Architecture in '71: Lively Confusion
By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE
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The state of the art of architecture in 1971, the first year of the trillion-dollar building decade, was one of lively confusion.

The trillion-dollar figure predicted for the nineteen-seventies in the United States is probably as much an indication of inflation as of need. But while recession-struck architects' offices were shedding personnel like autumn leaves, the Dodge construction index, which deals in such statistics, showed a whopping increase of 17 per cent in construction for 1971 and foresaw continuing gains for 1972. That is a lot of building by any measurement —except, perhaps, the standards that make it architecture.

This is one of a series of appraisals by The New York Times's critics.

The confusion is about what makes it architecture, in definition and practice. Whether architecture should be an art at all in this time of environmental crisis, what it is if it isn't an art, what the role of the profession is and should be in a world racked with problematic change, is a debate that has moved from the radical young to the members of the Establishment. This is the season that architecture is on the couch.

This year the architect is evangelist and environmentalist, sociologist and esthete, polemicist and pragmatist, multidisciplinary man, revolutionary man, businessman and man on the spot. It is the most impressive juggling act around.

1971 was the year in which it was possible for an architectural project—indebted to conceptual art and fraught with you-name-it significance —to be a straight-faced suggestion for the levitation of the Pentagon. And it is also the year that produced the colossal cipher that is the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington. Architecture is not without black humor.

Today the architect is in the process of painful professional soul-searching prompted by a society suddenly aware of its sins, with many of them, in terms of the quality of the manmade world, placed squarely on his shoulders. Architectural schools are revising aims and curriculums to produce practitioners who can deal with human and social values that transcend traditional esthetics.

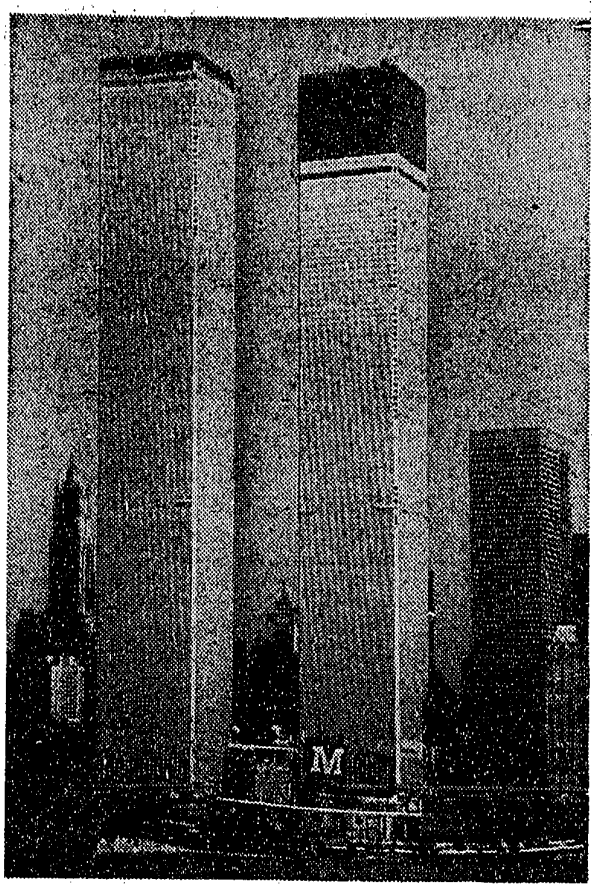
The debate is style vs. antistyle, the process vs. the product. Some architects, for whom the social process is all, are community activists and advocacy planners. They are asking for a larger piece of the environmental pie.

Others are stylists, reviving and reinterpreting the modernist vocabulary of the nineteen-twenties with stubbornly sophisticated and highly selective skill. They are producing buildings of absolute, arbitrary beauty that have little to do with gut, ghetto issues.

Still others reject architectural form of any kind. These would make of architecture a kind of "servicing" of an amorphous, shifting world of inflated shelters and personal pods with plug-in pleasures, imported from the English avant-garde.

The most interesting confrontation of ideas has occurred in the United States, largely through the work and philosophy of a low-key Philadelphia firm, Venturi & Rauch, presented this fall at the Whitney Museum.

