

Chapter XIII

SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURE IN SPACE ~ AND THE EXTREME ENVIRONMENT ON EARTH POSED BY THE COLLECTIVE SOCIETY FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

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ABSTRACT

In the extreme environment of Space, what viable philosophies should inform strategies for the architectural development of space habitations?

*At a time of global recession, with many of Earth's population subsisting in extreme poverty, are there **any** appropriate strategies for enabling the colonisation of Space? Given the political oppression many face here on Earth, has it perhaps become necessary to revision modern human society itself - to where it is now recognized as an extreme and hostile environment for the individual?*

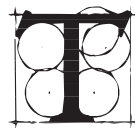
Presupposing Space is still viewed as an "Extreme Frontier", should it be "Challenged"? Is the implicit Frontier ethic of the heroic man fighting against a hostile environment still relevant? How does such a cognitive structure influence efforts to engage with Space?

What changes in thinking and feeling follow if dwelling in Space becomes second-nature? If an economy of poverty of resources for Space Colonisation and Habitation gives way to one of plenitude?

It may be that, by a reconfiguring of psychological attitude to where mankind realises it is already dwelling in Space - albeit vicariously - feasible steps by which men and women may actually move towards that objective will become more evident.

By extension, what picture does the World itself portray for its citizens if plenitude prevails? The author argues not for the gross materialist culture of mass consumption, but for the integral satisfaction of profound spiritual, psychological and material needs. Such an integral solution is characteristic of Traditional cultures before the impact of Modernity. It is suggested that the Traditional Philosophy of Art and Architecture has much to teach humanity about the wise development of Space.

*The observations expressed in this paper reflect the author's personal experience of local society in this insignificant corner of the Southwest Pacific, most particularly over the last fifteen years. They most certainly do **not** reflect his views on other societies that he has experienced, particularly North American, European and Asian, where he has been made most welcome, and to whose people he is most grateful.*



THE AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCES OF THE CULTURE OF this part of the Southwest Pacific over the last fifteen or twenty years have given him serious cause for concern. Some of the forces and influences that have come to shape and perhaps characterise the society here correspond to a degree with similar influences elsewhere. They appear as the very antithesis of the Western liberal tradition, where in principle there is no question that may not be asked, and no viewpoint that may at least be entertained, if for no other reason than the light it may cast on underlying structures of belief and the honouring of tolerance.

By contrast, what the author has experienced in recent years in what is nominally his home country, is an increasing intolerance of free thought and expression. There is an increasing sense of the inappropriateness and even illegitimacy of holding beliefs that do not conform to accepted social doctrine, and a collective intolerance of the questioning of any aspect of the wisdom of that collective doctrine.

This intolerance, which is promulgated by the mass media, is not just at the level of discourse, but extends to political and economic sanctions. Those who do not unthinkingly conform to the body of social propriety are rapidly marginalised. And all this happens in a quite rapidly changing society, where major alterations to the collective viewpoint that shapes the consensual view are taking place, and thus at a period when questioning and reflection are most desperately needed.

Perhaps what the author is trying to get towards - (in his personal experience in this region) - is an expression of a sense of

< society as the oppressor of the individual >.

This is in direct contrast to the collective wisdom that portrays the individual, by virtue of his (politically incorrect) attitudes and actions, or by virtue of his being assigned to a stereotypical collective identity (e.g. "men", "w.a.s.p.", etc.), as the oppressor of other individuals and of society in general. What is now evident is that mass consciousness - through its expression and realisation in institutions and frameworks of reality - has become too intrusive of and disrespectful of the individual's perceived, intuited, potential and realisable reality.

As a consequence, the perspective of seeing oneself as being intrinsically part of the body politic has now become redundant. (Possibly this view has arisen in response to - and as an antidote for - the oft-expressed view that submerges the individual's identity completely and unthinkingly in the mass consciousness). Society, as presently constituted, manifestly does not have the capacity or willingness to facilitate the full realisation of the individual's potential. The intolerance of the body collective, as evidenced in its coercive manifestations, has reached an extreme where it stifles the creative life-force of the individual. Society sacrifices the individual for its own selfish survival.

It is no longer possible to fulfil one's personally intuited destiny within the confines of the modern consciousness, locked in as it is to society's manifest inadequacies and lies. The task of individuation demands transcendence, a superseding of the social reality.

