



VINCENT SCULLY PRIZE AWARD CEREMONY

His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales

Awarded on November 3, 2005

Official Transcript

His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales: Professor Scully, Dr. Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, ladies and gentlemen. When we came in, my wife and I, we walked round the gallery and looked down on this scene, and there's nobody here and lots of chairs, and it looked ominously as though it had been set up for my execution. I am so gratified that the reality is slightly different. I really am so deeply grateful for the honor you give me today in adding my name to the distinguished list of recipients of this award. I can only apologize profusely for keeping you waiting for two years to receive this prize. I can't even blame New York traffic for that particular one. I remember coming here years ago, and so for me it is a great joy to come back to this truly remarkable building. It becomes even more remarkable the more you see it.

I am also grateful for the National Building Museum's generosity in endowing the award—as you may know, I have asked my Foundation for the Built Environment to put this gift to use in support of its work in helping to rebuild some of the Mississippi communities damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

My wife and I were utterly horrified to see the terrible scenes of destruction wrought by the hurricane across New Orleans and the surrounding area. Tomorrow, we will have the opportunity to meet some of the brave and resilient people now trying to rebuild their lives and to pay tribute to the astonishing efforts of emergency workers. I only hope, ladies and gentlemen, that my foundation can play a small part in the work that is now underway to begin the reconstruction.

Now some of you will no doubt know, the Mississippi Renewal Forum was held last month at the invitation of Governor Haley Barbour and Mississippi Renewal Chair Jim Barksdale. It was led by Andres Duany and coordinated by the Congress for the New Urbanism, which is chaired by the chief executive of my own foundation, Hank Dittmar. My foundation contributed a team of designers to the workshop, and I was greatly encouraged to hear that it produced community plans for 11 devastated towns on the Gulf Coast; house plans for both temporary manufactured housing and permanent housing; and plans for the restoration and renewal of basic infrastructure that will, perhaps, be more resistant to both storm surge and flooding. As you can imagine, I shall be following further developments with the keenest of interest.

All in all, the award could not have been more timely, and I cannot thank Professor Scully enough for having the courage to put my name forward for it. After all, I seem to be a dangerous commodity in certain circles, and receiving such awards is a relatively novel experience for me!

If I may say so, Professor Scully and I agree profoundly on some crucial fundamentals. Three issues strike me in particular: the importance of retaining our connection with the natural world, particularly through the garden; the value of traditional urbanism; and the abiding significance of the sacred.

My own garden, which Elizabeth mentioned, surrounding my Gloucestershire home of Highgrove, has long been a labor of love and an attempt, probably rather inadequate, I don't know, to work as much in harmony with nature as possible. Shaping it over the last 25 years has repeatedly given me cause to reflect upon what it is to be part of nature, not apart from it. There is a profound need, I believe—indeed, I would go so far as to say there has never been a greater need in light of the terrible forces of chaos we are helping to unleash through becoming further and further apart from nature throughout the 20th century—a profound need to move toward architecture and planning which similarly reconnects the human and natural worlds with one another.

There is also a pressing need to take up the great human cultural stories. In the same way that our food and the way it is produced can tell a special story, so our buildings should tell the irresistible story of human character and idiosyncrasy. We have overindustrialized the whole business of food production. We have overindustrialized our whole approach to the built environment. We have removed the soul—surely what the culture is all about at the end of the day—and thus lost the balance of things that must lie at the heart of a truly human civilization. Ultimately, as Professor Scully himself has observed, this has to become a collective effort from us all. To this end, my foundation has begun to engage with cutting-edge scientists, those trying better to understand the natural world through what are known as the “sciences of complexity.” One of the central issues we have been discussing with them is nature's way of handling large numbers. Nature offers clues as to how quantity and quality can go hand-in-hand; how a complex order can respect diversity; how we can again achieve the fine grain of scale that makes buildings and streetscapes such a delight; and, what's more, how we can be truly sustainable by being adaptive. It is time, I think, for a new approach, informed by such thinking.

Professor Scully's open-mindedness, and his willingness to evaluate things on their own terms, have nowhere been better demonstrated than in his championing of traditional urbanism—something I myself have been trying to do for nearly 20 years now. And look what it's done to me! When I was first poised, along with Leon Krier, to undertake the development of a new settlement at Poundbury, on the edge of Dorchester in the south of England, I was hugely encouraged by the achievement of Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk at Seaside, something I made mention of when I last delivered a speech in this hall 15 years ago. Just as the connection with nature reminds us of matters above and beyond ourselves, and of the need for reverence, so the city—rightly conceived—can remind us of both our dependence upon, and our responsibility for, others; and for the greater good through the simple, but denigrated, business of good manners, courtesy, and consideration for others. You remember the old phrase, “Do to others as you'd have them do to you.”

