

# Architectural Theory's Evolution and Response to Contemporary World

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**Abstract:- In the ever-evolving sphere of architecture and urban planning, the quest for creating inclusive, vibrant, and community-centered places has led to this study. This paper initially analyzes five architectural theories (Vitruvian Principles, Modernism, The International Style, Post Modernism, Sustainability & Green Architecture) to propose a more appropriate concept. In regard to promoting vernacular architecture and local architectural traditions, a more appropriate model 'Pluralistic Placemaking' is proposed. This theory advocates for the celebration of cultural, social, and aesthetic diversity in our communities, promoting spaces that not only reflect this diversity but also nurture a sense of unity and shared ownership. It encourages us to think architecture from many nuance approaches. Architects should not only consider architectural theories and traditions, but also consider the importance of community building, vernacular architecture, emergency and disaster resilient design, architectural conservation, aesthetic approaches and more. To be able to do that, we need to be aware of integration of theories and traditions, respect cultural context, understand symbolism, practice community involvement, exercise adaptation instead of assimilation, understand architectural language and allow flexibility and innovation.**

**Keywords:-** Architectural Theory, Pluralistic Placemaking, Diversity in Architecture, Inclusive Urban Planning, Community-Centered Design.

## I. THE EVOLUTION OF ARCHITECTURAL THEORIES

### A. Vitruvian Principles

The Vitruvian Principles, established by the ancient Roman architect Vitruvius, serve as enduring cornerstones in architectural thought. These principles, encompassing *Firmitas* (durability), *Utilitas* (functionality), and *Venustas* (beauty) underline the fundamental aspects of architectural design. *Firmitas* / Durability focuses on the structural strength and longevity of a building, ensuring it endures the test of time. *Utilitas* / Functionality emphasizes the value of functions, stressing why a building must serve its intended purpose effectively. *Venustas* / Beauty places importance on aesthetics, stating that a building should not only be functional but also a source of delight and visual harmony. The Vitruvian Principles continue to stand as a timeless framework that highlights the fundamental characteristics of durable and well-designed structures.

Brophy & Lewis explored in 'A Green Vitruvius' on how contemporary architects might include ecological concerns into their projects.<sup>1</sup> It emphasized sustainability, energy efficiency, and the use of environmentally friendly materials. It is an expansion of the original Vitruvian theory which now serves as a guide for architects to create environmentally conscious and responsible structures and spaces in today's context.

The Vitruvian Principles emphasize the fundamental elements of strength, functionality, and beauty. But it falls short in addressing the dynamic cultural and social needs of contemporary diverse communities.

### B. Modernism

'Form follows function' is a famous phrase by Louis Sullivan which sums up the Modernist ideology that the design of a building should be dictated by its purpose. 'Less is more' is a minimalist mantra by Mies van der Rohe which captures the Modernist preference for clean lines and uncluttered spaces. 'A house is a machine for living in' is a quote by Le Corbusier which highlighted the functional aspect of architecture in the Modernist worldview. Modernism in architecture is a significant movement that emerged in the early 20th century, primarily as a response to the elaborate and ornate styles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as Victorian and Edwardian architecture. It reflects a philosophical shift towards simplicity and functionality, influenced by the rapid industrialization and technological advancements of the era. Key components of Modernist architecture include the use of industrial materials such as steel, glass, and reinforced concrete, enabling the creation of open, airy spaces with clean lines and minimal decorative elements.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vivienne Brophy and J Owen Lewis, *A Green Vitruvius: Principles and Practice of Sustainable Architectural Design* (London: Routledge, 2011)

<<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781849776929>>.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History (World of Art)* (Thames & Hudson, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Le Corbusier, 'Towards a New Architecture', *Reprint of (1927)*, 2014, 312.

<sup>4</sup> James R. Abbott, 'Louis Sullivan, Architectural Modernism, and the Creation of Democratic Space', *The American Sociologist*, 31.1 (2000), 62–85

<<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-000-1005-0>>.

<sup>5</sup> Francesco Passanti, 'The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 56.4 (1997), 438–51

<<https://doi.org/10.2307/991313>>.