So the author's thesis is that modern society (in his experience in this region) has become an extreme environment for the individual, who no longer wishes to structure his reality in its terms. Society has sought to take possession of the individual's identity, and of his soul. It is now necessary to vigorously reject that colonial intrusion and ensuing cultural marginalisation, and reassert one's essential right to oneself, to one's own being.

But in this process, the individual faces a bewildering and overpowering array of projections and expectations and demands on his world-view, encountering what in the final analysis may only be regarded as a violent totalitarian regime. Its primary function is to suppress dissent, in order to protect its own privileged position as definer, manager and maintainer of reality.

What alternatives present themselves? How might the individual escape from his conditioning, from the pervasive mass conditioning?

- 1 One possibility is that no escape will be permitted on Earth, as the politically correct mentality - aided and abetted by the mass media - assumes more and more power over the global populace. Perhaps it will need breakaway space colonists to develop their alternative cultures and individual realities. All power to them. Their need may well become the driving force to space colonisation.
- 2 Another possibility may be a collective shift in consciousness, so that the oppressive nature of human society becomes far more apparent. Being found unacceptable, it is then radically changed to where responsible freedom of the individual prevails.

The writings of Jung throw light on this escape from mass conditioning. Jungian psychology asserts the vital recognition of the shadow, and the necessary embracing of both darkness and light in the search for wisdom. This contrasts only too sharply with an excessive and neurotic law-and-order platform, which appears as self-righteous hypocrisy, concealing merely the animal instinct to exert power over others, and of the group over the individual. The behaviour and beliefs of all individuals, it is assumed,

must conform to one's (collective) dictates of what is right and proper. The viewpoint also conceals a rage that the world as experienced will not conform to one's image of how it should be. In the final analysis, this is to deny one's own shadow, to reject the intoxication one sometimes feels with what are generally regarded as antisocial preoccupations. It results in a collective scapegoating, as Jung makes clear, of those others who appear as the unfortunate projections of the collective psyche.

Overriding and underpinning all is the deep-seated fear of what may happen if one's control is surrendered, if the deep forces that stir the psyche are recognised, respected, and responded to. Instead, they must be crushed, suppressed, and denied... But in the end, this is to be alienated from and to deny one's very nature.

The individual's deep nature is thus seen from the collective perspective to be violent and diseased, by virtue of its nonconformity to the social mandate. But where does the true violence lie? With the liberated creative individual; or with a possessive stifling society? And who should take responsibility for it? The individual - whose resources are comparatively minuscule - or the collective, with its plethora of institutions, power and wealth?

One surmises that it is rather that one faces a collective hysteria, which arises as a structural property at the death of society... a death that has become necessary, in order to release individuals from their suffering, which has been inflicted upon them by an unjust social order. Buddhist doctrine, as evidenced in the Tibetan Book of the Dead and the Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation, emphasises the necessity of death for transformation. And whoever recalls signing or agreeing to a contract with society? How much credence can one then possibly give the notion of a "social contract"?

What does it then mean to be free, to be more free from social conditioning, to move towards greater autonomy and self-determination?

What is lacking in contemporary society is transcendent awareness - an appreciation of things seldom being what they appear. This blindness stems from the secularisation of the modern world-view, and the popular debasement of authentic religious experience. It becomes more difficult to accept and embrace paradox - the hard fact of existence that has to be faced - that it can sometimes be deeply wrong to be right, and deeply right to be wrong. But the issues of human interaction that confront the individual can not be simply reified into a rigid dualistic doctrine, of this being right, and that being wrong. Rightness and wrongness can not be concretely defined in absolutist terms, as the politically correct would have men believe.

The individual counts, as the sole and final source of consciousness - his world matters profoundly, and in the final analysis the state and its manifest collective institutions have no inherent authority over him, save that which he voluntarily and willingly grants in full consciousness.

Perhaps these concerns are in the process of becoming more evident; societies will arise that respect the individual, that invite him to participate in its body corporate in exchange for caring for him, respecting him, nurturing his inner life and creative expression. The recent collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe give some cause for hope. And the author finds an openness to new ideas in North America that is refreshing, a willingness to debate issues, entertain new perspectives, and try out new ideas. If any people are temperamentally suited to Space Colonisation, it is surely the people of North America.