I sought at Poundbury, therefore, to create an example of a mixed-use, pedestrian-orientated community that reflected local character and local tradition. My main aim was simply to provide a place that might enhance both the quality of life of the people who would eventually live there and the local environment. The obvious starting point was to analyze the successful places and buildings that people have enjoyed living in for centuries, and to draw out the lessons of why they were still so popular today. Then I wanted to know how these lessons could be developed to make them better suited to contemporary needs.

I rather hope, now that over a thousand people live there and 600 people work there, that Poundbury has proved the point that it is in fact possible—and I was told it was never possible—to break the conventional mold of zoned development and create a mixed-use community. Its lessons are simple: a network of legible, interconnected streets that accommodate the car while celebrating the pedestrian; the centrality of the walkable neighborhood as a building block, accommodating work, play, shopping, and living in a harmonious way; the “pepper-potting” of affordable housing and market rate housing; and, finally, the reliance on traditional urbanism, local vernacular architecture and natural materials to restore a sense of harmony, proportion, and, above all, something called “beauty” to day-to-day life.

Incidentally, the Guinness Housing Trust—which is providing the affordable housing, now comprising 30% of the dwellings—in fact I went down the other day to celebrate the hundredth affordable house there. The trust tells us that Poundbury is its most successful and trouble-free site. Why? Because of a far higher satisfaction level than anywhere else; and this is due not only to an integrated, mixed approach to housing and workplaces, but also to the fact that people appreciate living in attractive houses. Crucially, in my view, the affordable housing at Poundbury is indistinguishable from that sold on the open market—a market that has been quite responsive, by the way!

I know that there has been similar innovation in urban planning here in the United States. Indeed, we in the U.K. have been studying progress here and have learned a great deal from exchanges and discussions with U.S. policymakers. This sharing of best practice and lessons learned is an increasingly important aspect of our bilateral relationship and a sign of the deep partnership between the U.S. and U.K. So, today, there is a worldwide groundswell of new interest in this kind of compact, mixed-use, walkable settlement, as a means of addressing the challenges of the future. Incidentally, the demand to visit Poundbury and use it as a teaching laboratory has been so great that my foundation has had to base staff of its own in the town!

You might be interested to know that the work of my Prince’s School for Traditional Arts—which is showcased in one of the exhibitions that opens here today—has at its core the search for the sacred; and this search crosses boundaries of cultures and religions. The Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts program at the School was initiated by Professor Keith Critchlow to specialize in the arts and architecture of Islam, as well as the traditional arts of other civilizations. One of the principal aims of the school is to encourage appreciation of the universal values that are fundamental to the arts of the great traditions of the world. You know this, of course. You have also seen fit to give this award to the Aga Khan.

The study of traditional architecture throughout history, and across the world, has revealed the widespread use of certain proportioning principles in designing pleasing, human-scaled buildings and towns. A

fundamental understanding of the geometry underlying these proportioning systems—and its relationship to universal principles now being recognized by the sciences of complexity—is as important to architects and planners as learning drawing skills. Sadly, neither topic is well covered in our modern educational system—another example of the way in which the 20th century has seen the deliberate destruction of man’s intimate interrelationship with nature. Architectural proportioning reflects an ancient consensus about the best way to create harmony between people and their environment. An understanding of the use of these proportioning systems throughout history can help us to understand why well-loved places have endured, and also how to make places today that can be as well-loved by future generations. Failure to do so can only result in ever greater alienation and uglification.

Yet this is only one—and, I suspect, not even the most important—of the tools by which societies in the past have been able to create things both beautiful and satisfying, and which appeal to our sense of the sacred, if I am allowed to use such a dangerously old-fashioned concept. Christopher Alexander—a visionary known to Andres and Elizabeth, and I’m sure to many others of you too here today—has shown that timeless processes can be every bit as valuable as timeless forms. He has convinced me, certainly, that each of us possesses the means to nurture the sacredness of the places we inhabit, by ensuring that our actions, however small, respect the wholeness of these places. By doing this, ours become healing actions; and for these we are not dependent on any intellectual elite of architects and planners.

Underlying all of this is the much-misunderstood concept of tradition—often derided or neutralized into the term “traditionalism.” Traditionalism makes us forget how tradition really works, just as “modernism” has blinded us to what it means to be truly modern. These terms encourage us to see tradition and modernity as enemies, whereas in any sane society they would be the best of friends. Tradition, in truth, is not about style, nor is it, for that matter, about pastiche; it is about learning from the best of what has gone before. It is something infinitely varied, infinitely adaptable, infinitely changing—a language, even a dialect, that is based on a coherent grammar, allowing infinite flexibility and creativity within a discipline. Why is it, do you think, that the contemporary world recoils so violently from anything involving discipline? We are told ceaselessly, and to the point of boredom, that we need constantly to adapt to rapid change. And yet, paradoxically, the only real way in which you can adapt to change is through a discipline. Civilization itself is surely a discipline of its own, when you think about it.

