The force of deconstructionist critique has left the modern legacy of the classical architectural tradition relatively unscathed, despite classicism’s long association with both humanist thought and European imperialism. Classicism’s intrinsic aesthetic appeal and cultural prestige have limited consideration of the conditions of its appropriations. Moreover, the investigation of such appropriation necessarily involves an associative, even speculative, relation of design process to the social processes linked with or operated through the built architecture; even if the reliability of official or personal documentation and the objectivity of historical inquiry can be assumed, there is inevitably an appreciable level of reading into and writing out of archival material on specific architectural commissions. Yet architecture is the most readily appreciated articulation of socio-economic interests and their legitimating ideologies, particularly during the temporally and geographically extensive spheres of the modern era. The elite residential and institutional buildings of expansionist—colonial into imperial—Britain exemplify such articulation through the appropriation of classical iconographical tradition and aesthetic to assert superior status, authority, and regime. Three commissions, linked by the presumed manifestation of civility and jurisprudence but from different chrono-geographical sites, have been selected in order to explore the complex and conflicted relationship between design intention and architectural performance—a hybrid arena of cultural formation nicely figured in the ancient mythic Chimera. Consequently, the analysis draws upon deconstructionist...
and affective critical strategies with the objective of clarifying the circumstances and societal impact of design aesthetic. The contradictory tasks and values assigned to the classical architectural tradition have been less closely interrogated than its historical and modern ideologies. Notable exceptions are Roger Kennedy’s exploration of the harsh economic underpinnings of Italian and Anglo-American Palladian classical architecture in *Architecture, Men, Women and Money in America 1600-1860* and Alan Colquhoun’s brief essay on “Classicism and Ideology” in his *Modernity and the Classical Tradition*. An indication of the discrepancies between function and claim, and between ethic and aesthetic, are evident in two celebrated commissions that allied neo-classical design and legal profession: Kenwood House by the Adam Brothers for the celebrated judicial reformer Lord Mansfield, 1761-1768, and the Supreme Court in Washington, DC, designed by Cass Gilbert, 1932-1935. If Mansfield’s decision in the 1772 James Somersett case heralded a halting turn against slavery among the British ruling order culminating in the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and system in 1834, it did not mark the eradication of racism. Similarly, the monumental portico of the Supreme Court despite the inscription in the entablature, “Equal Justice Under Law,” recalled the slavery accepted in ancient Greece and racial segregation largely tolerated in American jurisprudence until the 1960s. To that divergence between cultural constitution and constitutional conduct may be added the fascist, totalitarian, and more recent neo-liberal embrace of classical architectural models that has further tramelled classicism’s humanist legitimacy. This chimerical aspect of architectural classicism is further signified by the titles of two studies of its modern legacy in modern Germany: David Watkin’s *German Architecture and the Classical Ideal* and Alexander Scobie’s *Hitler’s State Architecture and the Impact of Classical Antiquity*.

**SITUATING THE INQUIRY**

In seeking to extend investigation of the divergent tasks assigned to classical architectural iconography, the focus will be on episodes associated with the expansion of British jurisprudence both internally and overseas. The episodes deliberately ally individual with collective enterprise especially linked to the enforcement of property and racial policy. Each represents an instance where architectural articulation discloses larger conflicts between aesthetic and ethic—somewhat akin to the ongoing tension between justice and legality. Consequently this essay will interrogate the appropriation of the classical ideal at three chrono-geographical sites. The first reconsiders a commission prominent in the consolidation of neo-Palladian paradigms in monumental British residential architecture that would influence colonial design conventions. The second re-examines the completion of a series of Palladian-inspired and classically styled courthouses (and government facilities) across South Carolina during the cotton boom and the heightened apologia for slavery; and the third, the place of the Edwardian classical [third] courthouse at Vancouver in the expropriation of indigenous land title and promulgation of racial policy in British Columbia.

