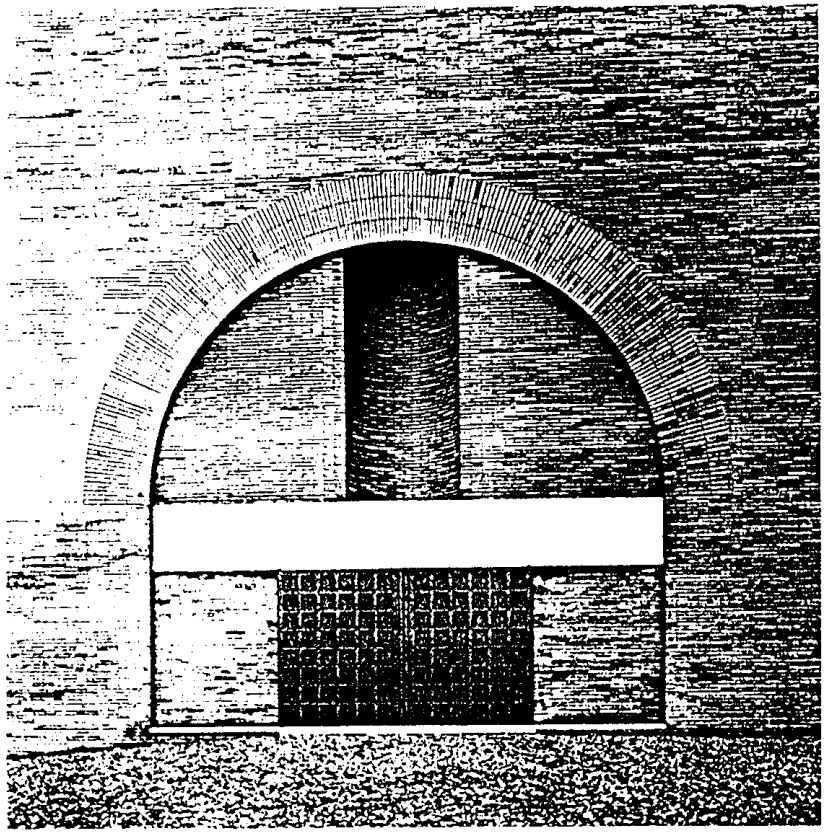

"The Solitude of Buildings"

Kenzo Tange Lecture March 9, 1985

George Gund Hall

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I thank Dean McCue for his kind words. Once again, I understand the responsibilities I have inherited in accepting the chairmanship of the Department of Architecture of the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, starting July 1st. I cannot forget those who have led the school in the past; but permit me to confess how much it touches me to know that I will hold the position once held by the late Josep Lluis Sert. This is the greatest stimulus, and at the same time, a great challenge. I expect and hope that he will act as my remote and loved mentor.

I felt honored when Dean McCue asked that I become a candidate for this position, and was understandably assailed by fears about its commitments and duties, because I realize what Harvard means: people all over the world look to Harvard as their guide.

With the awareness that Dean McCue and Professor Harry Cobb would be beside me, I accepted the position, certain that I would find here at the GSD the enthusiastic and competent faculty able to carry out the work implicit in the school's pedagogic mission.

I firmly wish to serve the school in striving toward the four qualities Professor Cobb identified five years ago when he accepted the position I will hold, and I quote him now: "The qualities that seem essential to our educational mission are coherence, rigour, openness and audacity." I know how much Dean McCue and Professor Cobb have endeavored to emphasize these qualities at the school. Openness and audacity, coherence and rigour. I could not find better words to define the future of the school as I envision it. That is my firm belief and I will work to keep these qualities as alive as they are today.

Let me affirm that I will not delude those who have placed their confidence in me. The one statement I am able to make at this early date is a promise. I will do my best and put all my energy into serving the university, honoring what some universities have professed and what I still believe: that knowledge is not the private property of one group of people or one country, and that it should be shared by all people of good will throughout the world.

On a different note, it is a duty for me, as much as a pleasure, to present myself and my work to the students and my fellow faculty members tonight. I would like to thank the GSD and the endowment given in the name of Kenzo Tange for this opportunity.

I have chosen three buildings as examples of my work . They differ with respect to requirements and site conditions, but all are public buildings. They may be regarded as representative of my work over the last ten years.

Why buildings instead of projects? Why work instead of a theoretical discourse? I believe that in the crude reality of built works one can see clearly the essence of a project, the consistency of ideas. I firmly believe that architecture needs the support of matter; that the former is inseporable from the latter. Architecture arrives when our thoughts about it acquire the real condition that only materials can provide. By accepting and bargaining with limitations and restrictions, with the act of construction, architecture becomes what it really is.

