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Canada

ARCHITECTURE AND IDEOLOGY

THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA:

(A Reading of the Architecture Using Feminist and Postmodernist Theory)

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ABSTRACT

ARCHITECTURE AND IDEOLOGY
THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA:
(A Reading of the Architecture Using Feminist and Postmodernist Theory)

The National Gallery of Canada, designed by Moshe Safdie, officially opened in May, 1988. Simultaneously, discourses rooted largely in feminist and postmodernist theory questioned the enterprise of the museum in a post-industrial society. These writings demythologized the concept of the museum as a universally representative institution and placed its authority in doubt.

Since its inception some two hundred years ago, the museum as a political vehicle vesting the interests of culture in the hands of the 'public' has been surrounded by contesting discourses of politics and power. The identity and 'meaning' of the National Gallery of Canada, both as a popular national symbol and as a signification of culture, is also based on a complex network of representational practices. The intention of this thesis is to make 'more visible' the 'dynamics of ideology' which affected the form the architecture would take, and which in turn 'naturalizes' a particular view of history; one which constructs 'meaning' in art and architecture, and inevitably constructs the public as well.

This study is a particular 'reading' of the architecture of the National Gallery of Canada, feminist and postmodernist,

taken at a specific point in time, the opening of the Gallery's first permanent structure.

I would like to thank my advisors Prof. Christine Ross and Dr. Ellen James for their professional assistance during the process of this research. They provided an open-minded, dialectical environment through which I could explore a relatively new methodological procedure in the study of architecture and ideology. I am extremely grateful for their insightful and considered advice.

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INTRODUCTION

> The private possession of statues and pictures, their status as a part of the furnishings that surround them, has made us forget or ignore the fact that most civilizations created the work of art for a sanctified place. For several centuries this was the palace. But in a more profound, often more lasting -- and more revealing -- sense, it has been the underground vault, the sanctuary, the façade of the temple, the tomb, and the sacred grotto. For these are not places simply of luxury and prestige, but of another world. This is apparent to us at first sight of a cathedral, and in all of the tombs of Egypt that remain where they were built.[1]

The public possession of statues and pictures within the institution of the museum has made us forget or ignore the fact that the art work situated there has been taken from those places for which it was created, emptied of its original 'meaning', and re-constructed through another system of representation as an 'object d'art' suitable for mass consumption. The privileged position of statues and pictures within the discourse of art and the ideology modernism, has also made us forget or ignore the fact that much of the work created in the past three decades, in the epoch now known as the postmodern, is centered on dematerialized art practices.

These are focussed on social and political inquiry, and rarely suitable for display in a museum within the high-art system of modernism as it presently exists.

In the Spring of 1988, the National Gallery of Canada opened the doors of its first permanent structure amid a flourish of media hype rivalling any Hollywood premiere. Thousands paid homage to the grand signifiers of art and architecture. Simultaneously, discourses rooted largely in feminist and postmodernist theory questioned the 'sanctity' of art preserved through the aesthetic object and the role of its temple, the museum. These writings demythologized the concept of the museum as a universally representative institution. They examined its base in modernism and the history of art, and emphasized a history of exclusions. Through these discourses the authority of the museum has been placed in doubt, and its roots in patriarchy and a modernist ideology of mass production and consumerism is questioned. What, then, does it mean to build a monumental museum such as the National Gallery of Canada at this particular time in history, and in this particular way?

THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA . . .

A SANCTIFIED PLACE?

A PALACE?

A MONUMENT?

A VAULT?

A SANCTUARY?

A TEMPLE?

ANOTHER WORLD?

A TOMB?

The meaning invested in the identity of the National Gallery of Canada, both as a popular national symbol and as a signification of culture, is based in a complex network of representational practices and institutions. This thesis is a particular reading, feminist and postmodernist, taken at a specific point in time. The format is intended to reveal the dynamics of ideology produced by contesting representational practices surrounding the Gallery at a pivotal point in its history . . . the opening of its first permanent structure. It takes place at the conjunctural site of architecture and the textual discourses of feminism and postmodernism.

It is hypothesized that through a study of the architecture of the National Gallery of Canada, it will be possible to make 'more visible' the underlying dynamics of ideology which affected the form the architecture would take, and which in turn 'naturalizes' a particular view of history; one which constructs 'meaning' in art and architecture, and inevitably constructs the public as well. The methodological procedure used in this thesis is loosely based on Demetri Porphyrios' 'critical architectural history'.[2] In it, critical history examines architecture precisely at that point where common sense would dictate "this is the way it should be", where the realization of a particular architectural

format seems most logical. Following this line of exploration, this study will:

1. Examine the museum's base in modernism in order to establish the context in which a particular form of architecture developed, and the process which 'naturalizes' a specific view of history.

2. Explore some of the theories of the current epoch, i.e. postmodernist and feminist, in order to reveal the contesting factors surrounding the museum discourse generally at this time in history.

3. 'Read' the architecture of the National Gallery of Canada through the elements of Topography, Tectonics and Typology vis à vis 1. and 2., the discourses of modernism, postmodernism and feminism.

INTRODUCTION

ENDNOTES

1.André Malraux, Museums Without Walls, trans, Stuart Gilbert and Francis Price (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1967), 192.

2.Demetri Porphyrios, "On Critical History", Architecture, Criticism, Ideology, ed., Joan Ockman, coed. Deborah Berke, Mary McLeod (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985).

CHAPTER I

ARCHITECTURE AND IDEOLOGY

ARCHITECTURE AS DISCOURSE

> ...insofar as a building is shaped by ritual it does not simply house function, it comments on it.[1]

Architecture is not a passive recipient of the values and beliefs of a given society. It actively participates in the production of 'meaning' through an ordered system of 'language' and 'forms'. This semiotic system of ordered meanings produces signs which can be read. Like verbal language, the discourse of architecture is a cultural process and will vary depending on the dominant representational conventions surrounding it.

Representation is 'presenting again'. Inherent in re-presenting is a margin for interpretation. This level of interpretation which is 'once removed from the real' involves mediation. Through mediation, which is arrived at by various cultural conventions, a consensus is formed which over-determines the particular convention used in any given discursive construct. How architecture will be viewed is a result of this mediation process; i.e. that one building is read as a shopping center, while another very similar structure is read as a national monument is an example of representational systems defining the 'meaning' of particular architectural forms. Conversely, the discourse of

architecture can comment on, change or support any given system of ideology. It follows then that the study of the discourse of architecture (through its choice of typology, tectonics and topography) can disclose within that particular 'ordered system of signs' how knowledge is constructed and how it is seen to represent 'truth'. This 'truth' defines the parameters of what is legitimized and therefore holds power within a given society.

A study of architecture within this ideology involves an acceptance of the Foucauldean concept of 'discursive formations'. It must, of necessity, negate the notion of a fixed 'truth' within historical studies. Traditionally, it has been the role of research in both art and architecture to establish a line of antecedents, seeking origins, reconstituting traditions, following evolutional curves and projecting teleologies.[2] The postmodern writer and researcher, however, deals with a complex interrelation of cultural manifestations. The discontinuities, differences and dispersions of research are now included in a process of critical writing, which Michel Foucault describes as an epistemological mutation of history.

Simultaneously under the political impact of feminist theory, it has become impossible to view traditional history as fixed, inclusive and universally representative. More than one-half of the population was excluded, the female half, and therefore their version of 'culture' and of 'truth' negated.

The feminist position, and one which the postmodernists have subscribed to as well, is that the representational systems of the West admit only one vision . . . one version of 'knowledge' in society . . . and that is the version of the constitutive male subject. That is, through representation, a culture has developed which is centered on a unitary male point of view. Both feminist and postmodernist theory focus on this aspect of representational systems in order to expose the power that authorizes certain views while "blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others".

> Among those prohibited from Western representation, whose representations are denied all legitimacy, are women. Excluded from representation by its very structure, they return within it as a figure for - a representation of - the unrepresentable (Nature, Truth, the Sublime, etc.). This prohibition bears primarily on woman as the subject, and rarely as the object of representation, for there is certainly no shortage of images *of* women.[3]

Because women have been rendered as an absence within the dominant culture, their very real exteriority to Western representation exposes its pretentions as a system of culture which is universally representative. Feminist theory in the past thirty years has begun a process of deconstructing the myths of art history, of examining through language and psychoanalysis the patriarchal history society has inherited. This has involved a retrieval of woman's place in the history of society and of art. The exclusion of women has forced

scholars to identify and explore the social and political side of culture, and most recently to use representational theories in order to gain a clearer understanding of how knowledge is constructed and how ideology functions in order to know where power lies in institutional bodies.

Janet Wolff in The Social Production of Art points out "There is disagreement about what ideologies are, and there is also disagreement about how ideologies are related to other aspects of social life."[4] However, she is committed to the view that ideas are not independent of material conditions of existence and that the relationship of the two is not accidental or haphazard, but structured and systematic.

Similarly Demetri Porphyrios in "On Critical History" considers architecture a materialist site of ideology. It is a discursive practice, he says, in need of demythification. In his article he outlines a potentially comprehensive and rigorous definition of 'architecture as ideology'.[5] It is based on the assumption that the ideas, values and images by which individuals perceive their society at a given moment are inevitably linked to productive relations and manifested at materialist sites, such as architecture. Implicit in this definition is that architecture has a social function, "...to insert the agents of an architectural culture into practical and aesthetic activities that support or subvert (in varying degrees) the hegemonical power."[6]

Foucault suggests that power functions through a process of what is perceived to be 'truth'; to Porphyrios power is the capacity of a social group to realize its specific objective interests. Hegemony indicates that the process of realization of interests need "not be reduced to pure domination by force or violence, but rather comprises a function of leadership and ideology by means of which social relations are founded on active consent."[7] He proposes reversing the process by which architecture as ideology "naturalizes and dehistoricizes a historically created reality."[8] He sees history as presented by the historians of modernism in terms of "mythification", and advocates a "demythification", a clarification aiming to reveal and therefore gain or give a pure "state of understanding". His 'critical architectural history' in some respects is symptomatic of what might be called a postmodernist/post-structuralist, and particularly feminist, mistrust of accounts based upon either the individuality of the creative subject or the absolute autonomy of the 'life of forms'.

In an examination of culture and material conditions, Stuart Hall, while rejecting the culturalist assumption of identity, rethinks ideology as the historical articulations between forms of consciousness and forms of practice and struggle. Hall says that by positioning the individual within a predefined space, ideology enables the reproduction of the 'structure-in-dominance' to take place.[9]

For Hall a social formation is a 'structure-in-dominance'. Based on this premise, then, the architecture of the National Gallery of Canada becomes a materialist site, the manifestation of a social formation or a 'structure-in-dominance'. This is accomplished through the "masking" of knowledge, whose source is very difficult to identify, but which prevents people from "recognizing the real".

It is Hall's insight that ideologies are systems of representation materialized in practices, with the emphasis on ***systems*** of representation. He designates numbers of them in any social formation, and in this he is indebted tc Foucault's concepts of discursive formations. "Ideologies do not operate through single ideas; they operate, in discursive chains, in clusters, in semantic fields, in discursive formations."[10] Finally, Hall sees different ideological discourses contesting one another, often drawing on a common, shared repertoire of concepts rearticulating or disarticulating them within systems of difference or equivalence.[11]

Following this line of reasoning, ideology for purposes of this thesis is defined as a 'dynamic' process of interrelated 'discursive formations', representing different points of view. These are manifested at materialist sites, such as architecture, within a dominant discourse. The convention within which this discourse functions is arrived at through an 'unconscious' agreement to produce a particular

structure-in-dominance. This occurs because it protects, nourishes and replicates a specific power system; one which is perceived to be beneficial to both those people empowered to make the decisions and to those people affected by the decisions.

THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA: A STRUCTURE-IN-DOMINANCE

The National Gallery of Canada is a particular account of Canadian history and of the history of art. It is action in the form of a monumental architectural gesture; one which was taken by politicians, art historians, artists, curators, architects, designers, technicians and the media in the name of the 'public' and the 'nation'. It is also a museum involved in concepts of modernism, mastering and mystification. It is silence. It represents what is not spoken, what is absent, what is trivialized or marginalized in art. The National Gallery of Canada involves a particular politics of presentation, and reflects a particular ideology, whether conscious or unconscious. Does it represent change? What meaning of art does the architecture support? Does it constitute a Foucauldean 'site of power'? What is its role vis à vis the public? What does the monumental gesture of architecture 'mean'? Through a clarification of the ideology of the gallery will it become possible to see the legitimation process at work, and to examine the effects of power?

Power to sanction certain statements and actions;

Power to exclude, marginalize, negate;

Power to mystify;

Power to change;

Power to inculcate;

Power to protect a particular economic base.

CHAPTER I

ENDNOTES

1.Spiro Kostof, A History of Architecture; Settings and Rituals (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 19.

2.Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1974), 12.

3.Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism", The Anti-Aesthetic; Essays on Postmodern Culture, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 59.

4.Janet Wolff, The Social Production of Art (London, England: MacMillan Education Ltd., 1981), 50.

5.Demetri Porhyrios, "On Critical History", 16.

6.Ibid., 16.

7.Ibid., 16.

8.Ibid., 16.

9.Lawrence Grossberg and Jennifer Daryl Slack, "An Introduction to Stuart Hall's Essay", Critical Studies in Mass Communication, Vol. 2, No. 2 (June 1985), 89.

10.Stuart Hall, "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates", Critical Studies in Mass Communication, Vol. 2, No. 2 (June 1985), 104.

11.Ibid., 104.

CHAPTER II

THE MUSEUM: A MATERIALIST SITE OF IDEOLOGY: CONSTRUCTED WITHIN THE DISCOURSE OF MODERNISM

THE PROJECT OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Prior to the eighteenth century and the 'Project of the Enlightenment', art was an intimate part of communal life. Its religious and ritualistic use ensured the integration of everyday living with art. But as Jürgen Habermas (after Max Weber) has pointed out cultural modernity arising out of Enlightenment thinking meant the separation of "substantive reason expressed in religion and metaphysics into three autonomous spheres".[1] Science, morality and art became different areas of study, corresponding to specific professions dealt with by experts. As a result the distance between the culture of experts and that of the public grew larger. Enlightenment thinking based on the notion of 'progress' was essentially thought to mean that the arts and sciences would promote control of natural forces, i.e. man over nature. This would result in moral progress for all, and happiness would automatically ensue. 'Man' has succeeded only to find in the last decade of the twentieth century that 'he' cannot survive without the nature 'he' has destroyed in the name of ***progress***.

