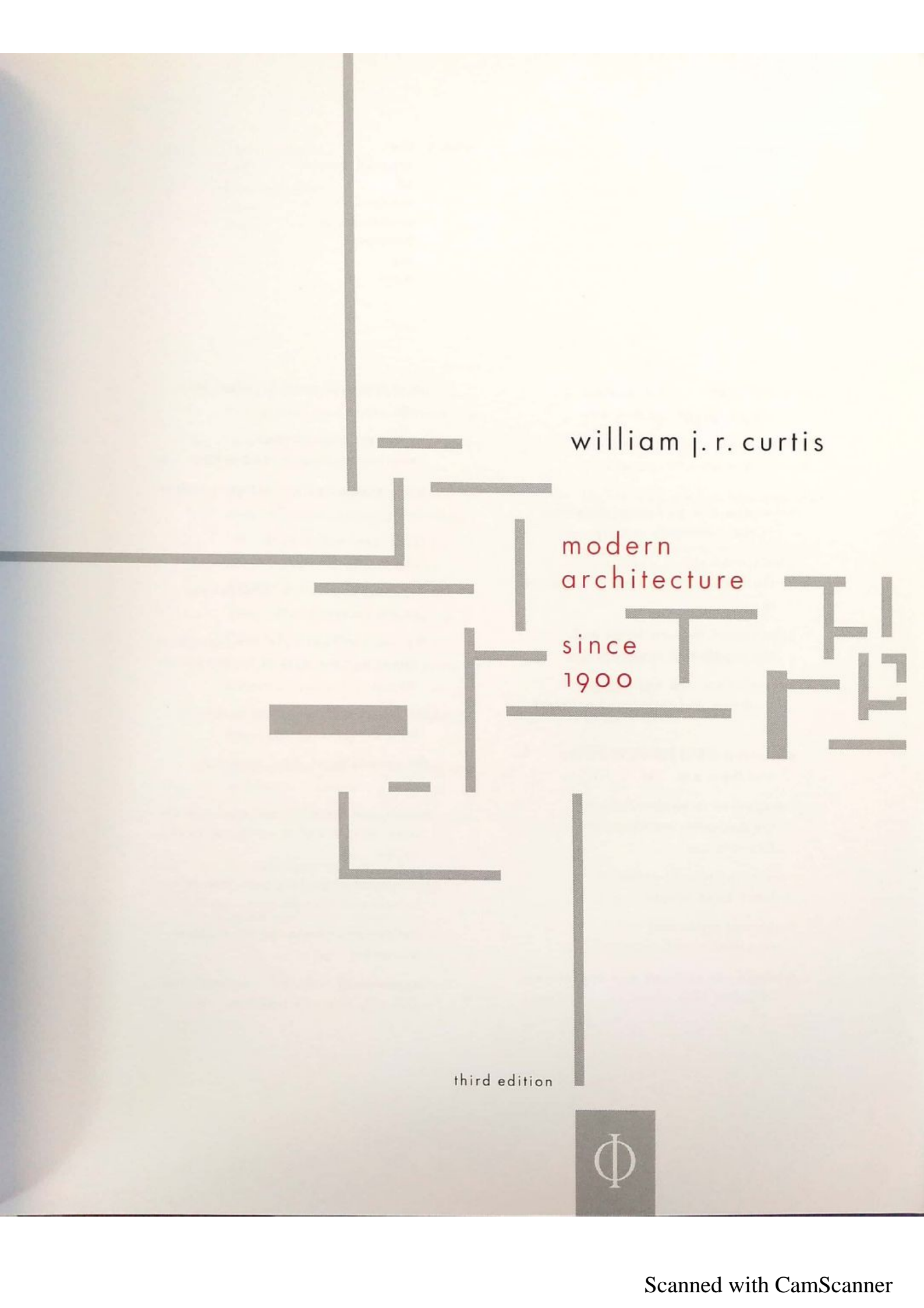
Described by architectural historian James Ackerman as 'immeasurably the finest work covering this field in existence', this book takes the long view, relating modern architecture to diverse earlier traditions, and showing how enduring principles continue to be transformed. It has deservedly been called a 'classic'.

cover illustration:

**ludwig mies van der rohe,**  
brick villa project, 1923, plan

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third edition



part 1 the  
formative  
strands  
of  
modern  
architecture

prefaces 7

introduction 11

- 1 the idea of a modern architecture  
in the nineteenth century 21
- 2 industrialization and the city:  
the skyscraper as type and symbol 33
- 3 the search for new forms and  
the problem of ornament 53
- 4 rationalism, the engineering  
tradition and reinforced concrete 73
- 5 arts and crafts ideals in britain  
and the u.s.a. 87
- 6 responses to mechanization:  
the deutscher werkbund and  
futurism 99
- 7 the architectural system of  
frank lloyd wright 113
- 8 national myths and  
classical transformations 131
- 9 cubism, de stijl and new conceptions  
of space 149

part 2 the  
crystallization  
of  
modern  
architecture  
between  
the  
wars

10 le corbusier's quest for ideal form  
163

11 walter gropius, german  
expressionism and the bauhaus 183

12 architecture and revolution in russia  
201

13 skyscraper and suburb:  
the u.s.a. between the wars 217

14 the ideal community: alternatives  
to the industrial city 241

15 the international style, the individual  
talent and the myth of functionalism  
257

