# From Some Place to No Place: Liberalism and Architecture

**ISHAAN JAJODIA**

Yale University

## INTRODUCTION

There is more to 'poetic justice' as a turn of phrase than meets the eye. It betrays an idiom of thought that once mapped beauty onto virtue, and ugliness onto vice. The ancient Greeks use *kallos/kalon* to define both what beauty is and what moral excellence, arete, aspires to be. Over the course of the last century, however, we have tried to bury the aesthetic dimension of political life without understanding its importance to politics—to the ways in which it helps form the men and women who partake in political life. In some ways, the falling away of political aesthetics was necessary to move beyond twentieth-century totalitarianism. Both Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno famously voice their discontent with the aestheticisation of politics, condemning it tout ensemble. "To write poetry after Auschwitz," Adorno says, "is barbaric" (Adorno 1983, p. 34). "The logical result of fascism," Walter Benjamin notes in the epilogue to his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', "is the introduction of aesthetics into political life" (Benjamin 2007, p. 241). The very question of beauty has thus faded away, tarnished by the horrors of the twentieth century.

In recent years, however, political theorists and philosophers have made great strides in rescuing aesthetics from this misguided wholesale condemnation. Kantian philosophers such as Roger Scruton and Susan Shell have laid considerable groundwork for the extensive re-examinations of what it might mean to think about political aesthetics without descending into either totalitarianism or relativism (Scruton 1979, 2011; Shell 2022). Other theorists have similarly begun to consider the question of the built environment, and the role that aesthetic considerations play in political life. A recent volume edited by Duncan Bell and Bernardo Zacka, Political Theory and Architecture, exemplifies this trend (Bell and Zacka 2022; Zacka 2023).

The burgeoning literature on aesthetics is worth contending with for political theorists, and not only because of the importance of aesthetics to the way we experience, analyse, and categorise the world. The liberal tradition, which dominates contemporary political theory, has historically struggled to develop a political theory of aesthetics.[1] The aesthetics of liberalism can often be summed up by the maxim *de gustibus non est disputandum*—there is no disputing about taste." Through a wide-ranging study of architectural styles in liberal regimes, I hope to show that liberal regimes, do, in fact, have their own ideal version of what architecture ought to be.

Liberalism is not a single analytical category existing outside of time. It, too, has a history, a history that remains intertwined with the history of art and architecture, and an analysis of that interconnected history helps us unpack the claims that liberalism can make on aesthetics. In this essay, I focus on the relationship between liberalism and the past, or between liberalism and tradition. I begin by periodising liberal regimes into three broad categories: the first refers to the early liberal regimes of the late eighteenth

century; the second refers to those same regimes in their twentieth century "modernist" articulations; and the third refers to liberal regimes that emerged out of imperial projects. The three types, I suggest, differ in their relationship to the past: the early liberal regimes celebrate continuity, the late liberal regimes discontinuity, and the imperial liberal regimes both at once. The old liberal regimes often draw on the visual vocabulary of the old order, of the *ancien* regime that they have overthrown. Modernist liberal regimes, on the other hand, create an altogether different visual language, freed from the bonds of the past. At their best, imperial liberal regimes reach somewhat of an in-between—respecting local traditions while incorporating new elements from the outside.

What changes between the three types is not only their relationship to the past, but also the visual idiom that corresponds to it. My claim is that the styles and outlooks of these monuments reflect the priorities of their respective regimes.

My argument proceeds in four sections. First, to examine the early liberal regimes of the late eighteenth century, I begin with Pugin's Houses of Parliament, which I consider alongside the work of Benjamin Disraeli and Edmund Burke. Second, for the twentieth century late-liberal regimes, I look at Eero Saarinen's modernist American Embassy in London, one of the first American embassies to be built in a non-classical style—a mere three decades after the completion of the neoclassical Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. Third, for imperial liberal regimes, I turn to India and focus on Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker's New Delhi, with its curious mix of classical and Indic styles, built in the last years of the British Raj. Finally, I end with a discussion of uniformity in contemporary architecture—of a "global style" that often fails to make space for local permutations. The sense of "no place" now pervades architecture in liberal regimes, and I argue that this is not an accident but the embodiment of the betwixt relationship that contemporary liberalism has with the past (Kunstler 1994).