The shift from a primarily aristocratic, agrarian and religious society to an industrial, secular and populist one arising out of the scientific discoveries of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Enlightenment thinking, created a new middle class. Notions of individualism, humanism, liberalism and the concept of the 'centrality of man' are rooted here and are woven into the fabric of the democratizing trends, emphasizing the 'rights of man' which were then developing. It became politically imperative at this point to gain the support of the new middle class, and the museum was one of the vehicles through which this was accomplished. Not only was the museum linked to the capacity of 'man' to perfect 'himself', but it was intimately tied up with the ownership of objects; in the right of the public to own art. From this early moment in its history, the museum was a site of contesting discourses between the rising middle class, governing bodies, artists, critics and politicians. These contesting discourses were materialized in the development of criticism, the writing of art history and the development of the museum itself; all of which came into being about the same time on the waves of the French Revolution.

The museum became the materialist site of ideology at which culture was seen to be handed over to the people via the transfer of ownership of great works of art. In order to gain the political support of the public, it was essential that power appear to be vested in them. It is precisely at

this juncture that aesthetics and politics joined forces to create a power which was to flourish in the mid-nineteenth century and which would become by the end of the twentieth the society of the ***spectacle***.

The museum was conceived from the start as an instrument of "cultural reintegration on a higher level, a means of spreading historical and esthetic knowledge among an ever-broadening segment of society, allowing to all a share of the cultural manna which had formerly been the food of a privileged few"[2]. As Thomas E. Crow points out in Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris[3] this involved a question of who spoke to the needs of this new middle class. In other words, who was empowered to characterize this public, what 'it' wanted and 'what was good for it'.

The Louvre which opened on 10 August 1793, was the first public museum. In it a storehouse of treasures was made available to the people for the glory of the state, in the former palace of kings transformed into the "Musée National: Monument Consacré à l'Amour et à l'Etude des Arts". As its title indicates, this first public museum was concerned with 1) a national monument; 2) the love of art and 3) the study of art. Nationalism and patriotism were evident from the very first development of the museum as a democratizing enterprise. Napoleon's systematic program of art confiscation and the triumphal entries into Paris displaying for the masses the

booty of war, enlisted the backing of the 'people' in the name of newly acquired treasures. Massive carts bearing such statues as the Apollo Belvedere and the Laocoon, received exuberant applause from enormous crowds. But simultaneously, while Napolean succeeded in despoiling much of Europe of its prime art treasures and turning them over to public ownership through the museum, there continued to exist a dual relationship on the part of the people to these aesthetic objects which they had always associated with the classes of oppressors.

This was manifested, as Linda Nochlin has documented in "Museums and Radicals: A History of Emergencies", in large-scale destruction of both religious and secular monuments of works of art to the point that once the National Assembly decreed the nationalization of the property of the clergy,

> ...almost at once (it) had to make provisions for the preservation and protection of the works of art which fell under this heading. It was precisely in these emergency circumstances that the Commission des Monuments came into being. Rescued from the fury of the people by revolutionary art lovers and scholars, the visual objectifications of tyranny, superstition and oppression were, through the alchemy of the museum, transformed into the National Heritage, the most precious possession of the people. By the time of the 1848 Revolution, the notion that the museums were the possession of the people was a clearly established idea.[4]

Protecting culture *from* the public was as important to the museum as protecting it *for* the public; and this ambivalent relationship between the 'public' and those-in-the-

Culture Capitalists to use Pierre Bourdieu's term) has persisted throughout the history of the museum.

The manipulation of the public within a particular dominant discourse, one which suited an industrialized, capitalist, patriarchal and pictocentric society, was facilitated by making the museum one of the constituent institutions of the city.

At this point the museum was comparable in many ways to the grandeur of the strong-holds of culture in the pre-modern period . . . the palaces and churches.

The Architecture of the Museum:

The Louvre, though not designed for the specific role of the museum (it had been a palace prior to this time), was typical of these early public art galleries. As Helen Searing points out in "The Development of a Museum Typology" within these grand houses and palaces, certain rooms had been developed which suited the specific purposes of displaying art, such as the long narrow hallways of the Grande Galerie of the Louvre. Typology developed specifically for the art museum during the age of Enlightenment, when it became essential to focus public ownership in order to gain political support.

> Particularly in France architects were concerned with developing a solution that would address the possibilities and problems involved in the exhibition, protection, and conservation of works of art.[6]

The first museums bore the imprint of ancient Greece, Imperial Rome and Renaissance Italy. The time had not yet come for redefining architecture in terms of the 'masses' of an industrial society. Instead, the references continued to be to the grand and monumental architecture with which art had always been associated. The long gallery was considered the ideal space for viewing art. This was probably a typological reference to the origin of public exhibit space in the Louvre and other grand houses. Between 1802-05 the French theorist J.N.L. Durand published a design for an ideal museum consisting of a series of long vaulted galleries which surrounded four courtyards and a rotunda.

> The spatial formats and structural prototypes codified by Durand recur in museum design throughout the nineteenth century.[6]

The long colonnades which front the façades, vaulted galleries lighted with arched clerestory windows, courtyards circumscribed by galleries, and the central large rotunda with an oculus, like its model the Pantheon, were to become symbolic details of museum typology. Even the Guggenheim designed by Frank Lloyd Wright over the years 1943-1959 can be interpreted in terms of basic Durandesque museum typology. The Altes Museum in Berlin (1823-30) designed by Karl Friedrick Schinkel, based on Durand's museum project of 1803, was to provide another essential feature, the imposing exterior staircase, elevating the structure and thrusting the central rotunda up a full two flights of the building. This

sense of monumentality and grandeur would provide historic continuity linking a formerly aristocratic and ecclesiastic art to a developing industrial society, and legitimizing the art forms of a mass culture.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MASS CULTURE AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS

By 1863 Charles Baudelaire in "The Painter of Modern Life"[7] was able to describe modernity through the activity of a product of the new middle class, the Flaneur. His strolling stylish presence on the grands boulevards of Paris marked the emphasis on a changing world, one which Baudelaire linked to the ocular, to movement and the ability to grasp the ephemeral, the fugitive, the immutable.

The shift to an industrial society provided people with the time and money to occupy the new spaces of urban leisure. As T. Crow points out[8] this new middle class, much depicted in Impressionist paintings, frequented week-end resorts, the 'grand boulevard', and places given over to conspicuous displays of a brand of individual autonomy specific to that class, the right clothes and accessories as well as the right poses and attitudes were required.

> It is for him (Schapiro) entirely appropriate that the formation of Impressionism should coincide with the Second Empire, that is, the period when bourgeois acquiescence to political authoritarianism was followed by the first spectacular flowering of the consumer society. The two phenomena cannot in fact be separated from one another; the self-liquidation after 1848 of the classical form of middle-class political culture prompted a reconstruction of traditional ideals of individual

> autonomy and effectiveness in spaces outside the official institutions of society, spaces where conspicuous styles of 'freedom' were made available. That shift was bound up with the increasingly sophisticated engineering of mass consumption, the internal conquest of markets, required for continuous economic expansion.[9]

This, then, formed the basis of an economy of 'individualism', 'desire' and 'leisure' and was reflected in much of the art of the period and legitimized by the pre-eminent cultural institution of the new middle class, the museum. The transference of art from its original religious and aristocratic base to a secular and populist one was intrinsically bound up with the economic base of industrial capitalism, i.e. consumerism.

Mary Kelly establishes "modernism" specifically as a discursive field which is situated in calculated practices of reviewing, publishing and exhibiting; a field which marginalizes any art which cannot be taken in at a glance. Modernism emphasizes sight and is linked to a market structure based on creating desire in order to enhance the commercial value of given works. It is not only a particular work of art which is purchased, but also something by a unique individual, which is possessed. That something is secured by a signature and a date.[10]

This meshing of uniqueness with economic value is central to Enlightenment thinking. In order to maintain its market value, a work of art within modernist practice had to meet specific conditions (peculiar to industrial capitalism), and

these essentially meshed authenticity with economics. The work had to be 'creative', 'autonomous', and involve a 'proprietorial' element. Often the buying and selling price at auction was of extreme importance. Not uncommon in modernist practice, was a catalogue raisonné of an artist's work, in which the history of the work actually meant a listing of such information reducing the work of art to a series of commodity transactions. As Brian Wallis points out[11] what we are left with in the period of late capitalism and post-industrial society are the excesses of two hundred years of turning everything into objects of consumption.

Though criticism of the museum emanating from 'radical' artists seems almost commonplace now, it was in evidence as early as the middle of the nineteenth century. Even then the catacomb of the museum was seen as an establishment preserving the past at the expense of the present, and was being shunned by avant-garde artists of the day. Members of the Realist, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist groups, though they saw the museum as the only viable alternative to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, questioned the Louvre as a "...symbol of that absolute domination of the past which blinded artists and public alike to the demands of the present, and which could only be overcome by the radical gesture of burning it to the ground."[12] People like Monet and Pissarro, whose works now form the backbone of many museum collections reportedly

maintained that "...we must bring down the necropolises of art."[13]

Despite the passion of much of the anti-museum rhetoric of the nineteenth century, it is essentially based on the traditional concept of art as created objects of painting and sculpture. As Linda Nochlin points out, a major change in the concept of the museum took place in England, fueled by the writings of the radical activist and anti-high art advocate William Morris. With the creation of the Victoria and Albert Museum there was an attempt to bridge the gap between the fine and applied arts, between taste and industry.

As early as 1835 a "Select Committee on Arts and Manufacturers" had been appointed by Parliament in order to enquire into the best means of extending knowledge of the arts, and of the principles of design among the people. This resulted in the formation in 1852 of a "Museum of Manufactures" which was created for "the selection, description, and preservation for their own sake of the finest products of artistic craftsmanship".[14] It was in England, the most industrialized nation of the world at the time, that the contradictions surrounding the role of the museum in a democratic and industrialized mass culture are first discerned. They are the same contradictions which surround the museum at the end of the twentieth century.

The Machine à Exposer:

Architecture during the nineteenth century kept pace with the changing ideology and economic needs of the masses. Under the impetus of a thriving industrialist society an alternate tradition of exhibition developed at this time. Based on the need to exhibit newly manufactured goods, but also including more traditional art, the great expositions of the mid-nineteenth century were the mark of a changing society and mass culture. Side by side with the high art museum typology which flourished during this period, new design types developed to meet the needs of an industrial mass culture. The grand Crystal Palace in London constructed in 1850-51 is one of the earliest examples of these huge machines à exposer designs. A vast, undefined space, it is the beginning of a building tradition which reaches into the later half of the twentieth century with such museums as the Centre Pompidou in Paris, by Piano and Rogers, which opened in 1977. These museums, both then and now, represent an attempt to make art objects more relevant to mass society. Though essentially trade fairs in the nineteenth century, the great expositions are an important landmark in recognition of a changing ideology concerning the distinction between 'high' and 'low' art and the ambiguous role of the museum in mass culture.

The Twentieth Century and a Rejection of Historicism:

By the twentieth century anti-museum feelings became solidified in the politico-aesthetic doctrine of the Italian Futurists and the Russian Revolutionaries: "We will destroy museums, libraries..."[16] proclaimed Marinetti in the Futurist Manifesto of 1908. Since the advent of modernism, the need to align art with life has been the concern of artists. This has taken place against the dominant discourse of industrial capitalism and consumerism. That much of the work which Clement Greenberg championed, from a Marxist position, became emptied of its 'revolutionary' meaning and turned into the prize 'objects of consumption' of the twentieth century reveals the contradictory position of a 'populist' culture. The dominant discourse of modernism has been able to accommodate much of the art produced within its era by emptying it of all meaning, except for the formal and aesthetic. By de-politicizing the art work modernist discourse encouraged a re-presentation of the work within the acceptable 'economic' boundaries of uniqueness and aesthetics.

Turn-of-the-century architectural theories exhibit an underlying concern with technological change. A building was no longer seen as a neutral structure on whose surfaces were displayed representations of ideas. Instead, it became a vehicle for change, one which was intrinsically bound up with a new technology, standardized products and mass culture.

This very technology which freed architecture from the confines of historicism, embodied within it the ideology of the modern era . . . of the rising middle class and an egalitarian society. As a result of modernist rejection of typology in favour of universal solutions based on advanced technology, a new type of museum architecture developed.

> Architecture as volume, not mass; regularity but not symmetry; reliance for aesthetic satisfaction on the intrinsic quality of elegant materials, fine proportions, and technical perfection rather than applied ornament. The façade is obviously a non-load bearing skin, stretched over the structure.... Formal axes, grand corridors and fixed galleries were abandoned for loft-like floors that could be partitioned off.[16]

These changes developed in part due to improved building technology but more importantly they were intended to accommodate a changing art and an expanded role for the museum. Museum design had to be re-interpreted in order to exhibit large abstract canvasses, photography, installations, film and industrial design. In addition, the promotion of extensive social, cultural and educational programs meant that the spaces for these activities had to be integrated into museum architecture. The Museum of Modern Art in New York City founded in 1929 was a leader in this area. The new building completed in 1939 displayed a new concept in exhibition space and circulation, and is considered by many to be the archetypal cosmopolitan art museum in the International Style. The public, based on an expanded middle class, whose very survival was rooted in industrial capitalism

and consumerism was finding its 'own' architectural forms. This trend reached its pinnacle in the designs of Mies van der Rohe for the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 1962-68.

A Post-Industrial Society:

> ...following World War II a new kind of society began to emerge (variously described as postindustrial society, multinational capitalism, consumer society, media society and so forth). New types of consumption; planned obsolescence; an ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes; the penetration of advertising, television and the media generally to a hitherto unparalleled degree throughout society...[17]

In The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics,[18] Arthur Kroker describes a society in ruins, one whose heroes and ideals do not work. Notions of truth, science, God, art, nationhood etc. are all under question. It is a society disrupted, not by some ominous external force, but by its own nihilistic misplaced energy . . . a society inverted upon itself and consuming its very being into non-existence. It is a high-tech society, Kroker writes, whose value system appropriates from mass media and so life becomes a 'simulacrum', where seduction, violence, power and the 'will to death' are based in the dissolution of the 'space of the social'. Mass media is the real world, a 'mediascape' of advertising and hidden power. Kroker situates society in a mire of excrement, a class society which has disappeared into mass society.

