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# *Handbook of Historical Sociology*

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## 21

## Architecturing Modern Nations:

## Architecture and the State

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Since their origins in the nineteenth century, nation-states have had a strong desire for representation, and this has led to attempts to express idiosyncratic national identities against the many universalizing tendencies inherent in modernity. Culture has provided a very effective space in which to impose national identities, and architecture in particular has been the site of many state-led projects. This has resulted in the creation of many socially significant buildings which have come to embody the nation code. This chapter assesses how and why nation-states have often attempted to impose national codes using architecture to construct or reflect a national identity.

Increasingly it is acknowledged that architecture is a carrier of social meaning (Frampton, 1990; Heynen, 1999), and a way that societies come to understand themselves culturally. This understanding is possible because architecture is a way of representing materially (often literally 'in concrete') the central ideas, aims and sentiments of a particular epoch of history. It is in this way that architecture gives abstract historical trends and aspirations a tangible reality – indeed the British artist and architectural critic John Ruskin (1819–1900) went so far as to suggest that we cannot remember without architecture.

Designing buildings is a way to represent the social symbolically, and as such provides a

way of 'reading' the past, but sociology is yet to produce a coherent theory of architecture. Although there have been some key works on architecture in the sociological tradition,<sup>1</sup> sociologists have been slow to develop a framework to understand this important reflection of cultural identity. There have been some noteworthy sociological accounts of architecture, but a 'sociology of architecture' framework does not currently exist. Significant contemporary contributors in the sociological tradition include King (1990), who addresses the relationship between architecture and global capital, Manuel Castells (1996), who briefly addresses some interesting points concerning architecture and globalization, and Ulrich Beck, (1998) who has written a short essay on architecture and the city. Postmodern thinkers such as Derrida (1994), Jameson (1985) and Lyotard (1994) have also addressed architecture to varying degrees as part of their broader writings, and Jürgen Habermas (1989b) has discussed post-modern architecture from the vantage point of his theory of modernity, as has another critic of postmodernism, Harvey (1990). In a more philosophical tradition, writers such as Foucault (1985), Heidegger (1971) and Scruton (1977) have all written fragments on architecture. Interestingly it would appear that architectural theorists engage with sociological frameworks more readily – notable

examples being Bonta's *Architecture and Its Interpretation* (1979), Tafuri's *Architecture and Utopia* (1999 [1976]) and, more recently, Bernard Tschumi's seminal *Architecture and Disjunction* (1994) and Vale's *Architecture, Power, and National Identity* (1992). There is also interest within architectural theory in critical theory and the Frankfurt School, as is particularly apparent in the work of Heynen (1999) and Wellmer (1998). Aside from these relatively recent works in social theory, some notable works on architecture within historical sociology are by Braunfels (1988), Glog (1975), Kostof (1985) and Watkin (1986).

One of the main contentions of this chapter is that historical studies of architecture and the social theory of architecture can be brought together in a historical sociology of architecture, for it is evident that architecture has historically been an important cultural expression of collective identity. This chapter, focusing primarily on the British example but also drawing on other European cases, gives an overview from the vantage point of historical sociology of how state-led, monumental architectural projects in particular have shaped our understandings of the nation.

#### MODERNITY AND THE NATION-STATE

To offer a thorough definition of modernity is far beyond the scope of this chapter.<sup>3</sup> However, for present purposes, I would like to follow Delanty (2000), Habermas (1987, 1989b), Strydom (2000) and Toulmin (1990) by suggesting that modernity is perhaps best characterized as a 'spirit', an 'ethos' or a 'project'. By considering modernity in such a way, it is possible to identify some of the key themes inherent in the modern age. For Habermas, (1988b) one of the central aspects of the 'project of modernity' is the end of tradition as a form of legitimation. This progressive dynamic within modernity was based, amongst other things, on faith in the emancipatory potential of knowledge or science. Indeed the idea of a technology-driven utopia has concerned sociology since its inception, with Auguste Comte (who coined the term 'sociology') suggesting that the modernizing force of science could be utilized for the benefit of society.

The progressive role of knowledge generally, and science specifically, was central to modernity as an intellectual project. The innovative nature of knowledge and science was something

that states wanted to colonize – nation-states that successfully aligned themselves with discourses of science and industry were perceived as modernizers, as dynamic institutions. Although in many respects a 'product' of modernity, the developmental nature of the nation-state became a vital dynamic for modernity. States were central to the project of modernity and shaping the world in which we live – indeed the twentieth century was characterized by state expansion (see Poggi in this volume).