16 the image and idea of le corbusier's  
villa savoye at poissy 275

17 the continuity of older traditions  
287

18 nature and the machine: mies van der  
rohe, wright and le corbusier in the  
1930s 305

19 the spread of modern architecture to  
britain and scandinavia 329

20 totalitarian critiques of the modern  
movement 351

21 international, national, regional: the  
diversity of a new tradition 371

part 3 transformation  
and  
dissemination  
after  
1940

- 22 modern architecture in the u.s.a.:  
immigration and consolidation 395
- 23 form and meaning in the late works  
of le corbusier 417
- 24 the unité d'habitation at marseilles  
as a collective housing prototype  
437
- 25 alvar oalto and scandinavian  
developments 453
- 26 disjunctions and continuities in  
the europe of the 1950s 471
- 27 the process of absorption: latin  
america, australia, japan 491
- 28 on monuments and monumentality:  
louis i. kahn 513
- 29 architecture and anti-architecture  
in britain 529
- 30 extension and critique in the 1960s  
547
- 31 modernity, tradition and identity  
in the developing world 567
- 32 pluralism in the 1970s 589

part 4 continuity  
and  
change  
in the  
late  
twentieth  
century

- 33 modern architecture and memory:  
new perceptions of the past 617
- 34 the universal and the local:  
landscape, climate and culture 635
- 35 technology, abstraction and ideas  
of nature 657
- conclusion: modernity, tradition,  
authenticity 685

bibliographical note 690

notes 693

index 720

acknowledgements 735

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#### Illustrations to part-openers

pp. 18–19  
Frank Lloyd Wright, Robie House, South Woodlawn, Chicago, 1908–10, perspective drawing

pp. 160–1  
Le Corbusier, project for a house near Carthage (Maison Baizeau), 1927–9, sketch

pp. 392–3  
Louis I. Kahn, Salk Institute for Biological Sciences, La Jolla, California, 1959–65, sketch

pp. 614–15  
Frank Gehry, Schnabel House, Brentwood, California, 1990, sketch

preface  
to  
the  
first  
edition

Modern architecture was evolved less than a century ago to reconcile an idealized vision of society with the forces of the Industrial Revolution. While it made drastic breaks with the past it also allowed the basic principles of architecture to be rethought in new ways. The reverberations of this major change are only just being felt world-wide, and it may be that we are nearer the beginning of a tradition than the end of one. Even the recent reactions against modern architecture rely for the most part on their enemy for intellectual definition: as soon as forms are produced, they are seen to be extensions of the discoveries made earlier in this century. It seems a good moment to pause and to reflect on the shape of this new tradition. That is what this book sets out to do by examining the architecture of the past eighty years in detail.

I make no apologies for concentrating on buildings of high visual and intellectual quality: a tradition is formed from a sequence of such high points which hand on their discoveries to lesser followers. I have emphasized the problem of architectural language and have tried to show how a number of extraordinarily imaginative individuals expressed the deeper meanings of their times in symbolic forms. I thought it would be a good thing to strip away myths and to present the complex picture of modern architecture as simply and honestly as possible. As far as I know the views presented here do not belong to a particular 'school'. I have posed the same basic historical questions – 'what, why and how?' – that one would ask for any period.

While the book does not set out to substantiate a historical dogma or to persuade the reader that one style is better than another, it does reflect a point of view and does possess a strategy of its own. I have been concerned throughout with the ways in which ideas may be given form, and with the vital interplay between individual invention and the conventions provided by period style and tradition. At the core is a concern for authenticity within a personal vocabulary, in which form, function, structure and meaning are bound together with a certain conviction and character of inevitability. The reliance on 'movements' of the stock-in-trade survey, with its flat treatment of individual buildings and architects, has been avoided. Instead, the scale of approach has been deliberately varied

from chapter to chapter, sometimes to give a close-up, sometimes to give a long or broad view. For a tradition is never an even, linear development of uniform impulse and intensity. It blends personal expressions of depth with lazy repetitions of formula and glib flashes of fashion; it draws together the cosmopolitan and the regional over certain embedded patterns of formal thinking; it links past principles and schemata with new solutions and intentions. To grasp the complex inner structure of a tradition, then, various approaches and intellectual tools will be necessary; and since a central obsession is the power of architectural abstraction to bind together levels of meaning, I have found it essential to concentrate on a few individual buildings in depth.