While, on the one hand, writing such as Kroker's defines a society in ruins, on the other hand many aspects of postmodernism provide a more positive view of society. Postmodern theory reinforces work of social and political relevance by artists, writers, architects etc. concerned with providing a balance to the excesses of late capitalism and working towards a more equitable society. Postmodern and feminist theory also provide specific working tools for change through the development of new methodological procedures and critical practices. Victor Burgin, British artist and theoretician, situates the beginnings of postmodernism in the early 1960's. The development of dematerialized art practices and the emphasis on a pluralistic form of society are rooted here. Dividing lines between high and low art became blurred, and all forms were being viewed as part of a larger whole, that is as part of the representational practices in contemporary society. This was also a period marked by social change both in Europe and in North America. The theoretical writings which began to flourish questioned the 'self-evidently eternal verities of art', inherited from the Enlightenment and Romanticism.[18]

Continental theory, based on structuralist and post-structuralist thought, provided a wealth of theoretical writing on postmodern society. These theories were based in semiotics, psychoanalysis, political science, philosophy and feminist theory. They have formed much of the basis of the

museum discourse over the past thirty years. Increasingly a type of philosophical writing occurred, which simply was called 'theory'. This then, formed the basis of what H. Foster in his preface to the Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture[20] calls a postmodernism of resistance. It arises as a counter-practice to the official culture of modernism and is opposed to a postmodernism of reaction, which is most often associated with architecture and a return to historic 'codes'. A postmodernism of resistance is concerned with a critical appraisal of history and not an appropriation of historic forms. A resistant postmodernism questions cultural codes and origins and it explores social and political affiliations. A postmodernism of reaction is seen as a pastiche which exploits cultural codes whose essence is rooted in modernism.

In a collection of essays published under the title Art After Modernism editor Brian Wallis states:

> One principal attitude, which the essays in this book contest, is this tendency of modernism to posit artworks as the products of an autonomous, disengaged form of labor and consumption, freed from normal social commerce by virtue of their status as objects designed exclusively for visual pleasure.[21]

He further defines the central purpose of art and art criticism since the early 1960's as "the dismantling of the monolythic myth of modernism and the dissolution of its oppressive progression of great ideas and great masters."

> As the leading cultural products of late modernism - abstract expressionism, the nouveau roman, existentialism, avant-garde film, New Criticism

> - were gradually set aside, they were replaced by art forms and critical models which specifically countered the ideals of modernism. Pop art, for instance, deliberately accepted as its subject matter the low-culture tabloid images rejected disdainfully by modernism . . .[22]

Artistic production since the 1960's has deviated defiantly from the clearly defined aesthetic categories of modernism. This is particularly evident in the work of women, which had always been excluded from representation within modernist tradition. As Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin has emphasized in "Feminism and Modernism: Paradoxes" the very definition of modernism as an auto-critical enterprise leading to the definition of specificity of each art-form (i.e. formalism) has translated the history of art since Manet into Wölfflinian terms of formal evolutionary cycles of refinement; thus it impeded the possibility of a typically feminine contribution. In fact, the history of formalism in the period of modernism, naturalizes the producer of art and deals only with connections between works. It pursues an aesthetic of the masterpiece, linking great masters of the present with great masters of the past.

> The facts have shown clearly that for reasons other than entirely aesthetic ones woman and the category of the 'great master' have never gone together well.[23]

Michel Foucault has emphasized that the cultural codes we live by, the orders of discourse we follow, all manner of representation, are not natural and secure. They are arbitrary and historically determined and therefore subject

to critique and revision. He saw these as artificial constructions through which we apprehend the world: images, languages, definitions, which in turn construct social representations such as gender and class. These privilege one element of society over another. Essentially for this very reason Pollock and Parker in Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology have described the need to criticize the history of art. They are representative of many intellectuals in contemporary society who emphasize the need to study art as " . . . an institutionalized ideological practice which contributes to the reproduction of the social system by its offered images and interpretations of the world."[24] This viewpoint holds that art is part of a greater social complex. Art is, in fact, a social production which actively produces meanings; furthermore, this position states that art constitutes ideology. It does not merely illustrate it. Art is then defined in terms of 'social exchange' between producers, viewers, commentators and collectors.

It was in the early 1970's a turning point occurred in women's relation to art and to the established history of art. Art practices began to pursue various forms of enquiry and manifested themselves in a diverse artistic format ranging from land art, to video, photography, installation, performance art etc. Not only were artists searching for new forms outside the traditional male domain of painting and

sculpture, but also they were retrieving lost crafts such as quilting and needlework.

Images of women in the history of art have been produced from the male viewpoint. This particular view of one-half the population has been perpetuated, protected and legitimized by the institution of the museum. Not only have definitions of womanhood been presented with the help of the museum, through men's eyes, but work which was specifically derivative of women has been negated and marginalized.

Theoreticians, like the artists themselves, have explored the female sensibility and aesthetic raising the question of its biological determination versus social construction. In most recent years, a shift has occurred and feminist exploration (like postmodernist research) now focusses on representation and gender difference rather than on a specific female sensibility. As Pollock points out women's exclusion from the academies did not only mean reduced access to exhibitions, professional status and recognition. It signified their exclusion from power to participate in and determine differently the production of the 'languages' of art, the meaning, ideologies and views of the world and social relations of the dominant culture.

The extensive body of research which has developed in the period now known as the postmodern, unequivocably proves the exclusion of women as constituting people in the official culture of modernism. It has demonstrated the narrow dominant discourse of modernism on which the museum was founded and has developed. Essentially this has been a logocentric, patriarchal, consumerist ideology, emphasizing connoisseurship and aesthetics in a pictocentric art. What is not there, represented, marginalized or negated is what the discourse of the postmodern era is about.

The Museum in the Postmodern:

Traditionally, the role of the museum has been one of acquisition, preservation, research, exhibition and education. Increasingly the function of the museum has shifted from its nineteenth century position to one which is in closer harmony with the society it serves.

> The identity and image of the museum is changing, for it now doubles as a community center, a school, a shopping center, and often a movie house. And increasingly - now that large fundraising dinners and gala parties at museums are becoming commonplace - the museum functions as an unusual sort of country club.[25]

While this describes some of the perceived changes in the museum, others in society would encourage more drastic and radical alterations. As Linda Nochlin points out in "Museums and Radicals: A History of Emergencies":

> The radical artist may, for example, want to do away with the whole concept of the museum (which he

> conceives of as a mortuary for dead cultural artifacts) and the whole notion of art-as-objects, calling for a merging of life and art, or the death of art. The political radical, on the contrary, may call for an art of greater social relevance and immediate comprehensibility and may sneer at non-art, anti-art, environments, concepts, software and process as simply more of the same bourgeois elitism and mystification. The socially committed museum worker may feel that his project lies in the realm of popularization and dissemination . . . [26]

Douglas Crimp in "The Postmodern Museum" describes contemporary art practices (since the 1960's) as essentially social and political. Postmodernist artists employing various strategies have worked to reveal the "social and material conditions of art's productions and reception, those conditions that it has been the museum's function to dissemble."[27]

In another article Crimp draws on Theodor Adorno's help in burying the institution of the museum.

> The German word museul (museumlike) has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are the family sepulchres of works of art.[28]

How does the museum in the postmodern era accommodate art which has increasingly turned to modes of production that are incompatible with the museum's space, that seek new audiences, that attempt to construct a truly social praxis?

Kenneth Frampton in "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance", discusses the

'relative' failure of the theoretical concept of modernist architecture, which is seen to have facilitated the 'progressive' trajectory of the Enlightenment. He now questions the triumphs of science, medicine and industry which previously had seemed to confirm the promise of the modern project. Following the First World War and the upheavals of revolution and economic depression, these 'advances' induced a state of affairs in which the interests of both monopoly and state capitalism were "for the first time in modern history, divorced from the liberative drives of cultural modernization".[28]

Land speculation and the resulting rape of the environment, together with standardized products, came to mean maximized profits at the expense of good architecture and improved quality of life. Instead, technological advancements served to alienate society further from nature and social interaction.

The postmodern response in architecture has been primarily a re-appropriation of historic codes meant to capture the 'by-gone days'. These have flourished alongside and sometimes in conjunction with an attempt to integrate the culture of the masses into an architecture of 'meaning'. Louis Kahn, perhaps more than any other architect, is responsible for directing museum design back to its early Durandesque typology. He is seen to have recreated a museum tradition for the late twentieth century by employing new

structural systems while restoring old planning types.[30] In the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas of 1966-72 Kahn returned to the ideal of the vaulted gallery and at the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven, 1969-77, he pursued a design of flexibility while simultaneously rejecting the totally fluid space of modernist museums. At the Yale Center, for the first time, shops were incorporated into the original museum design. Both these museums have had tremendous influence on subsequent museum design, including the National Gallery of Canada.

The Neue Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart by James Stirling and Michael Wilford, 1977-84, is an example of this return to museum typology of the nineteenth century, with references to Schinkel's Altes Museum. What is interesting here is the way in which this architecture is seen to reflect a kind of fragmentation, which is precisely what the critics of the National Gallery of Canada have objected to so strenuously. Helen Searing aptly describes the Neue Staatsgalerie in terms of a romantic ruin:

> The rotunda, while still used for the display of sculpture, is missing its dome, and the vegetation springing up and over its stone walls suggests that the museum has become a romantic ruin. This, as well as the pieces of masonry that have apparently "fallen" out of the wall to either side of the main entrance, is a design decision that could seem to question the very nature of the museum enterprise.[31]

Within a consideration of the museum as a materialist site of ideology, what does the Neue Staatsgalerie tell us? Is this

a response to a society in ruins? Is it a statement on the completion of the project of modernism within the institution of the museum? In the era of the postmodern, art has focussed on the social and the political. It has emphasized the impermanent, the formulaic and the reproductive versus the uniqueness and contemplative of modernist practice. Is the very nature of the museum enterprise in question? How has the National Gallery of Canada, completed in the Spring of 1988, responded to the challenge of art in the postmodern era?

CHAPTER II

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CHAPTER III

THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

A FESTIVE OPENING

The National Gallery of Canada officially opened the doors of its first permanent structure, a massive rose granite and glass monument in May 1988. Black-tied and sequin-studded élite jostled drinks and hors-d'oeuvres in a crushing crowd of ten thousand at a much-publicized opening night gala. Shocking orange, dotted purples, turquoise and lemon-yellow patterned clowns glided through the streets of the Byward Market area, adjacent to the Gallery. Coloured balloons and banners welcomed the thousands of tourists to the site. It was a spectacle of publicity and media events which attracted 825,000 visitors during the first six months following this festive opening. In a postmodern age of 'consumerism', 'nihilistic pleasure' and 'death of the social', Canadians seemed focussed together on this new national gallery, its art, and particularly, its architecture.

It had been one hundred and eight years since the Marquess of Lorne presided over the Gallery's first opening on 6 March 1880.[1] After many temporary and inadequate homes, finally the gallery would have extensive, efficient and permanent spaces. This would include conservation laboratories, library and research facilities, auditoriums, storage space, restaurants,

shops and lounges and, of course, the 'ideal' exhibit spaces. These would be perfectly lit, with humidity and temperature tightly controlled for preservation purposes. This was to be the ultimate high-tech environment in which to preserve, conserve, educate, entertain and sell. The total gross space of 46,112 m^2 would more than double that of its previous home in the Lorne Building on Elgin Street in Ottawa, which was 18,266 m^2.[2] It exemplified an ideology committed to protecting and preserving 'unique' objects.

A GALLERY FOUNDED ON THE MODERNIST IDEAL OF NATIONALISM: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BEGINNING YEARS

The National Gallery of Canada was the outcome of the foundation of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 1880. It was formed through the Ontario Society of Artists under the initiative of the then Governor-General, the Marquis of Lorne and his consort, Princess Louise.[3] They in fact chose the initial forty academicians whose work became the foundation of the collection, thus ensuring a gallery founded on British taste. The act of 1882 incorporating the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts placed in the hands of the Canadian Government, for public exhibition, the diploma pictures deposited by the members of the R.C.A. Initially the Gallery survived by means of annual grants voted by parliament and by means of gifts. Where these gifts were coming from, and how they affected the direction the Gallery would take is an un-researched area in

the history of Canadian Art. In 1907, the Royal Canadian Academy induced the Laurier government to appoint an Advisory Arts Council to assist in matters relating to spending of public funds on art. This council eventually displaced the Royal Canadian Academy as the nation's "chief tutor" in artistic matters, "and in so doing made it clear that businessmen, civil servants and philanthropists were in the process of becoming the country's arbiters of artistic taste".[4] The triumvirate consisted of Senator George Drummond, President of the Bank of Montreal, Sir Edmund Walker, President of the Bank of Commerce and Sydney Fisher, Minister of Agriculture. They were instrumental in hiring Eric Brown in 1910 to head Canada's national art institution. Brown was the son of a prosperous Nottingham (England) wine merchant with business connections in Canada, and with no formal art training. Through their combined efforts the search for a 'Canadian Identity' became centered on the painters, now known as the Group of Seven.

Until the construction of the National Gallery building in 1988, there was an absence of a visible monumental 'sign' around which public ownership could be focussed. The surrogate symbol of the Nation's cultural 'heart' was instead cathected unto a 'National School of Landscape Painting', through the work of the Group of Seven or Eight.

Within the discourse of modernism, it was essential to sell to a middle-class, industrialized public in order to gain

enough support to ensure the continuation of the 'museum venture', i.e. collecting, preserving and exhibiting using public tax dollars. It was the appeal of nationalism which was to provide the initial impetus to legitimize the National Gallery of Canada within a specifically Canadian artistic context.

Nationalism, a phenomenon of the modern world, was manifested in Canada on the eve of Confederation when political leaders such as D'Arcy McGee emphasized the need of the new Dominion to create a "New Nationality", a "Canadian nationality".[6] According to W.S. Wallace, the growth of Canadian national feeling was not shared by all in this period of the 1860's. Too many practical problems had to be dealt with, and it was only in the interest of a few to promote national patriotism.[6]

In 1871 a group called Canada First was formed whose primary aim was the general problem of finding or creating a Canadian national spirit. Their ideas of Canadianism were broadly divergent, but on one major point they seem to have agreed. "Although Canada First talked of creating a *Canadian* nationalism, they in fact equated this with Ontario provincialism; and there never were representatives from Quebec or the Maritimes in the movement".[7] In 1871 William Foster, one of the leaders of the group published an article entitled "Canada First: Our New Nationality", in which he summed up the

group's ideals. Central to his thesis were notions of a Canadian Nation, which we see carried into the twentieth century and affecting the foundation of the National Gallery of Canada. Firstly, the concept of a romantic Canada was emphasized; secondly, it was seen to be imperative that Canada not use 'Old World' models, and thirdly, that there was a need for a common objective. This stress on nationalism struck an immediate response in the press of the day. The Toronto Globe urged that only a strong feeling of nationalism could maintain Canadian existence separate from the United States.[8] Canada First concentrated on educating and convincing the people of Canada that there indeed was a national identity peculiar to them. Their aims were calculated towards the construction of a ***homogeneous*** people, encouraging broad patriotism, national unity and self government.