Before examining those three episodes, some further introductory remarks are in order. The figure of the Chimera was chosen as one ancient expression of uncertain or deceptive conditions; it also parallels the blurring of causation and association in the analysis of specific commissions within much broader, and not necessarily consistent, societal conditions. The usual meaning of chimera derives from the form of the fabulous monster of Greek mythology described by Homer as having a goat’s body with a lion’s head and dragon’s tail. Thus, in the *Concise* and *Current versions of the Oxford English Dictionary*, it bespeaks hybridity and illusion, or an unrealistic idea or hope. E. Cobham Brewer’s *Dictionary* termed it an “illusory fancy, a wild incongruous scheme.” Here it specifies the sense of dichotomy between the architectural aesthetic and the societal functions of buildings serving, or associated with cultural-cum-political agenda.

The contradiction, or chimera, is especially obvious, albeit by default, in the preface to the poem *Hellas* penned by Percy Shelley: “We are all Greeks, Our laws, Our literature, Our religion . . . [have] their roots in Greece.” His subconscious wording of class, cultural, economic, and privilege—the We—would be challenged in the socially conscious poetry of William Blake, who also railed against the academic system and its connoisseurship of the classical tradition. Shelley was practicing a form of literary noblesse oblige assuming that his privilege entitled him to speak for his similarly advantaged audience. And here it might be noted that such presumption of authorial power was a feature of the hegemonic cultural activity critiqued by, among others, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. But insufficiently recognized is the condescending inclusion built into the exclusionary process of “Othering.” Shelley’s preface is quoted by Richard Jenkyns in the Introduction to *The Legacy of Rome*. Jenkyns presents a nuanced summation, including the oppressive and vicious elements of its republican and dictatorial eras; and he nicely accounts for the authoritarian yet also revolutionary potentiality of both its ideological and aesthetic patrimony. Of particular
significance is his acknowledgement of the instrumental and legitimating components of the Roman classical legacy: the high language of its arts operating as a “political tool, used to smooth away the harsh edges of cruelty and deceit.”

One anecdotal recognition of such disparity of aesthetic and ethic within the visual language of classical architecture was articulated by the British Graecophile architect, William Wilkins—interestingly playing out the theme of blackness/darkness invoked by the three sites under study. When at Athens in 1802, Wilkins was perturbed by evident traces of polychromatic decoration on the Propylaea and Erechtheion because, as he intimated in his later antiquarian tract *Atheniensia* (1816), these confounded his formal and aesthetic conception of ancient classical architectural ideal. A genealogy of pure or “white” classicism was built into the humanist tradition upon which mid and later modern Euro-American culture was fabricated from a positivist reading of ancient practice. As noted, this concept is a factor in, and component of, the political conventions and aesthetic idioms at work in each of the sites under scrutiny. The English language and Anglo-Saxon literary and artistic tradition from before the Elizabethan Renaissance equated ancient ideal with Caucasian (British) rule. However poorly comprehended and partially appropriated, the classical armature increasingly present in British culture became a factor in the justification and encouragement of colonization, and thereby the “Peculiar Institution [of slavery]” and alienation of indigenous land title. British and European colonial architecture relatively quickly embodied Renaissance-filtered classical repertory and latterly monumental Roman pedigree, reaching a short-lived apogee in the massive imperial seat of power at New Dehli (which Edwin Lutyens had wished to be frankly classical and bereft of native idiom).

A closer reading of the ethical dimensions of architectural aesthetic—allowing for consideration of the policy accompanying the choice of formal stylistic features—can emerge from modification of both the complicit and the detached interpretations of cultural expression argued from different perspectives by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* and Richard Etlin in *In Defense of Humanism*, or, with closer respect to the classical tradition, by George Hersey in *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture*, and Indra McEwan in *Vitruvius: Writing the Body of Architecture*. Reflecting lines of inquiry by Anthony Vidler’s aptly titled *The Writing of the Walls: Architectural Theory in the Late Enlightenment*, these authors accept the potency of literary and visual articulations in the imposition of regime, even if acknowledging that aesthetic qualities can exist in varying degrees independently of the ephemeral instrumental purposes assigned to their formal bearers. Interestingly, an earlier, less critical discourse of associative legitimation was especially evident among those British antiquaries and scholars who cemented the Anglo bond with classicism; and it continued into the more academic and transatlantic iteration during the final period examined in this essay.