Another central tension within modernity is the relationship between universalism and particularism. Put simply, states must resist culturally universal tendencies at some level if they are to develop an identity that is sufficiently distinct. Nation-states had a strong desire for representation under conditions of modernity – in other words, they wanted to be culturally distinct from other nation-states – and it was this tendency that encouraged cultural particularism. Architecture has been a built expression of such tensions, as states have self-consciously raided and modified historical styles of architecture to reflect specific aims and sentiments. The influential nineteenth-century critic John Ruskin argues that there are two 'duties' to be carried out by national architecture: 'the first, to render the architecture of the day, historical; and the second, to preserve, as the most precious of inheritances, that of past ages' (Ruskin, 1992 [1849]: 215).

A defining characteristic of modernity is the centrality of the nation-state, and the development of the nation-state is an institutional reflection of many of the broader progressive tendencies inherent in the modern age. Gerard Delanty (in this volume) defines two distinct entities: the nation (a cultural community) and the state (a political administration). He suggests that nationalism is often a result of states attempting to define nations. Although the discourse of the nation has never been the sole preserve of the state, it is clear that the state was often able to impose an authoritative definition of the nation – to define the cultural identity of 'their' community. Most often, high culture was the site where such definitions took place, and architecture was just one way the state attempted to codify the nation under conditions of modernity. In the modern age, citizenship was acted out at, and subsequently reflected on, the level of the nation, and this gave the state the potential authoritatively to define the nation. Important state codifications of the

nation emerged via art, flags, national anthems and within the discourse of history generally, but even more than this, such cultural manifestations of the nation played an important role not only in codifying the nation but also in creating a nation in the historical memory. State-led landmark architecture has proved a very important way of expressing and developing the national code, and many of the discourses identified above as important trends of modernity find their substantive reflection in state-led, landmark buildings.

#### THE NATION-STATE AND HISTORICISM IN ARCHITECTURE

Benedict Anderson (1983) suggests that without print culture (namely the novel and the newspaper) the nation would be unimaginable, and it is clear that via culture nation-states find ways to codify abstract discourses and aims. In this context it is also perhaps worth stating Billig's central argument with regard to national identities: that 'in the established nations, there is a continual "flagging" or reminding of nationhood ... a continual background for political discourses, for cultural products. ... [D]aily, its [the nation's] symbols and assumptions are flagged' (Billig, 1995: 8–9). Historically architecture has been an important and effective way not only of 'creating', but also of 'flagging' the nation. Architecture has had, and continues to have, a vital role in shaping the social imagination, in helping us recognize the society in which we live.

Architecture has been an important site of nation-building projects, thus expressing particularism in a much more specific sense. As suggested above, the development of the nation-state was often accompanied by a strong desire for state representations of the nation. State-led projects that attempted to codify an existing (or create a new) national identity often used architecture to embody the nation code,<sup>4</sup> and this usually meant modifying universal architectural styles to specific, or particular, national contexts. Culture generally, and architecture specifically, had a central role in defining the nation code in the modern age, as the development of nation-states necessitated the state giving a tangible form to an abstract 'cultural community' or nation. As a result of this, architecture became one of the most important ways that nations came to know and recognize themselves.

In many ways architecture is a discourse that is particularly open to national codifications through the modification of universal. The role of architects in designing such monumental, national buildings is to impose, through particularistic cultural references, for example, a 'national style'. Architecture has often represented universalistic expressions of civilization and has frequently transcended the particularism of national cultures. Clearly, without modification (or particularization), universal architectural aesthetic styles such as Baroque, Classicism, Gothic or Modern do not distinguish one nation code sufficiently from any other. In the era of nation-state building it is clear that states encouraged the development of distinctive architectural styles to codify the nation.

As a result of these tensions, the history of architecture as a built expression of national identity is a long and compelling one. Although obviously not 'national' *per se*, both the Greeks and Romans built systematically on a huge scale, and oppressive, exclusive structures such as Hadrian's Wall (built circa AD 122–8) sent out a message of colonial might to would-be invaders and the colonialized alike. From the beginning of the Victorian Age to the start of the Great War (1837–1914), Britain witnessed the building of a huge amount of buildings that consciously attempted to reflect state (read 'national') sentiments and aspirations. Many public buildings, such as universities and museums, emerged as monuments to the progressive and civilizational aspects of Victorian society. It can be suggested that such architecture has reflected a self-assured, culturally secure, colonial nation that considered its own society as the clearest expression of 'civilization'. As this was perhaps the most conscious attempt to use architecture in developing and reflecting a national identity, Victorian Britain is a good place to illustrate substantively some of these broader theoretical debates.

