

ASSAYING ERIC ARTHUR'S CAMPAIGN TO MODERNIZE CANADIAN DESIGN

> RHODRI WINDSOR LISCOMBE

A FRAUGHT HISTORY

The cultural impact of the First World War (1914-1918) upon architecture merits further inquiry. The life and work of Eric Ross Arthur offer an enlightening perspective. His career history enables a discursive approach to the issue of change in design thought and practice—what we may call *praxis*. The approach here embraces the material, ideological, aesthetic, and anecdotal aspects of architectural production.

Arthur literally graduated from war into architecture, although he escaped actual fighting. Nonetheless he was a participant in the flows of patriotism and cynicism that framed the war. This was waged with marked violence, societal disruption, and technological development as has been examined in a large body of scholarship.¹ The literature on the War's legacy for Canada is equally diverse.² Although centred in Northern Europe, the War had global reach, in part through the transoceanic British Empire, thereby anticipating the eventual geographical reach of the Modern Movement(s) in architecture, urban planning, and design. The War ruptured established cultural conventions that underpinned both academic and reformist design approaches, inevitably diminishing obstacles to the advance of modernism in professional *praxis* and public perspective. The war additionally elevated conviction in large-scale planning and technocracy that also formed part of modernist agenda. Despite the First World War's rapid destruction of social ideals and values, this article

RHODRI WINDSOR LISCOMBE is Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia, having served as department head and Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. Recipient of research, teaching, and publishing awards, he has written extensively on trans-Atlantic architecture and its cultural role, his most recent publications being *Architecture and the Canadian Fabric* (UBC Press, 2011) and *Canada. Modern Architectures in History* (with Michelangelo Sabatino, Reaktion Press, 2016). A re-assessment of architecture development in Canada and the United States from 1914 is in press for the new edition of Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture* (RIBA and UCL, forthcoming). As Rhodri Jones, he is the author of a study of memory and experience, *Edges of Empire* (Rarebit Press, 2017).

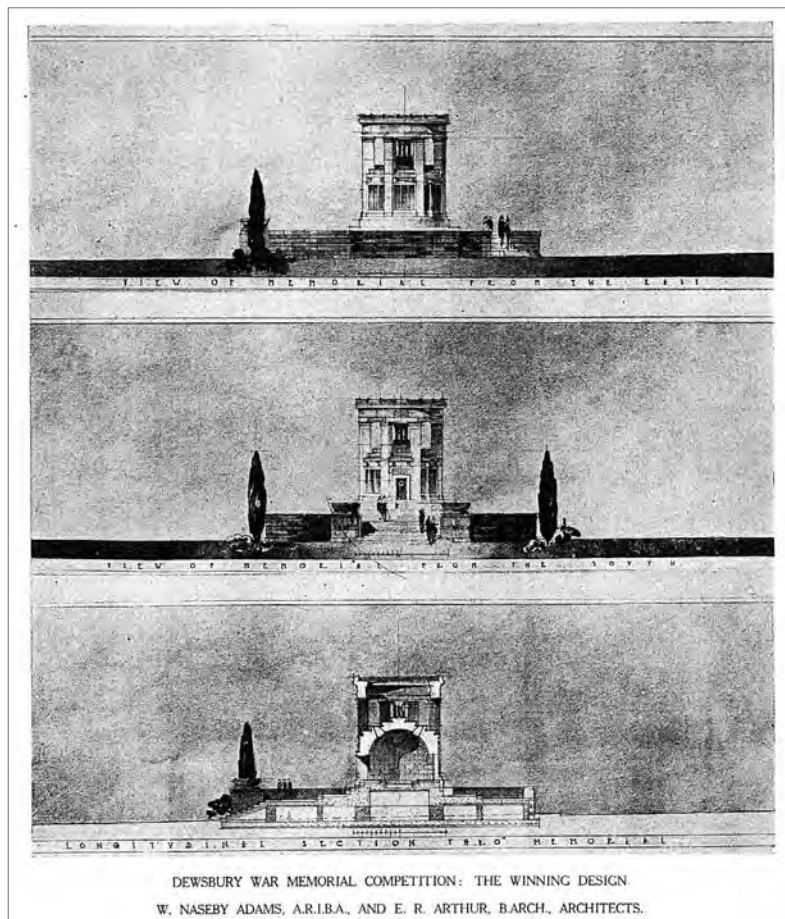


FIG. 1. ERIC ROSS ARTHUR AND W. NASEBY ADAMS, WINNING DESIGN FOR A WAR MEMORIAL AT DEWSBURY, YORKSHIRE. | PUBLISHED IN *THE ARCHITECT'S JOURNAL*, APRIL 16, 1928.

argues that, as in the case of Eric Arthur, its legacy of changed concept and action was slower and cumulative. The focus will be more upon the post-1918 promotion of modernism, including correspondence with military campaign and Arthur's policy as editor of the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (JRAIC)* rather than upon his own brand of modernist architecture. Lastly, by way of introduction, this article contends that his shift to modernist design was not so much pioneering as thoroughgoing. Arthur's embrace of modernist design lagged behind British-based Canadian Wells Coates even if preceding fellow academically trained Canadian John Lyle and McKenzie Waters. The latter's account of touring Northern European cities was published by Arthur in the September issue of the *JRAIC*, three months into his editorship.

LEGACIES OF THE "WAR TO END ALL WARS"

Arthur, born in Dunedin, enlisted in the New Zealand Rifle Brigade at Trentham, a suburb of Wellington, in January 1918. He was demobilized from active service on March 14, 1919, bereft of physical "Marks and Scars," of "Good Conduct and Character," and already a student at the Liverpool School of Architecture.³ An outbreak of typhoid fever—anticipating the devastating Spanish Influenza epidemic that compounded the War's death toll—had kept Arthur out of active service—until the Armistice. As indicated, the conflict indirectly enabled him to obtain architectural training at the celebrated University of Liverpool under the tutelage of the liberal classicist, Sir Charles Reilly, through award of the Lord Kitchener National Memorial Scholarship. The War's sad toll also brought Arthur his first major commission—the result of a competition. This was a widely publicized

war memorial for those killed from the Yorkshire mill town of Dewsbury. Albeit at a remove, Arthur certainly comprehended the harsh trauma of trench fighting, in which a high proportion of the British architectural profession had participated.

The passage from patriotic enthusiasm to revulsion experienced by many design professionals has been recounted recently from a British perspective.⁴ Although military participants who published accounts, such as Major-General Sir Frank Swinton, acknowledged that the War left a "world distraught," they upheld justificatory patriotism—typified in his book on the War's battlefields by the caption to an illustration of the Royal Regiment of Artillery monument erected at London: "Their Glory Perpetuated."⁵ Such rhetoric resounded around the British Empire, including its senior Dominion, Canada. It had transient architectural statement in the predominantly academic classical temporary structures for the 1924-1925 British Empire Exhibition, which were generally regarded as being modern both temporally and aesthetically. The one exception was engineer-architect Owen Williams's bold modernist reinforced-concrete Wembley Stadium (later lauded in an article by Frederic Lasserre that Arthur selected as new editor for publication in the June 1938 issue of the *JRAIC*). The very scale of slaughter, or in the language of the day, sacrifice, resulted in anxious endeavour to justify the carnage and maintain prior norms. Such a resonance is more evident in the pioneering authentic recounting of trench fighting by Canadian Peregrine Acland, *All Else is Folly. A Tale of War and Passion* (McLelland & Stewart, 1929), and in the title of British architect Tom Thirtle's darker recall in *The Great Stupidity* (c. 1928, unpublished manuscript held in RIBA Archive⁶).