I know these words may sound odd today. First, because we are in a school of architecture where learning is based upon the convention implied by drawings and models. We are therefore inclined to believe that within these resides the entire discipline. Second, because during the last, let

me say fifteen years many architects have believed that construction is not worth the effort it involves. For them the task was finished at the drawingboard, avoiding any contamination. And fears of contamination are understandable. Architecture as a profession is a long way from satisfying anyone who loves the discipline. It has lost the importance that it had in society in the past. Victor Hugo said that books had killed cathedral architecture; it wasn't entirely true then, but it seems we could say today that mass media communication has reduced architecture's relevance. Architecture is no longer vital, neither as in the most pragmatic point of view that identifies it with cities and housing nor as the reservoir of symbolic communication. Architects unconsciously recognize this problem but are not willing to confront it directly. And therefore, although they would like to connect architecture with society and reality as in the past, they often take a wrong path and become prophets of utopian dreams. Architects desire a bigger role for architecture, or at least a more respected position. And perceiving it as unreachable, we architects are protecting ourselves by nurturing the fantasy that architecture can be represented simply through drawings. Such a view has been supported by the dialectic between utopia and reality. If architects cannot serve reality, they at least will work for the future world dreamed of in utopia. Such a view has produced beautiful drawings and presented wonderful intentions, but in my opinion these efforts are not intrinsically architecture—which does not mean that people who act this way are not architects.

I realize how predominant this approach is today, but at the same time architects must resent this approach, because buildings begin to appear as mere reflections of drawings or as direct physical representations of a process. This dramatically changes the relationship between the buildings and reality. Many architects today invent processes or master drawing techniques without concern for the reality of building. The tyranny of drawings is evident in many buildings when the builder tries to follow the drawing literally. The reality belongs to the drawing, not to the building. There are so many examples of this attitude that I do not need to elaborate it. The buildings refer so directly to the architect's definition and are so unconnected with the operation of building that the only reference is the drawing. But a truly architectural drawing should imply above all the

knowledge of construction. Today many architects ignore issues about how a work is going to be built. Some will argue that this has happened in the past, that some works were executed without being visited by their architects, who trusted directly in drawings and specifications for the execution of their projects. But, of course, everyone will agree that architects in the past took advantage of a social coherence that does not exist today. A drawing accepted, before it was drawn, certain building conventions. It has been only recently, perhaps with some architects of the Enlightenment, that the connection between graphic expression and building knowledge began to dissolve.

On the other hand, many architects believe that the work of architecture should entail the exact registration of a process. If in the 1920s the idea of *promenade architecturelle* transformed the building structure and produced a series of sequences that introduced the idea of movement, in the 1980s the idea of architecture as the physical conclusion that consolidates a mental process has taken its place. By this transformation of a mental process in the consolidated reality, the self-expression of a building becomes less important than the expression of the architect's thoughts. Moreover, the automatic nature of the production of architecture prevents the object's autonomy. And, naturally, questions arise: Can the process be considered the aim of architecture? Doesn't architecture lie in the production of something else? May the simple registration of the process become the reality that we call architecture? Are buildings simply three-dimensional translations of drawings or the outcome of a so-called process? Previously this was not the case, when architects thought first of the reality of buildings and later of the drawings with which they might describe these thoughts. Today the terms of this relationship are often inverted.

The result of this conflict with physical reality is that architecture is transformed immediately either into the reflection of drawing or the representation of process. The term that best characterizes the most distinctive feature of academic architecture today is "immediateness." Architecture tries to be direct, immediate, the simple dimensional extension of drawings. Architects want to keep the flavor of their drawings. And if this is their most desirable goal, in so wishing architects reduce architecture to a private, personal domain. It follows that this

immediateness transforms the intentions of the architect, and turns what should be presumed as general into a personal, expressionist statement. Architecture has lost its necessary contact with society and, as a result, has become a private world.

