INTRODUCTION
TO THE 2013 EDITION

This book was first published thirty-four years ago, when I was half as old as I am now, and it has remained in print ever since – proof not so much of its merits as of the lack of competition. Much has appeared since that time in the fields of philosophical aesthetics and architectural theory, but nothing to my knowledge that does what I attempted in this book, which was to explore the first principles of building and design, beginning from the philosophy of mind. The result has all the flaws of a first attempt: awkwardness of style, over-eagerness to prove what goes without saying, a vigilant attention to other people’s confusions, and a blind eye towards confusions of my own. But it presents a rigorous argument – and one that I still believe to be valid – with a certain dogged thoroughness. I have therefore left the text as it is, making only a few minor adjustments in order to remove inaccuracies and to clarify the argument.

The main inspirations for the book were two: first the desire, implanted in me as a teenager, to join the fight against what Milan Kundera has called the ‘uglification of the world’; secondly my thoughts and dreams during a short stay, over forty years ago, in a house on Rome’s Piazza del Biscione, in the shadow of S. Andrea della Valle. Thanks to this second experience I became aware that the two hundred years of study and experiment, which led from Brunelleschi in Florence to Borromini and Maderno in Rome, were without compare in the history of architecture, and that the buildings produced during that time exhibit precious knowledge that is no longer honoured in many of our schools of architecture. In writing The Aesthetics of Architecture I had in mind to explain that knowledge and to show why it is knowledge and not just opinion.

Recent philosophy of art has been more interested in works of genius than in the currents of improvisation from which they emerge. This book, by contrast, concerns the aesthetics of everyday life. Although works of architecture include great and inspiring structures, whose goal is to lift us to another plane of consciousness – works like St Peter’s Basilica, the Parthenon or the Taj Mahal – those works are exceptional and could not possibly serve as a model for the ordinary practitioner. In its central and most significant application architecture is continuous with the decorative arts of furniture, gardening, carpentry and clothing. Its most important and lasting effects arise from the desire of ordinary people to ‘get things right’, by producing arrangements and forms with which they can feel at home. I would express the point rather differently now, as the reader will see from Beauty: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford, OUP, 2009). But I stand by my main
contention, which is that aesthetic judgement is not an optional addition to ordinary practical reasoning, but the thing that completes it.

My argument is formal, and does not fight shy of the technical questions that were dominating academic philosophy at the time when I wrote: questions about meaning, reference and truth, about the nature of first-person knowledge and the structure of moral argument. But my underlying aim was to mount a philosophical defence of the classical tradition: not as the only possible repertoire of architectural forms, but as an exemplar of aesthetic knowledge. The analytical emphasis explains some lacunae in the discussion, and in subsequent work – notably in the essays collected in The Classical Vernacular (Manchester, Carcanet, 1991) – I have tried to fill these lacunae, in order to illuminate the moral and political significance of the dispute between modernism and classicism. The lacunae concern three ideas: the sacred and its place in our understanding of built forms; the city and its fate; and the deeper social, biological and cognitive significance of aesthetic values. In this introduction I will briefly review those topics.

Whether we consider the art of building in its origins or in its present condition, we should recognise the connection between building and settlement, and between settlement and consecration. In the Old Testament story of the chosen people Moses receives from God on Mount Sinai not the Ten Commandments only, but also the plan for a temple. And the building of this temple, its destruction by the Babylonians, its rebuilding, and its second and final destruction by the Romans, are the great events in a narrative in which architecture and its meaning are an important sub-plot. Settling is abiding, and we abide in the land only if we abide by the law. Architecture abides in both those ways. Buildings are places in which the two fundamental needs of human communities – law and settlement – come together. Communities take possession of the land by an act of consecration, building a place where their gods can dwell among them. Sacred architecture is therefore a paradigm, from which the lesser styles derive. The language of the temple informs the ancient city, and survives in every façade and alleyway, in every window-frame and door.

The classical temple is not an enclosure but a precinct, permeable to the city and its commerce. The god moves through it and around it with the easy confidence of a fellow citizen, while retaining the inner sanctum where he can hide in his divine apartness. The temple is both a place of sacrifice, where the sacred is recognised as a real presence among us, and a forum of congregation, where citizenship is on display. Three elements contributed to this effect: column, colonnade and steps.