This book was conceived in the late 1970s and written between early 1980 and early 1981, a time during which I travelled a good deal. The last third of the manuscript was nearly lost at the bottom of the River Hawkesbury in Australia when a canoe tilted over, and Chapter 16 was in process when the author luckily escaped annihilation in Beirut. It is an odd turn of fate that Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye should be associated in my mind with the sound of gun-fire, and that Aalto's Villa Mairea will always recall the smell of Kentish blossoms. I mention these wanderings to emphasize that the book was written well outside the poky confines of the architectural fashion houses of our time. In it I have tried to convey the character of fine building, to look for lasting qualities, to keep the long historical view. I have attempted to show what modern architecture may mean in remote parts of a rapidly changing world.

History is a communal activity in the sense that one is bound to draw on past models, and the bibliographical notes at the end of this volume are reserved for specifically scholarly acknowledgements. But there are more immediate debts. I am grateful to Mark Ritchie of Phaidon for introducing me and my ideas to a firm it was a pleasure to work with; and to all the staff at the publisher's who have been involved in steering the scheme through. James Ackerman read the penultimate draft and made some good suggestions, while Karen Harder diligently transformed my scrawl into an elegant typescript.

Finally I thank Catherine, my wife, for calmly and easily putting up with the odd states of mind that are bound to accompany the writing of a big book in a short time. I dedicate this book to her with a thought from Le Corbusier: to fix a plan is to have had ideas.

William J. R. Curtis, Boston, Massachusetts, 1981

# preface to the third edition

It is over a decade now since *Modern Architecture Since 1900* was first published. There was a second edition in 1987 but, apart from an addendum on recent world architecture, the book remained the same. The time has now come for some major additions and revisions. A book of this nature is by definition an evolving project, a working hypothesis, that must be tested, reordered and refined. The author welcomes the chance to take into account his own and other people's intervening researches and discoveries. With the third edition the aim has been to integrate new knowledge and experience in an existing structure and to accentuate themes that were left underdeveloped. The intention is to reveal more of the original soul while giving a better shape to the body.

In the period since this book was first written there have been several studies and monographs which have underlined the internal complexity of modern architecture and the richness and range of its theoretical intentions and formal sources. Major inventors such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Alvar Aalto or Louis Kahn, generated entire symbolic worlds and engaged with society on mythical as well as practical levels; they drew upon several cultures and traditions in formulating their respective versions of a modern architecture, and their contribution needs to be seen in the long term. While the polemical oversimplifications of the earlier histories have become less and less tenable, the need remains for texts charting large-scale developments. It is increasingly clear that modern architecture combines numerous strands and inflections which evade monolithic descriptions of either a stylistic or an ideological kind. The prototypes and principles defined earlier in this century continue to be transformed, inverted, cross-bred, mannered and regionalized in unexpected ways. In effect the present is heir to a diverse tradition.

When the first edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* was published, it was common to hear that 'modern architecture is dead'. But intellectual fashions come and go and substantial buildings remain: 'postmodernism' proved to be a temporary and localized phenomenon, while the string of 'isms' since then have continued in the usual way to distort history for their own purposes. Nevertheless, the ground has shifted and new questions have come to

the surface. Certain of the 'set-pieces' of earlier modern architectural literature are no longer adequate. The concept of an 'International Style', for example, tends to obscure the richness and regional diversity of modernism between the wars. Liberal assumptions about the 'democratic' nature of modern architecture require ever greater revision the more is known about Italy in the 1930s or Spain in the 1950s. A historiography based upon the cultural biases and power structures of the North Atlantic region cannot be justified when dealing with the world-wide dissemination of modern architecture in places like Latin America, the Middle East or India. Much still needs to be done on the intermingling and collision of 'universalizing' types with national and regional traditions, a basic feature of modernism (and possibly of modernization itself) from the beginning. Greater precision has to be given to the personal and period elements of style, and to the interplay between individual inventions, vernacular types and technological norms. Modernism needs to be examined in relation to a variety of world-views and social projects, but while the political context may be crucial, a distinction must be made between the outline of a task and the symbolization which leads to architectural form.

Many of these points were raised in the first edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, but the time has come to pursue them further. The simplest way of demonstrating how the third edition differs from the first is to list the main changes and additions. (A more detailed rationale is supplied in the Bibliographical Note at the end of the book on page 691.) There are seven new chapters in all, dealing with such subjects as: the industrial city and the invention of the skyscraper in the late nineteenth century (Chapter 2); national myths and classical transformations in the early twentieth (Chapter 8); the dissemination of modern architecture in several continents in the 1930s (Chapter 21); disjunctions and continuities in European architecture soon after the Second World War (Chapter 26). The final three chapters (33, 34, 35) form an entirely new Part IV on recent world architecture, organized around such general themes as the re-evaluation of the past, the response to local climates and cultures, the celebration of technology, and the re-emergence of abstraction. Rather than relying upon the usual

transient 'isms', this part of the book selects individual buildings and ideas that seem to add to an architectural culture of long-term value. Beyond the advertised fashions, the years since 1980 have yielded up an architecture of great diversity and richness, even if this has been realized against a background of growing urban disruption and mounting ecological crisis.

