BY KENNETH FRAMPTON

FOREWORD

It is one of the characteristics of architecture that as opposed to the other arts it is always contingent upon power. However idealized our image of architectural practice might be, architects are always made forcibly aware of the contingencies imposed by authority and of the resistance of the environment to its significant transformation. Thus architects are unable to escape the "thickness of things," no matter with what subtlety and cunning they rightly assert their artistic freedom which is simultaneously both real and contingent. Architecture is necessarily as tempered by the task-in-hand as it is often determined by the dictates of bureaucracy and by the equally prejudicial worldview of the client. Thus, as Alvaro Siza has put it, "architects are specialists in non-specialization," if for no other reason than that they have to take into consideration an infinite variety of seemingly extraneous forces. This may well explain why architects tend to become involved in interdisciplinary studies. Certainly this is true of Steven Moore, the author of this partly pragmatic, partly philosophical text, devoted to the theme of technology and place and dedicated in the first instance to a postmortem of the demise of Blueprint Farm, an eco-tech experiment established in Laredo, Texas, in the second half of the 1980's, as an integrated study of the mutual sustainability of architecture and agriculture.

This ecological exercise, subject to unrealistic expectations, never had a chance of proving itself since it was prematurely aborted even before it became fully operational. Moore reveals how Blueprint Farm was the ambiguous consequence of ambitious democratic politics, miscommunication, bad faith, incompetence, and outright opportunism, culminating in its draconian closure largely made in the interests of subsidized, large-scale agriculture. I am alluding, of course, to the agribusiness as this continues to undermine medium-scale farming throughout the North American continent, while polluting non-renewable resources in order to maximize agricultural production. As an experiment in alternative agriculture, Blueprint Farm was handicapped from the start. It was unfavorably sited on poor agricultural land and inadequately funded at either the federal or the state level, not to mention the consortium of ill-matched non-profit foundations and agencies that were patched together without having any clear mandate or chain of command. As the author points out, there was a further irony in the fact that while the Israeli irrigation technique applied on the farm was first developed at Texas A&M, it had been perfected as a method by the Israeli state, as an integral part of its state-supported, socialist *kibbutzim* system.

Despite its premature abandonment, Blueprint Farm would prove to be extraordinarily productive as far as the theoretical side of this essay is concerned, serving as a basis for an altogether wider debate as to the cultural and political predicament facing our species as we enter the first decade of the twenty-first century; namely, how and by what means should the instrumentality of technoscience come to be mediated in the name of a broader concept of human culture and welfare? This is surely the ultimate stake in a critical moment in which agriculture and architecture, among other social practices such as medicine and mass transportation, are but subsets that are contingent for their long-term effectiveness on the political vision of the society as a whole.

Given Moore's declared aim that the ultimate intent of *Technology and Place* is to re-cast my own thesis as to the resistant potential of Critical Regionalism, it is surely somewhat invidious for me to assume the task of prefacing this essay.

Influenced by Fredric Jameson's critique as this appears in his book *The Seeds of Time* (1994) to the effect that Critical Regionalism is an unduly aestheticized hypothesis that is neither *modern* nor *postmodern*, Moore advances the concept of the *nonmodern* as a general modus with which to evade the maximizing thrust of technoscience that has now expanded to such an extent as to appear at times to escape control. This is especially evident, say, where both production and jobs have been exported beyond the reach of democratic process and regulation, particularly to third world countries, where labor is cheap and where control over the conditions of production and even the quality of product are all too easily circumvented. While this kind of transnational subversion of trade unions and labor laws does not as yet obtain to the same degree in the production of built environment, we have little reason for complacency given the way in which the "received" motopian network dominates the society to such a degree that the mutually symbiotic relationships obtaining both between people and things and between people and people are equally determined, not to say disaggregated, by the all-pervasive presence of the automobile.

Moore sees electrification as an earlier version of the same kind of hegemonic technological system, first brought into being as a universally available grid by Edison and subsequently developed in such a way as to eclipse gas as an alternative source of energy. Moore informs us as to the efficiency of gas-absorbing refrigerators which, much like gas cookers, consume less energy than those driven by electricity. That which obtains in the case of gas, natural or otherwise, also surely applies to many other alternative forms of eco-technology, some of which were attempted in the case of Blueprint Farm, such as wind-turbines, drip irrigation, rainwater collection, and the building of cheap, well-insulated recyclable buildings out of straw bales. Clearly the conservation of rainwater and the concomitant reduction in storm water erosion will become crucial factors in offsetting the future nemesis of suburbanization; namely, the pending worldwide scarcity of water. One should also perhaps note equally valid "eco-tech" approaches such as the recycling of "grey" water and warm air,

tapping landfills for natural gas, and the related possibility of powering automobiles with hydrogen, methane, or ethanol, particularly where the last two may be obtained through the fermentation of biomass.