Interestingly, although not unsurprisingly, there was an ongoing debate in architecture in the nineteenth century about what constituted a 'suitable' style for landmark British buildings. Architectural styles such as Roman, Gothic, Greek and Baroque (which had all originated as vernacular constructions) had taken on stylized qualities and had come to be read as cultural codes loaded with meaning – this gave the 'battle of the styles' an almost moral dimension. It is perhaps worth clarifying that these meanings were not derived from

anything inherent in the aesthetic of the style; symbolic associations had developed often over periods of many hundreds of years. The question for the nineteenth-century state-builders thus became one of finding a style to suit the aims and aspirations of the state, and high-profile Victorian architectural theorists and critics were at the time 'torn between various doctrines which they could not reconcile' as '[t]he authority of historical precedent, the correct use of a national or local style in materials ... conflicted with the belief that history was a storehouse to be raided at random' (Kiddson et al., 1965: 272).<sup>5</sup> Historicism within architecture basically amounts to giving historical styles precedent over contemporary ones. It was only really in the nineteenth century that reasonably accurate knowledge of geographically or historically distant societies had been available, and it was arguably the dissemination of this information about architectural styles that meant Victorian designers could choose in which style to build.

Initially the Victorians considered certain styles suitable for certain types of buildings (although this distinction appears to have broken down towards the end of the nineteenth century). As a general rule, Gothic designs were favoured for religious buildings and a neo-classical style was favoured for public buildings (Wilkinson, 2000). However, when Gothic was used on public (or any secular) buildings, the moral dimension to the style was 'carried over', as it were, and the resultant association to the architects and the nation-builders was a desirable one. Gothic came to be considered (at least by the British) as a quintessentially British style, and the famous architect Pugin (1812–52) regarded Gothic to be morally uplifting (again, perhaps in no small part due to Gothic's historical origins in twelfth- and thirteenth-century cathedral design). For Pugin and many others like him, Gothic architecture had come to reflect a civilizing process, the aesthetic expression of the epoch when barbarism and paganism had been 'defeated'. As such it was a built testament to the age when the 'other' could be Westernized (or Christianized) and assimilated; it is clear that it fitted well with the Imperial Age and Victorian aims and objectives. This is an example of how modern nation-states attempted to reconcile the pursuit or development of a distinct national culture with the cosmopolitan ideal of the universality of European 'civilization'. The Eurocentrism in

this conception of civilization reflects the universalistic self-understanding of Victorian society.

The English nation-builders seemed to have felt a particular affiliation with Gothic, and this was evident in the design competition for the Houses of Parliament in 1834.<sup>6</sup> After a fire had destroyed the medieval palace of Westminster, the competition to rebuild the damaged section of Parliament specified a medieval (that is, Gothic) style. The competition was won by Barry (up until that point working in a neo-classical style) and Pugin (a particularly vocal supporter of Gothic architecture and an expert in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century church design). They decided on the 'inherently' English style of Gothic to rebuild Parliament, and this was an early development of what we now know as Perpendicular or High Victorian Gothic. This style of architecture is the first that can be called 'English' – High Victorian Gothic was a more creative style of Gothic that finally emerged around about 1845–50, and it was roughly in this period that Italian, French and German Gothic influences merged to create this 'correct' English Gothic (Kiddson et al., 1965: 273).

This is a clear example of how modern nation-states attempted to reconcile the pursuit or development of a distinct national culture with the ideal of the universality of European 'civilization'. There is an almost dialectical relationship between universal styles which are particularized to reflect a specific, non-universal identity. When universalized aesthetics do not allow for much individual expression, problems of distinction abound, and it is clear that Gothic was a relatively 'universalized' architectural style until the development of Perpendicular Gothic. As suggested above, Gothic carried with it allusion to an epoch of European history when paganism had been defeated; building in Gothic meant that traditions of prior classical civilizations were being developed and modified. So, 'Gothic' had become somewhat of a catch-all category within architecture (suggesting as it did a universal style which had played a key role in reflecting the achievements of the 'civilized' European nations), but what differed from country to country were the associations Gothic had as a style. Sutton (1999) suggests that in Britain Gothic revivalism was a liturgical mission, whereas in Germany, for example, the style was equated with Catholicism. Indeed August Reichenperger, a leading advocate of the style, saw Gothic as a

symbol of hostility to Prussian Protestantism (Sutton, 1999: 279). French architects who claimed Gothic as an originally French national style ironically emphasized its 'rationality' and 'functionality'.