## PUGIN, POINTED ARCHITECTURE, AND DISRAELI

Jan Werner-Müller argues that "the British, when having to rebuild the Houses of Parliament after a fire in the nineteenth century, thought it wise to stick with a Gothic approach" because "classicism as a style was coded as 'revolutionary architecture' as such" (Müller 2022, p. 28). This is a sweeping statement that bears further explanation. The most proximate problem with the assessment that Müller proffers is its ahistoricism. The Gothic Revival in England far precedes the rise of the Gothic Revival as the "house" style of official government buildings: the Gothic Revival begins in England with Wollaton Hall, built in 1580, and "throughout the seventeenth century Gothic was still being built in England" (Lang 1966, p. 245). By the late eighteenth century, Gothic Revivalism, downstream of the antiquarian interest in the Middle Ages, had taken root. Indeed, Mark Girouard argues that it was part of the rational and humane spirit of the English and Scottish enlightenment (Girouard 1981, p. 21).[2] Still, the question remains: did the British turn to the Gothic to avoid the association of classicism with revolutionary, or was the Gothic seen as the more authentic "English" style of building, one that sought to harken back to the past and link the industrial society of Victorian England to an older world of chivalric honour?

At the heart of my argument is the contention that earlier liberal regimes "built" to tap into the reservoir of the past, of the *ancien* regime that they had initially sought to supplant. In Britain, the *ancien* regime was the old Stuart Monarchy, which had been replaced by William of Orange and the Hanoverian succession by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Burke asserts throughout the Reflections that the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was a just and civil revolution, one conducted by lawyers and statesmen, not by knights and mobs (Burke 1987, p. 15).[3] The Glorious Revolution, important as it was, was peaceful and ensured continuity; the only thing that was affected was the line of succession, preserving the Protestant nature of the English regime and monarchy against the possible encroachment of the Papacy into English soil. Thus, Burke can write in the face of the French Revolution that the English, unlike the French, "are resolved to keep an established church, an established monarchy, an established aristocracy, and an established democracy, each in the degree it exists, and in no greater" (Burke 1987, p. 81). At the heart of the Glorious

Revolution is the mapping of the old regime onto the new; the institutions remain fixed, unchanging, and only adapting slowly through the intercourse of generations.

Disraeli is more explicit about his Romanticism, and while he has important differences with Burke, he most certainly shares in his enthusiasm for the past and the import it maintains to the proper functioning of the English constitution.[4] Unlike Burke, however, Disraeli expresses this architecturally, most prominently in his novel *Sybil*, or the *Two Nations* (1845/2017). In *Sybil*, the protagonist of the novel, Charles Egremont, visits the fictional town of Marney, which is home to the once-great Marney Abbey, run by the Catholic Church, and despoiled by Henry VIII in the course of the Protestant Reformation in England. Egremont is strolling through the ruins of Marney Abbey when the narrator observes a Gothic tower in the ruins: "It was tall and light, and of a Gothic style most pure and graceful", in stark contrast to the Norman tower, which is "short and thick and very square", lacking in the grace and airiness of the Gothic (*Sybil* II.4).

As Charles Egremont walks through the ruins of Marney Abbey, he can see the abbots of the years gone by, engaged in ritual and ceremony, adding to the Abbey and its surroundings a sense of beauty that finds no comparable expression elsewhere.[5] He lays his eyes upon the Abbey church, and in doing so, describes it as "a beauty that had at least turned away the wrath of man, still rose, if not in perfect, yet admirable, form and state, one of the noblest achievements of Christian art" (*Sybil* II.4). As he gazes upon the building's grandeur—the church as a palimpsest with visible signs of "great antiquity" (*Sybil* II.4), much like the English state—he contemplates the present events. But it is not the contemplation that we are concerned with, or with the destruction of the monasteries by Henry VIII—but with the politics of space. The disestablishment and plunder of the abbeys are profoundly political. Disraeli describes one of the towers of the Church: "It was tall and light, and of a Gothic style most pure and graceful ..." (*Sybil* II.4). In this early episode of the battle of the styles, we see the Gothic being identified with expressly moral and spiritual concerns: it becomes the symbol of an ancient past when Englishmen were free—the very freedom that early British liberals sought to bring to the modern world.

