

- Does the monument honor the achievements of an individual (for instance by the realistic depiction of the face) and at the same time suggest timelessness (for instance by traditional symbols such as a classic garment or a torch signifying enlightenment)? If so, how successful is the combination?
- Is the monument representational, like the *Statue of Liberty*, or is it nonrepresentational, like the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*? Or is it sculptural and architectural, like the *Lincoln Memorial*?
- Is it elevated on a pedestal or atop a flight of stairs, emphasizing its importance, or is it—democratically?—at ground-level?
- If nonrepresentational, is it symbolic? Of what? And how do the elements convey the symbolic meaning? Color? Scale? Material? Does—for instance—marble imply endurance, or does flowing water imply the passage of time? Do trees imply new life? Does a reflecting pool—or the black reflecting marble of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial—implicate the viewer? Maya Lin (quoted in *Art in America*, April 1983, page 123) said she chose black for the Memorial because she “wanted something that would be soft on the eyes, and turn into a mirror if you polished it. The point is to see yourself in the names.” Does the AIDS quilt, by its medium, imply family values?
- Does the monument include any relics? (In New York City, the monument dedicated to *The Maine*, the ship that exploded in Havana Harbor in 1898, includes a tablet cast with metal recovered from the destroyed ship.)
- Does the location of the monument contribute to its meaning, and does the monument contribute to the meaning of the location? The Statue of Liberty is in New York Harbor, the site where until recently most immigrants entered the United States. In Richmond, Virginia, Monument Avenue is the site of an equestrian statue (1890) of Robert E. Lee and of five later statues of Confederate heroes. In 1995 the nature of the site—in effect, a memorial for the Lost Cause—was changed when a statue of the African-American tennis star and civil-rights activist, Arthur Ashe (1943–93), was added.
- Does the monument include words? The Lincoln Memorial includes texts by Lincoln; the Vietnam Memorial and the AIDS Quilt record the names of the dead. If words are present, do they seem integral or merely tacked on?
- Has the monument been altered in any way, thereby reflecting a change in public taste? The Custer National Battlefield in 1991 was renamed the Little Bighorn National Battlefield. The original

monument consisted of an obelisk dedicated to the memory of Lieutenant Colonel Custer and the 270 soldiers and the Crow Indian scouts of the 7th Cavalry who in 1876 were killed by Sioux and Cheyenne Indians in Southern Montana near a stream called the Little Bighorn. The revised monument includes an Indian Memorial, dedicated to all the Indians who fought, on either side, to preserve their land and their culture. An earthen enclosure is marked with a cut or a “weeping wound”; two large posts flank the gap, forming a “spirit gate” that welcomes all of the dead, who now possess the wisdom they did not have when alive.

- Is the monument intended merely to be looked at from a distance, or is the visitor invited to establish some sort of closer relationship, for instance, by entering it?
- What is the name of the monument? Consider again the change from Custer National Battlefield to Little Bighorn National Battlefield. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Park, by using “park” instead of “monument” or “memorial,” puts the emphasis on Kennedy as a living force.
- Is the monument aesthetically pleasing?
- Is it intellectually stimulating?
- Does it matter who designed the memorial? The proposed monumental sculpture (page 109) of Dr. King in the Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial (in Washington, between the Lincoln and the Jefferson Memorials) was carved by Lei Yixin, a Chinese sculptor. Many critics believe it should have been carved by an African-American. The Statue of Liberty was created by a French sculptor, and in New York the memorial garden for the Museum of Jewish Heritage was designed by a non-Jewish British artist, Andy Goldsworthy. Do the works gain or lose anything because of the color or nationality of the creator?

Architecture

You may recall from Chapter 1 (page 12) Auden’s comment that a critic can “throw light upon the relation of art to life, to science, economics, religion, etc.” Works of architecture, because they are created for use, especially can be considered in the context of the society that produced them. As the architect Louis Sullivan (1856–1924) said, “Once you learn to look upon architecture not merely as an art, more or less well or badly done, but as a social manifestation, the critical eye becomes clairvoyant, and obscure, unnoted phenomena become illumined.”