Typically, war memorials were visually embodied in an academic architectural manner—classical and medieval formal aesthetic—for national and local monuments to the "Fallen." Thus, it is not surprising that the literature on War's legacy is ambivalent about specific outcome, especially regarding the broad field of cultural expression. Jay Winter proposes both that traditional "language, rituals and forms" marked much memorialization and that modernists reconfigured rather than obliterated cultural traditions along existing lines of development.⁷ Yet, as David Cannadine stated, the First War viscerally shattered all conventions.⁸ Indeed, Cannadine quoted Winston Churchill's assertion in *The World Crisis: The Aftermath* (Thornton Butterworth, 1929) that "all the glories and tools" of humankind had resulted in the capacity to "accomplish its own extermination."⁹ In the wider domain of memory studies, one of the main progenitors, Pierre Nora, classified the twentieth century as "an age of rupture."¹⁰ In Nora's celebrated anthology on the constitution of the French past, Andre Vauchy reproduced a photograph captioned "The aureole of suffering. Reims [Cathedral] after shelling in 1916."¹¹ Both patriotism and established convention delayed recognition—cultural and mental—as much as material change precipitated by the so-called Great War. Architectural *praxis* followed suit.

Arthur's first professional success upon graduating with honours from Liverpool (B. Arch. 1920 and M. Arch. 1921) had been first prize in the national competition for the War Memorial at Dewsbury. From that small Yorkshire town, more than a thousand young men had been killed between 1914 and 1918. The national competition was judged by his erstwhile supervisor, Sir Charles Reilly. Arthur's winning design, co-entered with W. Naseby



FIG. 2. DEWSBURY WAR MEMORIAL AS BUILT, PHOTOGRAPHED C. 2015. | WWW.WARMEMORIALSONLINE.ORG.UK, KIRKLEES COUNCIL, REFERENCE WM095172.



FIG. 3. GUSTAV A. MUNZER, GERMAN NAVAL MEMORIAL AT LABOE, NEAR KIEL, 1927-1936. | REPRODUCED FROM THE *JRAIC*, DECEMBER 1938, VOL. 15 NO. 12, P. 270.

Adams, was printed in *The Architects' Journal (AJ)* on May 16, 1923 (fig. 1). The memorial as built simplified the prize-winning design. It comprised a relatively modest masonry circular structure (tholos or rotunda), open in the upper register but enclosed below to hold civic and regimental plaques together with tablets of white marble, incised with the names of those killed (fig. 2). The, often brutal, passage from life to death suffered by those memorialized on the rotunda was signified by an open doorway in the lower section of one segment. Arthur's approach was more celebratory than Sir Edwin Lutyens's Cenotaph on Whitehall in London (unveiled on November 11, 1920), the formal abstraction of which deliberately eschewed ancient and modern religious symbolism. Yet Arthur moderated patriotism and melancholy. His tholos was encircled by six plain square antae raised upon a stepped base, framing the lower memorial components and

a central ornamental sculpture shaped as an eternal flame. The structure was crowned by an entablature ornamented with wreaths—denoting victory as well as death—and an attic cornice decorated with anthemias. The Memorial was dedicated in 1924, and illustrated again in *AJ* (May 1924) and the *Liverpool School of Architecture Yearbook* for 1932 (pl. lxxiii)¹².

Arthur's competence at what Lutyens famously called the "game" of academic design synthesis also won him appointment to Sir Edwin's office. There Arthur seems to have assisted with the commissions for the Britannic House [now Lutyens House] at London, and for the Vice-Regal Palace complex for New Delhi, each similarly redolent with the endeavour to sustain pre-War values and system. In company with Reilly, Lutyens valued the visual aesthetic of the ancient and modern (Renaissance) classical traditions.

But he also embraced new technologies of construction and function as well as remaining adept at the reformist Arts-and-Crafts mode that percolated the initial phase of the Modern Movement. Consequently, Arthur would not have been averse to modernizing approaches even if he remained wedded to conservative design values until the late 1920s. That conservatism, in the form of the Dewsbury competition and commission, evidently secured an invitation in 1923 to lecture at the School of Architecture at the University of Toronto. In May of 1924, he was offered a teaching position commencing in September.

By accepting the post Arthur anticipated the subsequent flows—ideological and personal—east-west across the Atlantic. By contrast, prior to 1914 the flow had been in a west-east direction. Not only was it a matter of professional opportunity, for many during the 1930s, particularly

as a consequence of the rise of German fascism, it was a matter of survival. Nazi persecution precipitated the diaspora of young modernist architects to new homes around the Empire-Commonwealth and United States. Among the former would be Jaqueline Tyrwhitt who taught at the University of Toronto shortly after organizing the exhibition of Town Planning at the Festival of Britain.¹³ (At Toronto she befriended and influenced another colleague of Arthur's, Marshall McLuhan.) Canadian and United States utilitarian reinforced concrete construction, most notably grain silos, had figured in Franco-German modernist theorization.¹⁴ The "New Spirit" of design process and practice required to embody contemporary economy, industry, technique, technology, and society.¹⁵ A rather different iteration of new-world regeneration of old-world performance occurred through the more efficacious battlefield tactics demonstrated by the Canadian Corps in the capture of Vimy Ridge from the German Army after the attacks from April 9 to 12, 1917. The attack had been sequenced using detailed topographical maps derived from aerial photography, antedating Le Corbusier's theorization of the "air-view" as a new diagnostic for urban reconstruction in his 1935 book *Aircraft*.¹⁶ And Canadian pilots—as my Royal Flying Corps grandfather frequently attested—were highly regarded by all combatants; four being awarded the Victoria Cross. The deeper tragedy of the War was early built into the enduring popular mindset by a Canadian Medical officer, Major (subsequently Lieutenant-Colonel) John McCrae, whose poem "In Flanders Fields" has become an enduring yet multifaceted focus of memory of warfare. Yet, akin to Arthur's modern classical Dewsbury Monument, McCrae maintained the façade of cultural tradition, in the guise of patriotic endeavour:

Take up our quarrel with the foe.
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch. Be yours to hold it high.