Modernism's focus on minimalism and rejection of ornamentation can occasionally result spaces that feel impersonal and disconnected from the historical and cultural background of the local context. It can also prioritize function above human sensitivity, creating places lacking of cultural and aesthetic life.

### C. *The International Style*

A significant architectural movement that arose as a subset of modernism was the International Style. It was defined by its emphasis on volume over mass, use of lightweight, industrial materials, and rejection of unnecessary ornamentation. It was celebrated from the 1920s until the 1970s. Originating in Western Europe and later spreading globally, this style attempt to express the age of industrialization through architectural design. Buildings in the International Style were known for their clean lines, geometric forms, open interior spaces, and a harmonious balance between functionality and aesthetics. The use of glass, steel, and reinforced concrete became trademarks, enabling the creation of structures that appeared to float. It attempts to defy the traditional architectural norms and break away from nationalistic concepts. It strives for a global, standardized architecture with universal principle attempting to address the power of globalization. It also attempts to connect nature with the use of large windows and open floor plans blurred the lines between indoors and outdoors, bringing light and air into the living space. It also introduced the concept of how art and technology cannot exist without the other. 'The artist must understand the machine, the engineer must be able to feel' was the famous quote by Walter Adolph Georg Gropius who tried to bridge the gap between artistic expressions and technological advancements which became one of the principles of the International Style.

However, by the year 1970s, it began to face criticism for its perceived coldness and lack of human scale. The International Style's pursuit of universal architectural solutions, end up overlooking the unique cultural, environmental, and social characteristics of each location. It leads to erasing of local identities.

### D. *Postmodernism*

Postmodernism in architecture arose in the late 20th century as a departure from the rigid norms of Modernism. It gained its prominence in the 1960s and 1970s and embraced playfulness, diversity and complexity. The minimalist and functional ethos of Modernism were questioned by postmodern architects like Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, and Michael Graves, Philip Johnson, who infused buildings with bold, symbolic, and sometimes quirky whimsical elements. It uses vibrant colors, unconventional forms, and decorative elements that often borrowed from historical or cultural sources. The intension is to create contextually sensitive and inclusive approach to architecture in contrast to impersonal and universal aesthetics of Modernism. It was a vibrant rebellious architecture with playful juxtapositions of historical styles, clashing patterns, and flamboyant neon signs. It broke the mold of 'less is more' mantra. It celebrated

diversity with wit and humor by being playful with scales and proportions.<sup>678</sup>

Charles Jencks' theory of 'The architect's task is to make buildings talk, sing, and dance' celebrates the ability of architecture to evoke emotions and engage in human senses. 'Less is a bore' a cheeky jab by Robert Venturi or 'Buildings are like people. They become more interesting as they get older' are interesting aspects of Postmodernism.

Postmodernism gradually to wane in popularity and influence in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Some of the major critiques include being kitsch, overly superficial or trivializing serious architectural discourse, focus on elitism and insider jokes in playfulness, historical distortion and loss of identity, Form over Function and inconsideration of environmental concerns.

### E. *Sustainability and Green Architecture*

Sustainability and green architecture gained significant momentum in late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It was a vibrant movement that integrates environmental consciousness into architectural principles. Energy-efficiency, usage of eco-friendly local materials, promotion of natural and recycled materials and integration with renewable energy sources like solar panels are major factors of consideration which emphasis on minimizing environmental effect. This movement not only focuses on reducing the ecological footprint of buildings but also attempts to provide healthier and more sustainable living environments. It reflects a growing awareness of climate change, scarcity of resources, and an ethical responsibility towards future generations.<sup>9 10</sup>

Glenn Murcutt advocated the usage of local materials and minimalism in design that blends with nature, with the phrase 'Touch the earth lightly'. Kate Orff promoted biophilic design and usage of natural materials by stating 'We need to design buildings that make us feel like we're outside, even when we're inside'. Vo Trong Nghia claimed 'Bamboo is the steel of the 21<sup>st</sup> century'. Hassan Fathy demanded architecture must also serve the poor.<sup>11</sup> Semih Eryildiz summed up the sustainable architecture into