The Roman architect Vitruvius suggested that buildings can be judged according to their

- *firmitas* (firmness, structural soundness)
- *utilitas* (commodity, function, fitness for their purpose, utility)
- *venustas* (delight, beauty, design)

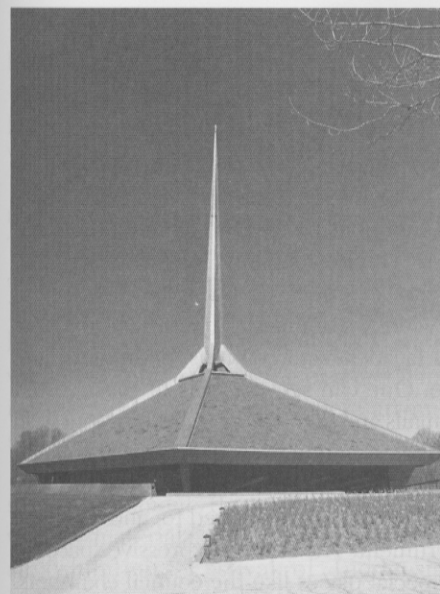
Firmitas gets us thinking about the structure and durability of the materials: The building should stand up in a given physical context (climate, prevailing winds, seismic zone, freeze-thaw cycles, sun angles for a particular latitude, and so on). *Utilitas* gets us thinking about how suitable (convenient, functional, usable) the building is for its purposes. Does the building work as, say, a bank, a church, a residence, a school? *Venustas* gets us thinking about the degree to which it offers delight when we look at it or move through it. Much (though not all) of what follows is an amplification of these three topics.

What did the client want? What was or is the **purpose** of the building? For instance, does it provide a residence for a ruler, a place of worship, or a place for legislators to assemble? Was this also its original purpose? If not, what was the building originally used for? Consider Le Corbusier's maxim, "A house is a machine for living in" (*Une maison est une machine-à-habiter*). Architecture is generally considered a useful art, and all architecture is designed to help us to live—even a tomb is designed to help the living to cope with death, perhaps by assuring them that the deceased lives in memory. Churches, museums, theaters, banks, zoos, schools, garages, residences, all are designed to facilitate the business of living.

Does the building appear today as it did when constructed? Has it been added to, renovated, restored, or otherwise changed in form?

What does the building say? "All architecture," wrote John Ruskin, "proposes an effect on the human mind, not merely a service to the human frame." One can distinguish between function as housing and function as getting across the patron's message—or the architect's. In Frank Lloyd Wright's formula, "Architecture is the scientific art of making structure express ideas."

- Sometimes the idea conveyed by the structure is grotesquely obvious as, for instance, when a frankfurter eatery is shaped like a frankfurter or a seafood restaurant is shaped like a ship or a fish, but
- Sometimes the relationship between structure and idea is more profound. A Gothic cathedral such as Chartres said, by virtue of its cross shape, that it was a house of Jesus. It also said, by virtue of the light coming through stained glass windows with their holy images, that it was a house of God (the Gospel according to John describes Jesus as the Light of the World) and the image of Heaven. In brief, Chartres Cathedral is an earthly representation of the Heavenly



North Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Columbus, Indiana. Architect Eero Saarinen. Dedicated in 1964. Photographer: Cathy Melloan. © Alamy Images.

Jerusalem, the eternal city, and visitors to the church presumably are elevated—at least temporarily. Some nineteenth-century libraries look like Romanesque churches, implying that books free the spirit. Eero Saarinen's North Christian Church (completed in 1964, after his death) has a central spire that, like the traditional steeple, suggests a connection between the earth and the heavens, but this rocket-like spire especially suggests both tremendous energy and a God who dwells in outer space. The position of the altar, in the center of the sanctuary and surrounded by curved rows of pews, is also meaningful: Religion is the center of life. To turn from churches to banks, we can note that a nineteenth-century bank said, by means of its bulk, its bronze doors, and its barred windows, that your money was safe. It also said, since it had the facade of a Greek temple, that money was holy. A modern bank, full of glass and color, is more likely to say that money is fun, and that it is insubstantial—just numbers sent electronically.