The association had attained clear if contested national political potency by the time of the Elgin Marbles Parliamentary Select Committee of 1816: “no country can be better adapted than our own to afford an honourable asylum to these monuments of the Schools of Phidias, and the administration of Pericles.”

The association of classical architectural tradition and British cultural polity persisted for many decades, as instanced by John Summerson’s *The Classical Language of Architecture*. Writing for a broad audience, Summerson defined classicism as comprising “rational procedure controlling—and initiating invention.” Upon that incipient paradox—classical design
being immutable yet inspiring innovation—stands a good deal of more traditional (formal/aesthetic/biographic/descriptive) architectural history. The designed object remains isolated from the underlying conditions of its production (including ethos in the functional social sense) and is thus comprehended chiefly through its stylistic and iconographic attributes. The genre is represented by the title and contents of Giles Worsley’s *Classical Architecture in Britain. The Heroic Age.*23 Yet, even in such more traditional architectural history, the political—and thus matters of deeper social ethos—is implied. For example, in *Palladian Style*, Steven Parisien begins the main text by printing an illustration from Inigo Jones’s copy of Sebastiano Serlio’s *Tutte l’Opera d’architettura e prospetiva* (1619).24 Underneath that illustration are printed the celebrated lines from James Thomson’s *Alfred* (1740) that became the quasi-British national anthem, *Rule, Britannia!* Nevertheless, Parisien’s examination of the everyday environment fashioned by Palladian idiom only touches upon the contemporary political order.

CLASSICAL LORE AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF CIVILITY AND LEGALITY

The British Isles

“Britannia Romana” was the name given the large bas-relief adorning the monumental Stone Hall in Houghton Hall, Norfolk, England, designed by the triumvirate of architects, amateur and professional, building a classical fabric for the burgeoning imperial edifice of Britain: Lord Burlington, Colen Campbell, author of *Vitruvius Britannicus* (published from 1715), and William Kent25 (fig. 1). Their patron, and in Burlington’s case, lesser peer, was Robert Walpole. As prime minister, Walpole helped develop both party politics and political oligarchy parading as democracy.26 He bolstered his political ambition through cultural appropriation as, indeed, would those who came to oppose his political leadership, most notably Viscount Cobham.27 During the three years after becoming prime minister in 1720, Walpole commissioned Campbell to commence building his country seat (1722) and oversaw the rapid passage of the most draconian legislation in British parliamentary history. This was the *Waltham Black Act* that received royal assent on May 27, 1723, and created fifty new capital offences. It was prompted by concerted action by powerful secular and religious landowners against increased poaching in traditionally accessible parks and forests. In the words of Edward P. Thompson, the Act coincided with Walpole’s political ascendancy and released a “flood-tide of eighteenth-century retributive justice suggestive of some complicity between the ascendancy of the Hanoverian Whigs and the ascending of the Gallows.”28

The core purpose, anticipating British strategic colonial and capital-commercial expansion, was the acquisition and protection of property. Houghton, dressed in the garb of ancient monumentality and glamour, signalled Walpole’s endeavour to elevate his social status into the landed aristocracy via construction of its major cultural artifact, the country house.29 In Walpole’s upper-class Britain, private property constituted the anchoring of

FIG. 3. UNION COURTHOUSE, SOUTH CAROLINA, DESIGNED BY ROBERT MILLS IN C. 1821. [HTTP://WWW.ROOTSANDRECALL.COM/UNION/ BUILDINGS/UNION-COUNTY-COURT-HOUSE].
social authority and societal order. Its outcome included the Enclosure Acts and, in North America, the erasure of indigenous land title. The Waltham Black Act, moreover, reflected, pace neo-Roman British virtue, the interests of a complacent and corrupt legislature whose members Thompson classed as “men who formed habits of mental distance and moral laxity towards human life.”