Almost contemporaneous to Disraeli's early writing is Augustus Pugin's most prominent work, Contrasts. While Disraeli does not subscribe to Pugin's Catholicism (Schorske 1998, p. 84),[6] the general overtones of Pugin's critique are more or less accepted by Disraeli; there is considerable evidence of their shared interest in the Young England movement and of a deep familiarity with each other's work: "Disraeli's three-decker roman a'clef included friends and admirers of Pugin" (Hill 2009, pp. 255, 313f, 314). If Pugin "pioneered the idea that building is a statement of value, reflecting the ethic of the builders," then Disraeli gave expression to that sentiment in his descriptions of the fallen present and the glory of the medieval past (Schorske 1998, p. 76). Like Pugin and Coleridge, Disraeli sees the medieval world "as a paradise lost"; in that world that is no longer accessible but through the ruins of the abbeys, the three find "a comprehensive symbol of the good society—all that modern England [is] not" (Schorske 1998, pp. 71-72).

Pugin writes: "the mechanical part of Gothic architecture is pretty well understood, but it is the principles which influenced ancient compositions, and the soul which appears in all former works, which is so lamentably deficient; nor, as I have stated, can anything be regained buy by a restoration of the ancient feeling and sentiments; 'tis they alone can restore Gothic architecture" (Bright 1979, p. 156). In this passage, as in Disraeli's *Sybil*, the positive programme being suggested is the revival of a past so distant that no living person has any direct memory of it: the Gothic past. It is a mythical past, conjured up in the story that is English Romanticism. It is an interest in the past on its own terms and for its own sake, but also motivated in the background by the political need to link the past to the present. Throughout his career, Disraeli harkened to the English constitution, from his first systematic work *Vindication of the English Constitution* to his parliamentary speeches (Disraeli 1835, 1914). The past was the past, but the present needed it because the discontinuities had become far too jarring and noticeable. The new, liberal democracy of Victorian England, while different, kept the elements of the English constitution more or less alive, albeit in different forms. In Burke's words: "an established church, an established monarchy, an established aristocracy, and an established democracy, each in the degree it exists, and in no greater" (Burke 1987, p. 81). Architecture,

too, would link the present to the past. The same antiquarianism fuelled both the revival of the chivalric ideal and the Gothic Revival in architecture (Girouard 1981). As Girouard puts it, "the bias of Victorian chivalry was towards absorbing the ideals of medieval chivalry into contemporary life, rather than trying to re-create it in something approaching the medieval form" (Girouard 1981, pp. 159-60). Just so with the Gothic Revival in architecture. The point was to keep the countryside and the Houses of Parliament rooted, that is, English: with a sense of place, of continuity with the past.

## EERO SAARINEN, UNTIMELY MODERNS, AND THE AMERICAN EMBASSIES IN OSLO AND LONDON

***Figure 1*: Balthazar Korab, United States Embassy, London, 1955-60 (Korab and Saarinen 1955).**

Most accounts and criticisms of modernist architecture begin with Le Corbusier's love for the new over the old. Corbusier famously suggested that Hausman's Paris be levelled for his new Plan Voisin—which, for better or worse, never saw the light of anything but the studio. But the legacy of modernism is more than that. Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen argues that "while Europeans tended to view the United States and its architecture as an embodiment of the 'world to come' … Americans wanted to clad their skyscrapers in historical garb" (Pelkonen 2023, p. 15). Modernist architecture has, much like the liberal democracy that spawned it, a dogged relationship to the past (Pelkonen 2023, chap. 6). Of all the modern architect-built embassies for the United States in the 1950s—from Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer to Edward Durrell Stone—Eero Saarinen best represents this shift from antiquarianism to novelty (Loeffler 1990, p. 258). He is what Pelkonen calls an 'untimely modern,' fully aware of the past bearing down on the present, and

yet, still, a modern. Like many of his contemporaries, Saarinen wrestles with a characteristically modern problem: where does modern man stand in relation to the past? In the aftermath of the Second World War, the relationship between liberal democracy and history, and therefore architecture, began to change.