TIME AND CHANGE IN ARTHUR'S CAREER

Arthur's subsequent career as architect, educator, and editor in Canada from 1924 demonstrates how the War precipitated substantive but time-lagged re-formation of design ideology and imagery. Arthur's own change of thinking about design recalled a later insight of William Faulkner who remarked that the past was never moribund nor truly passed. Indeed, Arthur's change mirrored a broader recognition of the insubstantial fabric of conventional culture when confronted by such devastation of its underlying assumptions. Beside the assault on social ethos was the literal undermining of the fabric of academic architectural tradition. However, such reactive transformation in professional, and popular, attitude did not coalesce until the early 1930s. It coalesced between the opening in 1932 of Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock's celebrated exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, "The International Style," and the equally important show exhibited in 1938 by the Modern Architectural Research Group at London. Wells Coates exercised a leadership role—inviting his friend Le Corbusier to open the show—assisted by four young Canadian modernists: architects John Bland, Frederic Lasserre, Hazen Sise, and landscape architect Christopher Tunnard.¹⁷

Undoubtedly, as in the case of other contemporaries, external factors, particularly of economy and politics, precipitated a more thorough-going reconsideration of the design process, purpose, and principles. The Depression devastated the design professions—Arthur

acquired only two new students in 1933—and their erstwhile private, corporate, and institutional patrons.¹⁸ The rise to power in January 1933 of Adolf Hitler (exacerbating anxiety already stimulated by Italian fascism and Soviet totalitarianism) coincided with increasing acknowledgement of modernism in the *JRAIC*. Inevitably the economies of form and structure advocated by the various modernist coterie—albeit stemming primarily from philosophical rather than pragmatic stimulus—assumed a new level of relevance alongside the decay of aristocratic privilege (not just the decline of landed wealth on both sides of the Atlantic but also the shaky imposition of monarchical order via the 1918 Treaty of Versailles). The German reoccupation of the Rhineland in March 1936 and involvement in the Spanish Civil War from July 1936, reaching a nadir with the bombing of Guernica in April 1937, rendered renewed conflict all but inevitable. For many contemporaries, such events seemed to validate radical solutions, including in cultural production. Corroboration comes anecdotally in two excerpts from contemporary commentaries that Arthur included in the *JRAIC* during his early years as editor. One, printed in the December 1937 issue, was by Governor General Lord Tweedsmuir speaking to the Toronto Chapter of the Ontario Association of Architects, in which he stated: "You have a great chance. You are not under the bondage of any one tradition."¹⁹ The other, by Fred Haines, president of the Royal Canadian Academy, which Arthur included in the December 1939 issue: "A really beautiful factory building is worth more, has more influence than a museum full of the choicest art of antiquity."²⁰

The sea change in Arthur's design strategy can be allied with two salient thrusts he made into the growing professional battle

over the meaning of the modern and the War's memorialization. The timing is difficult to pinpoint with certitude, but that sea change must have gelled by 1935 or 1936. Specifically, this was during the period in which he compiled a talk for the Canadian Broadcasting Commission [CBC] series, promoting contemporary architecture. This was selected for publication in the February 1936 issue of the *JRAIC* by the then editor, British-born Isador Markus, whose pioneering advocacy of modernism deserves greater recognition; for example, Markus printed a positive review of the 1927 English translation of Le Corbusier's 1925 *Vers une architecture* in the November 1929 issue and published pro-modernist writings, including one by William Lescaze in the April 1937 issue, entitled "Why Modern Architecture?"²¹ Arthur's talk, titled "How to Appreciate Architecture," did not address his study of historic architecture in Ontario but instead embraced modernist design ethos. Nonetheless, Arthur's admiration for vernacular architecture corresponded with Le Corbusier's understanding of modernism's origins in localized traditional building method directed toward serving community function under local conditions.²² Aware surely of Le Corbusier's seminal *Vers une architecture*, Arthur revealed a profound rethinking of architectural purpose—using language that invokes post-War conditions (the Depression arguably being an indirect outcome of the First World War). "We live in a machine age," Arthur declared continuing in biographical vein, "and only now are beginning to see that modern materials and construction have an intrinsic beauty that needs no embellishment. The new architecture is being developed by young men who see behind them a depression in taste of 100 years in which archaeological research went hand-in-hand with slavish imitation."²³

Before examining Arthur's second thrust into the meaning of modern and the commemoration of the War, it should be noted that those sentences advert to both cultural rupture and technological rapture. For the First World War had, as noted, witnessed the veritable fall of established Order, whether societal or architectural (Orders, which had a particular moment in the warring powers' claim to uphold, or be legitimated by shared Christian religion. The switch from patriotism to revulsion is evident in Arthur's 1938 article "British War Monuments."²⁴ It was his first major independent contribution as editor of the *JRAIC*. Arthur poignantly articulated the consequence of the War's traumatic assault on the virtual space of symbolic meaning constructing design discipline and architectural fabric. He included lines written by Siegfried Sassoon whose war poetry epitomized the shift from patriotism to revulsion. Specifically, Arthur selected Sassoon's poem "On Passing the Menin Gate," penned about the opening on July 27, 1927, of perhaps the most monumental example of the academic classical type of war memorial. Designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, this was the part triumphal arch—part stoa Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing at Ypres in Belgium. Blomfield shared Charles Reilly's admiration for ancient Greco-Roman architectural style, having published important positivist studies of the classical [Renaissance] tradition in British and French architecture (1897 and 1911 respectively), but who would later decry modernist architecture in *Modernismus* (Macmilland and Co., 1934). From Sassoon's poem "On Passing the Menin Gate," Arthur reprinted the following lines, symptomatic of both the changed attitude to the War's waging and the role of architecture in bearing meaning:

Crudely renewed the Salient holds its own
Paid are its defenders by this pomp;
Paid, with a pile of complacent stone.
The armies who endured the sullen swamp.

During that period, Arthur completed the Charlotte and John Price Erichsen-Brown house and Canada Packers processing plants in Edmonton and Vancouver.²⁵ All broke with the past and demonstrated Arthur's endorsement of modernist design *praxis* in devising structural organization and formal organization from analysis of internal function, efficiencies in space-plan and, wherever possible, the application of advanced building technique and materials. Thus, while using brick, the aesthetic of the two plants differs markedly from the latter-day Georgian tenor of the mansion that Arthur had designed in 1928-1931 for Canada Packers company president James S. McLean on Bayview Avenue in Toronto.

POSITIONING ARTHUR IN THE POST-WAR MODERNISM

The resonance of that rupture in mental space, or the riving asunder of the prior edifice of culture in its broadest sense, echoes through articles Arthur chose to publish in the *JRAIC*. But before examining his initial editorial strategy during the run-up to the Second War, it is instructive to situate his campaign in broader thematic and chronological perspective. The regard of modernism as a campaign of societal renewal is evident in Arthur's editorial to the February 1945 issue of the *JRAIC*. Besides anticipating the need for six hundred thousand more houses in Canada by 1953, he described the upcoming annual meeting of the RAIC as being "on the eve of an era that is pregnant with possibility for the betterment of every Canadian . . ."²⁶ That is evident, positively, in an article

that he had accepted in 1942 from Warnett Kennedy (then still with the modernist-inclined firm of Gillespie, Kidd & Coia in Glasgow, before his emigration to Vancouver), entitled “Plastic Possibilities. The House of the Future,” alongside another by George Baker on “Architecture and Design of the T[ennessee] V[alley] A[uthority].”²⁷ Such rupture is evident, negatively, in a piece written by Percy Nobbs in December 1956, a decade after the end of the Second World War, the deadlier sequel of the War to End All Wars. Nobbs, the long-time director of the School of Architecture at McGill University, was an exponent of that alliance of historical architectural iconography with new structural system and material that characterizes modernity—the traditionalist precursor to modernism. Writing on “Architecture in the Province of Quebec during the Early Years of the Twentieth Century,” Nobbs averred:

At the end of the First Great war the cultural heritage of the Western World was shaken. By the end of the Second World War there was no money left to finance a cultural heritage. Construction and the apparatus of life had to be contrived with dollars, worth 20¢ by 1900 standards. We had to try to forget what the practice of architecture had meant and to content ourselves with accommodation engineering.²⁸

