

# THE MEDIOCRITY CULT

by Graham D. Livesey

*...The general tendency of things throughout the world is to render mediocrity the ascendant power among mankind.*

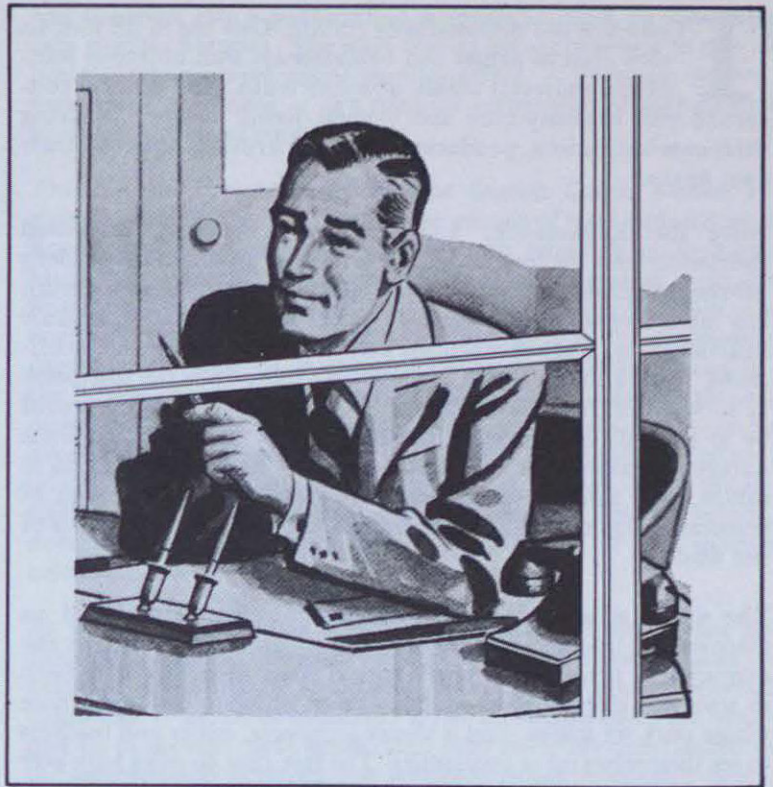
J.S. Mill  
*On Liberty*

**C**anada exists as a pedantocracy. She is a liberal/capitalist democracy of incredible diversity and potential — a country that could forge ahead of all others in the quest for a truly civilized state. Yet the governing standards are those of true mediocrity, incompetence, complacency and frightened conformity; with very few exceptions.

John Stuart Mill, the great British liberal/Utilitarian thinker from the mid-nineteenth century, predicted this fate for democracy. Yet it seemed to him that within the democratic system there lies the greatest potential for excellence and individual freedom. Mill wrote urgently for the liberty of the ordinary individual, for a system free from what he termed the 'tyranny of the masses' — rules dictated by mass society, rules that stifle individual awareness and creativity, that limit mankind's desire to learn. Mill warned that the Individual was in great danger and that freedom of speech, thought and action, as long as these did not harm others, were of absolute importance to a society wishing to progress. His own solutions to ensure that the British parliamentary system would liberate the individual, leave one very sceptical, however, the diagnosis is correct. "He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty other than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties."<sup>1</sup>

For the most part Canadians are dull conformists hampered by a crushing inferiority complex. The dictator of this regimented like-mindedness is our collective psyche, the mass media and the Almighty Greenback. Throughout our entire society the conformists widely outnumber the eccentrics who desperately want to both contribute to the collective and pursue their own lives. One must consider good architect/artists to be eccentrics, as the general trend in building, as in society, is to conform to the mediocrity cult. The Cult is comprised of those irresponsible businessmen who pose as architect/artists and whose sole concern is bucks — they take no responsibility for the horrors that they inflict upon the unsuspecting society. This is not architecture/art, this is interfering with the individual liberty of others. The Cult accepts no social responsibility in the way that a doctor might. The Cult often assumes a superior role to the rest of society, prescribing vast building projects that are even unfit for habitation by the dogs of war. The people are not to blame, for they do not care for the subtleties of esoteric architectural and artistic debate. The Cult is to blame; it must start producing buildings good enough to be understood and appreciated. The buildings themselves must educate the people. A tradition of good architecture must be established in architecture — a tradition that can seep into the psyche of Canadians. Quality is of the essence. The Cult must be de-programmed, to make way for the Architect/Artist.

The architect/artist must be seen as an equal contributor to society. The tyranny must end — too much talent is being ignored by Canadian society. One must remember that everyone is talented and that everyone can equally contribute to bettering both the lives of the citizens and the world in general. If buildings have become useless and/or esoteric, then this must end — it must be valid to the people, to the traditions, to the climate and to the infinite Canadian landscape. Architecture/Art is not just for the Architect/Artist. The true architect/artist has no credibility in society today because of the Cult — the businessmen in their three-piece



suits who rip-off society with their slick, economical, dumb non-architecture/art.

This may be a limited disease, but it is carried by the high profile of the so-called profession. The architect/artist must assume responsibility for his actions, he is the expert who can tell good from bad — society can remain only as an unconscious critic. The Cult will not be broken unless the members can break from the conformity and mediocrity of their attitudes and values: from the profession, the clients, the bureaucrats and the Money. This demands the courage to be individuals. Buildings are complex and omnipresent; they reflect to a certain extent the values and concerns of a society. Today the boxes of the Cult show who controls the entire soap opera. Why should greed, selfishness, and complacency prevail? The architect/artist only wants to gain acceptance, to shatter the power that money wields. Instead of talent and new ideas contributing to a better society, they are viewed with contempt and fear by the frightened conformists throughout the society, who direct our affairs. Moreover, within the animal kingdom we have been blessed with an unusual cranial capacity. "With us, heretical opinions do not perceptibly gain, or even lose, ground each decade or generation; they never blaze out far and wide, but continue to smoulder in the narrow circles of thinking and studious persons among whom they originate, without ever lighting up the general affairs of mankind with either a true or a deceptive light."<sup>2</sup>

There must be more to any society than money and conformity, especially within one questing for universal happiness. The people of Canada must become free as individuals, not directed in their actions by the society — this includes the Architect/Artist. The mind oppression must be fought. It is the perversion of the human species, it is the bomb, it is automation, it is everyone in the world lining up to see *Star Wars*. It is building without thought, without responsibility — searching only for bucks and for nothing else that architecture and people are.

## Notes

1. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty and Considerations on Representative Government*, New York, 1972, p.117.
2. Mill, p.93

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