The Waltham Black Act has not been referenced by historians of British Palladian architecture, but it is a component of the privileged, classically inclined mentality of the day. The jurisprudence it constructed cannot be divorced from the ancient aesthetic logic and lineament of the 1722-1723 scheme for Houghton Hall, drawn chiefly by Campbell (fig. 1). The symmetrical arrangement of pedimented wings, Palladian [Serlian] windows, ascending staircases, and central Ionic-ordered temple-portico visually project the social ordering built into the Act: putative democratic iconography masking, beautifying, a harsher oligarchical regime. The appropriative claims to superior agency, across many dimensions of socio-economic-political activity, operated bodily and visually; for instance the visitor’s drive up to the Hall followed by the ascent up into the portico and the main floor, or the ground floor used by family and close friends but predominantly assigned to service functions and servant accommodation. The hierarchical organization continued into the layout of rooms defining public status and private significance. The accompanying visual messaging comprised the all-the-while manifest classical architectural language of structural scale and composition plus ornamented features. The point of transition from external mass to internal volume in the Hall is commanded, as noted, by a bas-relief in the ancient mode depicting Britannia Romana. The classically derived visual logic and high-minded symbolism—embodying the essential design forms of triangle, rectangle, and circle later theorized by the aesthetically radical but politically conservative pre-Revolutionary French neo-classical architect Charles-Nicolas Ledoux—articulated a civility and social order that effected quite opposite values and regulations.

A non-architectural figure of this discrepancy between outward appearance and inward action exists in the contemporary Royal Navy, the chief instrument of British colonial capital and commercial expansion, as well as of its parallel antiquarian expedition and scientific enterprise. Aboard its ships—frequently named for the heroes of the ancient mythology and narrative read by its officer class, such as, just among the first letter of the alphabet, Achilles, Agamemnon, or Ajax—arguably the most serviceable members of the crew were the “powder monkeys” (young boys) running between the magazine and gun decks, all but invisible in the visible ritual and regimen of British naval power.

The American South

The chimerical role of classical architectural models was even more pronounced in the history of the first United States Republic, terminated in 1861 by the Civil War. A particular locus of chimerical classical appropriation emerged in the short-lived South Carolina cotton boom of the early 1820s, specifically in the series of twenty-eight courthouses-cum-government offices and jails erected across the state to standard designs drawn up by Robert Mills when acting commissioner of Public Works (1821-1822), superintendent of Public Buildings (1822-1824), and then in private practice. These carried forward the Palladian mode, codified in part by Houghton Hall, but with a heightened classical emphasis. While republican American classicism can be regarded as a part of the political and cultural reform, the courthouses, quite literally, reveal the dark side of its social praxis. The Afro-Americans whose labour underpinned cotton production and internal Improvements—the infrastructure of canals, roads and institutions built across South Carolina during the 1820s—were excluded from the common spaces of social activity and ceremony, in part through the visual and regulatory agency of such classical Palladian courthouses as Mills designed.

The paradigmatic models for Mills’s judicial architecture were the ancient temple, and most likely the Maison Carrée, or Roman temple at Nimes, so admired by his patron and mentor, Thomas Jefferson, together with the regional neo-Palladian idiom typified by Drayton Hall, 1738, and the fine mansion the slave trader Miles Brewton built for himself at Charleston, 1765-1769. The bulk of the sixteen courthouses proper erected to Mills’s standard designs repeated the Palladian composition of raised basement with central entrance archway penetrating a projected central portico rising almost to the full height of the pedimented building, and flanked by side staircases. This visual orchestration of ancient and modern classical conventions is exemplified by his courts at Greenville (fig. 2), Union (fig. 3), and York, begun in 1821, or at Orangeburg, commenced in c. 1825. The formula reached an aesthetic and functional zenith with his County Record, or as more usually named, Fireproof Building, in Charleston, 1822-1828. The internal arrangement of circulation and bureaucratic facilities echoed the proportional sequence of dimensioned space evident in the plans of villas Andrea Palladio published in his celebrated Quattro Libri, which Mills had studied avidly.
Consideration of the aesthetic and functional qualities of those judicial-cum-bureaucratic buildings—their visibility—has predominated over consideration of the less civilized policy enabled and legitimated through their design form and referencing—their visuality. The main disjunction obviously applied to the racial, but also more generally socio-economic segregation within the Southern society. Mills struggled, even more perhaps than Jefferson, with the Peculiar Institution. In his *Internal Improvement of South Carolina* (1822) and *Statistics of South Carolina* (1826), he questioned the economic and moral legitimacy of slavery, anticipating how the slower rate of technical and industrial development in his native state would prove to be a major factor in the defeat of the Confederacy. But he followed the American convention of regarding slavery as part of the British regime the Republic sought to reform; and he continued to depend upon domestic slave labour until his death in 1858. Nevertheless, and illustrative of the chimera invoked herein, his South Carolina jails and courthouses effected improvements in the physical and legal treatment of those accused and convicted of criminal activity, and accompanied the adoption of less harsh punishment that included the classification of criminality and the possibility of rehabilitation. Similarly, and notwithstanding the continued suppression of Afro-American and indigenous peoples, Mills fabricated a remarkable range of monumental classical revival institutions of modernizing and democratizing government in Washington and at ports along the New England seaboard.