The column is the first element in sacred architecture, the first proof that a community has built, by causing objects to stand as people do. The upright column is released from its imprisonment in matter, so as to stand in the world of mind. It has a posture, inseparable from its visible role as a support. It also has proportion: like a person, it can appear too fat or too
thin, too tall or too short, too delicate or too firm. It is visibly elastic, taking the weight that rests on it and passing it to the ground. It has a head and a foot, and just as the first may develop from the Doric cushion into a full Corinthian capital, so may the second grow from a plain slab to a sculpted base. Its parts are articulate, often fluted or moulded, so as to create the dialogue of light and shade without which stone is merely dead for us. (A stone column, properly treated, is not stone merely, but crystallised light.)

Thus the column approximates to the statue of the god himself: it is the minimal representation of life in sculpture, and, by virtue of its very minimalism, conveys an idea of permanence, of life removed from the world of decay and transformation – in short, of life become divine. In temple architecture, sculpture sits easily above and between the columns: for it shares its life with the architectural elements that frame and support it.

The colonnade provides the precinct of the temple – a boundary between inner and outer that is also fully permeable. The air of the city inhabits this precinct: but it is higher than the air of commerce, since the temple is mounted on a crepidoma. To every side are steps, which slowly raise the citizen to that higher plane where the god resides.

There is a graciousness in this arrangement, which everybody feels in the presence of a classical temple: a sense of the temple as utterly at home in its neighbourhood, embraced and uplifted by its law-abiding spirit. The god of the temple is not the mystery-god of some cabbalistic ritual, but the universal god of citizenship, the god of justice and law. In the Parthenon we see, in plastic form, the Athene of the Oresteia, the bringer of law, peace and compromise in place of the visceral blood-feud.

The classical Orders are extrapolated from the sacred architecture of the ancient world. Their peculiar authority comes not only from subsequent history, but also from their original use. From the concept of the temple, permeable to the city, yet sacred and removed from it, came that of the colonnade, and thence of the single column as the unit of meaning. The Roman building types – arch, aedicule, engaged column, pilaster, vault and dome – can all be seen as attempts to retain the sacred presence of the column, in the full context of civic life. In them we see the interpenetration of the sacred and the secular, and thus the sanctifying of ordinary humanity, and the humanising of the divine. That is the source of their appeal, and the reason for their durability. With the Roman building types began the true history of European architecture, which is the history of the implied Order. We see this Order preserved in doors and windows, in mouldings and cornices all across the Western world.

The classical templates affirm what is sempiternal in the midst of change, and tell us that we belong where we are, and belong as a community. They are the visible licence to dwell, and the reminder that we are members of a community not only of the living, but also of the dead and the unborn. Heidegger, not otherwise given to lucid utterance, made an important
contribution in arguing that ‘we attain to dwelling . . . only by means of building’.1 He could have put the point the other way round with equal truth: we attain to building only by means of dwelling. Building and dwelling are two parts of a single action, which is settlement.

Hence, prior to the modernist revolution, architects and builders have always used sacred shapes and details, in order to accommodate façade to façade, window to window, and doorway to doorway along a street, thereby making that street into a public space. I think it is important to remember this when we address the question of how to build today. The modern city street is composed from forms that have never had a sacred use or played a role in consecrating the land. They do not bear the imprint of those primal fears and needs from which gods are born. The new city is a city in which sheets of glass mirror each other’s emptiness across streets that die in their shadow. The facelessness of such a city is also a kind of godlessness.