Can architecture be a private world? May it be reduced to a personal expression? Architects, as much as they admire the personal realm in which other artists seem to work, do not work under the same conditions. Their work should be, in my opinion, shared by others or, at least, it should not be so personal as to invade the public realm in a manner that no longer belongs naturally to the sphere of the public environment. Architecture itself implies public involvement from the specific moment at which the design process starts until construction ends. And again we are on slippery ground, because the boundaries between public and private worlds today are more blurred than ever. When architecture is produced in cities, it conveys a public idea. Cities have a need for an architecture that is both a tool, in the sense of artificially transforming the physical environment, and a frame for supporting social life. The notion of a shared language for producing the world of objects—the different types of buildings in and with which we live—emerges as a given for understanding architecture and its production. And therefore I do not think that we can justify as architecture the attempts of some artists who, confusing our discipline with any three-dimensional experience, create unknown objects that at times relate to a natural mimesis, and at other times allude to unusable machines.

But without the connection that existed in the past between project and production, builders become mere instruments, and technique becomes subjugated—a slave. The intimacy between architecture and construction has been broken. This intimacy was once the very nature of the architectural work and somehow was always manifested in its appearance. We know that a deterministic discourse doesn't explain architecture, but we admit that architects should accept techniques and use building systems for starting the process of the formal invention that ends in architecture. Even an architecture such as LeCorbusier's should be seen in the light of the time-honored acceptance of building technologies as the base for the formal proposal. And to be an architect, therefore, has tradition-

ally implied being a builder; that is, explaining to others how to build. The knowledge (when not the mastery) of the building techniques was always implicit in the idea of producing architecture. The knowledge of construction principles should be so thorough as to allow the architect the formal invention that always precedes the fact of the construction itself. It should appear as if the techniques imposed have come to accept form's boundaries, for it is the acknowledgment of these limits that renders so explicit the presence of building procedures in architecture. Paradoxically, it is technical flexibility that allows architects to forget the presence of technique. The flexibility of today's techniques has resulted in their disappearance, either in architecture itself or in the process of thinking about it. This is something new. Architects in the past were both architects and builders. Before the present disassociation, the invention of form was also the invention of its construction. One implied the other.

Architecture has always presented inherent arbitrariness as something unobtrusive. In other words, arbitrariness of form disappeared in construction, and architecture acted as the bridge between the two. Today arbitrariness of form is evident in the buildings themselves, because construction has been dealt out of the game of design. When arbitrariness is so clearly visible in the buildings themselves, architecture is dead; what I understand as the most valuable attribute of architecture disappears.

The price of such an attitude is paid by architecture, because very often some architects present us with an image of fragility and with a taste for the fictional. This is the natural consequence of immediateness. Curiously, this did not happen with the architecture of the Modern Movement, where the idea of immediateness could not be applied. Whether we are considering the techniques or the social goals, the architects of the Modern Movement respected both techniques and building programs. While their architecture perhaps was not successful in solving the problems posed simultaneously, they strived to involve such concerns in their work, and consequently their architecture cannot be characterized by its immediateness. Then, the idea of architecture always implied an awareness of the outside world in addition to the strength of the images. But today the lack of con-

tact with the outside world brings with it the fantasy of an autonomous architecture controlled exclusively on the drawingboard.

It may be argued that architecture in the future will lack the quasi-perennial condition that it had in the past and will from now on be characterized as ephemeral. That would explain the tenuous condition of our buildings despite their stone. Architecture is influenced today by this ephemeral condition and thus presents itself as ephemeral, no matter what its material. And this poses for us a major question: Is architecture today no longer able to endure as it did in the past? In today's architecture does there exist the sensation that works are perishable? I think these questions must be answered affirmatively, and only in so doing will we be able to oppose such a tendency, by acknowledging the gratifying way in which buildings accepted their own lives in the past. The construction of a building entails an enormous amount of effort and a major investment. Architecture in principle, almost by economic principle, should be durable. Materials should provide for the building's long life. A building formerly was built to last forever or, at least, we certainly did not expect it to disappear. But today things have changed. Although we resist regarding our architecture this way, it is far removed from traditional architecture, despite our professed respect for history. We probably unconsciously know that architecture is not going to last as long as it used to. But we reject such ideas, even though the real situation affects architecture and marks it with the flavor of the ephemeral. If architecture is ephemeral it can be immediate.

If architecture once contributed to the reality of fiction, henceforth it will contribute to the fiction of fiction. The pride of architecture was to make real the fiction, because the way in which architecture was produced implied a continuity between form, as contrived in the mind, and built form in such a way that the latter became the only existing reality. The ideal world was transformed into a real world because what characterized architecture was the fact that it should be built. It was a mental product that took its consistency from the act of expression alone, becoming at the same time an independent reality. Today's architecture has lost contact with its genuine supports, and immediateness is the natural consequence of this criti-

cal change suffered by the role of architecture in the world. I still believe in an architecture of reality, but I should acknowledge the great extent to which my belief is the manifestation of a wish for more than what I can reasonably forecast for the future.

