PARADIGMATICS

Reprinted from the March, 1968 issue of ***Architectural Review.***

...the revolution that has taken place in the intervening years in the relation of the history of architecture to the practice of architecture. The two have separated; they are different employments—two games now, not one.

SIR JOHN SUMMERSON

(speech given at the presentation of the Royal Gold Medal, 1967)

The differentiation of the species "architectural historian" from the species "architect" undoubtedly reflects a vital development in our present concept of architecture's relationship to its own history. But this development does not explain why architectural historians have tended more and more to become fused with the genus "art historian"; a fusion so intense that the American Society of Architectural Historians, with a membership of 3,500, is virtually obliged to hold its annual meeting in conjunction with the College Art Association of America. The fusion seems to have little to do with the nature of architecture, and seems due more to philosophical developments in nineteenth-century Germany and to artificial pressures exerted by, or congenial to, academic administrations. That the two disciplines can derive mutual benefits from a close awareness of their related activities is incontestable; indeed, the concept of the "unity of the arts of drawing" is of such venerable antiquity as to constitute, in some measure, a historical justification in itself. But for those architects and architectural historians who are concerned with discovering what, if any, is the practical value of architectural history, and with the means of conveying such significance as it may have with unequivocal clarity, there are dangers in this fusion which are greater than the dangers which arose from the fusion of architecture and archaeology a century ago.

Firstly, there is the danger of arbitrarily imposing a universal and interchangeable system of classification. The idea of an interchangeable terminology has, of course, been for over a century the harmless affectation of a small coterie of critics of painting and music, whereby, for example, paintings are commended for their "tone," and music is praised for its "colour." But whereas such transpositions were originally innocuous literary contrivances, the ideal of a universal taxonomy has now become so solemnly orthodox and rigid that most of the standard textbooks on the history of music used in American universities divide the subject into "medieval," "renaissance," "baroque," "rococo," "classical," "romantic," "post-romantic" and "twentieth century," as if these classifications were demonstrably fundamental to all forms of artistic expression. Indeed, Joseph Machlin's *The Enjoyment of Music* even includes numerous illustrations of painting, sculpture and architecture, in a transparent endeavour to convince juvenile musicologists that this universal classification requires no philosophical proof. In the history of music, this classification was introduced by Curt Sachs, who studied the history of art in Berlin before switching to the history of music. But the system fits so neatly into the concept of the "unity of the arts" that other musicological classifications (such as the theory that the history of music has only three main divisions: "candlelight," "gaslight" and "electric"—a theory which has obvious important architectural implications) are seldom even considered.

The second danger exemplified by this universal art-historical taxonomy is the confusion between morphological and chronological classifications. In the musicological sequence just quoted, "post-romantic" is obviously a chronological classification, though "romantic" would seem to be morphological; and the ambiguity of mixing terms indicative of formal characteristics with terms indicative of specific eras would seem to me far more harmful than is usually supposed (if one may judge from the architectural histories published in recent years). Many architectural historians actively support this confusion, and would presumably argue that formal characteristics are inseparable from the motives which produced them, and hence inseparable from the era in which they were produced. This point of view is well expressed by Kerry Downes in his rejection of Mannerism as a classification for the work of Hawksmoor. "It is tempting," he writes on page 47 of his monograph, "to stretch an overworked stylistic term and call Hawksmoor a Mannerist, although none of the classic explanations of sixteenth-century Mannerism

would account for Mannerist Style in the England of Queen Anne. It certainly cannot be explained by reference to social history, for the 1640's and 1680's had passed without it." Yet the claim that Hawksmoor was Baroque must surely be open to similar objections if we accept Joseph Machlin's explanation of its causes—the establishment of the "absolute state," Cartesian rationalism, bourgeois ambition and the intensification of piety (a summary which corresponds fairly closely with that given by Henry Millon in *Baroque and Rococo Architecture*). Hence we are left in the uncertainty as to whether the term "Baroque" signifies the possession, in common, of a number of morphological characteristics, or whether it is simply a synonym for "1600 to 1750."