We need to explore what human beings lose when the reference to sacred things is entirely expunged from their environment. Until this work is done we will not be in a position to evaluate what is happening to us, as one by one our towns and cities are surrendered to the curtain-wall vernacular. My own view (for which I have argued in The Face of God, London, Continuum, 2012) is that the result is a kind of desecration. That would, of course, be disputed by the modernists. But it could fairly be said that, since the publication of Christopher Alexander’s The Timeless Way of Building (Oxford, OUP, 1979) and Tom Wolfe’s From Bauhaus to Our House (New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1981), the modernists have been winning the commissions but losing the arguments. Vast and overbearing though the modern building types may be, they never acquire an air of permanence, but recreate the city as a frozen junkyard. Their raw functionality hurts the eye and the soul, for it speaks not of us and our right of dwelling, but of them. It is an anonymous they who built these things for inscrutable purposes that lie beyond our sympathies. In losing the reference to sacred architecture that inhabited our building types from the Greeks until the beginning of the twentieth century, we lose also our conception of the city, as a place where absent generations reside among the living, and the living too reside. The real cause of the decay of our inner cities, I believe, is the architecture that has killed them.

This leads me to the second lacuna in my discussion. I refer to buildings, but not cities; churches and houses, but not streets. Yet my own argument suggests that works of architecture cannot be understood in isolation. Buildings change their surroundings and are changed by them. Their effect depends upon the fabric in which they are embedded, and problems of design in architecture are inseparable from the problems of urbanisation. Our culture is a culture of cities, and without cities we could not conceivably have enjoyed the scientific, economic and political advances of the Enlightenment. Cities are also the social, economic and political heart of
the modern nation state, and every country that modernises does so by a mass migration from country to city. Hence, no problem is more important politically, morally, spiritually and aesthetically, than that posed by the degradation of the urban fabric.

The housing projects of the 1950s and 1960s, in which settled neighbourhoods were bulldozed and replaced by municipal housing in which nobody wanted to live, were the result of planning, as were the throughways and expressways that deprived city centres of their dignity and allure, and turned streets where people dwell into roads where people drive. Those projects had disastrous social consequences: a demoralised work-force frozen in places where work was no longer on offer, unvisited city centres, crime-ridden neighbourhoods, and the vandalising of public space. For plans have unintended consequences, which accumulate over a far longer period than the short-term benefits. The belief arose, therefore, that cities had been killed by ‘planning blight’ rather than by the modernist aesthetic.

Thus, in a celebrated book, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, which first appeared in 1961, Jane Jacobs argued that zoning leads to a disaggregation of the many functions of the city, so that people live in one part, work in another, take their leisure in a third, and shop in a fourth. Whole swathes of the city thereby become deserted for large parts of the day, and the fruitful interaction of work and leisure never occurs. Zoning contributes to the dereliction of the city when its local industries die, and ensures that the central areas are not places of renewal, but at best museums and at worst vandalised spaces for which no one can find a use. In successful cities, like Paris, New York and Rome, workshops, apartments, offices, schools, churches and theatres all stand side by side, with houses borrowing walls from whatever building has a boundary to spare.

Many writers take from Jane Jacobs the lesson that we should allow our settlements to grow as other things grow, through the ‘invisible hand’ that guides our free transactions. Hence, we should beware of planning, which assumes a knowledge that is not available to us as individuals, and available collectively only in the process and not in the plan. It seems to me, however, that the problem is not planning, but planning without a full store of aesthetic knowledge. Washington, one of the most successful urban environments in America, was planned, admittedly by a Frenchman, but nevertheless in a way that enabled the city to grow in answer to its needs while retaining the dignity of a metropolitan capital. Large areas of the great European cities were laid out by plans, and in Venice even the crenellations of the palazzi on the Grand Canal have been governed since the fifteenth century by city ordinances. The many planning disasters (documented by Peter Hall in Great Planning Disasters, London, Weidenfeld, 1980) should not blind us to the planning successes, which are aesthetic successes. The city thrives and endures when it is beautiful, and dies when it is not. The lesson of modernist urbanism is that ugliness kills, and we should plan to avoid it.
In the true city, people belong, as they belong to each other. Such a city, the Hebrew Bible tells us, starts life as a consecrated place and not as an instrument for merely human uses. Even if its population is constantly changing, the city owes its attraction and success to what is permanent. Cities are made by their long-term residents, by the institutions and facilities that grow within their boundaries, and by the public-spirited benefactors who care for them as a home. And that is why aesthetic values are all-important: they are advocates of our long-term interests in the court of our present desires.