Saarinen, who won a design competition for the British Embassy, had previously been rejected from the Architectural Advisory Committee of the FBO, the office responsible for embassies and missions, because Deputy Undersecretary of State Loy Henderson thought that Saarinen was too modernist (Loeffler 1998, p. 61). At the time, only a few decades earlier, modernism was still considered out of bounds. The Foreign Service Buildings Commission had commissioned the U.S. Embassy in Paris (1928-32) from Chester Delano and William Aldrich, who "created a classically styled steel and concrete Beaux-Arts building—solid, simple, and symmetrical" (Loeffler 1990, p. 253). In 1931, Antonin Raymond and H. Van Buren Magonigle drew on Californian Mission architecture for the US Embassy in Tokyo; in 1936, Harrie T. Lindeberg built a classical colonial-style house for the US embassy in Helsinki. All these projects were classical in style, unlike Saarinen's London embassy with its 37-foot eagle sitting on top of a modernist building. In the intervening years, between the Tokyo and Helsinki embassies (late 1920s-early 1930s) and Saarinen's 1950s Oslo and London embassies, something changed: modernism had become the house style of American diplomacy, replacing more classical styles.

Critics panned these modernist embassies because of what they represented. "To some," Loeffler observes, "the embassy looked like a bank or a corporate headquarters building" (Loeffler 1990, p. 256). The director of the FBO, responsible for embassy buildings, told the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee in 1959 that "they were tall, shaftlike buildings patterned in some respects after the UN building in New York. They bore no particular relationship to their surroundings, nor did they take into account at all any aspect of the local culture or architectural scene" (ibid.). By 1953, the director of the FBO was "advised by Assistant Secretary of State Edward T. Wailes "to discontinue modern architecture in favor of Georgian"." (Loeffler 1990, p. 260). The FBO did not acquiesce. As Loeffler notes, "the politics that dominated the selection process were, of course, the politics of the architectural profession itself" (Loeffler 1990, p. 258). Little could be done to dissuade the shift to modernism. For Loeffler, this was a tragedy: "It is ironic that these products of the modern movement, which had its origins in Europe, were embraced as corporate symbols in the United States but were less than effective as representatives of the United States abroad" (Loeffler 1990, p. 256).

Why focus on embassies? Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who would serve as the American Ambassador to India, observed in 1981 that "embassies are unique architectural subjects. Perhaps no other public buildings are of such symbolic importance: much more than our domestic public buildings, their appearance establishes an image of the American government and people" (Loeffler 1990, p. 251). It is the voice that the government projects as a self-conscious articulation of what it stands for. But the embassies that were built in the 1950s were hardly specific to place and locale; nor did they emphasise their Americanness. As a work of art, and as a piece of design, Saarinen's embassies in London and Oslo are remarkable; they stand at the cutting edge of mid-century modern design and architecture, much like Saarinen's famous tulip chairs. As political buildings, however, they seem to run counter to their stated purpose.

Consider the London embassy in Grosvenor Square. The building formally eschews any link to the past; the only thing that makes it seem "American" is the 35-foot eagle, sculpted by Theodore Roszack, and added to the initial design of 1956 sometime late in 1957 (Loeffler 1998, p. 206). But the eagle itself is "iconographically incorrect—it looks to the left instead of the right, as was the custom. Missing, too, are the arrows clutched in the left talon and the olive branch in the right, traditional symbols of war and peace" (Loeffler 1998, p. 206). Saarinen does little to honour the American tradition of iconic representation. It is clear that "the eagle was added [later] to 'symbolise' the London embassy, to tell people that it was an embassy, not an ordinary block of offices" (Loeffler 1998, p. 207). Saarinen managed to create an architectural marvel. But what he didn't do remains conspicuous: there is nothing American about them embassy, nothing that connects the building to the long, storied history of the nation it is supposed to represent.

While critics either lauded or panned it for architectural reasons, much of my interest with the embassy, along with the other embassy buildings commissioned by the FBO in the 1950s and 1960s, has to do with their relationship to the past. That none of these buildings and their architects saw fit to draw on tradition is a significant development in itself.

These buildings represent a considered move away from the past, like the three decades between the Lincoln Memorial and Wallace Harrison's UN headquarters. The change in design says something about the liberal democracy that these buildings aspire to represent. Mark Crinson argues that the lack of sense of place, of internationalism, is inherent in the project of modernist architecture: "Internationalism, we might say, was a willed principle of modernist architecture, it made a claim on ethics, on something higher than localised politics, wider than custom and tradition and more ambitious than the quotidian matters of building" (Crinson 2019, p. 11). What, indeed, does the US Embassy in London signify? The Houses of Parliament, resplendent in their Gothic Revivalism, seek to revisit a past that has long elapsed, connecting the present to the past, and building that long bridge that enables the past to lay claims on the present in a way that the Saarinen's American Embassy in London simply cannot. After two World Wars, the past seemed like a shackle that the West should break free from. Vincent Scully argues that "the last great nineteenth-century images are of continuity" (Scully 1974, p. 22). It appears that the great twentieth-century images are of discontinuity. Insofar as modernist architecture projects a vision of the past at all, it is as something to be overcome, not drawn upon.

