

ARCHITECTURE, URBANISM AND CRITICAL THEORY

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How should architects educate themselves in Sri Lanka today? Approaching this question from the standpoint of cities, I will present in the form of theses the basic lessons to be drawn from attempts made by modernist architects—in collaboration with avant-garde artists and thinkers—to change the world. These include critical reflections on not only the moment of modernism, but also the epoch of postmodernism in the West. I argue that the experiences of both modernism and postmodernism remain vital for postcolonial contexts as well—especially in situations such as post-war Sri Lanka, where urban planning assumes a leading role in the drama called development. To wit: whereas the mutation of modernism into modernization and the subsequent abandonment of urban space to market forces known as postmodernism present us with scenarios to be avoided at any cost, the combination of art, technology and politics alloyed in the unfinished project of modernism in the early decades of the last century still raise key questions for our architects and urbanists: how did our cities come to be what they are, what kind of cities do we want, and how do we go from the cities we have to the cities we love?

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