This nationalistic fervour filtered into the art world, and by 1908 the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto was an active center for nationalist debate. Many artists were members as well as people like Sir Edmund Walker, then Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Canada. By 1911 nationalistic feelings in Canadian politics defeated Sir Wilfrid Laurier's trade policy of reciprocity with the United States in a crushing defeat at the polls, electing instead Robert Borden on a nationalist platform.

Following the First World War patriotism resulting from Canada's participation as a country in that war, renewed and strengthened interest in certain quarters in Canada as a nation, fueled the search for a particularly Canadian identity. This revolved around the definition of a 'public' within a particular bias: English, immigrating to Canada in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, accepting Britain as head of an empire, viewing the land as 'foreign and exotic', something to be conquered and used for materialist gains. It was essentially a patriarchal, imperialist point of view, focussed on central Ontario, negating the already existing cultures of the Native People indigenous to Canada. The search for Canadian identity through this definition of the 'public' held specific 'power' biases, privileging one segment of the population while prohibiting and negating other groups. This view marginalized the long-standing French Canadian culture, as well as that of other founding groups such as the Chinese and Ukrainians.

The need for a distinctively Canadian art based on the land was being consciously discussed at the turn of the century.[8] The romantic concept of coming to terms with the land physically was, through representational practices, inscribed into the paintings of the Group of Seven. The impact of World War I, industrialization, westward expansion, development of mining and other natural resources, the railroads and their combined impact on the acceptance of the

work of the Group has been written about in great detail. The representational practices which defined the 'meaning' the Group would carry have been well documented, though their impact as a constituant factor in ideology has not been fully explored. This 'meaning', constructed through representation, is what became the plastic idiom through which an ideology of nationalism, imperialism, industrialism, individualism and patriarchy could be manifested. Though contesting accounts existed in the early years of their formation negating all the factors on which this 'sign' of nationalist identity was based, the replication of 'meaning' was assured within the dominant discourse of modernism.

In the final decade of the twentieth century, in the era of the postmodern, the discourse of modernism has taken the form of canonizing this 'romantic past'. A ritual of respect and honour is granted to the 'remains' through the vehicle of the museum.

CONSTRUCTING A NEW BUILDING

> ...the history of architecture is inevitably linked to the pageantry of human endeavors - government, religion, commerce, knowledge and its preservation, justice and its administration.[10]

Nowhere is this more evident than in the building of the National Gallery of Canada. As its official name indicates, this is not simply a National Gallery of *art* in Canada. It is more specifically the National Gallery *of Canada*. The history

of this gallery, its close ties to government and business (through its Board of Trustees), and its particular search for a Canadian identity since its inception have formed a specific theme evident in the development of this institution.

In 1982 the Canada Museums Construction Corporation was established by the federal government and assigned the task of selecting the site and architect for the new National Gallery Building. Dr. Jean Sutherland Boggs, a former Director of the Gallery, was asked to undertake the enormous responsibilities associated with leading this corporation. Numerous previous attempts had been made to have a permanent gallery constructed, but all had failed to materialize. As early as 1936, the Toronto architectural firm of Mathers and Haldenby was retained to draw up plans for a building on the present site of The National Arts Centre. Again in 1954, a competition for a new gallery was held and won by Winnipeg architects Green Blankstein Russell and Associates. In 1976, a more complete project evolved in which a competition was won by the Parkin Partnership, but never realized."

During the tenure of Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, the political will emerged to complete the National Gallery. As Trevor Boddy points out, "Trudeau was eager to leave his architectural mark, and the official openings in the next twelve months of the National Gallery, the Museum of Civilization and the Canadian Chancery in Washington can only be read as final acts of the Trudeau government because without

his personal commitment to these projects, they would have never proceeded in a country deeply marked by recession and intensely sceptical of cultural spending and government largesse."[12] According to Moshe Safdie, the architect of the National Gallery, Trudeau's role went beyond that of political support. He in fact made an essential design decision by opting for an external circulation system from the entry to the Great Hall.[13] The leadership for this major cultural project appears to have come both from Prime Minister Trudeau and Dr. Jean Boggs. Her involvement seems to have been significant, not only in terms of keeping funding flowing to ensure completion, but in architectural terms which affected the typological referencing of the gallery. As Safdie has said;

> I had only one big argument with her. I had drawn the Great Hall stepped down to the river - the upper level was to be circulation, the lower where parties and ceremonies would happen - and she kept saying that a great room shouldn't be stepped. She overruled me and said it should be flat. Now I look at the results and think she was right.[14]

This is but one indication of her enormous power in terms of how this building format would take shape.

After a limited selection process among twelve of Canada's most highly-recognized architects[15] Moshe Safdie and Associates, in collaboration with the Parkin Partnership of Toronto were given the commission to design this new cultural building. The advisory board stipulated that the building was to be a national monument; the surrounding architecture was to be

respected, and the building was to have a ceremonial character. This gallery was to do more than house art. It was to be a national symbol.

> They (Boggs and Trudeau) wanted Canada to have not only a functional facility for the collection, conservation and display of art, but more importantly, a symbol - a bold public reminder of the fundamental role of art in the development of a nation.[16]

The Gallery advisory staff requested that the building have a ceremonial character. The politicians wanted a building which would earn them congratulations, and curators wanted an architecture that would elevate the art and edify the visitors.[17] Presented with a detailed building program, Safdie was faced with a complex integration of atmospherically controlled spaces, stringent lighting specifications, and the design of exhibit spaces which would meet the standards of numerous curators and artists. Born in Haifa, Safdie came to Canada from Israel at the age of fifteen. He studied architecture at McGill University, Montreal, and attracted international attention with his thesis project, Habitat, a beehive complex of apartments, built at Expo 1967. Now a world-renowned architect, Safdie, has offices in Montreal, Boston, Jerusalem, and New York. He has held distinguished professorships at Ben Gurion, Harvard and Yale Universities. He is a prolific writer, and a strong opponent of Postmodern architecture.[18] Sensitive to more traditional art, Safdie appreciates such work as Giovanni Bellini's grisaille

Lamentation Over the Body of Christ in the Uffizi, and holds a great respect for analytical cubist paintings as well. However, he is not particularly interested in contemporary art, and does not consider either the Dadaist or Pop movements as art.

In architecture his likes range from Islamic and Romanesque to a 'certain degree of gothic'. He admires the work of Sir John Soane, Le Corbusier and Alvar Aalto and above all, and without reservation, Louis Kahn, with whom he studied.[18]

In the past five years he has been awarded an unprecedented number of important commissions in Canada. The Musée de la Civilisation in Québec City, a major addition to The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Toronto Ballet/Opera House and the National Gallery of Canada, all of them major cultural landmarks.

CHAPTER III

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CHAPTER IV

A POSTMODERN READING OF THE ARCHITECTURE

EXTERIOR MASSING AND TOPOGRAPHICAL CHOICES

Adele Freedman, in the Globe and Mail (May 21, 1988) described the new National Gallery of Canada building as a 600,000 square foot "beau geste" on the banks of the Ottawa River.

> It occupies a dramatic, historically charged site that plunges down to the water at a promontory, Nepean Point. Across an Inlet, to the south, looms the late-Victorian, neo-Gothic splendor of Parliament Hill.[1]

As Freedman noted, its proximity to the Parliament Buildings, on the Ottawa River, the historic water route which allowed the development of the Ottawa-Hull area, and on the ceremonial route of Sussex Drive, the home of the Governor General and the Prime Minister, make this location an important political choice.

Surrounded by monuments, the Gallery is next door to the War Museum and the Mint, facing an historic Roman Catholic basilica and in close proximity to the site of the proposed American Embassy. It is an ideal location within which to establish the Gallery as a national monument.

Kenneth Frampton has observed that a particular history is inscribed on any given site. History in this context refers not only to recorded interpretations of past political and

social events, but takes into account the archaeological components of the land and the way in which the site has been used and cultivated over time.

Nepean Point has been primarily used as an outdoor 'people' place, where concerts and picnics have drawn a public accustomed to spending leisure hours over-looking the Ottawa River, surrounded by green grass and mature trees. The manner in which the National Gallery has been sited, constructed, and landscaped, does not integrate the historic use of Nepean Point concert area as a 'green space' in the heart of the city. Instead, it creates a distinct division between this area and the Gallery 'space'. The result is that the most pleasant natural environment on the water-side of the site seems peripheral and 'shut-off'.

Between the colonnade and Major's Hill Park, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, landscape architect, has designed a terraced garden. It is intended to depict memories of A.Y. Jackson's Terre Sauvage painting by combining stunted pines, Siberian juniper, Arctic willow and Siberian dogwood with large slabs of northern stone.[2] Using the myth of the Group of Seven or Eight as a selling point to the public, millions of dollars have been spent to landscape the National Gallery site in as minimal a fashion as possible. This essentially meant reducing the amount of 'green' to a nominal level. Lush trees, flowers, and grass have all been excluded. Oberlander's landscaping has come as close to the stark environment one might find both

in northern Canada and conversely in hot arid, non-fertile areas of the Middle-east.

In this space, on one of the busiest city street corners in Ottawa, an amphitheatre has been built. Who would want to sit there with traffic noise and fumes some few feet away? Why was the amphitheatre not constructed in the naturally sloping area at the rear of the building between the curatorial wing and the main building? The greater variety and richness of terrain, as well as more ample space, would have enhanced the options available to performance artists using the amphitheatre for their work. The entire area surrounding the Gallery could have been developed using Land Art projects instead of 'landscaping'.

In the siting and construction of the National Gallery, Moshe Safdie was asked to respect the surrounding monuments. Although this request has been considered in terms of siting and height restrictions, there is little relationship between the architecture of the Gallery and the Georgian façades of Sussex Drive, on which the building is situated. In essence 'respecting the environment' seems to have meant respecting the monumental structures of government and religion. Little attention was given to the surrounding neighbourhood, nor to the outdoor use of Nepean Point.

The height restrictions may account for the dense, low-lying weight of this expansive complex. If the building had been more openly constructed, a different type of massing

using a more open system of units abutting at different angles, and if the Great Hall had been stepped down to the River, with access to the outdoors from that area (both of which Safdie originally proposed and was over-ruled), then gardens, outdoor restaurants and sculpture areas could have taken advantage of the best archaeological components of the site. Instead these have been distanced, diminished, in favour of modernist interests of nationalism through the monumental.

> Athough at the entrance hall a visitor will be able to take an elevator to the two exhibition floors above, he or she may prefer to climb the gradual ramp, essentially a glazed street with views towards the south over Major's Hill Park, the Rideau Canal and the Parliament Buildings. In designing this processional space Safdie was responding to the letter from the chairman of the Gallery's Advisory Committee that was transmitted with the architectural programme to the architect. In that letter there was a plea that 'the new Gallery should combine with its site to give a sense of approach and a sense of ceremony appropriate to a great national institution'.[3]

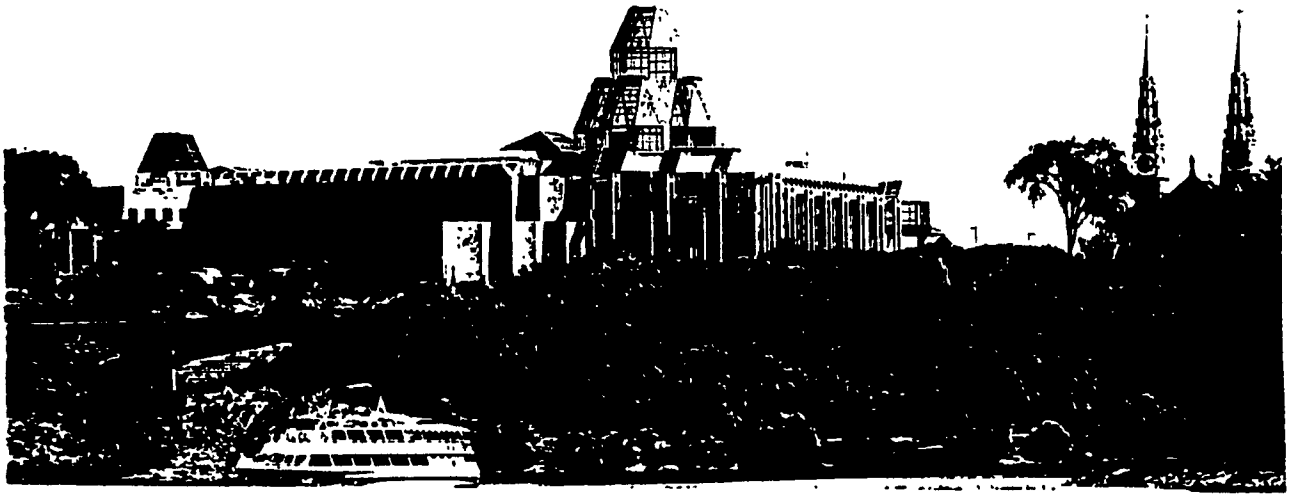
Concern was primarily with building a monument, respecting other monuments, and being a part of the ceremonial route taken by high officials on important occasions.

There is no question that in the designing of the National Gallery building, Moshe Safdie adhered to the request of his client. Together they have built a shrine. It is an imposing monument. Like the cult temples built out of materials of eternity, this pink and grey granite structure is a heavy dead weight lodged permanently into its symbolic site. Reminiscent of the pyramids, and similar to these ancient Egyptian burial

chambers, the National Gallery emerges from Nepean Point, recognized primarily by the stacked honeycombed triangular silhouette of the Great Hall on its main southern façade, (Fig.1). As in King Zoser's first step pyramid (Fig. 2) this is a ***mound,*** a monumental marker locating the burial mastabas and linking them by a shaft to the entrance. Safdie's early preliminary sketches (Fig. 3), which he worked in clay and paper, are directly linked to ancient Middle-eastern burial chambers and vaults. Information data published in the Architectural Record, October 1988, state that though the Great Hall silhouette ***could*** be interpreted as a gesture to the Victorian Gothic Parliamentary Library, essentially it has "little to do with Gothic Revival,"[4] and is derived instead from the muquarnas vaults found in the early Islamic architecture of Iran, a long-time interest of Safdie's (Fig. 4).

FIGURE 1

Silhouette of the Great Hall



(Reproduced from "A Treasure House in Granite and Glass"; A Communications Pamphlet published by Canada Museums Construction Corporation Inc., 1988).