In the *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1982), James Q. Wilson and George Kelling advanced the ‘broken window’ theory of urban decline, according to which neighbourhoods that seem to be abandoned soon are abandoned. Broken windows attract more broken windows, graffiti attract graffiti, neglect attracts neglect. The smallest amount of policing, sufficient to prevent that first broken window, might save a whole neighbourhood from otherwise inexorable decay. The ‘broken window’ theory, I suggest, is simply the first step towards a more comprehensive view of the city as an aesthetic creation. Cities degenerate when they are seen merely as instruments, which can be abandoned when their purpose is fulfilled. When buildings have no face, and when streets become roads, the instrumental concept of the city comes to dominate the perception of those who make use of it. The downtown is then abandoned at night, and the suburbs absorb what remains of communal life – absorb it, and also atomise it, breaking the community down into households living in studious isolation side by side.

A city becomes a settlement when it is treated not as a means but as an end in itself, and the sign of this is the attempt, by residents, planners and architects, to fit things together, as you fit things together in your home or your room. That is what the classical vernacular provided, by spreading the memory of sacred things along the channels filled by everyday life. And, after five decades of modernist destruction, there is now a movement among architects to return to old patterns of urban organisation, to defend and enhance the centripetal city, and to question the need for suburban sprawl.2

That leads me to the third lacuna. I describe the aesthetic experience of the individual, the impact of architecture on individual people and the contribution of the built environment to the search for self-identity and self-knowledge. But in this context ‘self’ denotes a relational concept, since individuals realise their nature only in cooperation with others who are doing the same. I do not make as explicit as I should that aesthetic values embody the search for social recognition, and that the pursuit of the ‘right’ appearance, the ‘fitting’ or ‘appropriate’ order of parts, and the ‘correct’ way of laying things out are all ways of expressing a primal bid for social membership: the very same bid that underlies religion, and which inhabits our sense of the sacred. A home is a settled place, a place of love and ease into which others can be invited and which it is good and comforting to share. Hence, the aesthetics of everyday life is essentially other-directed.
Through our aesthetic choices we are making ourselves present. Presentations are our avatars: they make us known to others and solicit their endorsement for what we are. But they are also instruments of self-knowledge. They are part of the process that Fichte and Hegel called *Entäusserung*, through which the subject knows himself as object in a world of subjects like himself. I am not alone in seeing the theory of *Entäusserung* as the great and distinctive achievement of German idealism; nor am I alone in finding the theory immensely difficult both to state and to defend. But, however it is stated, it seems to me that aesthetic education has to be included in the process of self-realization. We achieve freedom by making ourselves accountable. Self-presentation is a fundamental part of this process: what I am in your eyes is part of what I am for you; and what I am for you is part of what I am. There is an existential need to present myself to others, and to feel my self-presentation as right in their eyes as it is in mine. And the process is reciprocal: my standards and my style are precipitated out, so to speak, from the continuous challenges that I offer and accept in the world of others.

The home is not a solitary place: it bears the mark of our attachments, those from which we have come, and those to which we aspire. In making a home we are shaping a community, even if it is a community of one. The solitary aesthete displays about him the ideal community of which he alone is a member, and every finicky detail that he adds to his surroundings is an accusation, a warning to those who approach to live up to it, and a way of saying that they don’t. Aestheticism is the final defeat of the aesthetic; a retreat into a castle of its own devising. In its normal forms, however, aesthetic judgement plays a part in shaping a real and living community by enlisting the cooperation of others in the building of a shared abode.

The normativity of aesthetic judgement is an integral part of this project. Kant has a suggestive way of putting the point, namely, that in aesthetic judgement we are suitors for agreement. In all normal aesthetic transactions, such as dressing, arranging a room, putting goods and flowers on display, we are making the small adjustments required by social harmony. More accurately, we are suitors for acceptance, and this means that there is a reference outwards in what we do, which gives purchase to the judgement of others. They are free to criticise, to ask us ‘why?’ And, as I argue in the body of this work, a process of reasoning issues automatically in response to this freedom.