And why is it, do you imagine, that so many people want to live in the lovely old conservation areas of our towns and cities—the bits that weren’t knocked down in the orgies of destruction in the 1950s, ’60s and ’70s. Why do they, and so many architects, want to live in such places, or to visit them while abroad on their holidays? Because their essential characteristics of harmonious proportions, of human scale and hierarchy, strike a common chord within our hearts. These are the subtle qualities of architecture that so many people find instinctively beautiful. But their origins lie in shared human psychology, which—as new research is confirming—is intimately connected to human well-being.

So it is certainly not my intention to try to impose any single notion of tradition on people. Mine is a very modest proposal: it is that professionals, policy-makers and the media leave room, without prejudice, for people to satisfy their intuitive hunger for traditional things. What I happen to care about is how people live from day to day—how communities can shape their everyday surroundings to fulfil their needs

simply, effectively, and beautifully. Those needs, after all, have not changed so very much over the centuries. It is out of ordinary things that real traditions are fashioned. I believe we must see each piece of the built environment as part of a living language, connected to a living tradition.

Tradition, rightly understood, is a frame work for confronting and responding to the complex problems of urbanization and globalization. Goethe once said we should be “tending the fire, not the ashes” of our past. The only fire we seem obliged to tend today is that invisible yet destructive one that drives the internal combustion engine. Incidentally, if you remember, Goethe also said that “architecture is frozen music.” There you have it again: proportion and rhythm. If we don’t keep in time to the music and rhythms of nature, we initiate dissonant oscillations that increasingly lead to chaos and confusion, loss of meaning, and disconnectedness.

One of the greatest challenges we face today is that of sustainability. The Bruntland Commission definition of sustainability says that we should act without compromising future generations, which is rather difficult without a crystal ball. We obviously can’t literally look forwards, but we can look back in order to see what we have built around the world that has been proved to adapt well to change and that still functions efficiently. The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce recently previewed the 2005 State of the Future report, outlining what it considers to be the 15 greatest challenges facing humanity over the next 50 years.

First on the list is: “How sustainable development can be achieved for all.” It notes that humanity may have consumed more natural resources since the Second World War than in all of history prior to that time. Next to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, unsustainable growth may well be the greatest threat to the future of humanity. Yet without sustainable growth, billions of people will be condemned to poverty, and much of civilization will collapse. Further vital issues on the RSA’s list include how we can bring population growth and resources, including clean water, into balance. The world’s population has grown to 6.5 billion, with more than 4 billion being added since 1950. It may grow another 2.6 billion before beginning to fall, according to the U.N.’s lower forecast. Today’s 3.2 billion city dwellers are likely to increase to 6 billion by 2050. Once thought a problem, urbanization—and I should stress, the right kind of urbanization—could now be part of the solution, through imaginative, innovative localization, to poverty, ignorance, disease, and malnutrition due to its efficiencies and economies of scale.

It was, I confess, with slight frustration therefore that I read the fifth challenge on the list: “How can policymaking be made more sensitive to global long-term perspectives?” It continues: “Those who guide the world into its future need to adopt a more future-oriented mindset themselves. ... Unfortunately the daily complexities of politics leave little time to consider the bigger picture. Corporate stakeholders want quick profits ... NGO leaders looking at the longer term often do so only from the perspective of a single issue; and news executives are driven by the need to keep people’s attention by emphasizing the drama of the moment. As a result, decision-makers feel little pressure to consider global long-term perspectives.” You may not be surprised to hear, ladies and gentlemen, that I believe it is only by looking at building for the longer term, building tomorrow’s heritage, that the right decisions are likely to be made. From funding mechanisms that allow for patient money, to buildings that can easily last for 300 years, we must

be sure that we can look at what is actually cheaper over the long term. This is why some New Urban projects, my own ventures at Poundbury, and a number of new developments my Foundation for the Built Environment has designed are planning compact, efficient, and beautiful places that are built to stand the test of time. This is not always easy, or course, but there is a growing body of evidence being collected that financial returns can be healthier in the long term, and the people who live in these places can be happier as a result of the way these developments are laid out.

Recent work by Professor David Strong of our Building Research Establishment has found that “vernacular architecture offers a form and a function that enables comfortable conditions to be achieved, optimum and sustainable use of indigenous materials, and low environmental impact.” For example, the use of passive heating and cooling systems found in vernacular buildings made of natural materials is increasingly favored over steel-and-glass structures that are dependent upon complex technological solutions that often fail to deliver on early promises. U.K. building regulations are set to require a 25% reduction in carbon emissions, and this will largely come through greater use of the thermal properties of natural materials and passive ventilation.