John Ruskin viewed Gothic as a 'celebration', and implored designers to render the architecture of the day historical, and to fill their buildings with historical reference and meaning. He was adamant that history was the most important legitimating value, as it was the site of social learning and a 'civilizing' process, and he even believed that no new architectural styles should be developed, as existing (historical) styles were already sufficiently expressive. Ruskin thus emphasized the relationship between history, the state and the nation, and believed architecture should be a reflection of this. He argued that the state should create (and subsequently find) its reflection in certain types of architecture – especially in public buildings. This meant that 'successful' or 'good' architecture must be strongly rooted in collective memory and in tradition. Therefore, for Ruskin, architecture is a central way in which tensions between the past, the present and the future are played out, and it is this that makes architecture the national symbol. Bernhard Giesen and Kay Jünge in this volume look at the way historical meanings are articulated, and for Ruskin architecture was the clearest representation of such collective understandings.

Indeed Ruskin suggests that within Gothic architecture is the potential to reflect 'all that need be known of national feeling or achievement' (Ruskin, 1992 [1849]: 272). Writing on Ruskin's interpretation of architecture, Hatton (1992) suggests that he viewed buildings and styles in a 'textual' way. In this respect, postmodern/deconstructive theories of interpretation can be traced back to Ruskin, whose contention was that meaning does not necessarily exist in external form, but rather in the reading and historical allusions made by the building (or 'text'). This, Ruskin claimed, is how people come to appreciate architecture, when each subsequent generation can 'read it; this would seem to imply a nostalgic, sentimental populism – and indeed much national architecture was characterized by such populist historical references. The aforementioned tension between universalism and particularism is also alluded to by Ruskin, who saw significant architecture as that which carries universal messages in culturally specific ways, so that Gothic as a style has universal

'messages' but vastly differing national interpretations. Ernest Gellner (1983) also suggests that such recycling of the past is vital to nationalism, as it allows the masses to re-experience past glories and to relive former triumphs, and it is in this 'recycling' that we can see expressions of the tension between universalism and particularism.

#### ARCHITECTURE AND THE MODERNIZING STATE

From the example of Gothic architecture we can see that the past has proved to be a powerful legitimating force for the aims and aspirations of state definitions of the nation. However, as Habermas (1989a) suggests, a key element of modernity is to break with tradition as a source of legitimation for future activity. Thus, for Habermas, is another key tension inherent in the modern project, as modernity *creates* traditions as well as destroys the past as a sole category of legitimation. For its part, architecture has been very significant in inventing traditions as modern and building national histories as continuous and unbroken unities (even when in 'reality' they are far from it). So, in this respect, historical references are inherently conservative and anti-modern. In modernity a far clearer source of legitimation is to be found in the future; utopian aspiration was a central dynamic within the modern project. The next group of state-led projects used a potentially Brave New World and a progressive future as their justification – this future was to be ushered in by technological and industrial advance under the auspices of the expanding, modernizing nation-state. The rupture between the High Victorian Gothic and modern architecture could hardly have been more pronounced – modern architecture renounced ornamentation of any description (especially historical or culturally specific) and saw a new drive towards functional buildings with a universal aesthetic. Resultantly, aesthetic modernism was not an architectural discourse that could easily be used to codify a national identity.<sup>8</sup>

Coexistent with attempts to use historical references and past 'triumphs' as definitive of British identity was a state-led project with modernization and industrialization as its themes, which was ultimately to prove more significant than debates around the battle of



the styles. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was undoubtedly one of the defining points of the nineteenth century. Far removed from the historicism of Gothic architecture, the central architectural motif of the Exhibition, the Crystal Palace, came not only to be regarded as its definitive symbol, but also more broadly to represent (and hopefully help to create) a dynamic, progressive and forward-looking nation. With the Exhibition, the Victorian state attempted to place itself as a powerful, advanced institution that was driving a rapidly industrializing society. However, as is pointed out by Roche (2000) amongst others, the international dimension of the Exhibition must not be overlooked. Indeed, the official title was 'The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations'. This was arguably so that the industrial achievements of other nations could be compared against the British, who at the time were the world's strongest industrial power.