But elsewhere one sees only too clearly widespread suffering, coercion, repression, and the rampant and rapid loss of civil liberties.

The simplistic dualism that characterises the collective forces of oppression stem in large part from an inadequate world-view, a *Weltanschauung* that simplifies the world into discontinuous alternatives, through excessive application of the logical law of the excluded middle. Something is either this, or it is that; it cannot be both at once; it cannot be neither; it cannot be the case that things are just not that simple. The collective world-view sees simplistic linear continuums to aspects of experience, and forces the individual to be located on those linear continuums and within the collective framework.

But the unfortunate facts are that reality is of quite a different and superior order of complexity, and the individual qualitatively surpasses the descriptive schema proposed and unconsciously projected by the collective body. Such notions are discussed in the author's *Aesthetics of the Sacred*,¹ where he advances structural notions of interdimensional harmonics and harmonic hierarchies as antidotes to simple binary differentiation and the linear hierarchy. In his *Radical Tradition*,² he questions whether the proper end of the individual is as sociopolitical activist or metaphysical muse. And he finds in reality a natural and profound order, whose expressions in structural morphology may be found everywhere.³

Secondly there is the problem of society being actively blind to its own shortcomings, of actively suppressing diverging opinion. Perhaps this is a structural property of collective entities, and has to some degree a necessary rationale. But it has become excessive. To think, and to feel, and to be creatively, where it does not conform with social expectation, is termed "*dissent*" - a colonialist control of the language of discourse... implying an unquestioning assumed priority and rightness to society's collective stance, and a relativisation and discrediting of the individual reality.

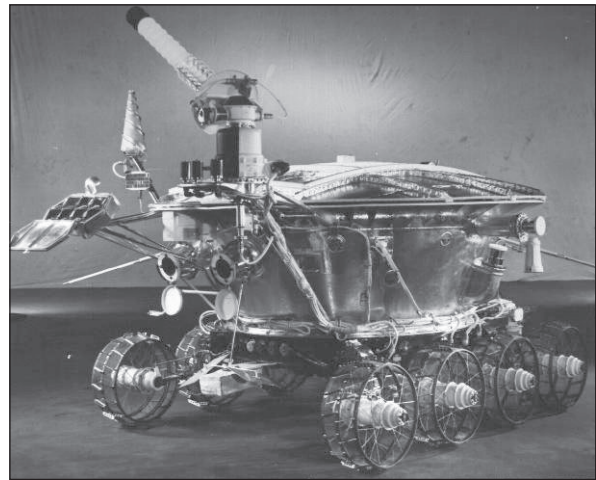


Figure 1 : Lunokhod: Moon Robot circa 1970, courtesy Lavochkin Association

To conclude these musings on the state of the world and society in this region of the globe as having become an extreme environment for the individual, the author should like to state that he believes in the inherent sanctity of the individual reality, a sanctity that must precede the power of the state and of the collective. In its essential purity, individual reality is of a higher order than any possible expression of the collective will. The author is grateful for this opportunity to express these individual reflections.

- 1 Meurant, Robert C., *The Aesthetics of the Sacred - A Harmonic Geometry of Consciousness and Philosophy of Sacred Architecture*. The Opoutere Press, 1989, pp. 58-9.
- 2 Meurant, Robert C., *Radical Tradition - Seven Essays Concerning Yoga and Meditation, Traditional Architecture, Sociopolitical Power, and the Philosophia Perennis*. The Opoutere Press, 1989, Ch. IV: "The Human Individual - Sociopolitical Activist or Metaphysical Muse?"
- 3 See the author's: *The Myth of Perfection of the Platonic Polyhedra*. PAPER People and Physical Environment Research Conference on Myth Architecture History Writing, University of Auckland School of Architecture, 1991. Also his: *Is Equality Sustainable?* EDRA 23 Equitable and Sustainable Habitats, Boulder, Colorado, April 1992; *Natural Harmony: A Structural Morphology of Consciousness?* First International Seminar on Structural Morphology, Montpellier, France, September 1992. *Circular Space Trusses ~ A Centralized Structural Geometry for their Design and Prefabrication*. Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Space Structures, University of Surrey, U.K., September 1993; and his *The Tetraktys of Polyhedra ~ Their Harmonic Structure according to Traditional Geometric Schema*. Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Space Structures, University of Surrey, U.K., September 1993.