For those countries that have enjoyed a wonderful quality of life over the past century, it is surely time to focus on putting our own houses in order to provide the solutions to convince the developing nations, which are rapidly growing in wealth and demanding the same quality of life we have all enjoyed, that more appropriate layouts of settlement ultimately give a better quality of life. To find new solutions for these major global issues, it is essential that we combine a thorough understanding of how past civilizations ordered themselves, using minimal resources, together with new science and technologies so that we really can “have our cake and eat it.”

Modernism has led us to seek answers in a host of technical “fixes.” Traditionalism often only pays it lip service. Real traditional thinking has always tried to see the whole picture. You only have to spend time in great buildings like the Alhambra, or the Alcazar, in Andalusia, to understand how, with a total absence of flashy tricks, climate, temperature, light can all be controlled at once, with minimum impact on the earth. We see in such masterpieces of tradition a comprehension of natural and human systems as complementary and intertwined.

New analysis techniques, new scientific knowledge, new technologies offer opportunities to reduce energy use, water consumption, and waste. The development of new techniques and building systems that can be applied within a traditional framework is likely to have a much greater impact than “high-tech” methods, as most existing buildings are traditional and most consumers seem to prefer traditional architecture. We must surely be striving to create the kind of versatile and attractive environment that can offer an enduring character and serve generations through hundreds of years, rather than the 20-year planning cycles of today, which rather tend to lead to a throwaway society and throwaway world.

Some of those here today may already be aware of the work of my Foundation for the Built Environment. Established in 1999, having grown out of my Institute of Architecture, originally formed in 1992, it brought together a number of separate initiatives, dedicated to improving the quality of people’s lives by teaching and practicing timeless ways of building. It is now one of 16 charities of which I am president

and which, together, comprise an effort to address the fundamental need for interconnectedness between the human and natural worlds. The foundation challenges the architectural, planning, and building professions to design in a way that learns from the past, and that enriches, rather than denigrates, human aspirations, while still meeting more basic needs. In no arena is this challenge more pertinent than the urgent environmental agenda. The effort to demonstrate and teach that traditional architecture, building, and urbanism can effectively deliver truly sustainable development is an integral part of both our education program and our ongoing practice work.

Our Civitas exhibition, opening here today, and the catalog that accompanies it, demonstrate both the commonality and the differences in the way the universal principles of good urbanism are formulated in the U.S., the U.K., and continental Europe. We can all learn a lot from each other—and that’s what I believe this exhibition is all about. Indeed, so strongly do I believe this that, as you know, I recruited Hank Dittmar as chief executive of my foundation last year, and I’m glad to pay tribute to the progress he has made in taking this important work forward—and to the fact that it was to the U.S. that I knew we had to turn to find the chief executive I was looking for! I might feel that I should apologize to you for depriving you of him were it not for the fact that his work so obviously retains a global dimension!

To achieve the delivery of these principles, an essential factor is, if at all possible, to allow those who will live in the community an opportunity to participate in the planning process. With strong leadership, many hands can enrich rather than muddle the design. In the exhibition and catalog you will find information about Enquiry by Design, a process my foundation pioneered in the design of the extension to the English Midlands city of Northampton, and has since applied in many other places—designed to ensure that there is active and constructive community participation. In fact, where this particular technique has been deployed now, we have gathered evidence to show that it can reduce the normal planning process from two and a half years to four or five days.

The exhibition on the work of the School of Traditional Arts will unveil a collection of works crafted in a school, which, so far as we know, is the only one in the world where traditional arts can be practiced at the postgraduate levels. The school believes that, just as in traditional societies, art is not a luxury, but a part of everyday life; that traditional art invites the viewer to look at it not only as the personal expression of an individual artist, but also as that particular artist’s evocation of a universal principle.

Borges wrote of tradition as the “knit-work of centuries of adventure.” So why don’t we set our sights on a living traditional architecture of this kind, to complement our renewed respect for the sophisticated complexity of traditional urbanism? This is not a matter of personal taste or fragmentary meanings; it is a matter of finding again what is truly sustainable, and sharing once more what is truly human and which tells the great enduring human story.

Increasingly, I feel a new consensus emerging—a new kind of modernity, if you will. It implies that we can find effective ways of dealing with the big problems of our day, which do not oblige us to bury beneath our abstractions the very things that make life worth living. And it requires we build again the types of places we all know strike a chord in our hearts, however “modern” we are; places that convey an everlasting human story of meaning and belonging.

Whatever the case, I am most touched to receive the Vincent Scully Award and take the greatest possible pleasure in opening the exhibitions *A Building Tradition* and *Civitas*.