World Fairs and Expositions generally introduced utopian visions of the future, and frequently this progress was to be driven by science and industry. Habermas (1989b) suggests that the emergence of a public sphere is one of the characteristic developments in modernity, and one reading of such exhibitions is that they allow a public culture to form, and even allow people to participate in civil society. As with participation in the political public sphere, involvement in such exhibitions and fairs was not equal across society, but the populist nature of the events did guarantee mass participation. Roche argues that this mobilization was primarily because states and elites 'need to win the "hearts and minds" of the newly enfranchised working-class citizens for projects of economic growth and nation-building' (2000: 34). He suggests that what he calls 'megaevents' – such as the Olympics and World's Fairs – reflect a 'performance complex' inherent in modernity in which national and international events aimed at involving participation by mass publics. Gellner (1983, 1994) has also shown how national identity aimed at (and indeed was dependent on) the incorporation of mass publics into the state via 'discourses of belonging'.

Considered within these frameworks, the Crystal Palace is an example of monumental, state-led architecture, and it is significant that the building has come to be remembered more than the contents of the Exhibition. The winning competition entry was by Joseph Paxton, who provided a quick and ultimately

revolutionary structure in which to house the exhibition of science, industry and art. Modernization was a key idea for the Exhibition, and Paxton's was the perfect structure to symbolize these broader state aims, utilizing, as it did, the most modern building materials and construction techniques. Paxton (not originally an architect *per se* but a greenhouse designer) was at the forefront of designing functional buildings of glass and iron in the nineteenth century – other comparable projects are most notably London's railway sheds, such as King's Cross (1851), Paddington (1852) and St Pancras (1868). Indeed, from the point of view of architectural history, it is perhaps significant that Paxton merged engineering and architecture, as previously these two professions had been fragmented due to processes associated with industrialization – architecture was associated with art and craft, and engineering was the foremost expression of the machine age. It is also perhaps worth remembering that the use of iron and glass on public buildings of this century; it was advances in machine technology that allowed the panels of glass to be cut so accurately as to allow repetition of a pattern. Perhaps never before has a building made such a virtue from its 'newness'. Architecturally, the Crystal Palace was highly significant. For the first time in a building of this size, the volume of the building was significantly greater than its mass. The airy effect was accentuated as the iron on the building was painted light-blue, making it almost indistinguishable from the sky (and the glass), and this light, glassy 'modernism' was to characterize much of the Bauhaus's aesthetically modern architecture in the twentieth century.

Prince Albert, Victoria's consort, was a staunch supporter of the project, which he suggested should have 'exhibition, competition and encouragement' as its central aims, and the Crystal Palace housed exhibits that celebrated industry and scientific advance. However, Stern also suggests that the building is significant not only as a vast shelter for such educational and industrial objects, but also as 'an internalization of public life on an unprecedented scale as it was the first building realized on the scale of mass democracy' (1994: 52). William Morris (1834–96), an influential reformer and a staunch supporter of historical reference in architecture, saw the exhibition and the Crystal Palace as a celebration of bad design ethos – namely the triumph

of machine production over craft. Predictably Ruskin was also very critical of this modern, industrial architecture and also suggested it represented all that was negative about mass production in society.

The Exhibition and the Crystal Palace did have strong state backing, however. The cultural reformer Henry Cole and Prince Albert<sup>10</sup> were two high-profile patrons, as was the future Prime Minister William Gladstone, who was another member of the commission. However, there were also dissenters, and a suitably cynical Disraeli remarked that 'this Exhibition will be a boon to the Government, for it will make the public forget its misdeeds'; although he also acknowledged that in a progressive country change is constant' (cited in Pearce and Stewart, 1992: 11). For present purposes, it is the modernizing aspect of the Exhibition and the role the Crystal Palace played in symbolizing this dynamic that we are concerned with, although it would be a mistake to overlook the continuity with traditional values altogether (Stern, 1994). Other related focuses could well be on the Exhibition as an imperialist project, or as a legitimization of capitalist ideology, or as a celebration of secular bourgeois values. For this chapter the important aspect is how far modernism, industrialism and science, key aspects of the modern age, were reflected in the state's landmark buildings.