This suggests a way of clarifying my defence of aesthetic objectivity. Judgements are objective if we are led by our nature as rational beings to agree upon them. This does not mean that those who disagree can be persuaded; nor does it mean that those who agree can find the reasons for doing so. But it implies that there is some core set of aesthetic constants to which human nature is attuned. In this, aesthetic judgement is closely related to moral judgement. The core moral judgements are objective, even though no one – nor even Kant or Aristotle – has found the final proof of
them. They are objective because rational beings, consulting only the facts, and setting aside everything that might compromise their impartiality, will come to agree on them, or at least on a central core of them. You will agree with your neighbour about the evil of murder, rape, enslavement, or the torture of children, so long as you and your neighbour put self-interest and passion aside. Those who don’t agree with such judgements cannot as a rule be persuaded; but that is because they cannot and will not be dispassionate (neighbours kill each other in civil wars on account of their passions, not their judgements).

Something like this is true in aesthetics. About basic matters rational beings have a spontaneous tendency to agree, provided that they set their special and distinguishing interests aside. But in this area it is extremely unlikely that they will disregard their own interests. Those most notorious for rejecting basic principles are those with the heaviest investment in doing so: for example, architects. There is therefore a powerful vested interest in the view that there are no objectively valid standards of aesthetic judgement, or the view that standards must always be shifting, in obedience to social, economic and technological change.

Subtract the profit-makers and the vandals, however, and ask ordinary people how their built environment should be designed – not for their private good, but for the common good – and a surprising level of agreement will be reached. People will agree, for example, on scale: nothing too big for the residential quarters, nothing too broad or tall or domineering for the public parts. They will agree on the need for streets, and for doors and windows opening on to the streets. They will agree that buildings should follow the contours of streets, and not slice across them or in any way arrogate to themselves spaces that are recognisably public and permeable. They will agree that lighting should be discreet and if possible mounted on permanent structures. They will agree on the humanity of some materials and the alienating quality of others; in my view they will even agree about details such as mouldings, window-frames, and paving stones, as soon as they set them in the context of comparative judgement, and learn to think of them as chosen not for their personal benefit, but for the common good. The classical styles in architecture, in particular the pattern-book vernacular familiar from Hausmann’s Paris and Georgian London, embody this kind of reflective agreement.

Many of those who dismiss the classical tradition do so because they see it merely as a system of ornament – details that can be stuck on at will, and which bear no relation to the intrinsic structure. But that is true only of the degenerate forms of classicism. Properly understood, even in its vernacular use, the classical grammar is a system of composition, a way of building organically, so that detail follows detail and part answers part. Several recent writers have argued, in response to such observations, that there are universal and intuitively understood principles, which have been exemplified by
all successful styles and in all civilisations that have left a record of themselves in their artefacts and buildings. These principles are followed by life itself, and govern the process that unites part to part and part to whole in a complex organism. Because these principles correspond to life processes in ourselves, we intuitively recognize their authority, are at home with buildings that obey them, and uncomfortable with buildings that do not. The forms, scales, materials and surfaces of many modern buildings deliberately flout these principles, and this is a sufficient explanation of the hostility that they arouse. The solution is not to return to classical ornamentation but to return to universal principles of composition, as Gaudí did in Barcelona.

Versions of that argument have been given by Leon Krier, Nikos Salingaros, and Christopher Alexander, the Austrian-born British architect and theorist, now a professor at Berkeley, who has over decades consistently advanced the idea of a timeless way to build. He writes:

There is one timeless way of building. It is a thousand years old, and the same today as it has ever been. The great traditional buildings of the past, the villages and tents and temples in which man feels at home, have always been made by people who were very close to the center of this way. It is not possible to make great buildings, or great towns, beautiful places, places where you feel yourself, places where you feel alive, except by following this way. And, as you will see, this way will lead anyone who looks for it to buildings which are themselves as ancient in their form as the trees and hills, and as our faces are.

Alexander supports that far-reaching claim (made in The Timeless Way of Building) with a kind of generative grammar of architectural form. He lays down rules that produce results which can be understood by the ordinary user of the building, who unconsciously recuperates the process whereby the building is composed. This is something like the way we recuperate the deep structure of one another’s sentences, according to Chomskian linguistics, by understanding how those sentences have been generated by repeated applications of transformation rules.