- The J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building in Washington, D.C., with its masses of precast concrete, looks like a fortress, uninviting, menacing, impregnable—the very image of the FBI.
- Collegiate architecture often speaks an obvious language: Brick buildings in a Georgian style suggest the nation's earliest colleges; stone buildings in Collegiate Gothic (pointed arches, narrow

windows), common around 1900, are supposed to suggest a pre-industrial world of spirituality and scholarship. The chapel at the Military Academy at West Point, evoking a medieval fortress, suggests spirituality and also an appropriate militancy.

In Winston Churchill's words, "We shape our buildings: thereafter they shape us."

What, then, are the architectural traditions behind the building that contribute to the building's expressiveness? The Boston City Hall (see page 117), for all its modernity and (in its lower part) energetic vitality, is tied together in its upper stories by forceful bands of windows, similar in their effect to a classical building with columns. Classical façades, with columns, pediments, and arches, are by no means out of date. One can see versions of them, often slightly jazzed up, as the entrances to malls and high-style retail shops that wish to suggest that their goods are both timeless and in excellent taste. The classical tri-partite expression of base, middle, and top may be looked at another way as well. The repetitive windows at the top are dedicated to, and symbolic of, the bureaucracy of municipal government. The one-off expressive spaces in the middle indicate the presence of special places like the council chambers. And the base is open as the brick paving of the plaza climbs up the lower portion of the walls symbolically inviting the public into the building.

Here is how Eugene J. Johnson sees (or hears) Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building (1954–1957):*

Austere, impersonal, and lavishly bronzed, it sums up the power, personality, and wealth of the modern corporation, whose public philanthropy is symbolized by the piazza in front, with its paired fountains—private land donated to the urban populace. If the piazza and twin fountains call to mind the Palazzo Farnese in Rome, so be it, particularly when one looks out from the Seagram lobby across an open space to the Renaissance-revival façade of McKim, Mead and White's Racquet Club which quotes the garden façade of Palazzo Farnese! Mies set up a brilliant conversation between two classicizing buildings, bringing the nineteenth and twentieth centuries together without compromise on either part. Mies was in many ways the great classicist of this century. One might say that one of his major successes lay in fusing the principles of the great classical tradition of Western architecture with the raw technology of the modern age.

—"United States of America," in *International Handbook of Contemporary Developments in Architecture*, ed. Warren Sanderson (1981), 506

*Eugene J. Johnson. Quotation in *International Handbook of Contemporary Developments in Architecture*, edited by Warren Sanderson. Copyright 1981 by Warren Sanderson.

Notice how Johnson fuses *description* (e.g., "lavishly bronzed") with interpretive *analysis* (he sees in the bronze the suggestion of corporate power). Notice, too, how he connects the building with history (the debt of the piazza and twin fountains to the Palazzo Farnese) and how he connects it with its site (the "conversation" with a nearby building).

We have already seen (pages 29–31) that, like other buildings, **museums and the exhibition spaces** within museums make statements. This is true whether the museum resembles a Greek temple and is entered only after a heavenward ascent up a great flight of steps, or whether it is a Renaissance palace or a modern imitation of one, or whether it is insistently high-tech. When the Museum of Modern Art opened in New York in 1939, with an entrance consisting of a revolving door on ground level, it was making the radical statement that an art museum was more like a department store than it was like a temple.