Another example of such a state-sponsored iron structure was the Palais des Machines, which was built to house the World's Fair in Paris in 1889 to celebrate the centennial of the Revolution. As with the Crystal Palace, the transparent glass shell accentuated the already huge, cavernous interior, and both buildings were made possible by technological advances in the production of steel and glass and by the application of new scientific/mathematical knowledge to design and construction – a combination of these dynamics ushered in the 'machine age' of modern architecture over the following hundred years. The other, more famous, architectural symbol of the Paris World's Fair of 1889 was the Eiffel Tower (designed by Gustave Eiffel), which was another example of highly modernized girder construction, albeit on a less functional building. The tower has a huge symbolic value for Parisian and French identity,<sup>11</sup> and is another example of modernized processes of design and construction that, when applied to state-led architecture, reflects certain progressive aims of the nation-state. The Eiffel Tower, in

common with Paxton's girder construction, is a showcase for the functional construction techniques at the centre of the dynamic nature of architectural modernism. Sigfried Giedeon, one of the most influential modernist architects, was captivated by the new spatial experiences which he believed to be at the heart of these new types of buildings. He wrote of 'delimited space' associated with such buildings, a concept that was to be a central tenet of architectural modernism (Heynen, 1999).

#### MODERNISM AND THE NATION-STATE

The Festival of Britain in 1951 can also be seen as a continuation of the trend of state-led definitions, or productions, of the nation via the medium of architecture. As with other state-led British celebrations of the nation, this was held in London,<sup>12</sup> on the South Bank of the River Thames. The then Deputy Prime Minister, Herbert Morrison, believed that the purpose of the Festival should be to highlight Britain's contribution to arts, science and industry. From this perspective it would appear that the aims and objectives of the 1951 Festival were broadly the same as they were in 1851 – namely a pride in national achievement and a celebration of free trade and industrial strength.

However, as Frampton (1990) points out, postwar Britain had little financial power (the budget for the Festival was £12 million), nor did it really have the cultural assurance legitimately to claim any sort of monumentalist expression. Many things had changed since 1851 – an empire was in decline, industrial supremacy had been challenged, and even food rationing had continued after the war – leading Frampton to assert that 'Britain was in the final stages of relinquishing its imperial identity' (1990: 262). This less self-assured Britain post-Second World War is perhaps reflected in the lack of what could be considered monumental architecture at 1951's Festival. Another factor perhaps guiding the ethos of the postwar Festival was that the general public were more cynical about the ability of free trade, industrialization and science to provide social justice and progression. The cultural content of the Festival also reflected changing patterns of leisure – there was undeniably a less educational tone to the Festival, which was oriented more toward consumption,

than in the Great Exhibition a hundred years earlier.

It could be argued that growing insecurity about cultural expression is reflected even in the origins of the project, as well as in the architecture the Festival produced. The 'Festival of Britain' was initially suggested by the Royal Society of Arts in 1943, and the spirit of renewal and optimism it was intended to engender was clearly articulated in a 1946 exhibition called Britain Can Make It' (appropriately held at the Victoria & Albert Museum). Indeed, a phrase the media frequently used to describe the Festival of Britain was a tonic to the nation'. It is an interesting point of comparison that the architecture built for the Festival, and indeed the Festival itself, was seen as part of the regeneration process. It is clear that for the Victorians architecture and such mass public events served a different function – they were a *reflection of*, rather than a *catalyst for*, progress.

A group of new buildings demonstrating avant-garde principles to design were erected as a celebration of (read an encouragement to) Britain's culture. The Dome of Discovery and the Skyline were temporary buildings which can also be seen to celebrate the potential of technology, but the central, permanent architectural symbol of the Festival of 1951 was the Royal Festival Hall (designed by London City Council architects). As suggested earlier, modern architecture had ushered in an era in which historical ornament or decoration was outlawed – the central modernist dictum is that form should follow function, and this led to a renouncing of historical reference and a universalized aesthetic (supposedly) driven solely by function. Aesthetic modernism, with a lack of historical ornament or decoration or reference points, is not really a discourse that lends itself to being codified around any particularistic collective identity. Modernism is ultimately an architectural universalism, with strong tendencies towards territorialized, culturally unspecific buildings. The modern movement also signalled a move away from monumentality in architecture, and, consequently, large-scale state projects were far less likely to attempt to express, or develop, a sense of the nation via an elaborate or grand building. As a result of these factors, the discourse of modern architecture was not one which could be easily codified around a nation code, and in this sense any 'national' architecture is in the strictest sense of the term 'anti-modern'.

