

A BOOK LAUNCH of Peter Blundell Jones's , *Architecture and Ritual: How buildings shape society*, published by Routledge, 2016

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This book explores how rituals are framed and defined by architecture. In order to do so Peter provides a liberal definition for architecture to include all buildings and even landscapes -rather than looking at material and technical aspects concentrates on 'the meaningful, spiritual, social and cultural aspects of buildings and the thinking behind them'. His definition for ritual includes both the grand and mundane, and considers anything from handshakes and tea breaks, 'rites of hospitality', obsessive-compulsive behaviour, to religious practices.

The book highlights a continued emphasis on the need for context. This is something that permeated Peter's building analyses throughout his career, particularly after the completion of the first edition of the book on Hans Scharoun, where he felt he had underplayed its significance. Ritual provides a rich focus through which to provide a perspective of context.

With Clifford Geertz as an inspiration, Peter had moved away from 'laws and instances view of things towards a cases and interpretations one'. He maintained that by doing this 'at least you can get something right'. He had been encouraged towards case studies by Peter Davey of the *Architectural Review* and later in the 'Masters of Building' series in the *Architects' Journal*. Exploration had continued into a deeper general history with *Modern Architecture through Case Studies* that provided an alternative view of modernism rather than that generally presented, that of 'form follows function', and instead revealed how buildings expressed social institutions. Its popular reception encouraged him to prepare a second volume. Furthermore Peter commenced to investigate various themes in architecture; *Architecture and Participation* with Jeremy Till and Doina Petrescu and *Architecture and Movement* with Mark Meagher.

The present volume, *Architecture and Ritual*, continues this series, and the case study approach. The contents is divided in three parts, or themes, each illustrated with four or five case studies:

Power and politics

- Opening of the British Parliament
- Lord Mayor's Banquet
- The Imperial Chinese magistrate and his Yamen
- The Nuremberg Rally of 1934

People and their territories

- Hunter-gatherer architecture: the Australian aboriginal people
- The Oglala Sioux and the four directions
- The Tukanoan maloca
- The Dogon and Mali
- The Dong, building types and building rituals

Modernities

- The European farmstead
- The modernist hospital
- The opera and the concert hall
- The Fun Palace project, Centre Pompidou and paradoxical ideas of freedom

Conclusion

Research for this book was not a separate activity, but themes seemed to appear naturally, emerging through requests particularly for theme-led contributions to the *Architectural Review*, for instance. For this, homage to Mary Douglas's *Implicit Meanings* (1975) led to an initial investigation into the Palace of Westminster; expanded and deepened it forms the first case study for this book. In order to be able to explore ritual at the scale of the city the Lord Mayor's show was selected and investigated both spatially and directionally. An interest in the law court, also sparked by Mary Douglas had generated PhD research at Sheffield supervised by Peter, while the methodology developed for this was later used to explore a Chinese case study on the same topic. This was also a topic that was later discussed at the colloquia of the Centre of East-West Studies, and features in one of the most innovative chapters.

Other topics for chapters had been sparked by debates, either public or with friends; a Twentieth Century Society debate in the Royal Festival Hall in 1996 on the topic of Albert Speer's contribution to Nazi Berlin led to exploration of the 1934 Nuremberg Rallies. The middle chapters, based largely on historic anthropological studies, but examined spatially, and illustrated with drawings by Peter's daughter Claire, provides a graphic account of specific rituals, re-interpreted for the first time to a wider readership. The new focus of ritual also encouraged re-examination of earlier topics, such as that of Hans Scharoun, and his researches of Hugo Häring's farm. This time the topic was expanded, placing it in a (Middle) European context.

The last chapter, before the conclusion, deals with topics Peter grappled with since his student days at the Architectural Association; with the technology-led architecture of the Fun Palace of Cedric Price and of the Centre Pompidou. The latter provided an opportunity to reveal how the aim of achieving a freedom of use failed, and how it became a formal cultural monument in the French tradition. In the conclusion an alternative building ritual is presented that Peter had previously explored in *Architecture and Participation*, and separately in a monograph, namely the work of the German architect Peter Hübner.

While the writing of *Architecture and Ritual* appears to have been almost an organic process it was by no means straightforward; most of the chapters went through various editions and re-writings; they would be read out to the East-West colloquia at which we had themed the meetings to coincide with the various chapters. Then there was some self-doubt about trespassing into the anthropological sciences and the difficulties of getting it finally published. Fortunately Routledge recognized its potential and in publishing it revealed that they saw it added a new layer of understanding of the place of architecture in society. This volume, which will undoubtedly become Peter's most widely read and quoted book, reveals how far Peter's vision had matured and broadened. There were lots of ideas and plans to take this even further, and it is unfortunate that we can only guess where they might have taken him.