Arthur accepted divergent opinion as part of his campaign to modernize Canadian architecture, even if he shared neither Nobbs’s snide re-jigging of Le Corbusier’s mechanistic metaphor for domestic designing nor his conservative nostalgia. Instead, he allowed counter polemic to be inserted into a larger structure of changed theoretical articulation. In the *JRAIC* of September 1950, Arthur printed a review of architectural education in British Columbia commissioned from

one of his star pupils at Toronto.²⁹ Fred Lasserre had worked from 1937 to 1939 as design assistant in the Tecton office in London and participated in the Modern Architectural Research Group [MARS] before joining the Construction branch of the Royal Canadian Navy. In 1947, Lasserre accepted the headship of the School of Architecture at the University of British Columbia. Interestingly, in his 1950 *JRAIC* article, Lasserre placed particular emphasis on experience-forming *praxis*, quoting Walter Gropius (for whom he helped secure an honorary doctorate at UBC in 1967) in writing that “Knowledge will come to life only by individual experience.”

BARRAGE AND CAMPAIGN

The War experience of Arthur, and more intensely so of Gropius among several other promoters of modernist approaches, was multifarious: on the one hand the vicious metamorphosis of idealizing cultural norms and longstanding customs, on the other the vital transformation of laborious activity by industrialized technology and science. The barrage of warfare had, like the rolling artillery fire at Vimy Ridge, cleared a path for the new thinking, analytical and aesthetic, outlined before 1914 in the variegated modernist agenda. By the 1950s, the mobilization of modernist theory, powered forward by the machinery of government propaganda, populist media, and consumerist economy sequentially mobilized by the World Wars, was operating in most theatres of social action. Indeed, the warfare imagery had re-appeared as a figure of changed professional discipline. For the January 1949 issue, Arthur garnered an article entitled “Murals—A Political Art” by Canadian art critic Paul Duval that included a declaration by Arthur’s former mentor, Charles Reilly: “Modern

architecture having, with its armour of steel, concrete, glass and other materials, won its offensive battle against the old formulas of expression, has now itself to give meaning and expression to the space it has conquered.”³⁰

The battle theme was picked up by another of Arthur’s Toronto students, David Powrie, when reviewing the impact of his study of modernist theory and practice. In an article based on his fifth-year thesis project entitled “An Investigation,” printed in March 1953, Powrie cited another veteran of the trenches, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who had observed that architecture had “nothing to do with the invention of forms . . . [it was] not a playground for children, young or old. Architecture is the real battleground of the spirit.”³¹ The dynamic of destructive high-technology warfare in legitimating reconstructive technologically-relevant architecture—and unforeseen outcomes—was nicely stated by Desmond Muirhead in “What’s Next in House Design” from a July 1952 *JRAIC* report on a symposium organized by the Architectural Institute of British Columbia. He quoted the landscape architect Thomas Church who had remarked that “The word modern became a battle-cry which degenerated into a style and finally a nasty word.”³²

ARTHUR’S EDITORIAL STRATEGY AND TACTICS

By now the prior reference to Arthur’s University of Toronto colleague Marshall McLuhan will hold more ammunition with respect to assaying Arthur’s editorial campaign.³³ Arthur sought to familiarize Canadian architects with international modernist architecture, its diverse theorization and effective representation in Canadian practice. In the more limited purview entailed in



FIG. 4. GRIERSON, AIMER AND DRAFFIN, AUCKLAND WAR MEMORIAL MUSEUM – TAMAKI PAENGA HIRA, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND, 1920-1929, PHOTOGRAPHED C. 2016.



FIG. 5. COVERS OF *JRAIC* JANUARY 1937 VERSUS JULY 1937.

(military) tactics, Arthur implemented an array of means to enhance his strategy, which will be defined below. Arthur anticipated McLuhan's articulation of the potency of media as primary transporter/transmitter of cogent, and associative, meaning. Arthur built upon his own shift to an a-historical, abstract, functional, and socialist/social democratic design pedagogy and practice.³⁴ He concentrated his forces on changing, but not regimenting, his fellow Canadian professionals through its core media, the *JRAIC*. He recognized the transformative seepage of words and images into mentality. And he appealed not only to his fellow professionals but also to the wider public who were interested in architecture, many of whom bought the *Journal*, the only Canadian architectural publication until the advent in 1955 of *The Canadian Architect*.

Moreover, Arthur was liberal in his pursuit of radical change. One concept that he shared with the imperial world within which he had been raised, and the modernist environment to which he aspired, was the validity of universal

values, and the validity of universal solutions to design problems or issues, especially societal. The importance of transcending geo-ethnic boundaries to defeat societal division and conflict was indicated by Arthur's publishing Peter Brieger's article on "Foreign War Memorials" alongside his on "British War Memorials, in the December 1938 *JRAIC*.³⁵ The monuments illustrated by Brieger included the remarkable, hauntingly modern, German Naval Memorial (fig. 3). Even as European polity devolved toward renewed war, Arthur evidently still hoped for a post/supra-nationalist political and cultural reality as sought through the League of Nations or universal language of Esperanto. Indeed, in his article Arthur commended his native New Zealand for making war memorials in Wellington and Auckland that were both publically useful and culturally proactive through their function as galleries and museums. He also emphasized the personal dimension of warfare: "A War memorial, however large, is a personal thing communicating the loss of relatives in a war, that eighteen years later does not seem so far away" (fig. 4).

The effect of wartime experience upon Arthur's editorial campaign becomes apparent through applying two theoretical and critical lines of attack. First, as noted, McLuhan's media analysis, and, second, as reinforcement, Hans Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics. Gadamer allows analysis to occur through attention to the very objects/subjects of research, out of which potentially conflicted process, forces of meaning emerge. Arthur combined textual with visual promotion of modernism; the textual approach will take precedence throughout the remainder of this article. Nonetheless, he selected generally high-quality photographs, often using comparison between *retardaire* and radical buildings, highlighted by a supposedly superior modernist aesthetic. Moreover, the clarity embodied in the modernist aesthetic informed Arthur's approach to the appearance and layout of the *JRAIC*. Likely influenced by his friend the English artist Eric Gill, Arthur radically revised the cover from July 1937 (fig. 5). Arthur also adopted a lucid page layout that exploited the, usually white, ground to notable effect not least when comparing conservative Canadian architecture with