The creation of the third edition has been a massive undertaking for all concerned – author, publisher, editors, picture researchers and designer – and represents something like a collective act of faith. When Richard Schlagman took over Phaidon Press in 1990, he and his new architectural editor David Jenkins immediately expressed interest in the long-term future of this book. The initiative for a new edition came at the right time, as there was just about the distance necessary to allow a major revision. The project could not have been carried through without the skill and tact of the same editor who oversaw first and second editions, namely Bernard Dod. I also wish to thank the picture research department (Philippa Thomson in particular) for tracking down photographic treasures in remote parts of the world, and the designer Isambard Thomas for his patience and sensitivity in finding the right form. Last, but not least, I am grateful to my family, Catherine, Louise and Bruno, for sustaining me through a testing transition.

William J. R. Curtis, Cajarc, 1995

## introduction

We have long come to realize that art is not produced in an empty space, that no artist is independent of predecessors and models, and that he no less than the scientist and the philosopher is part of a specific tradition and works in a structured area of problems.  
*Ernst Kris, 1952*

The historian who sets out to write a history of modern architecture has necessarily to begin with a definition of his subject. Many past eras have referred to their own architectures as 'modern', so that the term on its own is scarcely discriminating. The 'modern architecture' which is the main topic of this book was an invention of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was conceived in reaction to the supposed chaos and eclecticism of the various earlier nineteenth-century revivals of historical forms. Basic to the ideal of a modern architecture was the notion that each age in the past had possessed its own authentic style, expressive of the true tenor of the epoch. According to the same outlook, a break was supposed to have occurred somewhere around the middle of the eighteenth century, when the Renaissance tradition had faltered, leaving a vacuum into which had flowed numerous 'inauthentic' adaptations and recombinations of past forms. The task, then, was to rediscover the true path of architecture, to unearth forms suited to the needs and aspirations of modern industrial societies, and to create images capable of embodying the ideals of a supposedly distinct 'modern age'.

Already around the mid-nineteenth century such theorists as César Daly, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc and Gottfried Semper were discussing the possibility of a genuine modern style, but they had little conception of its form. It was not until just before the turn of this century, with considerable stimulus from a variety of intervening structural inventions, that imaginative leaps were made in an attempt at visualizing the forms of a new architecture. This pioneer phase, which resulted in (among other things) Art Nouveau and the Chicago School, was the property of the 'advanced' industrial nations of Western Europe and the United States. Even then there was relatively little consensus concerning the appearance of a new architecture; there were, rather, broadly shared aspirations capable of visual translation in a variety of ways. 'Modern architecture', it was intimated, should be based directly on new means of construction and should be disciplined by the exigencies of function; its forms should be purged of the paraphernalia of historical reminiscence, its meanings attuned to specifically modern myths and experiences; its moralities should imply some vision of human

betterment and its elements should be capable of broad application to certain unprecedented situations arising from the impact upon human life and culture of the machine. Modern architecture, in other words, should proffer a new set of symbolic forms more directly reflecting contemporary realities than had the rag-bag of 'historical styles'.

In actuality, between about 1890 and the 1920s a number of positions emerged which claimed 'modernity' as a chief attribute, until by the latter decade it seemed as if a broad consensus had at last been achieved. At any rate, this is what some practitioners and propagandists wished their contemporaries to believe. They thus invested considerable effort in distinguishing the characteristics of the 'International Style' – that expressive language of simple, floating volumes and clear-cut geometries which seemed to be shared by such diverse architects as Le Corbusier, J. J. P. Oud, Gerrit Rietveld, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and the rest. *This* they claimed was the one true architecture for the twentieth century. Other contemporary developments were conveniently overlooked, and everything was done to plaster over differences and preserve the façade of a unified front.

But history did not stand still, and the same creative individuals who had seemed to be pushing towards a common aim went their own separate ways; in turn, seminal ideas were transformed by followers. Thus the architecture which was supposed (wrongly, it turns out) to have expunged tradition founded a tradition of its own. In the years after the Second World War, many tributaries and transformations were developed around the world. Reactions, critiques and crises – not to mention widely differing circumstances and intentions – compounded the variety. If a historian were to look back in a century's time at the period 1900–95, he would not, therefore, be overwhelmed by some single, monolithic main line of development running from the 'pioneers of modern design' (to use Nikolaus Pevsner's phrase) up to the architecture of the last quarter of the twentieth century. But he would be struck by the emergence and domination of new traditions gradually overrunning the inheritance of attitudes and vocabularies bequeathed by the nineteenth century. Moreover, this insinuation of new ideas might be

seen in global terms, working its way bit by bit into different national and regional traditions, transforming them and being transformed by them. This book takes such a long view.