<sup>6</sup> Charles Jencks, *Post Modernism: The New Classicism in Art and Architecture* (Academy Editions, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Jencks, *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Postmodernism* (Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour, and Denise Scott Brown, *Learning from Las Vegas - Revised Edition: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (The MIT Press, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> David Bergman, *Sustainable Design: A Critical Guide (Architecture Briefs)* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Rob Fleming and Saglinda H Roberts, *Sustainable Design for the Built Environment*, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Hassan Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor: An Experiment in Rural Egypt* (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

three major themes: energy efficiency, water management and food production (urban farming).<sup>12</sup>

‘Cost and Accessibility’ has always been One of the most common critiques of this movement since low-income communities and developing countries cannot afford a typical green building. ‘Greenwashing and Hype’ is the accusation used against this approach when architects pursue superficial green features while neglecting broader environmental concerns. ‘Overreliance on Technology’ occurs when architects end up neglecting fundamental design principles.<sup>13</sup> The absence of clear and rigorous standards for green buildings causes ‘Lack of Standardization and Regulations’. ‘Aesthetic Limitations’ and more importantly ‘Social Disconnect’ of the communities while focusing solely on ecological consideration. It pushes us to consider other possible nuance pursuits in architecture.

## II. PLURALISTIC PLACEMAKING

Renowned philosopher of **Pluralism** Isaiah Berlin used an ancient Greek poem ‘The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing’ to explain his theory.<sup>14</sup> In his theory, a hedgehog (a typical monist) sees one big thing and the fox (a pluralist) sees many things. His theory stresses on why the society needs more pluralists in the world. **Placemaking** is the term used in architecture for turning ‘spaces’ into ‘places. It turns the empty irrelevant urban voids into meaningful active places.

Following is the summary of religious architectural traditions, contemporary architecture movements and other major relevant factors.

## III. RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURAL TRADITIONS

### A. Hindu Architecture

Best works of Hindu architecture can be found in rock-cut caves, beehive-shaped shikhara (temple towers), garbhagriha, temple complexes, intricate carvings and towering gateways (gopurams) in South-East Asia. Major key figures behind this architecture were Krishnadevaraya, Raja Raja Chola I and Raja Bhoja. Best case studies include Brihadeeswarar Temple and Khajuraho Temples of India, Angkor Wat of Cambodia and Pura Temples of Indonesia.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Semih Eryildiz and Demet Eryildiz, *Emarlik-Ecological Design and Planning :Eture -Ecological Design and Planning* (Istanbul: Istanbul Okan University, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Victor Papanek, *The Green Imperative: Ecology and Ethics in Design and Architecture* (Thames & Hudson, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (United Kingdom: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1953).

<sup>15</sup> George Michell, *Hindu Art and Architecture (World of Art)* (Thames & Hudson, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Prasanna Kumar Acharya, *Hindu Architecture in India and Abroad (Manasara Series)* (Low Price Publications, 2006).

### B. Buddhist Architecture

Most of the finest Buddhist Architectural works are found in Temples, Monasteries, Stupas, Pagodas, Rock-cut cave architecture and symbolism of lotus flower, the Dharma wheel, and the Bodhi tree. Major key figures of this architecture were King Ashoka, Kukai and Saicho. Depending on the location and branch of teaching, it can be sub-categorized into Vajrayana Architecture, Mahayana Architecture and Theravada Architecture. Mahabodhi Temple of India, Borobudur of Indonesia, Kiyomizu-dera Temple of Japan, Potala Palace of Tibet, Bulguksa Temple of Korea, Mahamuni Pagoda of Myanmar and The Forbidden City of China are some of the best noteworthy case studies.<sup>17</sup>