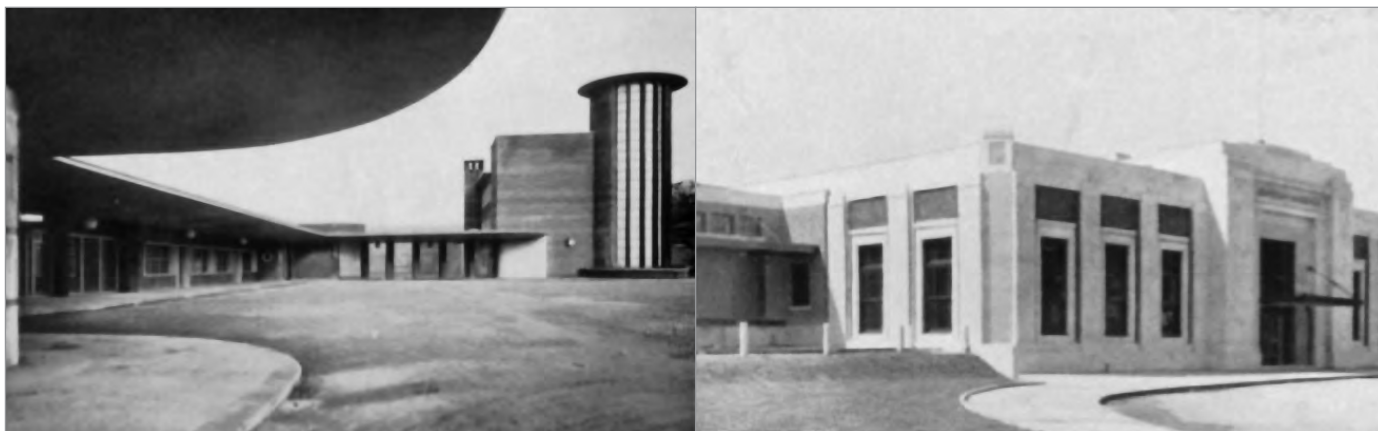


FIG. 6. COMPARATIVE ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE SIENA, ITALY, AND LONDON, ONTARIO, RAILWAY STATIONS. | REPRODUCED FROM THE *JRAIC*, 1938, VOL. 15, NO. 9, P. 207.



FIG. 7. SERGE CHERMAYEFF, WITH CHRISTOPHER TUNNARD, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, CHERMAYEFF HOUSE AT HALLAND, UK, 1935. | REPRODUCED FROM THE *JRAIC*, 1939, JULY, VOL. 16, P. 162.



FIG. 8. ERICH MENDELSON, CHAIM WIEZMANN HOUSE, REHOVOT, PALESTINE/ISRAEL, 1935-1937. | REPRODUCED FROM THE *JRAIC*, 1938, MARCH, VOL. 15, P.40.

more advanced international architecture (fig. 6). And he selected excellent examples of progressive modernist work from a remarkably diverse range of contemporary architects: from Tecton (led by Berthold Lubetkin) or Owen Williams, to Serge Chermayeff, Erich Mendelsohn, Le Cobusier, Oscar Niemeyer, and Sven Markelius (figs. 7-10). At the same time, Arthur encouraged experimentation with modernist practice among his peers, for example illustrating a proto-modernist house designed for Vancouver by his former student, the young R.A.D. Berwick, as well as the more thorough-going modernist design of his peer, Mackenzie Waters (figs. 11-12). And he employed humour,

as in the regular feature satirizing urban decrepitude in the Dominion captioned “O Canada” (fig. 13).

Turning to the textual aspect of Arthur’s editorial promotion of modernist design, his combined strategy was deployed on a broad rather than narrow front. Closer analysis reveals a sequence of critical dispositions that can be assigned an alliterative taxonomy (with each beginning by the letter ‘C’). These are (in general order of development in the *JRAIC* under Arthur’s editorship):

- **CONTENT**, embracing the re-design of the Journal’s cover as well as copy,

both professional and commercial; construction industry advertisements occupied approximately one quarter of each issue on average, and, as Westinghouse Company adverts printed in the *Journal* exemplify, reflected the penetration of modernizing rhetoric into the commerce and economy of urban design;

- **COMPOSITION**: addressing matters mainly concerned with editorial perspective—the ranking of contributors, topics and articles—layout and production design;
- **CONCEPT**, modes of strategizing the re-presentation of theory, critique, opinion, professional news and design



FIG. 9. LE CORBUSIER WITH OSCAR NIEMEYER AND OSCAR NIEMEYER RESPECTIVELY, AND HEALTH BUILDING, DAY NURSERY AT RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, 1937-1943. | REPRODUCED FROM THE *JRAIC*, OCTOBER 1943 ISSUE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, VOL. 20, P. 168; DAY NURSERY, VOL. 20, P. 169.

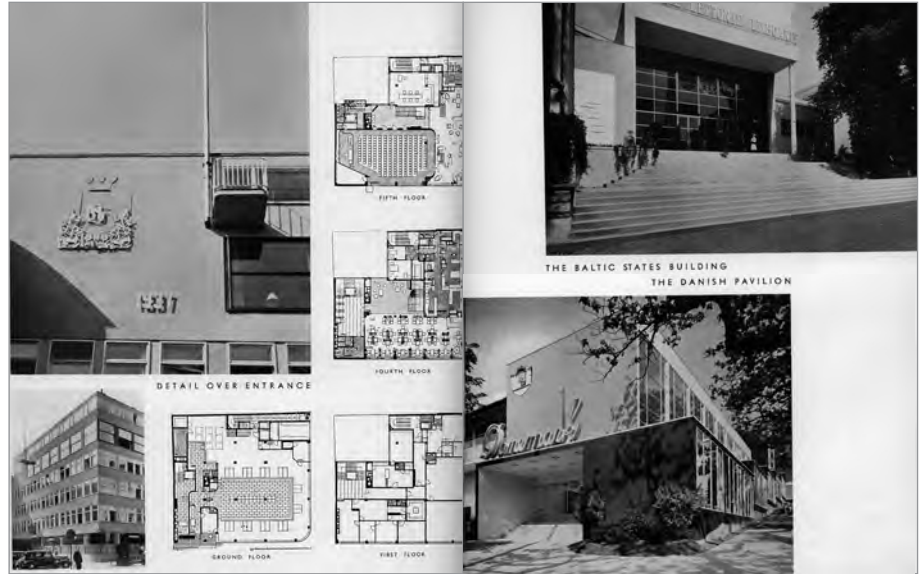


FIG. 10. SVEN MARKELIUS, TRADES CLUB BUILDING, STOCKHOLM, AT THE 1937 PARIS EXPOSITION. | REPRODUCED RESPECTIVELY FROM THE *JRAIC*, NOVEMBER 1938, VOL. 15, P. 250; AND OCTOBER 1937, VOL. 14, P. 205 ISSUES.

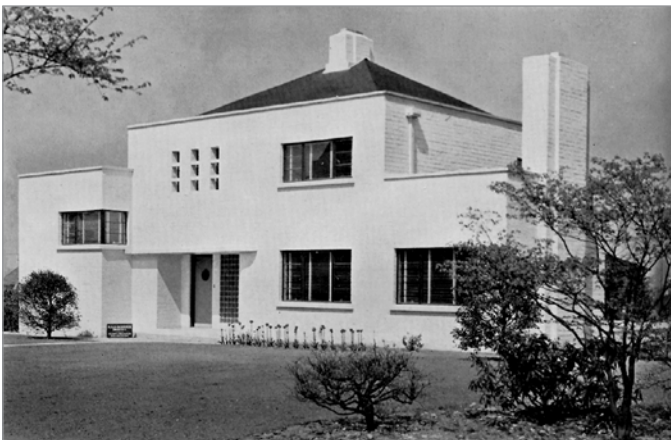


FIG. 11. R.A.D. BERWICK, CROSBY HOUSE, VANCOUVER, 1937-1938. | REPRODUCED FROM THE *JRAIC*, 1939, MAY, VOL. 16, P. 98.



