> to deal with a concrete basis which is utilitarian. It is, nonetheless, a purely aesthetic impulse, an impulse distinct from all the others, which in architecture may simultaneously satisfy an impulse by virtue of which architecture becomes art. It is a separate instinct. It will borrow a suggestion from the laws of firmness or commodity; sometimes it will run counter to them, or be offended by the forms they would dictate. It has its own standard, and claims its own authority (Bruegmann, 1985, 4)

And therein lies the rub. What makes a building beautiful? Surely we want to resist the idea that beauty is simply in the eye of the beholder, but can we? Who is the arbiter of beauty? In what some call modernist architecture and then in post-modern historicist architecture, the arbiter has become the architect. But there is a difference between the architect of the 19th century and the architect of the 20th. The Enlightenment architect of the 19thth century believed in the power of reason to reveal the nature of things. In this case, it was the nature of beauty. There was a deep-seated belief that there existed natural laws governing the beautiful and that the architect was best qualified to find those natural laws. In dealing with this ineffable quality of beauty, the modernist 19th century architect, while taking it upon himself to be the arbiter of taste, argued for taste allegedly based on reason. As Bruegmann puts it,

> Modernists believed the job of the architect, at least the genuine avant-garde architect, was to discover what these laws [of beauty] were and to insist on them even if they ran counter to society's expectations. In fact, as the nineteenth century progressed, the avant-garde moved further and further from the tastes of the population at large. (Bruegmann, 1985, 22)

The search for and hoped for discovery of universal laws of beauty by the chosen few (i.e., avant-garde architects) was seriously under-minded by those who followed Robert Venturi (1972) who, thanks to his criterion for post-modern architecture, that the present must recapitulate the past, inadvertently helped spawn the ubiquitous large office buildings with various embellishments such as columns and arches that line the sides of such places as the highway that leads from Dulles International Airport outside of Washington D.C. into the U.S. capital.[2] With recapitulation of the past as the sole criterion, beauty becomes taste, and we all know *de gustibus non disputandum est*. Couple this with the architect's retained conviction, a holdover from the 19th century, that he or she is the anointed arbiter of taste, this time not based on reason but fad or ego, and you get the architectural plague of the 1980s and 1990s.

What I am claiming is that the traditional criteria for evaluating the product have been undermined. They have been undermined by the development of new materials and techniques and by abandoning the 19th century modernist conviction that there are laws of nature governing beauty. Whatever criteria are provided have to do with

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[2] Steven Moore has rightly pointed out that Venturi was not directly responsible for this blight. Venutri was motivated by political and populist concerns, seeking to harvest interpretations from the past, rather than impose them from some *a priori* elitist viewpoint. His work was co-oped by others who lacked his political and populist leanings.

the taste of the individual critic, motivated perhaps by a reaction to modernity and modernist architecture, and that tells us very little about the building itself.

5   A Common Sense Proposal

Architects design spaces, but not all spaces are designed. As an undesigned space consider a forest, although there are designed forests in the Netherlands, France and elsewhere. Furthermore, spaces are always to be found in other spaces. And it is to the spaces within spaces I would direct our attention. I am not concerned with questions of the intention of the designer, for his or her intentions have their own problems. Instead I want to focus on the space itself. If spaces are always to be found in spaces, then the relationship between and among spaces seems a logical starting point for a new discussion of design criteria. I should also like to note that spaces have histories. A particular space is what it is because it has come to be that space over time. This applies to a building, a city, or an environment. The forces that create the spaces differ, some are through human intervention, like zoning, some are forces of nature. But spaces have histories and the interesting thing about these historical spaces is that there seems to be something like an evolutionary success story to the spaces that have sustained a certain continuity over time.[3] That is, some types of spaces work better in some spaces than in other spaces. And when it comes to building new spaces, I would suggest that we apply something I want to call *architectural common sense*. This is basically the normative claim:

– the space should fit the space it is in, *ceteris paribus*.

In talking about spaces in spaces, it should be clear that I am talking about the location and external look of a space. There are other issues as well to be considered, but time and space make these topics for other times. However, two seem especially important to at least note them. The first concerns the notion of function. That is: Does the space do what it is supposed to do? Having raised that issue, another immediately springs to mind: Who determines what the space is supposed to do? The ready answer, the person or institution that issues the commission, is problematic since the users of the space often have interests in conflict with those who commissioned the space and with those who designed it. Who determines whether the space in fact accomplishes what it is supposed to is another question like the first to be left unanswered.

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[3] This idea that spaces have histories and that knowing that history is important in design derives in part from some earlier ideas. In (Pitt, 2006a) I introduced the notion of *explanatory contexts*. The mark of an explanatory context when dealing with historical material is that it tells a *coherent story*. In (Pitt, 2001) I elaborated the notion of a coherent story into a *philosophical problematic*, where the point is made that to understand a philosophical problem in an historical context one must know its past history and, if possible, its resolution or its projected resolutions. Echoes of these ideas are to be found in the ideas of common sense design criteria.