### C. Jewish Architecture

Synagogues, Mikveh (Ritual Baths) and Yeshivas (Religious Schools) are the places that reflect best works of Jewish Architectural tradition. Due to Diaspora various other elements across Europe and America influenced on it. Some of the most influential forces of it came starting from King Solomon, Herod the Great, Erich Mendelsohn, Arnold W. Brunner, Albert Kahn and Daniel Libeskind. Some of the best case-studies include Great Synagogue of Budapest, Western Wall, Beth Sholom Synagogue (Pittsburgh) Oranienburgerstraße of Berlin and Victoire Synagogues of Paris.<sup>19</sup><sup>20</sup>

### D. Christian Architecture

Architectural styles of Christendom differ according to time periods Byzantine Period, Romanesque Period, Gothic Period, Renaissance, Baroque and contemporary. Some of the major branches of Christianity such as Catholicism, Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Anglicanism also had different influence on its architecture. Notable figures of this style which changed architectural movements include Emperor Constantine, Abbot Suger, Filippo Brunelleschi, Michelangelo and Christopher Wren. Notre-Dame Cathedral of Paris, St. Peter's Basilica and The Sistine Chapel of Vatican and Sagrada Família of Barcelona are some of the most noteworthy case-studies.<sup>21</sup><sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Wei Ran, *Buddhist Buildings: The Architecture of Monasteries, Pagodas, and Stone Caves* (CN Times Beijing Media Time United Publishing, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Vikram Lall, *The Golden Lands: Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand & Vietnam (Architecture of the Buddhist World)* (Abbeville Press, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Richard Cohen, *Building a Public Judaism: Synagogues and Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (Dover Publications, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> James F. White and Susan J. White, *Church Architecture: Building and Renovating for Christian Worship*, 2018.

### E. Islamic Architecture

Mosques, Madrasas, Mausoleums (Tombs) and Caravanserais are usually the finest works of Islamic Architecture. Some of the most distinctive Islamic Architectural Styles are of Arabic, Persian, Ottoman and Mughal. When this movement blends with local architecture, it produces new authentic local architecture. For instance, the Registan Square in Samarkand of Timurid artistry is very different from Great Mosque of Djenné or the adobe city of Mali. Some of the key figures that influenced this architectural tradition are Mimar Sinan of Ottoman Empire, Emperor Akbar and Shah Jahan of Mughal Empire. Some of the most noteworthy case-studies are Alhambra of Spain, Dome of the Rock from Jerusalem, Great Mosque of Damascus, Taj Mahal of Agra and Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque of Abu Dhabi.<sup>23 24</sup>

#### ➤ Vernacular Architecture

Vernacular Architecture is also known as ‘architecture of the people’ since it’s major focus is on creating environments for ordinary people using methods and materials that reflect their needs, traditions and environment.<sup>25</sup> It focuses on climate adaptation and sustainability. While traditional vernacular architecture was built spontaneously, it is now evolved into constructing with more sensible approaches to adapt the modern needs.<sup>26</sup> By studying Tuscan farmhouses, Japanese wooden houses, Mudbrick houses in Mali to Straw-thatched cottages of England, we can conclude vernacular architecture reflects culture.

#### ➤ Emergency and Disaster Resilient Design

Some of the main considerations include structural integrity, managing water sources, power grids, and escape routes. It is not only oriented on resource efficiency but also allow accessibility and inclusivity. Earthquake-resistant buildings of Japan, hurricane-proof houses of coastal regions, fire-resistant skyscrapers, green infrastructure and landscapes that reduce storm damage and absorb floodwaters are examples of it. It involves both disaster-resilient design and post-disaster shelter design.<sup>27 28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Luca Mozziati, *Islamic Art: Architecture, Painting, Calligraphy, Ceramics, Glass, Carpets* (Prestel, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> Leyla Uluhanli, *Mosques: Splendors of Islam* (Rizzoli, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Jorge Fernandes, R. Mateus, and L. Bragança, ‘Portuguese Vernacular Architecture: The Contribution of Vernacular Materials and Design Approaches for Sustainable Construction’, *Architectural Science Review*, October, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Xiaosui Xiao, ‘The Present Tense of “Vernacular”’, *Journal of Chongqing, Jianzhu University*, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Esther Charlesworth and John Fien, ‘Design and Disaster Resilience: Toward a Role for Design in Disaster Mitigation and Recovery’, *Architecture*, 2.2 (2022), 292–306 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture2020017>>.