The solution to the problem of urbanisation, according to Alexander, Salingaros, and Krier, is contained in the concept of scale. Successful buildings are not given size and shape, as it were, in one gesture, as though poured into a mould – though that is what happens in the cast-concrete monsters that flattened our cities, or the computer-generated bubbles and gadgets that have erupted across them in more recent years. Successful buildings achieve their size and shape, Salingaros argues, by a hierarchy of scale, which enables us to read their larger dimensions as amplifications of the smaller (A Theory of Architecture, Solingen, Umbau-Verlag, 2006). The architect ascends from the smallest scale to the largest through the repeated
application of a ‘scaling rule’ requires that the increase in scale from one level to the next in the hierarchy should be by a constant multiple. The choice of the constant is not arbitrary, since life itself seems to favour, in the fractal structures of snowflakes and crystals, in the exfoliation of leaves and cells, a figure in the neighbourhood of three, and it is the ‘rule of a third’ which, according to Salingaros, has been applied by master architects throughout history – for example, in requiring windows to be a third of the width of the wall that they puncture. Any number smaller than three will produce a cramped and cluttered surface, in which higher orders are not clearly differentiated from lower, and any number much larger will produce vast vacancies, such as we witness in the blank walls of glass that are the ever-more familiar background to city life.

Salingaros argues that modernism went wrong from the start, with Adolf Loos’s famous dismissal of ornament – a dismissal that effectively left the lowest end of the scalar progression undefined, so that everything larger became free-floating and ungrounded. Likewise, the use of poured and moulded materials that are without their own deeply embedded fractal structure is responsible for much of the lifeless quality of modern buildings, whose surfaces are without those textures that we recognise in flesh, rind and cliff-face: textures that themselves yield to scalar analysis. Similarly, the narrow boundaries that frame modern buildings – the edges of steel girders, the abrupt stumps of pilotis, the alloy frames of windows that cannot be opened, and the invisible edges of sliding or revolving doors – all serve to render boundaries weak, machine-honed and inflexible, as well as costly to produce and usually produced off-site, without reference to local conditions and irregularities.

Architecture without meaningful detail or grainy textures estranges us, according to Salingaros, because it frustrates our visual and cognitive capacities. The aesthetic constants to which he draws attention are, he suggests, rooted in life processes that lie deeper than any single tradition of visual grammar. And maybe that is true. But it is also true that we understand these constants by incorporating them into a visual language shaped by comparisons and adapted to the needs of social life. Only in the context of a live tradition are such constants really intelligible to us as aesthetic demands. In order to take note of them, therefore, we need to work within an adaptable grammar of form of the kind that I defend in this book.

Styles change by adapting, and buildings, too, adapt. Sancta Sophia has been a church, a barracks, a stable, a market and a mosque before becoming a museum. Most houses in our older towns have changed from domestic to commercial use and back again. And even when the purpose of building involves eternity – as in a temple dedicated to the immortals – the purpose will one day be changed, as Sancta Sophia shows. From this it can immediately be seen that functionalism is profoundly mistaken. When form follows function it becomes as impermanent as function. Purely functional buildings will never lose their stagnant and temporary appearance, not even
if they stand for a century. In architecture function should follow form, as it does in the streets of Bath or Paris or Sienna.

Moreover, if we abstract from the present and future functions of a building, and ask ourselves how it should nevertheless be constructed, then we have only one reliable guide. It must look right. Architecture is one of the many areas of social life in which appearance and essence coincide. We should not search behind the appearance for the hidden reality. That which is hidden is of no interest to us. Aesthetic value is the long-term goal, utility the short-term. Nobody wishes to conserve a building if it does not look right; but if it does look right, someone will find a use for it.