In thinking about an exhibition it is usually worth asking oneself what sorts of statements the museum and the exhibition space make. Think about why the material is being presented (consider the difference between titling an exhibition "Festival of Indonesia" and "100 Masterpieces from Indonesia") and why it is presented in this particular way. For instance, is the material presented with abundant verbal information on the walls, perhaps thereby emphasizing the cultural context, or with minimal labels and lots of empty space on the walls, perhaps thereby emphasizing the formal properties and the aesthetic values of each work? A number of recent museums, seeking to gain publicity of the sort gained by Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao (page 118), are conceived as enormous sculptures, but their high ceilings and vast irregular rooms (sometimes with curved walls that do not meet the floor at right angles) are not always well suited to displaying traditional small works of art.*

Do the forms and materials of the building relate to its neighborhood? What does the building contribute to the **site**? What does the site contribute to the building? Does the building contrast with the site or complement it? How big is the building in relation to the neighborhood and in relation to human beings; that is, what is the **scale**? A building larger than its neighbors, or elevated above them by a platform, suggests it is of greater importance. The Cambridge City Hall (1889); (see page 116), atop a slope above the street, crowns the site and announces—especially because it is in

*For an examination of many museums built in recent decades, see Victoria Newhouse, *Toward the New Museum*, expanded edition (2006). Among the topics Newhouse considers are "The Museum as Sacred Space," "The Museum as Entertainment," and "The Museum as Environmental Art."

a Romanesque style—that it is a bastion of order, even of piety, giving moral significance to the neighborhood below. The Boston City Hall (1968; page 117), its lower part in brick, rises out of a brick plaza—the plaza flows into spaces between the concrete pillars that support the building—and seems to invite the crowds from the neighboring shops, outdoor cafés, and marketplace to come in for a look at government of the people by the people, and yet at the same time the building announces its importance.

How do you **approach** the building, and how do you enter it?

Does **form** follow **function**? For better or for worse? For example, does the function of a room determine its shape? Are there rooms with geometric shapes irrelevant to their purposes? Louis Sullivan, in rejecting the nineteenth-century emphasis on architecture as a matter of style (in its most extreme form, a matter of superficial decoration), said, “Form ever follows



Cambridge City Hall, Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Mass. c. 1910. Longfellow, Alden, & Harlow Architects. Photograph by Thomson & Thomson. Courtesy of Historic New England. (HNE negative #7526-B).

function.” Sullivan’s comment, with its emphasis on structural integrity—the appearance of a building was to reveal the nature of its construction as well as the nature of its functions or uses—became the slogan for many architects working in the mid-twentieth century. But there were other views. For instance, Philip Johnson countered Sullivan with “form always follows forms and not function.” In looking at a building, ask yourself if the form serves a **symbolic function**; recall the “lavishly bronzed” Seagram building, which Eugene J. Johnson sees as summing up “the power, personality, and wealth of the modern corporation.” Equally symbolic or expressive is Eero Saarinen’s Trans World Airlines Terminal at Kennedy Airport, where the two outstretched wings suggest flight. Consider, too, Frank Gehry’s Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1997) in Bilbao, built by the side of a river in a Basque port city in northern Spain, whose economy was based on shipbuilding. Viewed from across the river, the titanium-sheathed design evokes a ship, expressing such ideas as the history of the city, grandeur, and elegance.

What **materials** are used? How do the materials contribute to the building’s purpose and statement? The Bilbao Guggenheim, (see page 118)

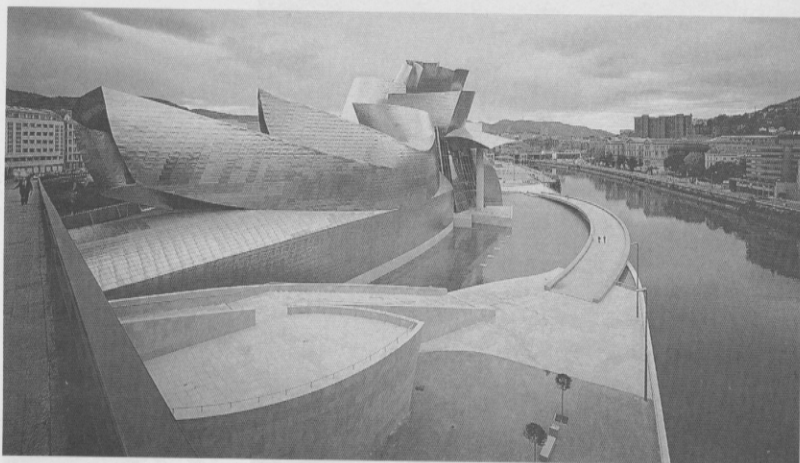


Boston City Hall, City Hall Plaza Center, 1961–1968. Photographer: Cervin Robinson. In *Architecture Boston*. (Boston Society of Architects, 1976).

