

One of the unfortunate consequences of suggesting the theme "Technology and the Architect" for this issue of THE FIFTH COLUMN is that the mention of technology and architecture in a first breath commonly inspires references to High-Tec architecture and the notion of a contemporary technological society in the second. At once, the relationship between technology and architecture is viewed in a manner which suggests it is something new or, at least, that it has become the focus of our architecture now that our society has become so overwhelmingly technological. The unfortunate part of such a dialogue is the haste with which it accepts the basic notion that contemporary society is predominated by technology, and the error it commits in disregarding the historical dependence of architecture on technology.

If one accepts Vitruvius' notion that architecture requires "firmness" then, as Geoffrey Scott has written in The Architecture of Humanism, by this necessity architecture "stands related to science, and to the standards of science. The mechanical bondage of construction has closely circumscribed its growth. Thrust and balance, pressure and its supports, are at the roots of the language which architecture employs... On every hand the study of architecture encounters physics, statics and dynamics, suggesting, controlling, justifying its design (and without which) architecture is impossible, its history unintelligible." (Methuen, pg.2) Today, the weight of this statement is being substantially enhanced as the development of computer-aided design opens up new approaches to the consideration of architectural design.

There is much room to question the notion that contemporary society is predominated by technology, and this debate is fundamentally a sociological one. The architectural dialogue on technology seems to have wandered incautiously into this sociological realm while, unfortunately, limiting their discussions on the subject to aesthetic expression. But the issue is far more complex than that. One might well question, for example, whether Douglas Cardinal's new museum in Ottawa is a more profound investigation of the architectural/technological relationship than the more blatantly "technological" work of Foster or Rogers. It seems that a far broader consideration of technology and architecture, derived from a clear understanding of their historical relationship, wherein technology served as a means and as an indispensable compliment to Commodity and Delight, is important to the future development of architecture.

La technologie et l'architecte
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