However, most users of a building are not clients of the architect. They are the passers-by, the residents, the neighbours: those whose horizon is invaded and whose sense of home affected by this new intrusion. This is why patterns and types are so important. The old pattern-books (such as those published by Asher Benjamin in Boston in 1797 and 1806, and which are responsible for the once-agreeable nature of the New England towns, Boston included) offered precedents to builders, forms ultimately derived from temple architecture, which could be relied upon not to spoil or degrade the streets in which they were placed. The failure of modernism, in my view, lies not in the fact that it has produced no great or beautiful buildings – Le Corbusier’s Chapel at Ronchamp, and the houses of Frank Lloyd-Wright abundantly prove the opposite. It lies in the absence of any reliable patterns or types, which spontaneously harmonise with the existing urban decor, and retain the essence of the street as a common home.

We build because we need to, usually with no special talent, and no high artistic ideals. The aesthetic is important not because we have something special or entrancing to communicate, but merely because, being decent and alert to our neighbours, we want to do what is right. Hence, modesty, repeatability and rule-guidedness are vital architectural resources. And that is why the most successful period of Western architecture – the period in which real and lasting towns of great size were envisaged and developed – was the period of the classical vernacular, when pattern-books guided people who had not fallen prey to the illusion of their own genius.

This does not mean that creativity and imagination have no place in architecture; on the contrary. We depend upon the stylistic breakthroughs, the innovations and discoveries that create the repeatable vocabulary of forms. Serlian windows, Vignolesque cornices, the classical orders, Gothic mouldings – these great artistic triumphs become types and patterns for lesser mortals. Our best bet in architecture is that the artistic geniuses should invest their energy as Palladio did, in patterns that can be reproduced at will by the rest of us.

The arguments that I have outlined in this introduction are beginning to gain acceptance. But the modernists have two ripostes to them. The first is to present their plans and schemes cocooned in jargon-ridden gobbledegook,
referring to thinkers like Bourdieu, Foucault, Deleuze and others, whose intellectual pretensions were adequately demolished by Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont in *Fashionable Nonsense*. Such is the stance of the prize-winning ‘starchitects’ like Peter Eisenmann, Rem Koolhaas, and Daniel Libeskind, whose intention is to overwhelm the critics with an unanswerable proof that they, the critics, have not kept up with the latest arguments and remain helplessly locked in the past. It would need a Jonathan Swift or a Ben Jonson to kill this nonsense with satire; meanwhile, Tom Wolfe has dented its pretensions sufficiently for the rest of the world to feel free to move on.

The other riposte of the modernists is to argue that the classical language is no longer available, except as kitsch or pastiche. Building with classical details and according to classical rules means building in a style that is dead, which cannot be used sincerely, but only ‘used’ in quotation marks. This riposte is far more serious and deserves a far longer reply than I can give it here. The concepts of kitsch and pastiche are indeed vital in the criticism of all aesthetic endeavours. But they denote phenomena that are far easier to perceive than to describe. My brief response is to say that there is a great difference between continuity and imitation, and that the classical tradition has survived over three thousand years, not by imitation but by adaptation. The process of adaptation was brought to an abrupt end by modernism, for no good reason and with catastrophic results. It follows that we ought to revisit the classical tradition and try once again to adapt it to our circumstances, and our circumstances to it. Moreover, there is pastiche and pastiche. Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress* is a pastiche of eighteenth-century Italian opera. But it is also a masterpiece of twentieth-century music. Vikram Seth’s *The Golden Gate* is a pastiche of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, and also one of the great novels of modern California. Why should architects be forbidden to do what composers and writers do with impunity?3

I have mentioned three lacunae in my argument. But they are connected. If the argument of this book is correct, then it is surely right to see the aesthetics of everyday life as recalling a primordial act of consecration. It is right to see the correct practise of architecture as requiring an aesthetic of the city. And it is right to understand this aesthetic as a social discipline, contained in patterns, rules and visual grammar. As I understand it, the classical idea is grounded in our deepest intuitions regarding the life of human communities, regarding the nature of public space, and regarding the need for law-governed order if real human freedom is to be achieved. Freedom is not individual licence, but a public engagement, and such is the freedom that the classical tradition has embodied. My argument in defence of that view may be intricate. But my conclusions are simple. And they are confirmed, I believe, by the reaction of ordinary people to what is happening now.

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