in addition to using titanium (a material chiefly used in aeronautics), uses a pale Spanish limestone that is evident in Bilbao's old university across the river, and so in its materials the museum embraces the past as well as the present. Or, as another example, take the materials of some American college and university buildings. Adobe may work well at the University of New Mexico, but would it be right for the Air Force Academy in Colorado? (The Academy uses different materials—notably aluminum, steel, and glass.)

Each building material has associations or, at least, potential associations.

- **Marble:** The Sam Rayburn House Office Building in Washington, D.C., is clad in marble veneer (costing many millions of dollars) because marble is thought to suggest dignity and permanence—though in fact marble is a rather soft stone. Marble is highly versatile: White or black marble, common in expensive jewelry shops, can seem sleek or aloof; pink or creamy marble, in a boutique with goods for women, can seem soft and warm.
- **Brick** often suggests warmth or unpretentiousness and craftsmanship.
- **Wood**, like marble, is amazingly versatile. In its rough-bark state it suggests the great outdoors; trimmed and painted it can be the clapboard and shingles of an earlier America; smooth and sleek and unpainted it can suggest Japanese elegance.



Frank Gehry, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997, Bilbao. Exterior view. The titanium-sheathed design evokes a ship, an apt form for a building in a city whose economy was largely based on shipbuilding and steel. Photographer: David Heald. © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York.

- **Glass** can be transparent, translucent, or even opaque, as in I. M. Pei's John Hancock Building in Boston. The exterior walls of the Hancock building reflect the sky and clouds, thereby animating and softening the building, which towers above its neighbors.

Do the **exterior walls** seem hard or soft, cold or warm? Is the sense of hardness or coldness appropriate? (Don't simply assume that metal must look cold. A metal surface that reflects images can be bright, lively, and playful. Curves and arches of metal can seem warm and "soft.") Does the material in the interior have affinities with that of the exterior? If so, for better or for worse? (Our experience of an interior brick wall may be very different from our experience of an exterior brick wall.)

Does the **exterior** stand as a massive sculpture, masking the spaces and the activities within, or does it express them? The exterior of the Boston City Hall (see page 117) emphatically announces that the building harbors a variety of activities; in addition to containing offices, it contains conference rooms, meeting halls, an exhibition gallery, a reference library, and other facilities. Are the spaces continuous? Or are they static, each volume capped with its own roof?

What is the function of **ornament** or of any **architectural statuary** in or near the building? To conceal the joins of a surface? To embellish a surface, and to suggest a meaning? (At Cornell University, the John Henrik Clarke African Library is clad with multicolor brick in patterns suggestive of American textiles. At West Point, above the main entrance to the chapel, is a cross in the form of a sword-hilt.) To emphasize importance? (The east end of a Christian church, where the altar is, sometimes is more elaborately decorated than the rest of the building.)

Does the **interior** arrangement of spaces say something—for example, is the mayor's office in the city hall on the top floor, indicating that he or she is above such humdrum activities as dog licensing, which is on the first floor?

In a given room, what is the function of the **walls**? To support the ceiling or the roof? To afford privacy and protection from weather? To provide a surface on which to hang shelves, blackboards, pictures? If glass, to provide a view in—or out?

What is the effect of the **floor** (wood, tile, brick, marble, carpet)? Notice especially the effect if you move from a room floored with one material (say, wood) to another (say, carpet).

Is the building inviting? The architect Louis Kahn said, "A building should be a . . . stable and *harboring* thing. If you can now [with structural steel] put columns as much as 100 feet apart you may lose more than you gain because the sense of enclosed space disappears." Is the public invited? The Cambridge City Hall has one public entrance, approached by a flight of steps;

the Boston City Hall, its lower floor paved with the brick of the plaza, has many entrances at ground level. What are the implications in this difference?