Moreover (and here we come to the third danger confronting architectural history) there are many scholars who, whilst accepting these main art-historical categories, introduce sub-categories which are in fact the very negation of that basic classification. Confronted with the difficulty of transmuting such an individualistc architect as Hawksmoor into a general category they would not hesitate to dub his work "neo-Mannerist" or even "Hawksmoresque." Indeed, it can be argued that the promiscuous proliferation of subcategories by such suffixes as "-esque," "-oid" and "-istic," or of such prefixes as "neo-," "proto-" and "crypto-," constitutes the hidden complex mechanism by which the procrustean bed of stylistic unification is made to work.

This mechanism would not be such a danger if architectural historians cold agree on a standard terminology. But there is not even any consistency among the leading authorities as to what precise distinction is implied by "Early Gothic," "High Gothic" and "Late Gothic," so there must be even less unanimity as to the meanings to be attached to mongrel expressions like "Late Baroque Classicism" or "Classicist Rococo." For some authors, terminological variations are frankly a device for providing literary piquancy, as in such adjectives as "Byzantinizing," "Byzantinoid" and "Byzantinesque": three terms which are all to be found in the same authoritative book. Nevertheless, the fact that the author of this book remarks that a certain building "is not easily pigeon-holed stylistically" suggests that stylistic pigeon-holing is a taxonomical ambition which still survives with unabated force in the most orthodox Rickmanesquoid tradition.

Defenders of multiplicity in stylistic classification argue that, whatever its disadvantages may be, these do not outweigh its usefulness; and they claim that, provided an author defines his terms, no confusion need be feared. Thus the standard textbook on Early American Architecture begins by stating: Quite arbitrarily, we shall in this book use the term "Colonial" to apply to those styles that flourished in the eastern colonies in the seventeenth century, and the word "Georgian" for the style that flourished in the eighteenth century in the English colonies of the Atlantic seaboard. The fact that the eastern provinces remained colonies of England until the Revolution may make such a distinction seem slightly illogical—as indeed it is from the standpoint of political history. The three reasons given are: *(a)* that this terminology is more forceful than a division into "Early Colonial" and "Late Colonial"; *(b)* that it avoids the use of confusing subcategories such as "Late Early Colonial"; and *(c)* that the term "Georgian," as a synonym for "1700 to 1780," is now customary usage in the United States. Yet, whatever the validity of these motives, it is evident that a student initially indoctrinated into this terminology will be completely confused when he is later told, by other historians, of the importance of the Queen Anne Revival in nineteenth-century America—especially now that a later textbook on American architecture identifies "American Queen Anne" with the period 1725 to 1750.

Finally, the greatest danger of all is that of giving undue emphasis to the identification of prototypes—a danger increased by the popularization of the erudite synonym: "paradigm." Few students of nineteenth-century architecture are now so ignorant that they cannot define a "Ledolcian Paradigm" or explain immediately why "Soufflot's Panthéon provides no such simple paradigm as Stuart's temple." The importance, for architects interested in the history of ideas, of understanding the influence of Durand's didactic technique, and knowing why the Munich Glyptothek might aptly be described as "generically Durandesque" is, I think, uncontestable. But in so far as Summerson is justified in describing both architecture and architectural history as "games," it is because the latter has become a game of "hunt the precedent," whereas the former has become a game of "hunt the unprecedented." I would claim that this antithesis is not just a play on words, but is the fundamental reason for the separation to which Summerson refers; a separation that is largely the fault of retarded developments in architectural historiography. The persistent emphasis on paradigms is obscuring what was *original* in buildings of earlier ages, and *why* earlier architects considered that their work was original; for it cannot be overemphasized that the inner compulsion towards originality has always been the mainspring of every great creative impulse in architecture, and future architects must surely be more intrigued by the manner in which buildings of the past were considered original by those who designed them, than by any real or conjectural prototypes. The criteria of originality have changed from epoch to epoch, and it is these changes which have most significance in the history of architectural ideas. If architects today occasionally display an extravagant concern with novelty for its own sake, it may well be because architectural historians are still unemancipated from a methodology devised when the principles of Revivalism constituted the basic architectural philosophy of the age.