Here it has to be admitted that there are particular difficulties of a sort which confront any interpreter of the recent past. The historian who sets out to write a history of modern architecture will be describing and interpreting traditions which have not yet come to an end. There is the danger that he may impose too exclusive a pattern on recent events, so making them point inevitably to whatever aspects of the architecture of his own time he happens to admire. History then degenerates into polemic. This is to be expected in the fashion-conscious literature which always seems to follow in the wake of contemporary movements, but similar faults are found to lie in the carefully pondered scholarly works which pass as the standard books on modern architecture. For all the force and clarity of their achievement, such early chroniclers as Sigfried Giedion, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Nikolaus Pevsner tended to share the progressivist fervour of their protagonists. Committed in advance to the idea of a unified 'spirit of the age', they felt they recognized its architectural expression in the works of the modern movement of the 1920s, and saw it as their job to write books of revelation, charting the unfolding world drama of the 'true architecture of the times'. (See Bibliographical Note, p. 690.) It is obvious from my earlier remarks that I do not wish to add some glowing extra chapters to such a saga; nor, let it be said, do I wish to add to the ever-growing heap of those 'revisionist' histories intent on demonstrating that modern architecture was some temporary fall from architectural grace. The historian of the present perhaps has a unique and almost unprecedented opportunity to see his subject (or, at any rate the early stages of it) with a certain dispassionate distance, and this should not be thrown away by indulgence in propaganda. Each year more buildings are created and more quarries of evidence on developments earlier in the century are unearthed, and this alone necessitates a revision of the broad picture. But history involves constant reinterpretation as well as the presentation of new facts, and even buildings, personalities and events that once seemed to have some immutable status must be rescrutinized and reconsidered. Between

the ever-growing collection of specialist monographs of quality and the broader but somewhat biased surveys, there is little that can stand scrutiny as a balanced, readable overall view of the development of modern architecture from its beginnings until the recent past. This book is an attempt at bridging the gap.

The earliest historians of modern architecture (perhaps one should call them 'mythographers') tended to isolate their subject, to oversimplify it, to highlight its uniqueness in order to show how different the new creature was from its predecessors. Parallel developments, like Art Deco, National Romanticism, or the continuation of the classical Beaux-Arts, were relegated to a sort of limbo, as if to say that a building in the 'wrong style' could not possibly be of value. This was both heinous and misleading. It seems to me that the various strands of modern architecture are best understood and evaluated by being set alongside other architectural developments parallel with them, for only then can one begin to explain what patrons and social groups used modern forms to express. Moreover, artistic quality, as always, transcends mere stylistic usage.

Another myth that the earliest writers on modern architecture tended to maintain – again to distinguish the new forms from their 'eclectic' predecessors – was the notion that these forms had emerged somehow 'untainted' by precedent. Again this married well with the progressivist bias in their history-writing, but it was scarcely a sensible way of explaining forms. In their eagerness to demonstrate their 'fresh new start', numerous architects between 1900 and 1930 certainly played down the influence of earlier architecture upon them, but this does not mean that one should take their claims at face value. Indeed, the most profound architects of the past hundred years were steeped in tradition. What they rejected was not so much history *per se*, as the facile and superficial reuse of it. The past was not, therefore, rejected, but inherited and understood in new ways. Moreover, modern architecture itself eventually created the basis for a new tradition with its own themes, forms and motifs.

Architecture is a complex art embracing form and function, symbol and social purpose, technique and belief. It would be as inadequate in this case simply to catalogue the ins and outs of style as it would be to reduce modern architecture to a piece

in a chess game of class interests and competing social ideologies. It would be as mistaken to treat technical advances in isolation as it would be to overstress the role of social changes or the importance of individual imagination. It may be that facts of biography are most appropriate (as in the case of Le Corbusier or Frank Lloyd Wright) or that analysis of structure or type is more in order (as with the American skyscraper); it may be right to work at the scale of the individual building in one case, the scale of the city in another; and while a book of this kind obviously cannot portray the entire cultural setting of twentieth-century architecture, it can avoid suggesting that buildings come about in a social vacuum by concentrating on patronage, political purpose and ideological expression in some instances.

Modern architecture has emerged against a setting of major social and technological transformations; it has registered a gradual shift from rural to urban existence in the industrializing world. It has served a multitude of interests and functions from mass housing to the glorification of capitalist institutions, from rarefied private villas to spaces of sacred meaning. It has been used both to break with the immediate past and to reinstate older continuities, both to handle the problems of the big city and to serve the aims of contemplative mysticism. In the circumstances it would be unwise to insist upon a simplistic formula governing the connection between 'ideology' and forms. Architecture is rooted in the processes and paradoxes of society, but it also transforms these into its own terminology: it works by parallel but different rules. The trick is to find the right balance between the internal logic of the discipline and the influence of cultural forces, between the social and the personal dimensions, between the unique order of the individual invention and that which is normative or typical.