## FROM STORIED PAST TO LIBERAL COLONY TO POSTLIBERAL DEMOCRACY: THE CURIOUS CASE OF INDIA

***Figure 2*: An Aerial Photograph of New Delhi, c. 1930s, courtesy of the Lutyens Trust.**

The Ancient Greeks, having found themselves in India under the command of Alexander the Great, encountered a rich culture of veritable antiquity, much like their own. Megasthenes, ambassador to the court of the Indian ruler Chandragupta Maurya, found much to commend, especially the planned cities of ancient India (Stoneman 2019, pp. 129-288). As a culture, society, and nation with a history spanning millennia, India has an aesthetic and architectural tradition that each successive regime has had to contend with.

In 1912, when Herbert Baker and Edwin Lutyens were commissioned to build a new capital for the British Raj, they confronted this very challenge (Stamp 1981, p. 372). Delhi had been the capital city of India seven times before this eighth iteration, forming a continuous seat of power for Indian regimes—regimes that were now in ruins, like many of their monuments (Singh 1971; Breese 1975). Each regime had laid claim to some part of the old city, leaving dozens of memorable buildings behind. The city was a testament to centuries of pan-subcontinental rule, and it was now time for the British to craft a new landscape of power (Baker 1926).

In many ways, Delhi is to modern India what Rome is to Italy, with each regime seeking to establish itself by leaving a mark on the same city. Baker, Lutyens' protégé and collaborator on New Delhi, admitted as such, observing in his address to the Royal Society of the Arts that not only does "the great, central vista of New Delhi faces Indrapat, the reputed Indraprastha of the first legendary city of Delhi," but also that many British observers tend to miss this history: "I wonder whether too much popular significance is not given to the deserted cities of Delhi. London thrives happily enough on the ruins of British, Roman, Saxon, Norman, Gothic and, alas to an increasing extent, on Renaissance Londons" (Baker 1926, pp. 774, 776). The need to ground this new, imperial capital for the British extended even to the roads, which were named "after great men and women of Indian history" (Baker 1926, p. 784).

One might expect the British, as an imperial power, to replicate the neoclassicism or the Gothic Revivalism of London abroad. But that is not what Baker and Lutyens set out to do. Baker and Lutyens drew from the neoclassical, but synthesised it with motifs from Indian history—from the timeless Hindu temple architecture to the Saracenic motifs brought to India by the Mughal Empire, and everything in between. Baker's own justification on the matter was expressed through Sir Christopher Wren's dictum, "Architecture has its political uses: it establishes a nation" (Baker 1926, p. 789). In establishing this Indian nation under British rule, the marriage of British neoclassicism to the various forms of Indian architecture was crucial. Irving notes that Lutyens' Delhi "married past and present, linking the legacy of the Roman, Asokan, and Mughal empires with Britain's physical and spiritual heritage" (Irving 1982, p. 14). To bring the ancient to bear upon the modern, the Occidental upon the Orient, the local to the global and the imperial: this was the explicit theory of Lutyens' Delhi.

Consider some specific architectural elements that Lutyens and Baker employ in their buildings of New Delhi: the chujja, the jaali, the bells, and the railings. Baker, in the aforementioned address to the Royal Society of the Arts, celebrates the chajja, "the familiar cornice of stone slabs which, supported on brackets or cove, overhangs the wall," before proceeding to describe the jaali, "pierced stone or marble slabs of intricate patterns," most prominently seen in screens, as having common origin with the "pierced masonry windows of Rome" (Baker 1926, pp. 785-86). The bell—a prominent motif in Lutyens' Viceroy's House, now home to the Indian Republic's President, the titular head of state—does double duty as an upturned lotus. The lotus is the "seat of footstool of the gods" in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, while gesturing to "the drop ornaments so common in Mughal architecture" (Irving 1982, p. 12). All these motifs capture the synthesis of the history of Indian art and craft that Lutyens sought to achieve. The gardens are laid out, in Lutyens' words, "of the Moghal type," replete with waterworks and the "quadripartite plans figured in Muslim conceptions of paradise, Hebrew visions of Eden, and the Hindu mythological geography of the world" (Irving 1982, p. 20).