FIGURE 2

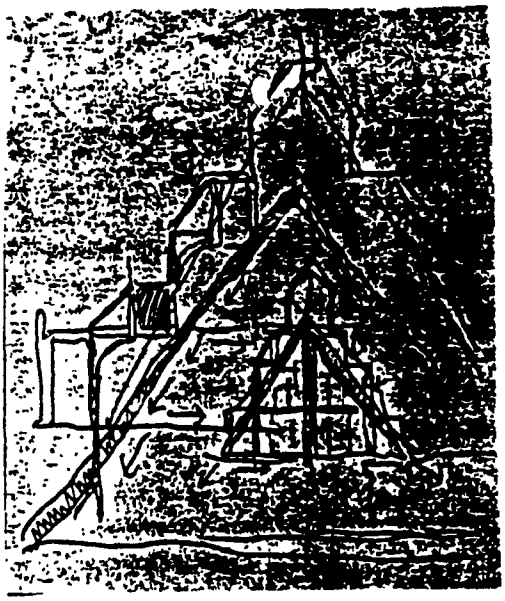
Step Pyramid of King Zoser, Saqqara.

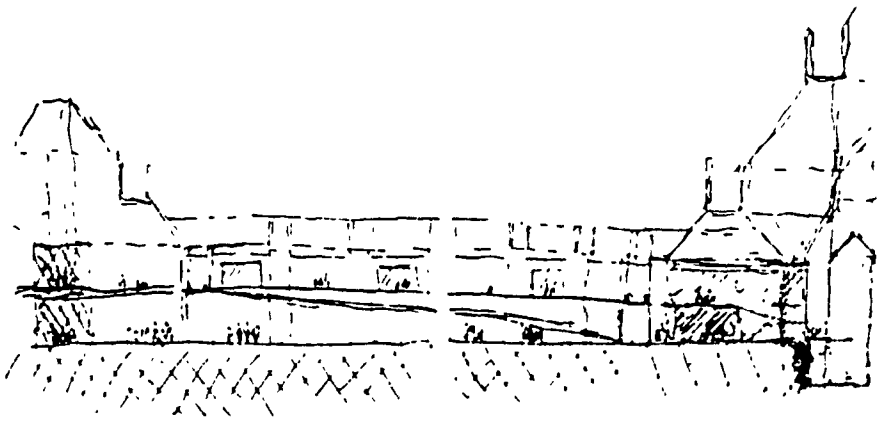
3rd Dynasty, c. 2650 B.C.

(Reproduced from H.W. Janson, History of Art, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1970.)

FIGURE 3

Early Sketches by Safdie.

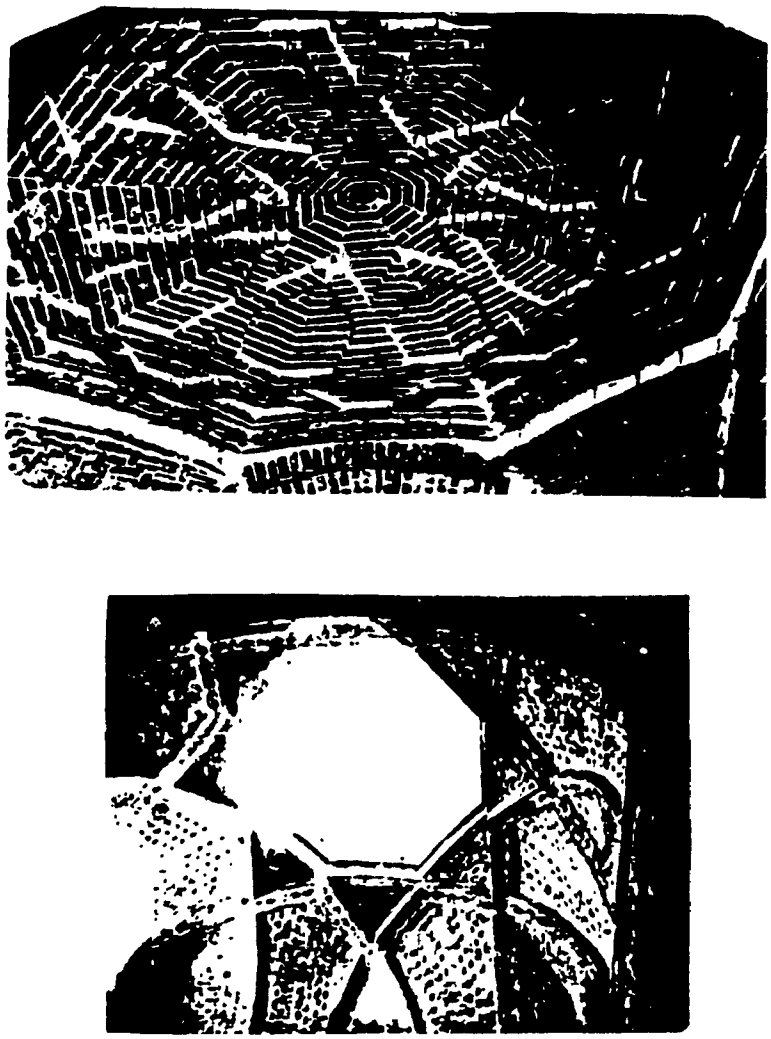




(Reproduced from Trevor Boddy, "Critique: Architecture on the Fast Track", The Canadian Architect, June, 1988.)

FIGURE 4

Isfahan, Masjid-i-Jami, oratory vault



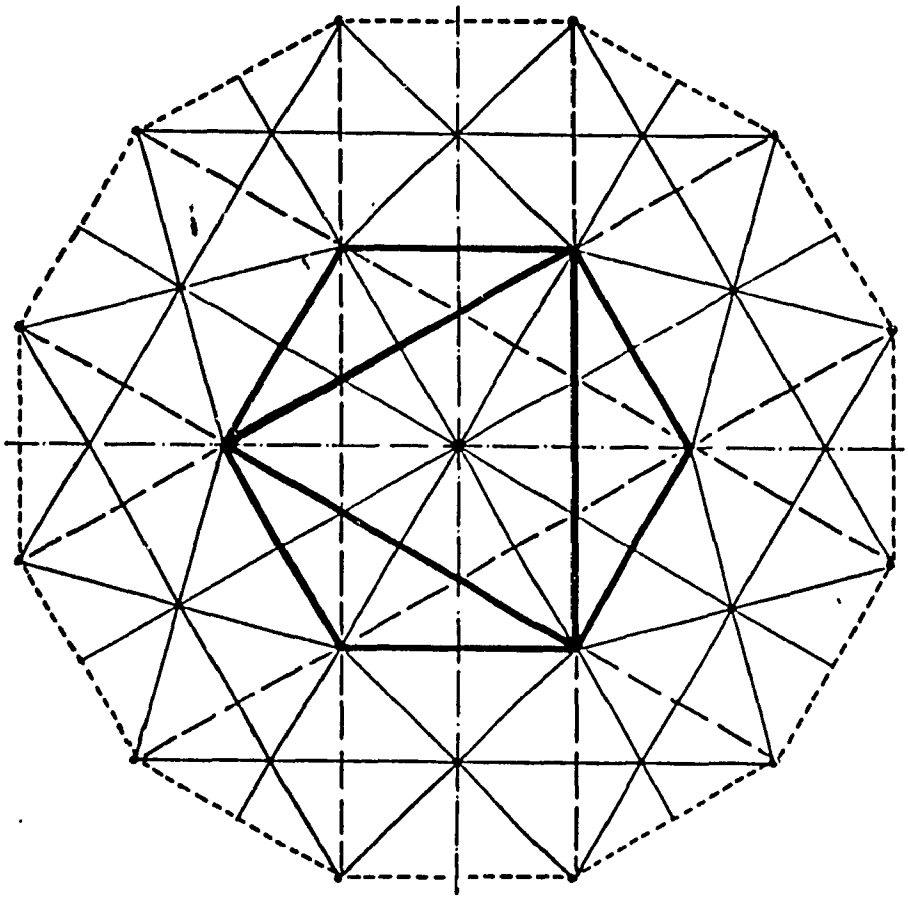
(Reproduced from R.A. Jairazbhoy; An Outline of Islamic Architecture, Bombay, London, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1972.)

The muquarnas (more commonly known as stalactite or honeycomb) is both an architectural and decorative element, whose origins are uncertain but was widely used throughout Islam. Early examples (11th and 12th century) indicate that muquarnas had primarily a structural significance initially, but shortly thereafter the decorative qualities of intersecting angles became the predominant concern. Essentially a geometric disposition of ornamentation with a three dimensional quality, the muquarnas has come to be recognized as a basic Islamic pattern of shapes based in mathematics and cosmology. It can be adapted to a variety of spaces and materials, and has been constructed in stucco and stone, and used in vast vaulted spaces as well as small decorative niches[5] (Fig. 5).

The similarity in the silhouette of the Great Hall is also closely related to a museum design by Le Corbusier, a favourite of Safdie's (Fig. 6).

FIGURE 5

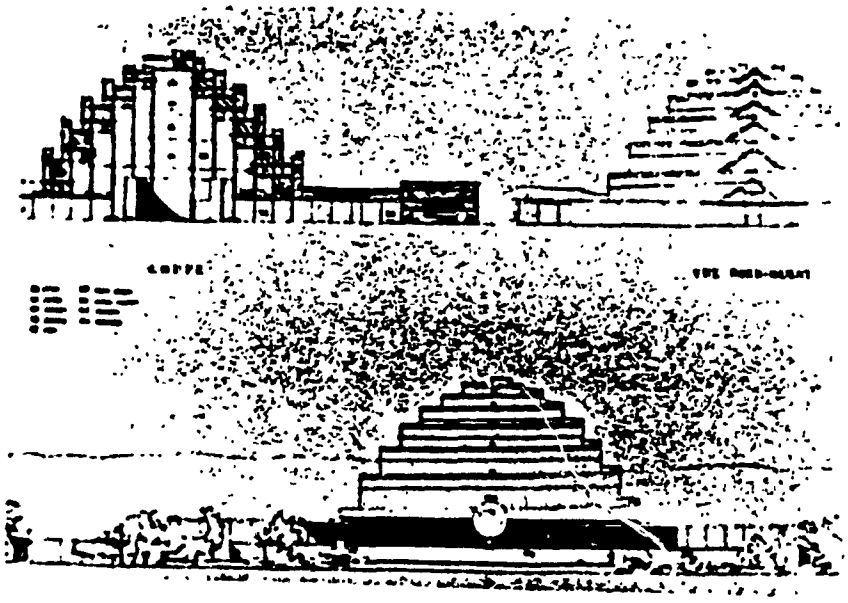
One of the Islamic Patterns used in architecture



(Reproduced from Keith Critchlow, Islamic Patterns; an Analytical and Cosmological Approach, London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).

FIGURE 6

Mundaneum, 1927, Geneva, Le Corbusier, architect



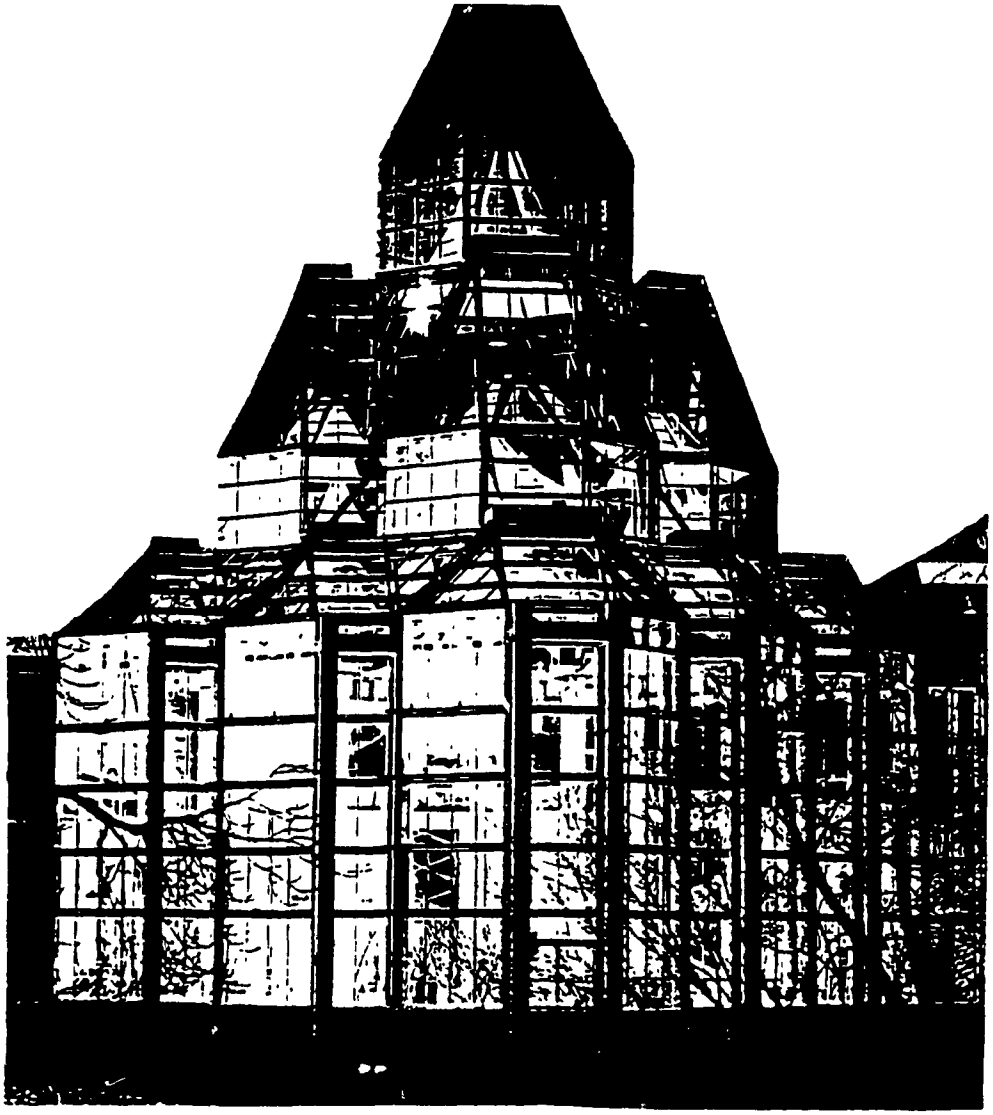
(Reproduced from "The Museum Building and Its Architectural Expression", Mehdi Ghafouri. Parachute, 46, March, April, May, 1987.)