However, it is clear that by making such modifications state-sponsored architects were still attempting to develop a distinct British style for landmark buildings such as the Festival Hall. In some respects this quest for distinction was successful.<sup>13</sup> The concrete on the building, shaped in wooden moulds, weathered in such a way to give the exposed, roughened material a drab, grey appearance. This geometrically inspired, visually harsh style quickly became labelled 'Brutalism', and was a uniquely British style that received widespread condemnation (Wilkinson, 2000: 178).

Ironically, the modernist architects working on such building as the Royal Festival Hall and the public buildings in Chandigarh, Brasilia and Finland were designing what they considered 'morally correct' buildings – in an echo of the debates around style a century earlier. Generally, for the architect working in the modern style, a 'morally correct' building or style is one in which, among many other things, form follows function (there is an emphasis on geometrical form), and there are rationalized and standardized design and building methods. Primarily, though, modern architecture is characterized by the use of advanced design, and, against Ruskin, a forward-looking modernist avant-garde comes to represent the aims and sentiments of the state project and the only acceptable source of meaning is in the future. However, certainly in the British case at least, there is continuity, a thread which runs through the Great Exhibition, the Festival of Britain and the Millennium Dome project. Progressive ideals, modernism, free trade and the potential of a new social order have all been dominant discourses within the tradition of state-led architecture. It is many of these tendencies that gave the project of modernity its inherently dynamic nature, and these events and the architecture they engendered will serve as a reminder of these aims. The architecture of these exhibitions, as in other state-led projects, has become central to symbolizing and reflecting these aims on a monumental, built scale.

### CONCLUSION

There is an extent to which collective identities need a symbol to become a reality, and throughout history landmark buildings would seem to offer an effective way of doing just this. The significance of the buildings

discussed in this chapter is that they simultaneously attempt to reflect and to create (or to modernize) images of the nation. I have suggested that this is often achieved by attempting to harness the central ideals and dynamics of modernity itself. Iron buildings such as the Crystal Palace and the Eiffel Tower came to be perceived as symbols of a radically new social age – in this sense, these structures reflected Enlightenment beliefs in the progressive nature of science, knowledge and technology. This new industrial age in Europe was to be ushered in by nation-states and driven by advances in industrial production; this is a further reflection of the cultural self-confidence and belief in progress, and it was these tensions that provided much of the dynamic nature of modernity. World's Fairs gave states the chance to situate themselves self-consciously with regards both to the past and (more pertinently in terms of modernist construction) to the future.

Architecture has been a vital way to shape the social imagination as it goes some way to symbolizing the society in which we live, and as such should be a concern for contemporary, as well as historical, sociology. Architecture has also framed our historical consciousness and our collective memories; it is a vital way in which a society goes so far as to suggest that '[a]s buildings are candid statements they have a moral superiority as records over many of those made by historians' (1975: 1) – although it is perhaps important to emphasize that reading architecture in a textual way raises problems of interpretation common to any 'text'.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of whether or not there can ever be an authoritative 'reading' of a building or a style, it is clear that architecture has an important symbolic role in representing the society in which it exists. If sociology is to attempt to understand architecture as such a carrier of meaning, then we must look beyond merely buildings and their histories, and question how and why architecture and architectural styles come to reflect, and construct, social meanings.

As cultural communities become increasingly fragmented and contested, so the very idea of the nation becomes more and more colonized by a variety of groups and in vastly differing ways. Clearly, architects working on landmark national buildings in the past saw themselves as representing and celebrating a clearly defined nation. Today, owing to the increasingly contested nature of nations, such

projects are more difficult to conceptualize, execute and, perhaps most interestingly from a sociological perspective, legitimate. As they were in the mid-nineteenth century. By the ability of the European state to adequately represent the diversity inherent in the nation is called into question, so state-led architectural projects which claim to be representative are increasingly challenged.

Architecture is now a more 'open' discourse in the sense that it is controlled less by the state than it was in the past. Resultantly, architecture is less likely to be a national project with distinct national styles. Although the contemporary relationship between architecture and the state differs in a number of key aspects from the same relationship in the past, architecture is an increasingly important sphere for the expression of collective identities. As European nation-states pursued different routes to (and through) modernity, so different cultural expressions of these paths emerge. Architecture articulates not only desires and aspirations of a particular age, but also the tensions manifest in it – and it is because of this that sociology has much to contribute to (as well as to learn from) the study of architecture.