Perhaps counter-intuitively, much of the backlash against Lutyens and Baker's plans for New Delhi stemmed from the Arts and Crafts movement, for which the project remained too steeped in the British

past. John Lockwood Kipling—father to Rudyard Kipling—and E. B. Havell both expressed significant sympathies for native arts and crafts and sought to overcome the overweening influence of Pugin's successors on Anglo-Indian architecture. Havell strongly opposed a proposed plan of action that would subsume the new monuments of British liberal empire into some misplaced classical or gothic revivalism, with no sensitivity to time or place (Stamp 1981, p. 372). Despite Lutyens' and Baker's synthesis between the English and the Indian, Havell wrote in a passionate letter to the Spectator of his dismal opinion and dashed hopes for what New Delhi could have been:

> to bring about a real co-operation between the European architect and the Indian master builder, and thus to give a new lease of life to the living traditions of Indian art which have been withering under the blight of European departmentalism. … If that real co-operation had been achieved, the new Delhi might have given birth to an Indo-British School of Architecture of intense vitality and natural strength. ... In this respect New Delhi has been a lamentable failure. ... New Delhi might have been something better than an excellent one-man show, designed to gratify the Indian love of splendour and to express the ideal of British rule in India (Stamp 1981, p. 373).

Not all critical reactions reduced Lutyens' Delhi to a false imitation, however. Robert Byron thought that it was the highest fusion of East and West, past and present, to be conjured into existence (ibid.). "Taking the best of East and West, bests which are complimentary", Byron wrote, "he has made of them a double magnificence" (ibid.).

Both detractors and advocates of Lutyens' plan suggested that the reality of British rule in India had shifted "from one of colonial master to one of liberal educator" (Johnson 2008, p. 484). And it was true that by the time New Delhi was inaugurated in its full splendour, the Indians had a measure of self-government that reached to a significant degree that which the Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, and South Africans had achieved. Four columns, representing each of these Dominions of the British Empire, were placed prominently in front of the Secretariat buildings on the top of Raisina Hill, modelled "after the pillars of Asoka, a Buddhist Mauryan Emperor who inscribed his laws on stone columns throughout South Asia in the third century BC" (Johnson 2008, p. 474). No mention was made of any of Britain's other imperial possessions. India was the jewel of the crown—both literally, through the Koh-I-Noor diamond, and metaphorically.

New Delhi was an articulation of the ideal of the city on the hill, of the exceptional nature of a now-liberal empire that was seeking to hold the historical past as a harbinger of the modern world. It belied an understanding of history that was sweeping, across time and space, in a way that few architectural projects had achieved. In 1920, when the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau visited New Delhi in its incipient stages, he remarked that "this will be finest ruin of them all" (Irving 1982, p. 23). There, the idea of history was clear: the present needed to be anchored in the past; the past was not merely the past, a relic of antiquarian concern and study, but something we lived in and laboured under. No regime could be bereft of the conscious articulation of and reminders of where it came from, even if those traditions had to be synthesised wholly anew to create another architectural language.

All inspiring stories end in essentially tragic acts. New Delhi is not any different. Gavin Stamp is worth quoting in full on this matter: "It is peculiar irony that the imported Western style of modern architecture which succeeded it has become more widespread and dominant, by the free choice of Indians, than any architecture imposed by British colonial rule, and, furthermore, it has done more to suppress and to neglect the traditional building crafts of India than ever did the old Public Works Department" (Stamp 1981, p. 376). Lutyens' Delhi, as it has now come to be known, is no more. But it still represents a distinct model of liberal imperial architecture: one that attempts to fuse two traditions into a unified model attentive to the past of both nations—neither modernist nor antiquarian.

## CONCLUSION: WHERE FROM HERE?

Through three admittedly peculiar case-studies, this paper attempts to say something about the aesthetics of liberalism and about liberalism itself.

First, there is no pure, unaltered liberalism: liberal regimes are always part of a cultural whole that depends on, though need not be subsumed by, a pre-liberal past. Eero Saarinen, Charles Barry, Herbert Baker, and Edwin Lutyens all build edifices for liberal regimes in different settings, from national capitals and metropoles to foreign outposts and imperial capitals. In doing so, they adopt the style, tone, tenor, and preoccupations of the regime that their buildings embody. In these monuments, liberalism coexists with other traditions: the Gothic, the Classical, the Hindoo, the Mughal, the Buddhist, the Mauryan, the Modernist. It does not replace them; they form the substratum upon which liberal regimes are foisted.