The Venturi firm tells us to learn from the physical realities of our society, which are the pop art and culture of the strip and drive-in.



United Press International
New York's World Trade Center, by Minoru Yamasaki

This has electrified one generation and horrified another.

Outrage is the real product, whether deliberately provoked by Venturi polemics to emphasize the belief that society demands and endorses a cut-rate product, or angrily voiced by their opponents, who consider the doctrine a deliberate and destructive slap at hallowed values of quality and excellence. Anyone who is anybody has been invited to at least one intellectually with-it little evening to discuss the Venturi menace.

The Biggest Buildings

Meanwhile, the biggest buildings in the world have been going up in American cities as usual.

The first tower of New York's World Trade Center by Minoru Yamasaki was topped out in 1971. Chicago began construction of the Sears Roebuck Building, by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, that will top the Trade Center. Boston broke out in a rash of skyscrapers. Houston, in true Texas style, topped everything with a 33-block renewal project backed by the Texas Eastern Transmission Corporation and designed by William L. Pereira, whom San Franciscans will never forgive for the futuroid Transamerica tower, also a 1971 product.

Atlanta's style of instant redevelopment, by the architect-promoter-investor-builder John Portman, showed that it may be the wave of the present as it moved into other cities and flirted with New York.

It was a big year for banks and convention centers. The best patrons of architecture as art continued to be universities and museums.

And if anyone doubted that the monument was still alive, there was Gordon Bunshaft's incredible embodiment of the skillfully edited spirit of Lyndon Johnson in his library-memorial dedicated in Austin, Tex., last spring, a lesson in consummate building and myth-making.

It was all done with money, in spite of the recession and inflation, and much of it was also done with mirrors. The mirror-glass building is this year's architectural chic.

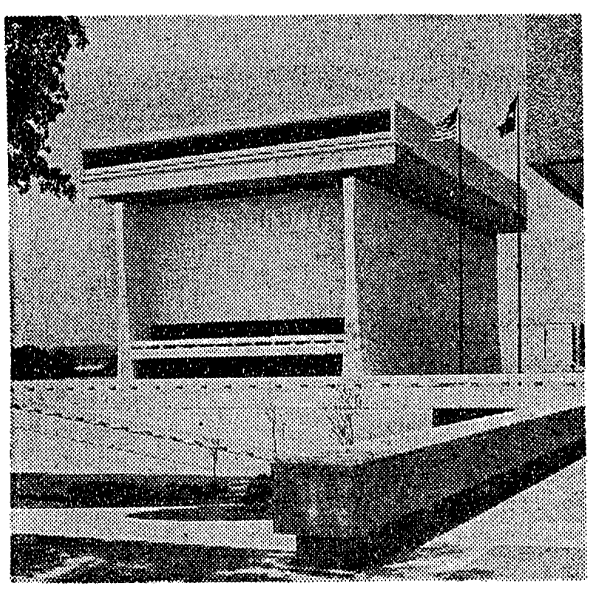
An Elegant Gallery

Every sizable city has one. They range from Philip Johnson's elegant, greenhouselike art gallery in New Canaan, Conn., honorably indebted to James Stirling's stylish English work, to I. M. Pei's scale-breaking, reflecting Hancock tower nearing completion in Boston.

This was also the year that preservation, once the battleground of little old ladies, made it big. In spite of conspicuous losses, preservationists can now point to distinguished successes in recycled landmarks and protected historic districts in cities too numerous to list. The results of 1966 Federal legislation and strong grass-roots movements are beginning to show.

And in New Haven—a true sign of the times—a symbol of rebellion and revolution has been rehabilitated. Yale's Art and Architecture Building by Paul Rudolph, which burned mysteriously two years ago after bitter criticism and rejection as an élitist work, was reopened to students after renovation. They announced that they proposed to live with the building as "a statement of the human spirit and a manifestation of an ideal of human culture."

It looks as if architecture may be coming back in style.



The New York Times/Jim Seymour
Lyndon B. Johnson library in Austin by Gordon Bunshaft