"There is no excellent Beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion," said Francis Bacon in the early seventeenth century. Does the building evoke and then satisfy a sense of curiosity?

What is the role of **color**? To clarify form? To give sensuous pleasure? To symbolize meaning? (Something has already been said, on page 00, about the effects of the colors of marble.) Much of the criticism of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* centered on the color of the stone walls. One critic, asserting that "black is the universal color of shame [and] sorrow," called for a white memorial.

What part does the changing **daylight** play in the appearance of the exterior of the building? Does the interior make interesting use of natural light? And how light is the interior? (The Lincoln Memorial, open only at the front, is somber within, but the Jefferson Memorial, admitting light from all sides, is airy and suggestive of Jefferson's rational—sunny, we might say—view of life. Similarly, the light in places of worship differs. A New England colonial church, with lots of clear windows and white walls, is full of light; a neo-Gothic cathedral, with narrow stained glass windows and dark woodwork, is subdued, mysterious, perhaps in some minds gloomy.)

As the preceding discussion suggests, architectural criticism usually is based on a finite number of topics that usually include the following:

- the building or monument as an envelope or object (its purpose, structural system, materials, sources of design, history, design [articulation of the façade, including all the arrangement of the windows and doors, ornamentation, color, formal composition/sculptural properties and massing])
- the interior (spatial organization and hierarchy), circulation (flow of traffic), connection with or separation from the exterior
- the building's response to context—both physical (built and natural) and cultural
- the place of the building in the history of the architect's work (in other words, what aspects of a project are consistent with those aspects commonly found in other examples of the architect's work), the philosophy of the architect and how the building does or does not reflect it.
- Criticism of contemporary architecture asks if the building is a green building (also called a sustainable building), i.e., a building whose design, siting, construction, and operation (lighting, heating and cooling, disposal of waste) do as little damage as possible to the environment and to the building's inhabitants.

If you are writing about the first or second of these topics—the building as an envelope or the enclosed spaces through which one moves—you may have only your eyes and legs to guide you when you study the building of your choice, say, a local church or a college building. But if the building is of considerable historical or aesthetic interest, you may be able to find a published *plan* (a scale drawing of a floor, showing the arrangement of the spaces) or an *elevation* (a scale drawing of an external or internal wall). Plans and elevations, often available in printed sources, are immensely useful as aids in understanding buildings. For a helpful introductory discussion of architecture that makes excellent use of plans and elevations, see Simon Unwin, *Analysing Architecture* (1997).

A few words about the organization of an essay on a building may be useful. Much will depend on your purpose and on the building, but consider the possibility of using one of these three methods of organization:

1. You might discuss, in this order, *utilitas*, *firmitas*, and *venustas*—that is, function, structure, and design (see page 112).
2. You might begin with a view of the building as seen at a considerable distance, then at a closer view, and then go on to work from the ground up, since the building supports itself this way.
3. You might take, in this order, these topics:
 - the materials (smooth or rough, light or dark, and so on)
 - the general form, perceived as one walks around the building (e.g., are the shapes square, rectangular, or circular, or what? Are they simple or complex?)
 - the façades, beginning with the entrance (e.g., is the entrance dominant or recessive? How is each façade organized? Is there variety or regularity among the parts?)
 - the relation to the site, including materials and scale

Photography

A *photograph* is literally an image "written by light." Although most people today think of a photograph as a flat work on paper produced from a *negative* (in which tones or colors are the opposite from what we normally see) made in a camera, none of these qualities is necessary.* Photographs can be made without cameras (by exposing a light-sensitive material directly to light), can be generated without negatives (color slides and Polaroid

*This discussion of photography is by Elizabeth Anne McCauley, David H. McAlpin Professor of the History of Photography and Modern Art, Princeton University. This "Photography" section was written for this text and used by permission of the author.