Whatever its specific roots, it is unmistakingly the 'primeval hill' of the Great Hall which is the visual symbol of the National Gallery architecture. This façade diminishes the expansive lead-box complex which sprawls solidly behind it. Not unlike the cult temples of the XVIII Dynasty, this enormous complex has the feeling of 'growth by accretion', one sees in Queen Hatshepsut's funerary temple at Karnak; the result of continuous building and addition in front of an original kernel. Though the tectonic massing in this instance creates particular historic memory links, simultaneously contesting discourses redefine the meaning of this monumental visual symbol.

Most writers describing its significance linked it to government, and the neo-Gothic architecture of the Houses of Parliament. Early information released by Dr. Boggs and the Museum Construction Corporation prior to the completion of the building seem to have reinforced and perhaps initiated this link to government through the architecture.[6] The non-discursive communications of the period appear to have followed this lead. Photographs of the gallery, for instance, were invariably taken from a low angle, accentuating a rising spiralling quality to the architecture, which required a particularly constructed perspective in photography (Fig. 7).

FIGURE 7

Low-angle Photograph of the Great Hall



(Reproduced from "A Treasure House in Granite and Glass"; A Communications Pamphlet published by Canada Museums Construction Corporation Inc., 1988).

Alternatively, shots were taken from a distance with the Parliament Buildings included within the same frame. Does the meaning of this 'primeval hill' now change . . . expand . . . narrow? Does a tectonic massing which has little to do with Gothic architecture now become recognized as neo-Gothic because of 'conditioned' and 'learned' memory links?

When viewing the gallery from its main entrance, the sense of entering a ceremonial space leading to an inner vault and subterranean chambers is overpowering. This is not a 'crystal palace', rising majestically into the sky. It is a stronghold . . . a 'rock-cut' entrance to the nation's vaults containing its treasures of art. This effect could have been amplified if the structure had been sunk underground even further. This monumental tomb could have been set into a mountain. It does not invite scrutiny from all sides. In fact, it is impossible to walk 'around' the building easily. The sense of something solid having been 'carved into' is much stronger than the sense of something having been 'built up'.

TECTONICS AND TYPOLOGY: THE POLITICS OF SPACE

The Interior Causeways

The main entrance, an octagonal lantern, is angled into the south-east corner of the main façade and is linked to the monumental 'marker', the Great Hall, by a ceremonial ramped colonnade, which is 278 feet long (85 metres) and 63 feet high

(19 metres). From the lobby you are drawn dramatically through this long processional causeway. Representational links have been made between this colonnade and Bernini's ramp at St. Peter's. Though Safdie photographed the Bernini ramp, Boggs herself (in an ambiguous statement) calls this a "surprising inspiration for an architect who has always disliked St. Peter's"; while simultaneously stating:

> He found reinforcement for his design when he visited the Scala Regia and photographed the gradual ramp of the Corridoio del Bernini leading to it.[7]

In ancient temples, the gradual rise in the floor in conjunction with the lowering height of the ceiling forced a dynamic focussing towards the rear and expressed architectonically the fact that the naos was the 'heaven' described by inscription. In the Gallery, similarly, the inflected rhythm of the massive poured-in-place concrete columns (which support an angled glass ceiling), together with the slopped granite floor, create a perspectival architectonic pull towards the top of the climb (Fig. 8).

It is a walk through light and shadow. Though surrounded by glass on the south side and above, one senses the magnitude, the solid power of the structural concrete and granite. Tectonically, the associations are with the standing *supports* of colossal ruins rather than the original structures of these ancient sites. What takes place is a ritualistic procession towards the interior of the tomb. The senses are totally

involved . . . the kinetic response of the body to the climb, the anticipation, and the body in movement make it difficult to look outward. One is confined by boundaries of light and concrete, defining space and confining sight.

THE GREAT HALL:

What is it?

What is one supposed to do here?

What does this have to do with art exhibits?

What does it 'mean'?

Why would a society build such a thing? What is of such great value to this particular society that would warrant this excessive demonstration?

FIGURE 8

The Colonnade; A Climb Towards the Great Hall

(Reproduced from "A Treasure House in Granite and Glass"; A Communications Pamphlet published by Canada Museums Construction Corporation Inc., 1988.)

Roland Barthes in The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies describes the tower as a universal symbol of Paris. An utterly ***useless*** monument, he says, which by its very inutility gives it a great imaginary function.

> . . . architecture is always dream and function, expression of a utopia and instrument of a convenience.[8]

The Tower is ***nothing*** and ***everything***. It achieves a kind of zero degree of monument, he continues. It is the "ineluctable sign", because it means all.

Like the tower, the Great Hall attracts meaning. In true modernist fashion it over-awes and inspires contemplation and respect. Seen to be Safdie's 'signature space', it is most often described in the media as a 'crystalline rotunda', whose source is the neo-Gothic Library of Parliament.

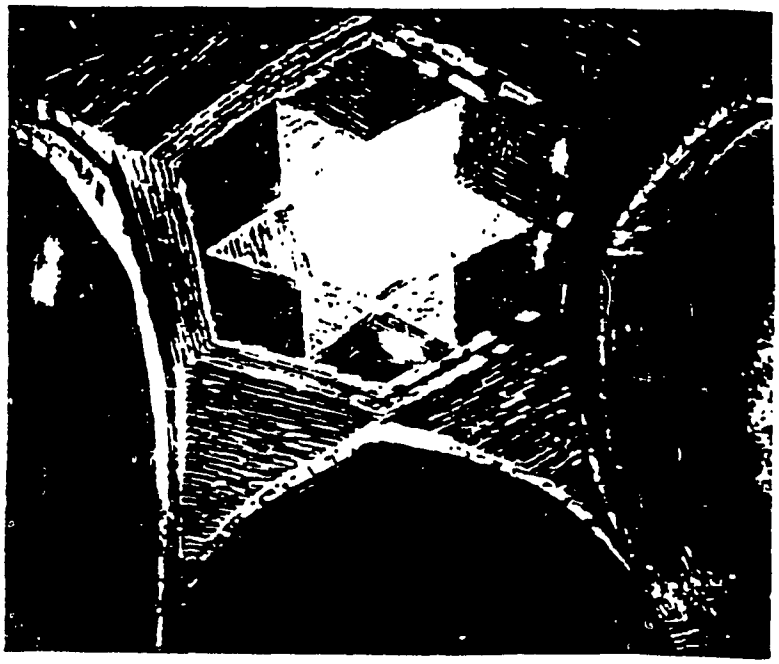
In the western world, its over-determined canonical references would be to the traditional 'Pantheonesque' rotunda central to museum architecture since its inception two hundred years ago. However, it is difficult to reconcile such typological inference with Safdie's interest in Islamic architecture.

The Great Hall's structural frame rises some 143 feet into the sky and supports what is essentially a glass room. The enigma of this hall is laden with modernist ideology. It forces contemplation and connotes reverence. As an 'installation', a ***useless*** structure, this is a powerful work of

art. Its massive scale, so many times greater than human scale removes it from the concept of what constitutes a room. One half of the room is walled in glass and topped with a glass dome supported by a cluster of four poured-in-place concrete columns which rise twenty feet to meet the lower edge of the dome's faceted frame. One is forced by the colossal height and expanse of the surrounding space to turn inward and upward. It becomes difficult to look beyond the 'frame' to the outside. The geometric pattern of the supporting steel structure and its quality of depth are highly reminiscent of the muquarnas type vault of the Friday Mosque Domes of Isfahan (Fig. 9) and (Fig. 10).

FIGURE 9

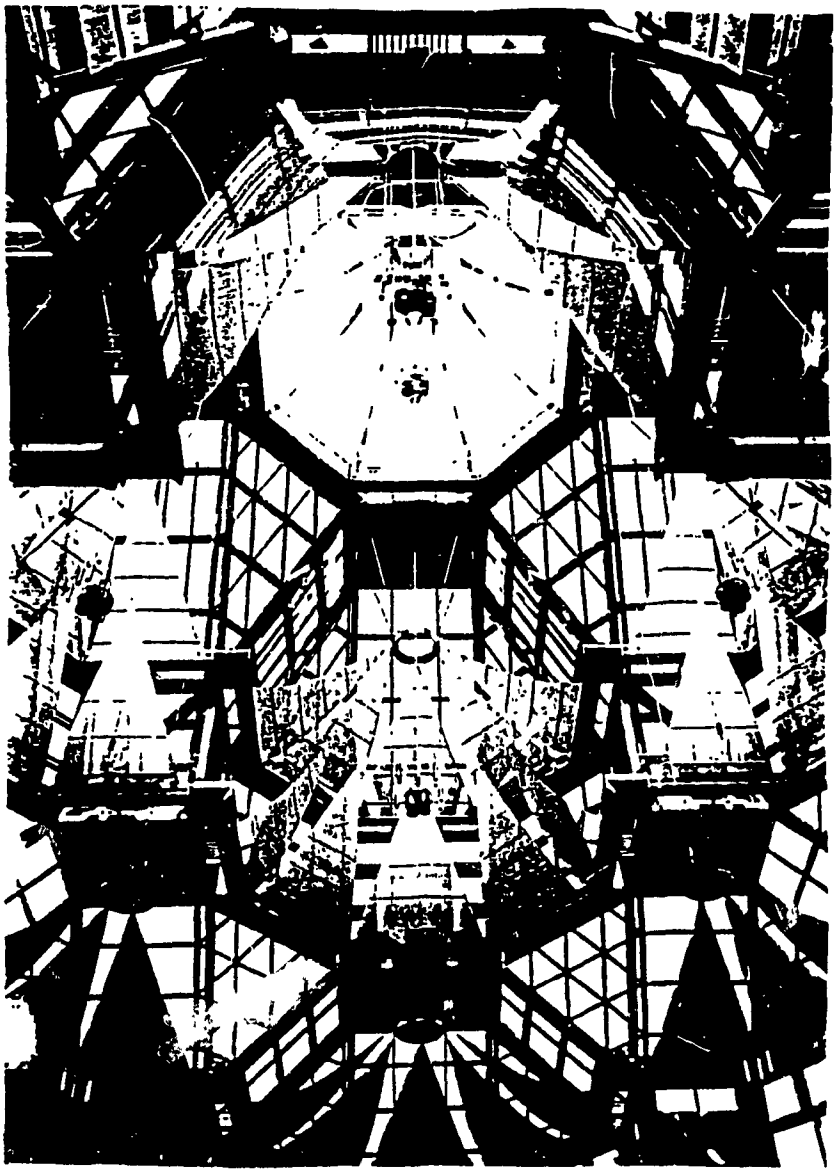
Domes in the Friday Mosque, Isfahan



(Reproduced from Moshe Safdie, Form and Purpose, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982.)

FIGURE 10

THE GREAT HALL CEILING



(Reproduced from Larry Richards; "Ottawa's Crystal Palace", Canadian Art, Vol. 5, No. 2, (June 1988).)

The earliest inscribed Islamic monument in Iran is the tomb chamber Gunbad-i-Qabus at Gurgan dating 1007. In it, Qabus ibd Washimgir, who figured larger in death than in life (like the Pharaohs of Egypt), but unlike them did not smother his corpse deep in the terrain; instead he had his body hung 150 feet above the ground in a glass coffin suspended by chains. A window opened to the outside world let in the sun every dawn and the stars at night.[9] Similarly, the Great Hall is a consecrated space sanctifying, dignifying and celebrating the great god of Art. The so-called panorama of the Parliament Buildings and the exterior view are minimalized. They become inaccessible, unimportant by comparison. Where are the inner chambers? From the Great Hall the most obvious access draws you down a long walled-in concourse, or alternatively up a grand and heroic Egyptian-style staircase to the next level.

> The Galleria is without doubt one of the handsomest rooms made in Canada this decade. With its stained ramp and blue fibreglass air supply nozzles, obvious debts are owed to recent Stirling, especially the epochal Stuttgart Staatsgaleria.[10]

Perhaps more than any other part of the gallery this space stimulates the imagination. It is an extended subterranean-like causeway, completely enclosed and without fenestration. Solid massing of granite wall on either side is relieved only by the cobalt-blue air nozzles, placed high on the walls, and looking very much like loud-speakers. One expects to hear sharp authoritarian directions to the crowds in the bomb-shelter-like space below. Like the false chambers

in ancient tombs, this causeway deceptively leads you away from the central gallery entrance (concealed from view) and comes to an abrupt stop at a staircase leading to the curatorial area, or to the restaurant, or through a 'back door' to the contemporary galleries. As Trevor Boddy describes it: it is a disappointing ending to a magnificent sequence from door to ticket pavilion to Great Hall through the colonnade, but does not end up well and demonstrates a "typically Canadian tragedy of incompletion, the half-felt, the glittering overture with the forty-watt finale".[11] Doubling back this long ramp and into the Great Hall the choice is to be drawn upward by the dramatic Egyptian ramp or alternatively seek out the inner chambers of the main floor Canadian Galleries.

The approaches are laden with secrecy, mystery and difficulty.

> The most predominant meaning in Safdie's National Gallery is its quantifiable impressiveness due to size. The glass castles at the corners, the ramps, the crystalline edges - these things being the Gallery's outward appearance, are geared to vast crowds, flooding attendance, great amounts of glass and gigantic views of the local cityscape - all things not to do, except by circumstantial locatic , w..th art, Canadian art, or Canada. These are things to do with tourism and the consumption of culture, rather than culture itself.[12]

It is, of course, precisely with tourism and the consumption of culture with which much of the architectural function had to deal. The perceived needs of the public within the definition assigned to it by the museum dictated the way in which the architectural space developed.

The entire exterior circulation space, i.e. entrance foyer, colonnade, Great Hall, concourse and restaurant have been constructed to handle enormous crowds of people. This concept of drawing great numbers of spectators to the museum is based on a ***blockbuster*** mentality.

> The blockbuster can be defined as a large-scale loan exhibition which people who normally don't go to museums will stand in line for hours to see.[1]

Intricately woven into the fabric of late-capitalist culture, the blockbuster is seen to satisfy the need for ***entertainment*** and is a way of competing for the public's leisure-time. As a result, it has emphasized showmanship and marketing tactics in line with an ideology of consumerism, its product being culture. To this end, the media becomes a tool with which to advertise to a public accustomed to 'hard-sell' marketing tactics. Through the media (interviews, brochures, TV etc.) the 'magnificent' quality of light has been part of the selling point of the new National Gallery building. What exactly does this mean? In curatorial terms, probably that the light is dim enough not to damage the works; in architectural terms, probably that the light defined certain structural elements, in engineering terms, probably that ingenious two-level shafts were devised to bring light down to the main floor (even though this experiment is not particularly successful). In media terms, however, 'light' was interpreted in full cinematic pure colour hues of lush

turquoise, rich purples, deep golds and midnight blues, all of which required particular photographic construction in order to be represented that way. This forms part of the philosophy of 'selling' to a mass audience accustomed to shopping centre colours and not too-subtle advertising. All of which is geared to bringing in ***numbers*** of people.