Here I must confess to a certain focused interest on questions of form and meaning. Most of the buildings to be discussed in this book are outstanding works of art which therefore defy simplistic pigeon-holing. They are neither direct expressions of political beliefs, nor mere stylized containers of functions, but rich compounds of ideas and forms, which achieve symbolic resonance beyond the level of mere 'signs'. They may be

thought of as dense emblems, microcosms, combining idealized visions of society with three-dimensional interpretations of the human condition. They transcend obvious representation, working on levels that touch mind and senses through the abstract control of space, light, structure, geometry, material and movement. I believe it should be a central aim of any history of architecture to explain why certain configurations and technical solutions were felt appropriate to a particular task, and to probe into underlying meanings and intentions. That simple and misleading word 'style' masks a multitude of sins, and when one investigates an artist of any depth one discovers a sort of mythical content which pervades the forms. We have to do with the ways in which fantasies, ideas, even intuitions of a moral order, are translated into architectural terms.

Next there is the tricky problem of where to begin: when does a specifically 'modern architecture' appear? Enough has been said to suggest that there is no easy answer to this question. It is interesting to note the variety of starting-points of earlier histories, naturally reflecting the writers' various notions of modern architecture. Thus, Nikolaus Pevsner, who wished to stress the social and moral basis of the new architecture, began his *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (1936) with William Morris and the Arts and Crafts of the 1860s. Sigfried Giedion, who was obsessed with the spiritual fragmentation of his own time and saw modern architecture as a unifying agent, portrayed the nineteenth century, in his *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941), as a split era – on the one hand the 'decayed' forms of eclecticism, on the other those 'emergent tendencies' (many of them in engineering) which pointed to a new synthesis of form, structure and cultural probity. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, who was preoccupied with describing the visual features of the new architecture, suggested in *The International Style* (1932, co-author Philip Johnson), that modern architecture synthesized classical qualities of proportion with Gothic attitudes to structure. In his later writings, though, Hitchcock became less adventurous, preferring to avoid sweeping theories of origins in favour of a meticulous, encyclopedic cataloguing of the sequence of styles.

The emphasis of history-writing was bound to

change as the modern tradition itself grew longer and more varied. Historians after the Second World War perceived their subject in a longer perspective and constructed more complex lineages. Bruno Zevi (e.g. *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, 1950) advocated an 'organic' cultural synthesis extending the spatial principles of Frank Lloyd Wright. Colin Rowe (in celebrated articles of the late 1940s) explored classical continuities within modernism and probed the ideas behind the forms. Reyner Banham, in *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960), re-created the theoretical background to the first three decades of the twentieth century and investigated the visual conventions and symbolic meanings of the 'machine aesthetic' of the 1920s. Peter Collins's *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture* (1965) concentrated more upon theories than actual buildings, tracing several of the intellectual components of the modern movement to nineteenth-, even eighteenth-century texts. The writings of Leonardo Benevolo (e.g. *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, 1960) stemmed from an entirely different historiographical tradition, dealing with social factors and the reception of architecture by the public. For him the crucial fact was the Industrial Revolution, modernism emerging as a doomed effort at solving the problems of the expanding city. Later writers preoccupied with the crisis of industrialization such as Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co (1976) or Kenneth Frampton (1980), built upon these foundations to articulate their own versions of a pre-history but with a greater awareness of the political and ideological contradictions of modern architecture (see Bibliographical Note, p. 690).

Here I must emphasize that the stress of this book is less on the theoretical roots of modern architecture than on its emergence and ensuing development. This is quite deliberate. For one thing I wish to insist upon a distinction between inherited theories and actual architectural ideas; for another it is the later (rather than the earlier) phases of modern architecture which have been neglected. It is now nearly three-quarters of a century since such seminal works as the Villa Savoye or the Barcelona Pavilion were created; but the past 45 years are still navigable only with the aid of a few treacherous maps distorted by fashionable tags and 'isms'. A comprehensive treatment of the post-Second World

War period is still impossible, but one can at least suggest a scheme which is not simply a one-way road towards some tendency or other of the very recent past. Moreover, history does not work like a conveyor belt moving between one point and another. A tradition may be ruled by dominant forms or governing principles, but it may also contain diverse strands, regional emphases, internal loops, disjunctions and continuities. In turn each artist develops a special relationship with the past. A personal language may crystallize features of its period and society, yet draw inspiration from several sources inside and outside architecture. Buildings of any depth occupy time on several levels, transmuting traditions near and far, transforming other realities in inner and outer worlds. It is misleading to treat them merely as parts or products of movements; the more interesting the individual creation, the harder it is to locate it in a particular chronological slot.

Thus the problem of origins is handled in the first part of this book, not through some hapless search for the first truly modern building (or something of the kind), but through the more fruitful approach of tracing the way inherited strands of thought come together in various individual minds in the last few years of the nineteenth century and the first few years of the twentieth, for it was then that *forms* were invented to express, simultaneously, a revulsion against superficial revivalism, and confidence in the energies and significance of modern life. It was the era of Art Nouveau, of Horta, Gaudí and Mackintosh; of Wagner, Hoffmann and Loos; of Sullivan's and Root's Chicago skyscrapers, and Wright's early houses with their new sense of space; of Behrens's and Perret's attempts at employing new methods and materials in the service of sober ideas abstracting basic classical values. It was the era too of Cubist and Futurist experimentation in the arts. Pevsner justly described it as the 'pioneer' phase of modern design, and this seems fair enough so long as one is not tempted to write off its creations as mere 'anticipations' of what came later, and so long as one does not imagine that the path from this exploratory period to the 1920s to have been straightforward. The future 'modern masters' both rejected and extended their immediate predecessors as they steered their way through a legacy of nineteenth-century dilemmas:

how to reconcile old and new, mechanical and natural, utilitarian and ideal? In turn they grappled with the contradictions of the industrial city and with conflicts between national and international definitions of culture. Most of them were exposed to regionalist formulations or versions of classicism during their formative years, and these influences were gradually absorbed into their work through a process of abstraction.