The chimerical nature of Mills’s republican classicism was not unique. It had been manifest in the configuration of his mentor Jefferson’s modern classical-Palladian villa at Charlottesville. Most obvious was Jefferson’s placement of his individuated and quasi-aristocratic accommodation atop the terrace fronting the main entrance and bounded at the lower level by slave quarters. The arrangement reflected the deeper disparities between ideal and practice embedded in cultural tradition, and the temporal lag within policy reform. One example was the location of the Capitol Building in the District of Columbia which Mills repaired and hoped to enlarge. The chief material signification of American republican democracy stood atop Breed’s Hill overlooking a slave market, only finally closed upon the introduction in April 1862 of President Abraham Lincoln’s bill to outlaw slavery. Further disparities would emerge in post–Civil War Reconstruction and, now, increasingly impinge upon indigenous Americans through the outcomes of the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny. Such deep discrepancy between political action and cultural pretension would not be restricted to the United States, but become a feature of European and British imperial regime in, usually, unreflexive reference to ancient Roman civilization. Moreover, a comparable procedure of idealization and disconnection operated across the gamut of revivalism. One British exemplar would be the romanticized, indeed exoticized historicism embraced by the Third Marquess of Bute and his architect William Burges in rebuilding Cardiff Castle (1868–1881), quite literally on the backs of underpaid miners working the unstable seams of anthracite coal in the not far distant valleys of South Wales.

The chimerical workings of historical iconography deserve further consideration with respect to Mills’s classicized judicial architecture. By being constructed in smaller settlements connected with the dispersed plantation system or efforts to increase productive agricultural and resource development, the buildings, in being non-denominational, likely realized a clearer formulation of local community identity than even churches. They were generally the most prominent structures in the central area through which all types of local population passed. To the educated and more mobile, they would recall elevated cultural tradition and its expression in the architecture of regional social privilege and its dominant economic centre at Charleston. In the quotidian scene, local inhabitants and visitors of all ranks would have registered themselves to some extent against their understanding of Mills’s architectural articulation and iconography. At the simplest level of response, the scale and increased compositional complexity of the courthouse would have registered the importance of its function positively or negatively according to viewer status and experience. The symbolism of classical order was doubtless apparent in varying manner to everyone, social status notwithstanding, but the chimerical nature of that reality would not necessarily have been acknowledged, let alone challenged—demonstrating the remarkable sequential fixity yet also fluidity of the messaging of which architecture is capable. Indeed, the scenarios evoked by Mills’s South Carolina courthouses would be writ large in the hyper-classicism mobilized in the twentieth century to celebrate Jefferson and Lincoln as icons of the superior political and cultural system. Each also incorporates a complex, and chimerical, architecture of constitution, construction, signification, and performance. The Lincoln Memorial was both a site of continued racial segregation and a locus of desegregation as well as radical protest. And, as Christopher Thomas has shown, its completion in 1922 owed considerably to the automobile and real-estate development lobbies intent upon profiting from construction of the Lincoln Memorial Highway linking Gettysburg and the Capital.
The Imperial West