FIG. 12. MACKENZIE WATERS, "THE DECK" AT THE ELGIN HOUSE HOTEL, LAKE JOSEPH, MUSKOKA, ONTARIO, 1938. | REPRODUCED FROM THE *JRAIC*, 1939, VOL. 16, P. 155.

practice, including the use of photography. These conceptual modes can be further classified under such lines of attack as a **comparative**, **collaborative**, and **corroborative**, offensive. Here the elevation of photography in architectural journalism, allied with a new aesthetic of formalist clarity and ascetic lighting, should be associated

with its wartime development and adoption for design process and propaganda by modernists, most notably by Gropius, Le Corbusier and Mies; and lastly,

- **CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY**, a consistent and frank recognition of the disjunctions between modernist aspiration and actual application, and awareness

of internal debates within the outwardly homogeneous project of modernism, particularly post-1945, became integrated into the growing consumerist economy and conventions of professional pedagogy.

Another dimension of the analysis is temporal, and allies with what might best be described as the time of meaning. That

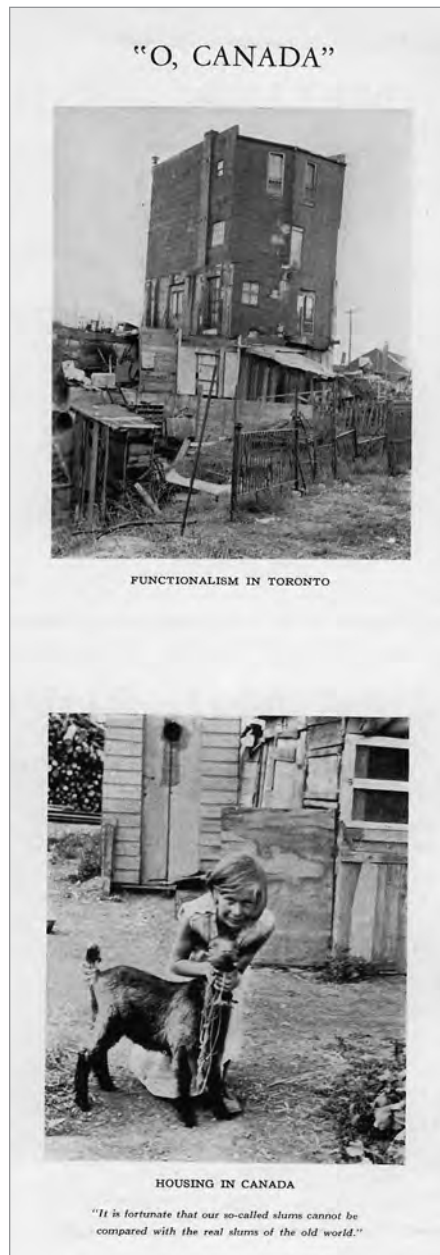


FIG. 13. "O CANADA" SEGMENT. | REPRODUCED FROM THE *JRAIC*, 1938, JANUARY, VOL. 15, P. 295.

is the timeliness of certain broad values, concentrated ideas or idioms, and distinct iconographies of cultural assumptions. With respect to Eric Arthur's editorial campaign, the temporal includes both the relative immediacy of change as a consequence of experience—the impact

of single incidents as well as of general conditions at one time—and the phasing of change through practice. The timespan of each World War was approximately five years.

Given that approximate span and the war theme of this article, the remaining review of Arthur's editorial strategy and tactics will concentrate on two phases: 1937-1943 and 1947-1954. This later phase is included because 1947 marked the implementation of the Canadian Citizenship Act—a significant moment in Canadian political and broader cultural formation. Furthermore, the forward tracking of his decisions will conclude at Expo '67 and upon a more evident presence of Canadian architecture in the later phase of—apparent—modernist international "victory." The following review is not exhaustive but intended to stimulate further research and development (underpinning much modern military enterprise). It will concentrate on content, concept, and critical reflexivity, each of which pertains to matters of composition by virtue of his enlistment of major agents of modernism and more easily viewed layout, typography, and illustration. The only partial exceptions to a remarkably consistent acuity in selection of modernist material are inclusion of illustrations of Adolf Strube's lugubriously modernized Volk German House of Sport in his first, July 1937, issue as editor, and absence of coverage of the highly important 1938 MARS exhibition opened in London with Canadian contributors by Le Corbusier.³⁶

Content

The journal typography was re-designed in July 1937 at Arthur's request by Eric Gill—who, as already noted, likely also influenced Arthur to reconfigure "modernistically" his erstwhile classical allegiance in the spare abstraction of the Ionic Order occupying the left side of the

cover. Arthur would publish Gill's article "Art Versus Fine Art" in the September 1938 issue, describing the changed visage—and design vision—of the Canadian profession, as follows: "What is called abstract painting . . . stimulates and rejuvenates the mind through the eye."³⁷

The radically changed visage-vision became realized in part through post-Second World War Canadian Reconstruction. This was the outcome of the reports of the British-inspired Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, published from 1944, on all aspects of Canadian post-war re-development, from major infrastructure to industrialization, natural resource policy, women in the work force, and "Housing and Community Planning." The trace of modernist theory in Reconstruction policy is exemplified by an article commissioned by Arthur from architect and town planner Humphrey Carver, trained, like the incoming Head of the McGill architecture school, John Bland, at the Architectural Association in London. Discussing the "Future of Low Cost Housing in Canada" in the July 1937 *JRAIC*, Carver declared:

If architecture is to be designed with modern materials for modern people it must adopt a contemporary scale of operations. Large social groups, large areas of land, large blocks of capital, large production and labour units are the elements which the profession must now employ to form design of significance.³⁸

A second example, also showing the variety of voice that Arthur mustered, came in architect A.S. Mather's December 1937 article "The Town," in which he prescribed:

The new town . . . must be planned and created, not as at present by thwarted and disillusioned planners who have turned their

back on civic design to devote their energies to traffic control, but to creative planners working against a background of knowledge of modern life and under a scheme of general and widespread development.³⁹

A third instance courses through an article written by the celebrated American modernist architect William Lescaze. Entitled “A New Architecture for a Changed World,” Arthur reprinted it from the *New York Times* (October 5, 1937) for inclusion in the *JRAIC* for January 1938. In it, Lescaze states that:

Man inhabits today a world very different from that which encompassed even his parents and grandparents. It is a world geared to modern machinery—automobiles, airplanes, power plants; it is linked together and served by electricity. New conditions create new needs. New needs, in turn, impose a new design for living and pattern of education to match.⁴⁰

And a fourth example was the article that Arthur accepted for the June 1938 issue from Fred Lasserre, “Modern Architecture: The New Aesthetic and Concrete,” in which Lasserre drew on his experience in Britain, claiming that:

Reinforced concrete has walked hand in hand with the new architecture. They have shaped and helped each other. Because of its plastic qualities, its great strength, and its clean, monolithic, shell-like character, it can, best of all new structural materials, be formed and moulded into the aesthetic vision of the modern architect.⁴¹