### NOTES

1. Although sociologists have not developed a coherent theory of architecture, many have taken up the related (but distinct) debate on space. Key works in this area include Hillier (1996), Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1989, 1996).

2. Defining 'architecture' is problematic. 'The art of building' is a well-used description, and although lacking in rigour and precision, this basic definition characterizes architecture as more than 'building' – architects add style or form to the functional building. Hillier offers a useful working definition that suggests architecture is both a 'thing' and an 'activity' (1996: 16–27), in other words a property of buildings (or groups of buildings) as well as the creative process of design.

3. For a more thorough discussion of the project of modernity, see Delanty (2000), Habermas (1987, 1989a, 1989b) and Wagner (1994).

4. There are many examples of non state-led buildings defining a sense of the nation. One of the most famous examples is Antoni Gaudí's church of the Sagrada Família in Barcelona, which was started in 1883 but was incomplete when he died in 1926 and remains unfinished today. The project is now being completed as the church has become a famous symbol of Catalan identity – as such the building has come to

reflect a nation *against* a state (as in Gaudi's lifetime), with Catalonia asserting its cultural identity.

5. This eclectic approach to materials and the appropriation of suitable historical styles was to be a defining characteristic of postmodern architecture almost 200 years later.

6. There are many comparable examples of state-led Gothic architecture, of course. The one most similar to the Houses of Parliament is perhaps Thomas Fuller's Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, Canada (1859).

7. It is revealing of a colonial mindset that 'English' identity becomes equated with 'British' identity.

8. Examples of planned post-Second World War cities that attempt to use architectural modernism as a nation code are Chandigarh and Brasilia. For more on the symbolic role of architecture in these cities, see Vale (1992).

9. Robert Stern suggests that although the Crystal Palace was a radically modernizing statement, it also represents the inherited historical ideals updated, and as such can be considered as a grand Roman public building of the imperial era translated into glass, metal, and wood' (1994: 51–2).

10. Prince Albert's support for the project was a hugely populist statement from a monarch at the time, and won him a vast amount of support from the general public. In fact the Albert Memorial (designed by George Gilbert Scott) contains numerous references to the Great Exhibition. It is perhaps somewhat ironic that such a staunch supporter of a modernizing project should be remembered with a Gothic monument. However, that the monument was of Gothic design illustrates the earlier points on national association, for if the style of English patriotism, as Wilkinson affirms, then the Monument was its most intense expression' (2000: 144). This memorial can be contrasted with other European monuments such as Chalgrin's classical Arc de Triomphe in Paris (1806) or the neo-classical Victor Emmanuel Monument in Rome (started 1885, completed 1911) by Sacconi.

11. Braunfels suggests that, historically, 'France more than any other country regarded its capital as a monument to its greatness, to the state, and to the level of its culture' (1988: 309). Understood in this way, President Mitterrand's *Grand Projets*, which gave Paris the Pompidou Centre (Rogers and Piano, 1977), the Pyramid at the Louvre (I.M. Pei, 1989) and La Grande Arche (Otto von Spreckelsen, 1990), can be seen as an attempt not only to situate Paris as a postindustrial city, but also to create a similar identity for France. This raises interesting questions about how far some capital cities can be viewed as reflections of the nation – for a historical perspective on European architectural reflections of this, see Braunfels (1998), while Vale (1992) offers some interesting postcolonial examples.

12. Again, this raises interesting questions, which are perhaps more pertinent today than in 1951, about tensions between the nation-state and the city. London-centric conceptions of the British nation still abound today, and it could be suggested that this is one of the

central reasons why the nation is such a contested category, as this doesn't adequately represent the diversity of England, let alone Britain. Such tensions could be seen to emerge around a more contemporary architectural project with similar aims, the Millennium Dome in Greenwich. For more on this see Jones (2002).

13. Paradoxically, many other national styles also emerged through particularization of the inherently universalizing modernist discourse. The Finnish architect Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) was at the forefront of developing a Scandinavian interpretation of modernism that featured timber, a traditional building material there (this style is particularly evident in Aalto's Finnish Pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exhibition).

14. Giong perhaps underestimates the heavily negotiated process involved in the cultural and historical construction of meanings around architecture when suggesting that '[b]uildings cannot lie; they tell the truth directly or by implication about those who made and used them and provide veracious records of the character and quality of past and present civilisations' (1975: 1). It is highly problematic to assume architects work autonomously, with total creative control free from pragmatic constraints such as policy networks, intervention from communities or the economy.

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