The second part of the book concentrates upon the crystallization of modern architecture between the wars. One does not have to be an advocate of the notion of 'classic moments' in art to single out the 1920s as a remarkable period of consolidation, particularly in the Netherlands, Germany, France, the United States and the Soviet Union. In retrospect this has been called the 'heroic period' of modern architecture; during it Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn, Gerrit Rietveld, Konstantin Melnikov, Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra (to mention only a few) created buildings of such innovatory force that they dislodged the hold of previous traditions, laying down new definitions of architecture for the future. It is precisely because this decade has been endowed with epic significance that one must be wary of over-selective treatments of it. In reality several ideals and definitions of 'the modern' coexisted in the 1920s, sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting: the functionalism and 'new objectivity' of Hannes Meyer; the lofty idealism of Le Corbusier; the controlled expressionism of Erich Mendelsohn; the primitivism and nature worship of Wright. To find the right balance between period concerns, personal style and the intentions of individual works, it is necessary to probe beyond appearances to the level of spatial organization and generating ideas.

The modern movement was a revolution in social purpose as well as architectural forms. It tried to reconcile industrialism, society and nature, projecting prototypes for mass housing and ideal plans for entire cities (e.g. Wright's Broadacre City or Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse). But there were several ideological roots to these Utopian aspirations and efforts at reform, and they were in turn implicated in a wide range of political agendas. The middle part of the book analyses the problematic relationship between ideology and modern

architecture in the Soviet Union of the 1920s, as well as totalitarian reactions against modernism in the following decade. It also considers the transformation of classicism in Fascist Italy and in social democracies like Finland and Sweden, and the interweaving of nationalism, internationalism and regionalism in several parts of the Mediterranean, Asia, Latin America and Africa. The conflicts of this period constitute much more than a battle of styles: modernism challenged the status quo, articulated new social visions and suggested alternative ways of life; it played an active role in the process of modernization.

Once a tradition has been founded it is transformed as new possibilities of expression are sensed, as values change, or as new problems are encountered. Moreover, new individuals inherit the altered principles and cultural definitions implicit in the prototypes and extend these in their own directions. By the outbreak of the Second World War branches of the modern movement had been founded in places as diverse as Finland and Britain, Brazil and South Africa, Mexico and Japan. A 'second generation', including figures such as Alvar Aalto, Berthold Lubetkin, Giuseppe Terragni and Oscar Niemeyer, modified seminal ideas to fit new intentions and to deal with entirely different climates, cultures, traditions. Meanwhile the originators themselves pursued their researches, reacting to the political and economic crises of the 1930s with less dogmatic versions of machinism, and with more accommodating versions of the 'natural', the vernacular and the 'primitive'. No single tag such as the 'International Style' will do justice to the range and depth of modern architecture produced between the wars.

The third part of the book examines the global dissemination of modern architecture from the 1940s to the late 1970s. Here we come face to face with problems attached to the phenomena of transplantation (as modernism was grafted into cultures quite different from those in which it began), devaluation (as symbolic forms were gradually emptied of their original polemical content, and cheapened by commercial interests or state bureaucracies), and regeneration (as basic concepts were re-examined or rejected, and as new expressive territories were opened up). As well as the late works of the ageing 'masters' of modern

architecture, this part of the book considers the gradual modification of earlier Utopian models of urbanism; the emergence of groups seeking a less absolutist approach to planning, such as Team X; the development of new 'strains' of modernism in diverse national cultures (e.g. Spain, Australia, India, Japan); general themes such as 'regionalism' and the reading of urban context; adaptation to local climates and cultures in developing countries; building types, like the high-rise apartment block and the glass-box skyscraper; and individual designers such as Louis Kahn, Jørn Utzon, Luis Barragán, Aldo van Eyck, Carlo Scarpa, Alejandro de la Sota, José Antonio Coderch and Denys Lasdun.

In the 1960s and 1970s crises and critiques occurred both inside and outside the modern movement, suggesting a more overt reliance on the past and on lessons to be learned from the traditional city; the progressive ethos of the 'modern project' also came under attack. Theoretical writings of the period encouraged a return to historical examples, through the manipulation of signs and references, or through the abstraction and transformation of long-established urban types. By the end of the 1970s it was fashionable to suggest that the way forward lay in going back. 'Postmodernism' emerged with its arbitrary recipes and quotations, and was soon accompanied by a collection of revivalisms and mannerisms in which any period of the past was game. When the Introduction to the first edition of this book was written in 1981 it stated: 'Modern architecture is at present in another critical phase, in which many of its underlying doctrines are being questioned and rejected. It remains to be seen whether this amounts to the collapse of a tradition or another crisis preceding a new phase of consolidation.'