The third instance of chimerical classicism lies at Terminal City. This is the sobriquet that was accorded to Vancouver in British Columbia on the western edge of Canada during the economic and cultural zenith of the British Empire. Its development from the 1880s in conjunction with the completion of the transcontinental railway was an outcome of the British North America Act that had established the Dominion of Canada in 1867. The Act, through written text, architecture, and infrastructure construction, literally articulated contemporary British, and Canadian, imperial claims to authority over nature and indigenous peoples that were being implemented through colonial-imperial expansion. The surveyor’s traverse and technical projection of both topography and land title—whether national, corporate, or individual—ran parallel to architectural infrastructural embodiment of social ordering.

During the later Victorian and, more so, the Edwardian era, when the final building under scrutiny was erected, architecture played a particularly potent role in marking settlement and the institution of colonial then local regimes. The negotiations leading up to the enactment of the Canadian Confederation, for example, included the commissioning in May 1859 of a competition for a federal Parliament complex at Ottawa. Architecture was tasked with the consolidation of the weak political structure of the Union of Canada concluded in 1841 through the construction of monumental buildings to house Parliament, government offices, and residence for the governor-general. Their scale and styling (neo-Gothic) were required to distinguish, materially and symbolically, Canadian nationhood in relation to Britain and French heritage, but in reaction to the United States system. Larger residences and facilities of either governance, such as customs and post offices, or of community, such as churches and schools, celebrated settler legitimacy as well as reconfigured the landscape of the supposedly un-ordered and un-peopled territory being expropriated for the Canadian Confederation. These constructions became the visible infrastructure of the many processes that the Canadian economic historian Harold Innis investigated in 1950 in Empire and Communications; incidentally, that same year he published Roman Law and the British Empire. The cultural epistemology of architectural iconography acted to emphasize the cultural ontology embedded in the architectural fabric.

The political authority exerted by significant colonial buildings is obvious in media illustration of important public ceremonies. One such was the visit to Vancouver in 1912 of Queen Victoria’s son, the Duke of Connaught and Strathearn, when he was governor-general. He arrived not long after the completion of the third courthouse. This had been erected to designs, still following a Palladian tripartite plan system, by Francis Mawson Rattenbury (fig. 4). On that occasion, militia and officials were lined up in patent reflection of the columnar order regulating the main longitudinal façades. The regular cadence of the two orders of attached columns and their supporting ornamentation, together with the central dome raised on an octagonal drum for heightened elevation, clearly coalesced elite and popular allegiances. An economic migrant from the volatile late nineteenth-century textile economy of the English Midlands, Rattenbury selected fashionably grandiloquent classical vocabulary, as against his own Scots Baronial/Chateau, Arts and Crafts, or eclectic free Renaissance idioms. His contemporary correspondence indicates that he sought to validate the presence of both Anglo-Saxons and Canadians in British Columbia—veritable colonial outpost of both Empire and colonizing Confederation—and to participate in the province’s increasing replication of the paraphernalia of cosmopolitan urban environment. The visibility of the courthouse and the visuality of its architecture...
thus served to accommodate and legitimate the regulations of provincial and municipal governments.49

The readily apprehended classical magnificence of the third courthouse legitimized less high-minded functions taking place within the fabric. The classical motifs articulating the façades thereby entailed a further chimera, for the architectural classicism was inevitably colluded with legal enforcement of preferential property and racial “rights” through the expropriation of aboriginal land title and elevation of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity. The building housed not only the courts, and elevation of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity. The building housed not only the courts, but also housed the Land Registry that operated processes that implemented erasure of First Nations’ traditional land title and racism.

The contradiction in the classic articulation of the courthouse furthermore embodied the attitudes and actions of the dominant settler society that outlawed the Potlatch ceremonies in 1918, denied citizenship (federally) to Aboriginal Canadians until 1961, and undermined their claims to title (and a legitimate history) until well after the British Columbia Supreme Court decision in the Delgamuukw case in 1997.51

Significantly, the decision to reject indigenous land title rested on the dubious assertion that the absence of written and illustrated history negated their socio-cultural legitimacy.