<sup>28</sup> Esther Charlesworth, *Humanitarian Architecture: 15 Stories of Architects Working after Disaster* (Routledge, 2014).

#### ➤ Architectural Conservation

The main ideology of architectural conservation is to preserve the past for the future. It protects and manage historically significant structures, buildings and landscapes. The use of science, technology, artistic sensibility, and understanding of traditions is required for this field. It intends to protect heritage of the built environment, cultural significance and values. There are several types of conservations (i) preventive method which maintain, monitor and prevent deterioration, (ii) curative method which repair the damages and address structural issues (iii) adaptive-reuse method which give new life to historic buildings while respecting their original nature and (iv) documentation and record keeping which preserve history and knowledge through archives, documents, maps and photographs. Although it is a crucial field, there are many challenges such as difficulties in raising awareness and appreciation, funding and resources, climate change and environmental threats, adaptation to modern accessibility and needs.<sup>29 30</sup>

#### ➤ Architecture and Aesthetic

Many approaches of aesthetic pursuits are developed in contemporary architecture. One that struck most is by Roger Scruton on the topic of ‘genius and originality’. Since the time of Kant, people are not to be entitled in the realm of art without the ‘originality’ a.k.a being an ‘authentic genius’. TS Eliot in his essay ‘Tradition and Individual talent’ argued that while the originality is necessary, it must be in the bounds of tradition. Otherwise, traditions shall die.<sup>31 32</sup>

Just doing something which hasn’t been done before when it shows no understanding of what has been done before is not originality it is merely unpredictability. To sweep away the art, tradition and architectural inheritance of a tradition just to create something else can be considered a fake originality. Aesthetic education starts from understanding and embracing a tradition to be able to define your own efforts in terms of it.<sup>33</sup>

## IV. CONCLUSION

The integration of diverse architectural traditions and practices in architecture could be very challenging. It requires careful consideration, a nuanced approach to design and respect for cultural sensitivities. Each architectural tradition carries with it a set of unique religious, cultural and historical values. Attempting to integrate them without proper

<sup>29</sup> R. Livingston, ‘Conservation and Applied Mineralogy’, *Canadian Mineralogist*, June (1986).

<sup>30</sup> International Council on Monuments and Sites, ‘ICOMOS’ <<https://www.icomos.org/en>>.

<sup>31</sup> Andrea Sauchelli, ‘The Structure and Content of Architectural Experience: Scruton on Architecture as Art’, *Estetika*, 49.1 (2012), 26–44 <<https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.89>>.

<sup>32</sup> Eleri Lloyd, ‘Aesthetic Value in the Built Environment’, April, 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Roger Scruton, ‘The Aesthetic Endeavour Today’, *Philosophy*, 71.277 (1996), 331–50 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100041620>>.

understanding and sensitivity could risk diminishing or distorting their significance. Some factors which should be taken into account are:

➤ *Respect for Cultural Context:*

The consideration and respect for cultural and religious significance as well as social and historical tradition is required.

➤ *Understanding Symbolism:*

Understanding meaning, architectural features, symbols, and patterns to be able to integrated in the design is essential.

➤ *Community Involvement:*

While dealing with significant spaces, local community and stakeholders in the design process is very important.

➤ *Adaptation, Not Assimilation:*

Assimilation means the adoption of the architectural style of the dominant culture, while adaptation means the modification of the architectural style to suit the local environment and culture. Because the goal is not to dilute the uniqueness of each tradition but to find points of harmony and integration.

➤ *Architectural Language:*

Consideration of the visual, spatial, aesthetic and symbolic aspects to create lies in understanding it's architectural language.

➤ *Flexibility and Innovation:*

Allowing the design to evolve and adapt over time is a part of innovation.

To sum up, 'Pluralistic Placemaking' is an ideology which demands architecture from various perspectives to solve the contemporary urban needs of the cities.

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