I do not think this is the appropriate moment to discuss further such important concerns, but in my opinion these discussions should take place in the school, and I would like to pursue these issues with interested students. Nonetheless I would like to respond to some of the questions I have introduced. Architects should realize that architecture, the work in which they are involved, their work, is a complex reality including many presences; for this reason the immediateness-fantasy is not possible. All these presences are reflected in the multiple mirror that a building is. They should be acknowledged in the design operation, in order to avoid the reduction that always distorts architectural reality. The fact that architects may become aware of the many ways in which their work is limited, that it has real boundaries ranging from the ideology to the brick, does not preclude architecture from being rendered. The ability to accommodate the multiple presences inherent in buildings should be the key with which the architect condenses disparity into the single self-supported presence of buildings.

As much as I consider drawings and models the necessary and natural support for our discussions about architecture in school, I encourage students to understand the immense pleasure that the actual production of architecture, the construction of buildings, offers. This means that I would like to accompany students in their initiation as architects, to be beside them as they become makers of buildings. We are living in a discontinuous world—in times of uncertainty, as Professor Cobb likes to say—and architects, regardless of their wishes and intentions, suffer as they stand unprotected before the diversity of the society in which they work. Therefore, once the architect has acquired his or her skills, the training of his or her eyes, the first imperative is to gain the critical knowledge that will permit the choice of the coordinates within which his or her career will develop; these are the coordinates to which his or her buildings will refer.

An architectural initiation includes today, in my opinion, a strong familiarity with history—a history that is no longer a storehouse of forms or a workshop of styles, but one that simply offers the material for thinking about the evolution of architecture, as well as the way in which architects worked in the past.

Now, why do I insist so much on the conviction that buildings are neither the outcome of a process nor the materialization of a drawing? In other words, why do I insist on the idea that buildings are not the exclusive property of the architect? Mainly because I believe the presence of the architect quickly disappears and that, once completed, buildings take on a life of their own. Architects endure all the difficulties involved in raising buildings—artifacts that perhaps at first can be said to reflect our intentions, express our desires and represent the problems we discuss in schools. For a time, we regard our buildings as mirrors; in their reflection we recognize who we are, and eventually who we were. We are tempted to think that a building is a personal statement within the ongoing process of history; but today I am certain that once the construction is finished, once the building assumes its own reality and its own role, all those concerns that occupied the architects and their efforts dissolve. There comes a time when buildings do not need protection of any kind, neither from the architects nor from the circumstances. In the end, circumstances alone remain as hints, allowing critics and historians to gain knowledge of the buildings and to explain to others how they took their form.

The building itself stands alone, in complete solitude—no more polemical statements, no more troubles. It has acquired its definitive condition and will remain alone forever, master of itself. I like to see the building assume its proper condition, living its own life. Therefore, I do not believe that architecture is just the superstructure that we introduce when we talk about buildings. I prefer to think that architecture is the air we breathe when buildings have arrived at their radical solitude.

Are all these considerations present in our works? I would like them to be. Because when architects realize that a building masters its own life, their approach to design is different; it changes radically. Our personal concerns become secondary and the final reality of the building becomes

the authentic aim of our work. It is the building's materiality, its own being, that becomes the unique and exclusive concern. This attitude allows us to establish the necessary distance between the building and ourselves.

Of all the figurative or plastic arts, architecture is probably the one in which the distance between the artist and his work is the greatest. A painter or a sculptor may leave his or her own direct imprint on the canvas or the stone; he or she often is inextricably attached to his or her work. This does not happen in architecture. In our discipline a natural distance separates us from our work; this distance should always be maintained, especially when our thoughts start to be materialized in a project. To keep this distance is to acknowledge architectural reality, but it is also the precondition for beginning a project. Architecture implies the distance between our work and ourselves, so that in the end the work remains alone, self-supported, once it has acquired its physical consistency. Our pleasure lies in the experience of this distance, when we see our thought supported by a reality that no longer belongs to us. What is more, a work of architecture, if successful, may efface the architect.

Are all these thoughts present in the work I will now present? I believe they were my companions throughout time. I fought hard to give Bankinter the splendor that baked clay may acquire when used in urban fabric, in this way establishing a natural connection with the existing villa. I tried to reflect the presence of the public realm in the city when I designed Logrono. I hoped the Roman world would once again be alive in Merida, a Roman city that had almost lost its memory.

But let me now go on to the images; I will try to make some of these thoughts more clear.