The key to all this is the synergetic hybridization of available techniques, and here we have to recognize that special interests are always involved in the maximization of any given technology, as in, say, the over-use, not to say abuse, of antibiotics in allopathic medicine. Maximization clearly militates against the judicious application of those techniques that are most effective in socioecological terms, within the parameters of most problem situations, for it tends to preclude the possibility that a given set of needs and desires may be met by a more sustainable interaction between different techniques, such as the combination of light-rail transit with automotive distribution or the mediation of air-conditioning through natural ventilation and the use of double-glazed solar walls.

Paradoxically influenced by Heideggerian ontology and Marxist critical theory, Moore partially grounds his *nonmodern* discourse in the work of two late-modern thinkers who in distinctly different ways chose to distance themselves from the traditional Marxist theory of alienation, which tends to preclude life-enhancing, ameliorative strategies under the prevailing conditions of monopoly capitalism. The two figures are Henri Lefebvre in his books *The Critique of Everyday Life* and *The Production of Space*, dating from the 1960's, and Andrew Feenberg in his *Critical Theory of Technology*, published in 1991. Moore follows Lefebvre in insisting that space is not just a palpable, volumetric condition established within the built environment but rather a set of relations between things and their users. Under this rubric space/place comes to be embodied through sociotechnical practice rather than through the presence or absence of an aestheticized object. So much we may say for the late modern obsession with compensatory, admiss consumption rather than the drive toward the life-enhancing potential of "lived-in" space.

By a similar token, Moore sees Feenberg as articulating a viable alternative to the social constructivist preoccupation with effecting standardized production through universal contractual agreements, since this purview tends to ig-

nore the unequal power relations built into the adoption of state- or market-driven technological systems. Feenberg is in favor of a participatory work-place democracy which would moderate the technoscientific tendency to determine production solely in terms of efficiency. As far as Feenberg is concerned, market-driven societies suffer from a perennial failure of imagination in not being able to entertain alternative technological practices that are both efficient and life-enhancing. In short, Feenberg, following Herbert Marcuse, envisages a holistic ontology in which the future culture and welfare of the species would depend less upon an exploitative and technologically maximizing relationship with nature. For Feenberg, contemporary technoscience as a social practice is compromised by a false rationality, which is virtually anti-ecological by definition.

Two other figures are incorporated into Moore's eclectic construction of the *nonmodern*. The first is the philosopher Gianni Vattimo, whose idea of "weak thought" is categorically opposed to the technological hegemony of the Enlightenment, while not being stylistically antimodern or addicted to the compensations proffered by Guy Debord's "society of spectacle." The second seminal figure, from whom Moore actually derives his notion of the "nonmodern," is the sociologist Bruno Latour, whose texts, *Science in Action* and *We Have Never Been Modern*, cause Moore to aspire to Latour's activation of the social as a potentially liberative, non-transcendental view of technological development. Latour is surely at his most critical in questioning the technoscientific construction of reality, inasmuch as the web of interests that support a given technique cannot be effectively challenged from the outside once the instrumental facts have been legitimized, as it were, by a "black-box" scientific peer review.

Taking into consideration the various "disalienation" theses advanced by Lefebvre, Feenberg, Vattimo, and Latour, Moore aligns himself with the synthetic "nonmodern" work of the American landscape architect John Tillman Lyle and his concept of a "regenerative architecture," as this is set forth in his book *Regenerative Design for Sustainable Development* of 1994. It is hardly surprising, given Lyle's professional formation, that the larger part of his study should address itself to the cultivation of landscape in terms of both energy flow and

hydraulic conservation to which all land-forms must react even in the driest of deserts. Many pages are thus devoted, in pragmatic terms, to recommended schemes for the conservation, absorption, diversion, and filtration of storm water, although this by no means exhausts the full scope of Lyle's comprehensive ecological know-how, which far from being a romantic critique of technoscience makes a very measured assessment of the pros and cons of various alternative strategies for the generation of energy and the cultivation of food. When it comes to architecture (and here one notes that Lyle much prefers the socio-biotechnical term *habitat*), it gradually becomes clear that we have been over much of this ground before, above all in the writings of Ian McHarg and also perhaps in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, whose Kropotkinian vision of Broadacre City was surely moving in a regenerative but nonetheless highly cultured direction as long ago as 1934.

This is where Moore ostensibly leaves us with the topographic proto-ecological implications of Critical Regionalism, sharply divested of its aesthetic, psycho-sensual, and anarcho-social conceits. And yet we are still brought back to confront the double aporia of our admass time: first, how do people get to want what they want (the paradox of desire, its arousal and gratification) and, second, how does the *vox populi* get what it finally opts for in terms of the current processes of our liberal democracy? This is the essential dilemma posed by rationality and power in the late-modern world, be it post-socialist or otherwise, and it is to this we have to turn as architects and non-architects alike, for in the last analysis everything rests with the client in the largest possible sense of the term. Here Moore returns us to the theme of education, not in the professional sense of the term but rather at the level of the society as a whole and not solely with respect to higher education but rather first and foremost in terms of the average high school curriculum. For until we get a higher level of awareness about the full scope of the environmental crisis induced by the relentless drives of our technoscientific civilization, very little progress will be made towards a consensual acceptance of a regenerative architecture in which building, dwelling, and cultivating are once again one and the same.