Despite the rhetoric about the 'end of an era', postmodernism proved to be ephemeral. In reality there was yet another reorientation in which certain core ideas of modern architecture were re-examined but in a new way. For the third edition (1996) a fourth part has been added which deals with the complex development of world architecture since around 1980. This avoids standard critical postures and largely fictional 'movements' and tries to single out buildings and tendencies of lasting value. The net is cast wide and includes the Third World as

well as the First. Examples are drawn from places as diverse as Spain and India, Finland and Australia, France and Mexico, the United States, Switzerland and Japan. It seems that there are several 'cultures of modernity' in the recent past, and that these blend together long-term patterns and agendas with contemporary problems and preoccupations. Increasingly, architectural ideas are crossing frontiers, and this part of the book is concerned with the intermingling of new and old, local and universal. It postulates the idea of a modern tradition with several strands and considers diverse ways in which ideas generated earlier in this century are being cross-fertilized and transformed in response to context and cultural memory as well as to rapidly changing social and technological conditions. The backdrop here is the exploding 'information' metropolis, a system of visible and invisible networks which is demolishing old definitions of country and city, and which is requiring a new scale of thinking somewhere between architecture, urbanism, landscape art and territorial planning.

It is through the close analysis of individual works of high intensity – their guiding ideas, their spatial structure, their societal myths, their responses to culture, technology and nature – that one may begin to sense the deeper currents of a period. If the last part of the book singles out buildings like Juan Navarro Baldeweg's Congress Hall in Salamanca, Spain (1985–92), Norman Foster's Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (1979–85), Balkrishna Doshi's studio 'Sangath' in Ahmadabad, India (1979–81), Juha Leiviskä's Myyrmäki Church, near Helsinki, Finland (1984–7), or Tadao Ando's Chikatsu-Asuka Museum, in Japan (1989–93), it is not just because they are outstanding recent achievements judged in purely architectural terms. It is also because they are among the recent buildings to draw meaning from their respective places and societies, while contributing to a global architectural culture of substance. They remind us that modernism in the late twentieth century possesses a complex identity; continuing to aspire to a certain universality, even as it reacts to different territories and traditions; stimulating radical innovation even as it reactivates its own generating principles; inspiring new visions for the future, even as it transforms the past.

Perhaps it is inevitable that, as the book draws towards the present, the author will fall into some of the pitfalls of his predecessors in championing some aspects, and chastising others of the contemporary situation. I can at least say that it has been my aim to present a balanced picture, maintain a long historical perspective, and make the basis of any judgements clear. We live in a confused architectural present which views its own past through a veil of myths and half-truths (a number of them manufactured by historians) with a mixture of romanticism, distortion and bewilderment. A freedom of choice for the future is best encouraged by a sensible, accurate and discriminating understanding of one's place in tradition. This book was written partly with the idea that a historical bridge might be built across the stream of passing intellectual fashions to a more solid philosophical ground, partly with the hope that this might encourage a return to basic principles. But such aims have been secondary: the first thing a historian ought to do is to explain what happened and why, whatever people may now think of it.

Awarded the architecture book prize from the American Institute of Architects (1997) for the third edition.

Awarded the Alice Davis Hitchcock Medallion (1984) by the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain for making 'an outstanding contribution to the study and knowledge of architectural history'.

Listed by the Comité Internationale des Critiques d'Architecture as one of the five most significant books on architectural history to be published in the years 1982-4.

'Modern Architecture since 1900 ... may very well be the best survey of any field in the history of architecture written since the prime of Nikolaus Pevsner and Sigfried Giedion.'

james ackerman

'The scope of the book is breathtaking, and so is the author's versatility in the field of twentieth-century architecture ... one is amazed by the brilliance with which he puts facts and arguments into interesting critical perspectives. Some of these chapters will set new standards in the historiography of modern architecture.'

stanislaus von moos *art journal*

'The skill with which the author moves from chapter to chapter, from topic to topic, from idea to idea, gives the entire book a coherence and unity unrivalled in textbooks on the subject.'

peter serenyi *journal of the society of architectural historians*

'Curtis's strengths - an intuitive sense of the past, the intellectual agility to trace the complex course of style and influence, the acumen to disengage idea from form.'

doug suisman *design book review*

'As close to a definitive guide of the architecture of our century as we yet have.'

hugh pearman *the sunday times*

'A classic survey that is by far the most comprehensive and intelligent of its kind.'

mike webb *la architect*

'A superb text for any course on modern architecture ... can provide the student of architecture with the means to accomplish his most arduous task: to see.'

skyline, new york

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