The blockbuster which was the innovation of Thomas Hoving (Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art 1966-1977)[14] was based on the premise that 1) the attraction of larger numbers of people was important and 2) the best way to do this was to use the marketing methods of Big Business. To this end he introduced the large flashy banners hanging on the façade of the museum to advertise temporary exhibitions. In addition, 'popular themes' were chosen, and he introduced dramatic lighting and other techniques of 'presentation' more in line with advertising techniques. Finally, came the gift shops, which often seem to attract more ***audience*** than the exhibits themselves.

The contesting views surrounding this approach to museology, have on the one hand emphasized the museum's role as educator and taken the position that numbers equal success. On the other hand, critics of this position have pointed to its inherent problems in 1) the area of corporate funding and 2) equating entertainment with education.

As Brian Wallis has stated in "The Art of Big Business", corporate funding is a mutual agreement between corporations and museums "based on a shared set of values, liberal humanism".

> This ideology common to the museum and the corporation, provides the subtext for the sponsored exhibitions. The 'official' ideology of the humanities, liberal humanism stresses the importance of the unique individual; it advocates abstract notions of freedom and democracy; and it prefers purified esthetics divorced from politics.[16]

This statement is of crucial importance to the discourse of the museum in a post-industrial society. This point of view emphasizes the connection between liberal humanism and aesthetics and suggests that the museum supports this ideological position, which negates the political. The architecture of the National Gallery of Canada designed to accommodate the ***blockbuster*** and its attending corporate funding would seem to legitimize this particular position.

The main reason for corporate funding is seen to be "improving - and ensuring - the business climate"[16] As Brian Wallis has pointed out, "For a corporation to structure and promote a coherent value system requires a certain control of information and a deliberate constitution of representations."[17] The critics of this position have stated they know of no proposed exhibit which has been altered to suit corporate funding. This is rather a naive position, as it seems obvious the proposals for specific exhibits put together as a package

and presented to a corporation, would already be ***neutralized*** (removed of controversial and political content which might be damaging to the business environment of the corporation), in order to be able to assure the funder that the exhibit has mass appeal. This thrust towards numbers (some would say over quality) is a fundamental issue in terms of what the museum's function should be. Is it to be a place where art meets the problems of living head-on, or is it to be a hallowed space enshrining a particular history of art?

Trevor Boddy, like many critics writing about the National Gallery, around the time of its opening, described it as a building of many 'schizophrenic' qualities. "Nowhere is this extreme architectural division between these areas (public and galleries) more evident than in the detailing of structure."

> A decision in the program for a pronounced architectural differentiation between public spaces and galleries was exaggerated by the opting for exterior circulation. This is the first and most important of the many schizophrenic qualities of the building: there is one architecture for the public spaces and another for the gallery areas.[12]

The interior chambers, in marked contrast to the expressive quality of the exterior causeways, have downplayed the tectonic elements of architecture. It is this contrast in treatment between the public and gallery spaces which so disarmed most critics writing about the Gallery in the spring and summer of 1988.

> To have made concrete structure such a major visual theme in the public zones, but only a vestigial hold-over in the galleries (most of the arches have

> no structural, only visual function) seems to me a contradiction not accountable to any programmatic or curatorial pre-condition.[19]

This unduly neutered approach to structural detailing once inside the galleries reinforces the typological referencing to the history of museum architecture within the tradition of western modernism. Vaulted and half-vaulted galleries, toplit and appropriat ly painted to suit specific historic periods, combine with the square clean barn-like space of late modernist museums. These form the basis of the typology throughout the exhibit areas. In the traditional Canadian and European galleries inspiration has been drawn from Louis Kahn's Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth and the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven, as well as the great museums of Europe and the United States.

> They could also be interpreted as an expression of Safdie's desire to be part of the main tradition of museum building, with reminiscences in the vaulting of the Grande Galerie of the Louvre, the Braccio Nuovo of the Vatican, the Cypriot gallery at the Metropolitan or the central halls of Pope's building for the National Gallery of Art in Washington.[20]

In scale and proportion these galleries are similar to the Kimbell and particularly to Sir John Soane's gallery at Dulwich in England. The proportion of height to width of the European galleries is almost identical to the Kimbell, and the Canadian galleries are about five feet wider. The width of the European galleries is the same as the central galleries at Dulwich, but they are seven feet lower.[21]

Why and in what context were these typological choices allowed to be recognized as operative truths? i.e. How was the function of the gallery space seen to be satisfied by these particular choices?

> The word 'function', when used in connection with architecture, has two senses. First, it simply means the way in which a building satisfies a set of pragmatically determined uses. Secondly, it means a certain architectural language, a language which represents a certain relation held to exist between human society and the mechanical and material basis of its culture.[22]

Essentially, then, the definition of the 'public' and its 'needs' dictate the functional decisions of any given architectural project. Turning this around allows us to see how the architectural choices are based in ideology.

At the National Gallery of Canada the interior depositories immediately remove the receptor from any 'sense of place', in marked contrast to the entrance causeways. Though ceiling fenestration allows a play of seasonally shifting light across gallery spaces, there is no relationship to locale on the interior. There are few windows for orientation and no 'known' pattern except that of other western museums.

It becomes essential to consult a floorplan in order to orient yourself within this space. 'cluding the curatorial wing linked by a bridge, the building is essentially L-shaped. It is a low, rambling two-level structure. The long arm of the L runs parallel to the entrance colonnade and the short

arm to the concourse. On the ground level are located the Canadian galleries. These circulate around the perimeter of a large rectangle, in the centre of which are two courtyards, which rise the full two stories of the building and are sky-lit. Between them is the reconstructed nineteenth century Perpendicular Gothic-Revival chapel of the Convent of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

The Canadian Galleries:

> Sadly, the most disappointing spaces in the building are the Canadian galleries.[23]

These appear sequestered under the second-floor European galleries. It was decided the Canadian galleries had to be located on the main floor, in what would be considered the primary space. Concerns in designing this space were essentially political. To gain the support of the public for the construction of a national monument, it was imperative to give precedence to 'national' art. They are the spaces into which Safdie *had* to bring natural light. As Dr. Boggs points out, "Here Safdie was worried about the hierarchy of primary and secondary spaces perceived in art museums with two super-imposed levels of exhibition spaces; he therefore devised a system of mirrored light shafts to carry natural light to the lower floor."[24] This ingenious mirror-lined sky-light shaft which pierces the vaulted ceilings and sends diffused natural

light through the main floor galleries is seen by Trevor Boddy to be less than the best solution.

> Unlike the unmuted skylights of the European galleries above, flat diffusers have to be used to distribute the hot spots of sunlight produced by the light tunnels. These are a particularly unfortunate detail; they neuter the character of the light and reduce sectional vitality in already short and busy rooms. Safdie would have done better to follow through on the borrowing from the Kimbell with a light bouncer detail, but this would have drawn attention to the fundamentally different quality of the light in the Canadian galleries compared to the European - obviously politically unpalatable.[25]

Why would it seem logical that the primary space is on the ground level? In much of the European world, the second floor is given the greatest importance. If, as Trevor Boddy points out, the key rationale for deploying the Canadian galleries underneath the European ones was to catch the pulse of the mainfloor arrivals, then this is subverted by Safdie's heroic staired ramp, which is far more accessible than the entrance to the Canadian galleries 'hidden' under a staircase, and needing the bolstering of two courtyards and a re-constructed chapel. It would have been more logical to locate the Canadian galleries on the second level, in closer proximity to the Inuit art, which somehow seems 'removed' from the bulk of the Canadian art.

The division of the Canadian galleries into separate regional spaces emphasizes a history of art in Canada based on a national identity of separate regions. It has the advantage of defining differences in art within regional

boundaries, but simultaneously presents the problem of over-emphasis on central Ontario. Historically this is where much of the Canadian collection focussed. This particular way of dividing the space is based on provincial (and therefore political) boundaries established at Confederation or later. Art, which does not fit into those boundaries, and which is indigenous to Canada is excluded. It becomes the 'territory' of an ethnocentric presentation within the Museum of Civilization, negating its 'high art' qualities. Why would a tall-case clock from Saint John, N.B. be considered high art suitable for the National Gallery, while an intricately carved chest from the Haida Indians becomes an object of curiosity and 'craftsmanship', but not high art? The design of these exhibit spaces was realized based on a view of the history of art within a pictocentric, ethnocentric and patriarchal framework.

Both the European and Asian Galleries on the second floor follow the Canadian galleries in an over-determined typological referencing. With their full vaulted ceilings and central strip of skylight, as well as appropriate colours of specific periods, these rooms refer to the canonical architecture of the Grande Galerie of The Louvre and The Braccio Nuovo of The Vatican for example.

This typology reinforces and further legitimizes a history of art within the discourse of modernism and its traditions. All of these spaces were designed to focus on the walls and therefore accommodate a pictocentric bias in art. This is emphasized even where 'movable walls' are given the appearance of being 'fixed'. The large 'virile' practice of painting is facilitated, while small etchings, miniatures, embroideries etc. do not 'fit in'.

The Rideau Street Chapel:

The chapel isolated in a crypt-like space at the very heart of the museum is concealed from easy view. Its only entrance is through a courtyard and not readily visible. Salvaged from demolition in the 1970's this Ottawa Chapel has been meticulously re-constructed. Its intricate fan-vaulting has been painted in muted creams, pale clear cerulean blue, and raw sienna; tightly assembled pieces of wood . . . attesting to high-quality historic as well as contemporary craftsmanship. The light is dim, the stained-glass windows ingeniously lit from behind by artificial light . . . a magnificent stage-set. Emptied of its original religious significance, it becomes like the artwork in the rest of the gallery a ***unique*** architectural ***object***. This was a women's convent; operated by women and attended by women. Missing are the voices of women, the rustling of black nun's-veiling as

they move purposefully about, the music, the hum of prayers, the smells of incense, flowers and burning wax. What is particularly noticeable because of its absence are the intricately embroidered linens, the complex tapestries which would have been part of this chapel. This would have been an ideal opportunity to introduce such art into the gallery system. Once again, culture is defined by emphasizing one aspect of craftsmanship while negating another.

The Courtyards:

The courtyards, one a garden court and another a smaller water court rise the entire height of the gallery and are roofed over in glass. These spaces have returned to the expressive tectonic quality of the causeway architecture. There is a cloistered medieval atmosphere here, Mediterranean in flavour. The proportions are decidedly Romanesque . . . solid . . . determined. Here the visitor can sit, think and feel. The light is clear and soft, diffused edges flowing over the granite and concrete spaces with cool pink washes. Though these spaces have been repeatedly written about as orientation devices, in fact they impede easy circulation through both the mainfloor and second floor galleries. Courtyards have a long tradition in museum architecture. However, circulation usually circumscribes the courtyard in its entirety. In the National Gallery, because the two courts and the chapel are lined up, and the galleries circulate around

all three as one unit, the traffic pattern is totally confusing. Similarly, both the second level galleries and the contemporary wing do not have *one* orientation locale. The galleries become mazes with 'false' openings. Some galleries have as many as six exits from which to choose. This excessive fenestration results in a constant retracing of steps.

The Contemporary Galleries:

> I have to confess that practically nothing that has been done in the name of art during my lifetime has had any significance for my understanding of the universe.[26]

As Jean Boggs points out in "The designing of a National Gallery" enormous effort had to be made to bridge the gap between Safdie and the curators of contemporary art. With regard to Dadaism and the Pop movements for instance he has stated "Personally I can't consider either as art".[27] His personal bias in this area might have proven a difficulty for him in terms of devising an architecture which could accommodate such work, and perhaps more pertinently, recent work of the post-modern period. Canadian artists were brought from across the country to talk with him about the problems of adequate and ideal space for contemporary art. After consultation with these artists and the curators of contemporary art, the natural lighting was minimized in these galleries.

> Safdie fought hard for the inclusion of natural light in these galleries, and at several times in the design process was over-ruled.[28]

In keeping with theories of modern art as autonomous and self-referential, the sense of place has been removed as much as possible. Where windows do exist they have been draped with a mesh-like fine wire screen which breaks the outdoor landscape up into thousands of TV-like dots. The reality of nature becomes an 'unreal' *image*, to look at. Almost half of the originally intended skylights were eliminated in these galleries due to curatorial and artist objections. As Jean Boggs has recorded,

> On another occasion Dan Flavin met with us and was even more provocative, writing me (Boggs) later, "Natural light is mostly irrelevant".[29]

These contemporary galleries are located in what is essentially a separate wing and can be entered through the concourse, via the second floor or through the main entrance to the Canadian galleries. They are large symmetrical, neutral and barn-like . . . the White Cube of modernism. As a result of this thrust towards the flexible cube of modernist loft-like spaces, these galleries are under designed. "There is none of the sectional drama of Isozaki's Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, with its intriguing diagonal cross-gallery views and borrowed sights of art in the next room."[30]

> Unlike the galleries in the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and The Power Plant gallery in Toronto, all of which have surprises coming from natural light - bold windows at the Whitney, amazing

> filtered top light at the MOCA, big view to Lake Ontario at the Power Plant - the National's Modern and Contemporary galleries are strangely under-designed to the point of feeling like warehouse renovations. Neutral, clear, regular places for unpredictable art have merit, but the institutional overreaction to top light - cutting back from 12 skylights in the original design to six in the finished building - and almost total lack of spatial and textual development raise suspicions of design paranoia in certain quarters.[31]

The problem of under-designing these spaces goes beyond aesthetic considerations. Essentially no design accommodation was made in terms of providing information about works of a non-aesthetic nature.

In these spaces are works which once had political and social motivation and are now reduced to aesthetic delight; presented as beautiful objects, in a magnificent space, with subtle light effects, and carefully selected wall colours. Through curatorial and design impetus these works beg aesthetic consideration. In some instances, the aesthetic reduction becomes ludicrous; i.e. when a spectator is heard trying to find 'beauty' in Marcel Duchamp's urinal "the pure gleaming white procelain against the warm golden pine".