Nevertheless, the design of the Vancouver Courthouse manifests a greater level of material architectonic contradiction, or obvious chimera, than the previous two commissions (fig. 4). The contradiction is apparent in Rattenbury’s misuse of ancient classical convention with respect to the order of columns spanning its major, northern frontage. Their capital is a hybrid of the Roman Ionic and their shaft is repeated at two different scales between main projected, entrance portico, and flanking bays. In particular, this repetition of differently scaled Ionic columns between the portico and wings inadvertently discloses the interdispersion between application and appropriation of classical exemplar at Edwardian Vancouver. The incorrect columniation can also be regarded as inadvertently corresponding with the inequities of the colonial regime. Moreover, Rattenbury’s superficially resplendent classicism materially represented the type of British Imperial hubris given popular cultural expansion in [William] Gilbert and [Arthur] Sullivan’s operettas, the verse of Sir Henry Newbolt, or the narrative of Rudyard Kipling—one of the many to invest in the real-estate boom that accompanied rapid, largely British, immigration into Vancouver (1906-1911).52 Like the imperial project, the classical ambition of the Vancouver Courthouse was flawed: a slipshod attempt at such grander assertions of Edwardian superiority as Lanchester, Stewart and Rickard’s Civic Centre at Cardiff (1898-1910), which fronted the crude, even cruel, social economy of the coal trade contributing to underpin British global, naval, and commercial enterprises.53

CONCLUSION

This selective analysis has mapped the appropriation of ancient classical design iconography to reveal the agency of architecture in social regulation during the mid-modern era. It has underscored the prestige accorded to the classical tradition during the consolidation of British, and North American, colonial authority. The widespread appropriation of its architectural patrimony, both ancient and modern, has been shown to involve a divergence between aesthetic and ethic, here likened to the deceptive hybridity of the ancient Chimera. Further, the inquiry reveals that the aesthetic distinction of ancient and modern Palladian classical architecture has generally limited attention to its work in protecting elite interests or projecting exclusionary regime. Additionally it has been shown that those aesthetic qualities helped validate and even palliate the often-repressive functions performed within the building: the visible formal attributes and visual rhetoric not infrequently diverging from the attitudes and practices enacted within the building. The analysis demonstrated that such contradictions, or chimera, were particularly evident in the compounding legal and institutional regulation anchored in social privilege, property ownership, and the projection of authority. Lastly, the foregoing analysis of commissions associated with the assertion of civility and jurisprudence through architecture indicated the value of further interrogating two aspects of the mobilization of classic (and more broadly historical) design tradition. The first is the sectionalist, counter idealist nature of historicism at work in the constitution of modernity. The second is the complex interplay of assumption and presumption, mentality and materiality, operating in the appropriation of historical cultural iconography.

NOTES


27. At Stowe, Cobham commissioned James Gibbs to build what became dubbed the Temple of Liberty, 1739-1740, in the Gothic[k] mode as demonstration of his superior command of democratic process. Friedman, Terry, 1984, James Gibbs, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.
30. For enclosure see Burt, Richard, 1994, Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property and Culture in Early Modern England, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press. Interestingly, Edmund Burke, in Reflections on the Revolution in France ([1790, 1st ed., J.G.A. Pocock], 1993, Indianapolis, IN, Hackett Publishing), stated: “The power of perpetuating our property in our families is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself.” (p. 36)
32. This passage engages with the work of Nigel Thrift (see note 2) and of Thomas Markus, particularly his 1993 Buildings & Power: Freedom and Control in the Origins of Modern Building Types, London, UK, Routledge.
37. An Italian treatise on architecture by architect Andrea Palladio, 1508-1580: I quattro libri dell’architettura [The Four Books of Architecture].


47. Respectively published at Toronto by the University of Toronto Press and at Fredericton by the University of New Brunswick.