Concept

One testimony to the success of Arthur’s campaign appears in the article “Planning for the Future,” that he accepted for the March 1955 issue from John Russell, director of the renowned School of Architecture

at the University of Manitoba that followed a Miesian modernist curriculum, and himself an accomplished modernist architect. “Planning,” Russell asserted, “is for people [and] must be concerned with the social and economic community and not merely with official boundary limits.”⁴² Russell had renounced the old role of architect as steward of privilege and power for servants of social democracy in articles on such new social incubator building types as “The Auditorium and Stage in your Community Centre,” July 1946, and in his explanation of pedagogy at Manitoba published in the May 1948 issue:

Such young practitioners have got to learn the all-important fact that an architect’s role is primarily one of service to mankind. We trust that many graduates in the next few years will catch the spark and spirit of the pioneer and be willing to spend sufficient time and effort to become firmly rooted in the community, for it is the only way that they will be able to understand and meet the building needs of both community and individual.⁴³

A year earlier, in 1947, when the *Canadian Citizenship Act* was passed and promoted, Arthur had assembled another in a series of typological issues. It focussed the professional lens on such core social institutional architecture as schools (William Lescaze and Richard Neutra’s work being included most) or hospitals. Writing on “Libraries for Today” in the *JRAIC* of February 1947, librarian E.S. Robinson dressed Russell’s ideological framing with architectural fabric:

Gone are the days of the monumental building with its flights of marble stairs, its gaudy entrance, its turrets and towers, general air of aloofness and badly planned interior. In its place we want a building, friendly, inviting and functional in which suitability of site and

placement, simple though distinguished lines, play of light and shade and use of materials play their part in creating a work of beauty reflecting the spirit within.⁴⁴

Arthur’s realization that conceptual change was effected through popular as well as expert verbal and visual discourse, and through the practical implementation of ideals, reflects wider alliances between modernist example and materialist enterprise. His version of the multi-sense *verbo-vico-visi* messaging (integrating language, sound and sight), advocated by McLuhan and his associates (Tyrwhitt included) contributing to the University of Toronto journal *Explorations*, was aimed at securing broad support.⁴⁵ It corresponded with the private-public partnership epitomized by the chief policy instrument of Reconstruction, the Central [later Canada] Mortgage and Housing Corporation. CMHC provided mortgage funding for private home purchase and also funded urban redevelopment, design education, and research, as well as low-income and university housing. Arthur let Lasserre define the new agenda for Canadian designers and design in the May 1947 issue, following up on D.C. Simpson’s March 1947 article “The Architect and Mass Produced Housing.” In a review of the architecture program at the University of British Columbia printed in the May 1947 issue, he wrote:

Emphasis [at the University of B.C. School of Architecture] will be laid on a broad and scientific understanding of human environmental needs, of building materials, construction, structures and of the processes of industrial and mass production (prefabrication). In the design workshop and laboratory, the student will build models and abstract studies as thorough grounding for three and four dimensional thinking [plus accounting, contract law and accounting].⁴⁶



FIG. 14. VILO REVELL AND PARKIN ASSOCIATES, TORONTO CITY HALL, COMPETITION 1956-1958 AND CONSTRUCTION 1961-1965, PHOTOGRAPHED C. 1967.

The ethical punch came thereafter in the article, in a sentence that Lasserre quoted from an article in *Architecture d'aujourd'hui* by Italian architect Ernesto Rogers (then editor of *Domus*): "We must aspire at the impossible, if we want to succeed with the possible . . . The hollow agnosticism of today must be replaced by a new culture, a new style."

Critical Reflexivity

In campaigning for change by deploying contrasting, comparative, and collaborative editorial tactics, Arthur did not relinquish critique. When introducing Lescaze's *New York Times* article in the January 1938 issue of *JRAIC*, Arthur, doubtless

seeking to win over instead of bombarding colleagues, admitted: "Our admiration for modern planning is unbounded but we do not hold with that school of thought which claims that a good plan will necessarily produce a good elevation."⁴⁷ Clearly, Arthur concurred with Le Corbusier. In assembling the February 1943 *Journal*, he re-printed the article "If I Had to Teach You Architecture," in which Le Corbusier reflects upon the interpretation of modernism:

The architecture of the new age has transformed the world. But it is still subject to violent and insidious opposition . . . But the greatest harm of all has been done by plagiarists who take the superficialities of

modern architecture and merely apply them to the same old carcasses . . . Architecture is a conception of the mind. Architecture is organization. YOU ARE AN ORGANIZER, NOT A DRAWING-BOARD STYLIST.⁴⁸

In order to reinforce his campaign, Arthur gave space to anti-modernists such as Osbert Lancaster whose, perhaps prematurely titled, B.B.C. talk "The End of the Modern Movement in Architecture" graced the March 1952 issue.⁴⁹ In April of 1953, Arthur included J.M. Richards's rather different criticism of modernism's abandonment of the engineers' design approach in a short piece titled "The Wrong Turning."⁵⁰ It partly recalled Joseph Hudnut, who, while active in the modernist "Push" as Dean of the Harvard School of Architecture, predicted "The Post-Modern House" in an article reprinted by Arthur in July 1945. Nonetheless, Arthur, later in April 1949, published Hudnut's article "Le Corbusier and American Architecture." In it, Hudnut celebrated the architect's transformative "Bible of Design" that "promises us a new world, the creation of our giant machines, and an architecture cleaned of cant and superstition in order that it may celebrate that world. We will not understand his work unless we understand it as a hymn in praise of the future."⁵¹

Arthur shared Hudnut's worries about the emergence of modernist pastiche and stereotypes and the danger of destroying genuine humanitarian and aesthetic expression. Hence, his having already published Hudnut's article "The Art in Housing" in May 1943.⁵² Hudnut called for higher design standards in war-workers' housing. Such sallies against failure to match modernist design aspiration are consistent. Take the article Arthur placed in the October 1946 issue on "Aesthetics in Modern Architecture," written by Harry Seidler, a part of the diaspora of young

modernists from Nazi Germany. Seidler had been interned and then trained in Canada (Manitoba).⁵³ Or the anxiety Lasserre expressed in his May 1949 contribution examining “Architectural Education,” that in reacting against academism, “We became functional, space conscious, structure and material worshippers. Arrogantly disdainful of any mention of aesthetic theory or beauty which could not be translated into the credit side . . . we became ‘practical’ and ‘realistic.’”⁵⁴ Or, lastly to Eric Mundt and Willem Dudok, whose articles “The Art in Architecture” and “Town Planning and Architecture” Arthur respectively put into the June and November 1949 journals. “Let us have functionalism” averred Mundt, “but let it be understood so broadly as to include the function of satisfying the non-rational need of emotional and spiritual guidance, the function of expressing values and meaning through a new symbolism.”⁵⁵ “I maintain,” Dudok stated, “that building only becomes art when it is sublimated by beautiful and harmonious space proportions which ingeniously express the purpose and especially the cultural significance of the building. . . . May we be led not only by *sagesse de l’esprit* but also by *sagesse de cœur* so that we may give to this thrilling age its own captivating beauty—a beauty which is essential to life.”⁵⁶

The radical yet reflexive campaign to modernize Canadian design waged by Arthur as editor of the *JRAIC*, and illustrated by these remarkable contributions that he solicited, continued beyond modernism’s corporate-consumerist triumph and the international recognition of a cadre of Canadian modernist architecture. Arthur carried his conviction of the need for a radical rethinking of Canadian architectural practice into his campaign for an international competition to build a truly modern city hall at Toronto. The City Hall competition

exemplified his embrace of an inventive modernism benefitting from international perspective and radical aesthetic (fig. 14).⁵⁷