The majority of gallery visitors are not prepared for this work, and nothing exists in the design of the space which would facilitate knowledge and put the work in context. The assumption that this is not the responsibility of the architecture is but one more example of the way in which architectural decisions get locked into a particular discourse. The architectural challenge in these spaces was to integrate

systems of information while protecting the 'reverence of' and 'dedication to' a modernist ideal of contemplation. This was the point at which high technology could have become integrated into the architecture of the museum, allowing it to become something other than a spectacle of frantic button pushing.

Work such as Hans Haacke's South African piece, on display at the Gallery opening, need to be explained to the public. This is not work which can be displayed in a 'high-art' system as it presently exists. It is essential to understand the raison d'être of the work, in order for it to have any impact. Through the architecture the transfer of this knowledge to the public could have been facilitated.

> The demand, voiced by advanced artists, ex-artists and new-left radicals, that art 'come out of the museums', cease to consist of valuable, market-oriented objects, merge with life - or, in effect, simply disappear - is in many ways an admirable one... Yet, on the other hand, such demands may simply be the ultimate act of avant-garde, elitist hubris... The death of art? The destruction of culture? The demise of the museum? These phrases tend to ring hollow: for the vast majority of people throughout the world, struggling against poverty, decimated by war and hunger or crushed by demeaning life-styles, neither art nor culture nor the museums themselves have ever really been alive.[32]

It is precisely with political and social injustice which much of the work of contemporary artists deals, and it would seem to be the responsibility of the museum to facilitate this type of work.

> The first museums were often extensions of art academies and were to be used, like the British Museum founded in 1759, by "learned and studious men". However, the democratic spirit of the later 18th century gave rise to the notion that museums

should be responsible to larger, more public audiences.[33]

Dr. Shirley Thomson, the new director of the Gallery has inherited the responsibility of defining and carrying out the role of the museum vis à vis the public. She has a Ph.D. in art history from McGill University and was formerly Secretary General of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO. Prior to that she had served for four years as director of the McCord Museum in Montreal.[34] Thomson is the Gallery's eighth director, and sees scholarship and research as one of the primary roles of the National Gallery of Canada. To Thomson this appears to mean a "form of popularization through the education department".[35] This form of popularization of education brings us back to the question of numbers and quality. The National Gallery attendance figures have tumbled dramatically from 452,244 in 1973 to 280,366 in 1979, down to 242,258 in 1985. "This slump comes at a time when other major institutions across Canada have been pulling in crowds in every-increasing numbers".[36] The hope that the new Gallery will provide big draws is worrisome to many critics of the museum. As Michael Conforti has noted broad social appeal is now a major factor not only in what art is presented, but in the manner of presentation. Civic responsibility is translated into producing high attendance figures, which in turn entice corporate financing for these expensive and extravagant exhibitions; precisely those exhibitions for which the National

Gallery of Canada was designed. The surplus of a capitalist economy is no longer sufficient to fund institutions committed to expensive programming.

> That economy's marketing techniques had to be employed, leading to new retailing ventures and the promotion of the names of corporate sponsors. The values that had traditionally guided the activities of the museum now include the values of the marketplace, private foundations and government funding agencies even endorsed this change by regularly demanding proof of earned income.[37]

The pressures of a populist approach to the museum and art have meant for many that the traditional activities surrounding the gallery have been undermined. The priority once granted to conservation and scholarly publications seem to have taken second place.

At the National Gallery of Canada, Dr. Thomson clearly has stated her intention of focussing on research and education. She intends to guard against "instant communications and instant gratification . . . the end of years of research is not necessarily a popular product".[38] The process of research and education for Dr. Thomson seem to be bound up in teaching people how to look at art. The crucial question here of course is ***what does it mean to look at art?*** As we have established in this thesis one never looks in isolation. To look is not a passive activity. It involves perception and knowledge, all of which are intrinsically bound up with representation.

The educational facilities available, such as the library, are reserved for a select few in society. Library hours are noon to five o'clock, Tuesday to Friday, and by appointment only. How many visitors to the gallery will seek out the knowledge they need to understand the work they are viewing? Why is this information not made more accessible? Why does it seem desirable to 'mystify' the public?

Access to information is central to a technological society. It is the final sharing frontier between the elite and the public. The museum was initially founded on the premise of shared ownership of prized objects. Its later focus became shared connoisseurship through public education based on formal aesthetics. Is it now the responsibility of public institutions, and the museum in particular, to make available full 'unmasked' knowledge of how contesting discourses within the representational systems of society create culture based in ideology and in turn create the public as well?

If so, a longer term development of the architectural program would have allowed a fuller clarification of the philosophy of art which the architecture was to serve, thus integrating and perhaps initiating tectonic, topographic and typological innovations which would have facilitated a greater variety of art with stronger social and political impact.

CHAPTER IV

ENDNOTES

1.Adele Freedman, The Globe and Mail, May 21, 1988.

2.Larry Richards, "Ottawa's Crystal Palace", Canadian Art, (Summer/June 1988): 57.

3.Jean Sutherland Boggs, "The designing of a National Gallery". The Burlington Magazine, Vol. CXXVII, No. 985, (April 1985): 202.

4.Mildred F. Schmertz, "Collective significance". Architectural Record (October 1988).

5.Derek Hill and Oleg Grabar, Islamic Architecture and its Decoration A.D. 800-1500, (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1964), 80.

6.Jean Sutherland Boggs, "The designing of a National Gallery". The Burlington Magazine. Vol. CXXVII, No. 985 (April 1985): 202.

7.Ibid., 209.

8.Roland Barthes, The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies, Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979). 6.

9.R.A. Jairazbhoy, An Outline of Islamic Architecture, (Bombay, Calcutta, London, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1972), 243.

10.Trevor Boddy, "Critique: Architecture on the Fast Track": 46.

11.Ibid., 46.

12.Stephanie White, "Museums and their Buildings: Our National Galleries", Vanguard, Vol. 14 (Feb. 1985): 10.

13.Albert Elsen, "Assessing the Pros and Cons", Art in America, Vol. 74, No. 6, (June 1986): 24.

14.Brian Wallis, "The Art of Big Business", Art in America, Vol. 74, No. 6, (June 1986): 28.

15.Ibid., 28.

16.Ibid., 29.

17.Ibid., 29.

18.Trevor Boddy, "Critique: Architecture on the Fast Track": 45.

19.Ibid., 45.

20.Jean Sutherland Boggs, "The designing of a National Gallery": 206.

21.Ibid., 206.

22.Alan Colquhoun, "Plateau Beaubourg", Essays in Architectural Criticism; Modern Architecture and Historical Change, (Chicago, Illinois: The Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies, by The MIT Press, 1985), 118.

23.Trevor Boddy, "Critique: Architecture on the Fast Track": 47.

24.Jean Sutherland Boggs, "The designing of a National Gallery": 206.

25.Trevor Boddy, "Critique: Architecture on the Fast Track" 47.

26.Jean Sutherland Boggs, "The designing of a National Gallery".

27.Ibid.

28.Trevor Boddy, "Critique: Architecture on the Fast Track": 46.

29.Jean Sutherland Boggs, "The designing of a National Gallery": 201.

30.Trevor Boddy, "Critique: Architecture on the Fast Track": 46.

31.Ibid.

32.Linda Nochlin, "Museums and Radicals: A History of Emergencies": 38.

33.Michael Conforti, "Hoving's Legacy Reconsidered", Art in America. Vol. 74, No. 6 (June 1986): 19.

34.Peter Day, "Art's First Lady", Canadian Art, Vol. 5, No. 2, (Summer/June 1988).

35.Ibid., 68.

36.Ibid., 70.

37.Michael Conforti, "Hoving's Legacy Reconsidered": 22.

38.Peter Day, "Art's First Lady": 69.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The National Gallery of Canada, funded by the government and answerable to the Cabinet and the Board has from its inception been strongly involved in the development of Canadian identity. Its links with politics have been obvious and undeniable, and its use of nationalistic fervor has been the basic tool through which the gallery has evolved. Its most effective directors and chairpersons have been those with the most political clout and knowledge, people such as H.S. Southam.[1] It was not until 1972, however, under the then Minister of Communications, Gerard Pelletier, that Canada instituted its first National Museum Policy. Pelletier's genuine interest in strengthening cultural institutions was instrumental in paving the way for the construction of the National Gallery. Based on the principles of 'democratization and decentralization', this was the first concerted effort to provide museums from Corner Brook to Victoria with financial assistance and services. "But Pelletier also shared his friend Pierre Trudeau's vision of a strong central government cementing national unity. So the museum policy had a political edge . . . . ".[2] Trudeau, abetted by Michael Pitfield and his technocrats in the Privy Council Office, bypassed all the usual financial controls of government. "They even set up an independent corporation to oversee the construction so the money wouldn't become subject to the National Museums

Corporation squabbles." The message in the final days of the Trudeau era is reported to have been "Get the goddam thing done."[3] It is this sense of urgency to see this grand monument completed during Trudeau's term of office which forced the architectural development of such a massive cultural undertaking into a "fast track" building approach.

"The sites were excavated before the architectural plans were finished, so there could be no turning back."[4] As Stephanie White has noted, there was a frantic attempt to get the National Gallery of Canada "legitimized by its form".[5] It was of paramount importance to get it built and quickly. What has been questioned has been not only the "unwieldy and unedited" final results, but some basic concerns have arisen in terms of the selection process of architects. The final decision appears to have been a largely intuitive choice by Boggs.

> After much sifting and screening of a cross-country selection of architects resulting in a short list of twelve, Douglas Cardinal of Edmonton and Moshe Safdie of Montreal emerged as the romantics of the group, speaking in terms of concept rather than construction, and presenting open-ended proposals for the Museum of Man that dealt with history, site and man, rather than building plans. The absence of architectural advisors on the selection board is curious. It meant, ultimately, that the selection had less to do with architectural merit, than with romantic lay person appeal, a fact that was self-evident to any architect after Safdie's and Cardinal's names were announced.[6]

It is generally recognized by critics that a "fast track" approach was essential tc the completion of this project. However, it has created numerous problems for a building as

programmatically complex as the National Gallery. In the final analysis

> The only way the project(s) could be ensured, according to Boggs, was "to get very large and politically embarrassing holes in the ground, fast, before a change of government".[7]

In this enormous effort to 'get the thing done', there was not time to examine the gallery's philosophy towards art and the public. The architecture took the form needed to satisfy the particular requirements of a museum constructed as a national monument inscribed within the ideology of modernism.

The representational system of the gallery, of which the architecture is a major part, embodies a hidden agenda, whether conscious or unconscious. It excludes the political content of much of the work exhibited, and thus reduces it to the level of aesthetics and connoisseurship. Alternative practices simply do not fit into the gallery system of high-art as it presently exists. As Crimp has stated in "The Art of Exhibition" many major galleries see it as their primary responsibility to provide the public with a direct experience of great works of art unburdened by the weight of history.[8] This, of course, means unburdened by the weight of knowledge.

The bulk of art historical research emanating from feminists and postmodernists has challenged the basis of the museum within this 'mythesizing' tendency of a modernist canon of art history. The inclusion of a Video Room and the use of information video monitors, which have accompanied some of the

temporary exhibits is an attempt to rectify this situation. These are, however, marginal in the total scheme of the Gallery.

It must be concluded that the architecture of the National Gallery of Canada has responded magnificently in the creation of a national monument. It has served the community of modernist history of art, the political community of the City of Ottawa and the Government of Canada. It also serves a 'public' constructed within the discourse of modernism and nationalism. ***Does it also serve the discourse of a resistant postmodernism?***

Architecture can be more than a representational practice replicating a dominant ideology. It has the ability to bring about change. Kenneth Frampton in "Towards a Critical Regionalism" discusses the need in a postmodern society for a resistant, identity-giving architecture, in direct contradistinction to the pure scenography of a reactionary architecture.

> The fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived *indirectly* from the peculiarities of a particular place.[9]

Though the National Gallery of Canada architecture has not facilitated the inclusion of the discourses of a resistant postmodernism in art, it appears that the architecture itself is in some ways a resistant practice.

If Critical Regionalism seeks to complement normative visual experience by readdressing the tactile range of human perception, then through the tectonics of the causeways and courtyard areas this has been accomplished at the National Gallery. These are not spaces which can be studied from two dimensional drawings. Their impact needs to be experienced. The western priority given to sight and the tendency to interpret the environment in perspectival terms negates the other sense and reduces architecture to its visual 'signs'. This is not to suggest that the experiences registered by the labile body are not modulated through representation. Rather, that a mediation between sensory experience and 'knowledge' takes place which leaves space for change. If, as Frampton has suggested, the primary vehicle of populist architecture is its communicative or instrumental sign, then what Safdie has arrived at is both populist and universal. It is both a bearer of world culture with populist appeal, and precluding a specifically eastern or western reading. At a time of conservative retrenchment in Canada, the tectonics of this architecture reinforce a Canadian identity which is pluralistic.

It has been the intention of this thesis to examine the 'unconscious' ideology which determined the form the new National Gallery of Canada building would take in the era of the postmodern. The format interfaced certain formalist

aspects of architecture with the textual discourses of feminism and postmodernism.

What has been revealed is the 'institutional' assumption that a national gallery should be constructed within a modernist ideology of art history. The contesting discourses of feminism and postmodernism, do not appear, at this time, to be part of the dominant ideology of the Gallery. Here they function in a marginal fashion and can be read only as 'fringe' activities within the Gallery as it presently exists.

The typological referencing of the interior galleries functions as a determinant, inscribing them within modernism. Through a postmodern and feminist reading, these spaces become crypts, containing the mummified remains of works which have been removed from the spirit of their original context. They have been buried within the outer shell of the exterior causeways, and marked by the pyramidal massing of the Great Hall, the symbol of the Gallery.

In the era of the postmodern, the National Gallery of Canada has been constructed as a tomb; a shrine to a 'dead' modernism and its base in patriarchy, individualism and de-politicized aesthetics.

> . . . history, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorize' the ***monuments*** of the past, transform them into ***documents***, and lend speech to those traces which in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence sometning other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms ***documents*** into ***monuments***.[10]

CONCLUDING REMARKS

ENDNOTES

1.Stephanie White, "Museums and Their Buildings: Our National Galleries": 8.

2.Charlotte Gray, "Museum Pieces", Saturday Night (Sept. 1988): 12.

3.Ibid., 12.

4.Ibid., 12.

5.Stephanie White, "Museums and Their Buildings: Our National Galleries": 8.

6.Ibid., 9.

7.Trevor Boddy, "Critique: Architecture on the Fast Track": 47.

8.Douglas Crimp, "The Art of Exhibition", October Vol. 30 (Fall 1984): 68.

9.Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance", The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture, 21.

10.Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, (London, England: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1974), 7.

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