Second, there is, in fact, an aesthetics of liberalism, but it can take different forms. In different ways, each of these buildings represents parts of the liberal ideal: the British parliamentary tradition, the American openness to the future, and the imperial ethos of the British Raj—halfway between tolerance and imposition. In every case, the material world stands for a set of liberal ideas. Nevertheless, each building also carries an altogether different conception of the state: the first emphasizes continuity, the second discontinuity, and the third a mix of both. I have tried to show that this maps onto three kinds of liberalism: an older, more conservative kind; a more recent, modernist kind; and a distinctly imperial kind.

Third, of the three styles, I want to suggest that the imperial one has something to teach the other two. To perverse their relationship to the past, early liberal regimes often indulge in antiquarianism. To break from the past, modernist regimes often erase particularity and embrace uniformity. Whatever one thinks of the British imperial project in India, Lutyens' work represents an alternative to both: a model that fuses the old and the new, at once tolerant of tradition and reformist in inclination. If Pugin's Houses of Parliament represent the limits of conservative liberalism and Saarinen's embassy represents the excesses of progressive liberalism, Lutyens' Dehli represents a valuable in-between.

This in-between offers a useful break from the contemporary tendency to embrace the rootless architecture that the likes of Saarinen pioneered. The title of this paper comes from James Howard Kunstler's *The Geography of Nowhere*. Echoing a long tradition of critics, Kunstler laments the staid uniformity that takes away the specificity of locales. I am not arguing that the intrinsic logic of liberalism produces this staid uniformity; indeed, my point is precisely that liberal societies have the resources to redefine their relationship to the past through architecture. I do not intend to argue that liberal democracies reproduce uniformity across national lines, but only that their relationship to the past, once foundational, has become utterly untethered. The relationship of liberal democracy to the past is dogged, haunted, obsessed with newness at the expense of variety and tradition. It is no accident that modernism seems like a natural fit for contemporary liberal societies. Nor is it an accident that contemporary liberal theorists either shy away from the question of aesthetics, or engage with it only to declare the question illegitimate. I hope to have shown that both impulses are counter-productive. If liberal societies are to find renewed vitality, they must also find visual vitality. Neither antiquarianism nor globalized uniformity will do. A renewed engagement with the past, halfway between tradition and innovation, could prove a productive place to start.

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## NOTES

1 My methodology here is decidedly materialistic: the material world is a better guide to action and the motives behind it than the artistic world, especially because city planning and monumental architecture demand not only extensive financial outlays but also the active involvement of the regime. They are sure guides to revealing aesthetic attitudes because they reflect official, government decisions on what should be represented and how it should be represented: the Parthenon, with its amalgamation of Doric and Ionic orders, tells us more about the seriousness of the claims that Pericles makes in his Funeral Oration about Athens being the school of Greece and of its cosmopolitanism than any other key piece of textual evidence we have. Buildings, city planning, and official architecture thus have significant value beyond their art historical value.

2 "By the second half of the eighteenth century there was a sizeable group of country gentlemen with antiquarian tastes, or antiquarians with friends among the gentry, all busy studying the Middle Ages, publishing the results of their researches and building Gothic buildings" (Girouard 1981, p. 21).

3 "If the *principles* of the Revolution of 1688 are anywhere to be found, it is in the statute called the *Declaration of Right*. In that most wise, sober, and considerate declaration, drawn up by great lawyers and great statesmen, and not by warm and inexperienced enthusiasts" (Burke 1987, p. 15).

4 There are important differences between the cultural and political views of Burke and Disraeli; I do not intend to obscure them. I address them in Jajodia (2023). Quinton's accounts of Burke and Disraeli also include valuable comparisons (Quinton 1978).

5 This paragraph and the following paragraph first appeared on a blog I wrote: https://journeys.dartmouth.edu/otemporaomores/2020/08/14/the-moral-economy-of-benjamin-disraeli/

6 Schorske remarks that Pugin and Disraeli shared "a somewhat similar Tory historical myth of the fall: Catholic Church corruption was the original sin. Tudor excess in breaking the economic independence of the Church magnified the consequence of sin" (Schorske 1998, p. 84).