NOTES

1. The compass of this scholarship is exemplified by Mosse, George L., 1991, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the Wars*, New York, Oxford University Press; Messinger, Gary S., 1992, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War*, Manchester, Manchester University Press; Bailey, Jonathan, 1996, *The First World War and the Birth of the Modern Style of Warfare*, Cambridge, Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, Occasional Paper no. 22; Mackaman, Douglas and Michael Mays, 2000, *World War I and the Cultures of Modernity*, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi; and Reynolds, David, 2013, *The Long Shadow. The Great War and the Twentieth Century*, New York, Simon & Schuster.
2. This literature includes from a design perspective: Young, Alan R., 1989-1990, “We Throw the Torch: Canadian Memorials of the Great War and the Mythology of Heroic Sacrifice,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 24, p. 5-28; Vance, Jonathan, 1997, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press; and the anthology edited by Berthold, Mike, Geoffrey Hayes, and Andrew Iarocci, 2007, *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment*, Waterloo, Ontario, Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
3. Certificate of Discharge in the Eric and Paul Arthur Fonds held in the Special Collections Centre at the Toronto Reference Library.
4. Compiled by Cathy Wilson for the Royal Institute of British Architects website in 2014 under the title “Architects at War, World War I, From the Trenches to the Home Front” (no longer available).
5. Major-General Sir Frank Swinton, 1936, *Twenty Years After. Battlefields of 1914-18*, London, George Newnes Ltd., respectively “Introduction” and p. 13.
6. See: [<https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/knowledge-landing-page/architects-and-the-first-world-war>], accessed November 9, 2017.
7. Winter, Jay, 1995, *Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 115.
8. Cannadine, David, 1990, “War and Death, Grief and Memory in Modern Britain,” in Joachim Whaley (ed.), *“Mirrors of Mortality”*: *Studies in the Social History of Death*, London, Europa Publications, p. 187-242.
9. *Id.*, p. 19.
10. Nora, Pierre, 1997, *The Construction of the French Past. Realms of Memory*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. xii.
11. *Id.*, fig. 29 on p. 65.
12. Recorded in the entry on Eric Arthur in Hill, Robert, 2009, *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950*, Toronto, Robert G. Hill.
13. Windsor Liscombe, Rhodri, 2007, “Perceptions in the Conception of the Modernist Urban Environment: Canadian Perspectives on the Spatial Theory of Jaqueline Tyrwhitt,” in Iain Boyd Whyte (ed.), *The Man-made Future. Planning, Education and Design in Mid-twentieth-century Britain*, London, Routledge, p. 78-98.
14. The diaspora of persecuted architects is among themes pursued in Liscombe, Rhodri Windsor and Michelangelo Sabatino, 2016, *Canada. Modern Architectures in History*, London and Chicago, Reaktion Press and the University of Chicago Press.
15. Windsor Liscombe, Rhodri, 1997, *The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver 1938-1963*, Montreal and Boston, Canadian Centre for Architecture and MIT Press.
16. Published by *The Studio*, London.
17. Liscombe educational app, downloadable at [colonizingmodernism.wordpress.com], with extensive bibliography and links.
18. See Kalman herein for Arthur’s teaching career.
19. *JRAIC*, 1937, vol. 14, no. 12, p. 24.
20. *JRAIC*, 1939, vol. 16, no. 12, p. 251; article p. 251-252.
21. *JRAIC*, respectively 1929, vol. 6, no. 11, p. 414-xxviii; and 1937, vol. 14, no. 4, p. 75-76.
22. See Keefer, Alec, 2001, *Eric Ross Arthur, Conservation in Context*, Toronto, Architectural Conservancy of Ontario; see also Sabatino, Michelangelo, 2014, *Pride in Modesty. Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular Tradition in Italy*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press. In his 1973 interview with Elizabeth Wilson, Arthur remarked that his study of historic architecture proceeded less from historical than design interest.

23. *JRAIC*, 1936, vol. 13, no. 2, p. 32-33.
24. *JRAIC*, 1938, vol. 15, no. 12, p. 259-265.
25. See Kalman, "Eric Arthur and the Introduction of Modernism to Canada," herein.
26. *JRAIC*, 1945, vol. 22, no. 2, p. 22.
27. *JRAIC*, 1942, vol. 19, no. 1, respectively p. 157-158 and 159-161.
28. *JRAIC*, 1933, vol. 33, no. 12, p. 419, article p. 418-419.
29. *JRAIC*, 1950, vol. 27, no. 9, p. 318-319.
30. *JRAIC*, 1949, vol. 26, no. 1, p. 10.
31. *JRAIC*, 1953, vol. 30, no. 3, p. 83, article p. 79-83.
32. *JRAIC*, 1952, vol. 29, no. 7, p. 247.
33. For McLuhan's contribution to media studies, and the sources of his thinking, see Cavell, Richard, 2003, *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.
34. Discussed in Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, *op. cit.*
35. *JRAIC*, 1938, vol. 15, no. 12, p. 266-272.
36. For the House of Sport: *JRAIC*, 1937, vol. 14, no. 7, p. 136-137.
37. *JRAIC*, 1938, vol. 15, no. 9, p. 209.
38. *JRAIC*, 1937, vol. 14, no. 7, p. 130, article p. 130-131.
39. *JRAIC*, 1937, vol. 14, no. 12, p. 264-265.
40. *JRAIC*, 1938, vol. 15, no. 1, p. 271, article p. 271-273.
41. *JRAIC*, 1938, vol. 15, no. 6, p. 145, article p. 145-147.
42. *JRAIC*, 1955, vol. 32, no. 3, p. 193, article p. 193-196.
43. *JRAIC*, 1948, vol. 25, no. 5, p. 139.
44. *JRAIC*, 1937, vol. 14, no. 2, p. 139.
45. Examined in Liscombe, "Perceptions in the Conception of the Modernist Urban Environment," *op. cit.*
46. *JRAIC*, 1947, vol. 24, no. 5, p. 145.
47. *JRAIC*, 1938, vol. 15, no. 1, p. 271, article p. 271-273.
48. [Emphasis in Le Corbusier's quote.] *JRAIC*, 1943, vol. 20, no. 2, p. 18, article p. 17-18.
49. *JRAIC*, 1952, vol. 29, no. 3, p. 55-57.
50. *JRAIC*, 1953, vol. 30, no. 4, p. 89-91.
51. *JRAIC*, 1949, vol. 26, no. 4, p. 99, article p. 95-99.
52. *JRAIC*, 1943, vol. 20, no. 5, p. 65-69.
53. *JRAIC*, 1946, vol. 23, no. 10, p. 245-247.
54. *JRAIC*, 1949, vol. 26, no. 5, p. 134, article p. 133-135.
55. *JRAIC*, 1949, vol. 26, no. 5, p. 162, article p. 161-162.
56. *JRAIC*, 1949, vol. 26, no. 11, p. 365, article p. 338-345.
57. For Arthur's leading part in organizing the competition, and the commission, see Kapelos, George, 2015, *Competing Modernisms: Toronto's New City Hall and Square*, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Dalhousie University Press; and also the brief overview in Kalman herein.