In 1789, an English visitor to Germany noted with some astonishment that at five in the afternoon the emperor goes “to the Corridor just near his own apartment, where poor and rich, small and great, have access to his person at pleasure, and often get him to arbitrate their law-suits.” The use of the word corridor might not strike a modern reader as particularly unusual. But the word was not all that common in English, and most certainly no English king at that time would have had such a corridor in his palace. Today, of course, corridors are so ubiquitous in our public buildings—and the word so casually used as metaphor—that one can hardly imagine that they played anything other than a relatively trivial part in the history of architecture. But that turns out to not be the case. John Soane’s Bank of England (begun 1788) had no corridors, and even the enormous Somerset House (1776–86), England’s first large-scale government building, made only limited use of them. The architect of Somerset House, William Chambers, defined corridors in his dictionary of architectural terms as an element of domestic architecture, no doubt creating the illusion—and to some degree the error—that corridors are primarily a feature of houses. If corridors were being built in English-speaking countries in the late eighteenth century, they were in prisons, as in the formidable Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin (fig. 1). But even in that context they were considered a novelty.

The resistance to corridors in the public architecture of early

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Figure 1. Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin, Ireland (1796). Photo by author.
nineteenth-century England was reinforced by their image as dark and lonely, sometimes even haunted. Charlotte Brontë visualized them as places for restless souls; Charles Robert Maturin in *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) made them into places of spectral encounter; for Lord Byron they were convenient props for the romantic soul. “But glimmering through the dusky corridor,” he wrote in 1814 in *The Corsair*, “Another [lamp] chequers o’er the shadow’d floor.”3 By 1877, however, when Henry James wrote *The American*, the perspective on the corridor had changed considerably. The main character of the book, the successful businessman Christopher Newman, passed his arm into that of his companion, and the two walked for some time up and down one of the less frequented corridors. Newman’s imagination began to glow with the idea of converting his bright, impracticable friend into a first-class man of business.4

The difference between the old and new is clearly manifest in the difference between the Royal Exchange in London (1844) and St. George’s Hall in Liverpool (1841–54) (figs. 2–3). On the outside both buildings, with their imposing, columnar porticoes, look equally classical. But their plans tell a different story. The former, in good Georgian tradition, has no corridors, whereas the latter has parallel corridors stretching along its entire 150-meter length. Though St. George’s Hall is almost always discussed as an example of the neo-Grecian style and was seen by Nikolaus Pevsner, the don of English architectural history, as the finest example of that style in the world, it should instead be celebrated as a fully modern building.5 It was modern not because its corridors were “functional.” They were much more than that. Tall, airy, and with marble floors, they constituted the organizing structure of the plan. Compared to the haphazard arrangement of the spaces of the Royal Exchange, where, for example, the window of a toilet faces out onto the grand entrance loggia, the plan of St. George’s Hall is methodical, clear, and purposeful, organized in a way that has obviously much to do with the rise of the professional class and the creation in the Victorian era of large national bureaucracies, law courts, and government ministries. But this is the end—or almost the end—of the story rather than its beginning. The question before us is not only, What is a corridor, but also, How did the corridor come into the broader cultural parlance? As

these preliminary sentences indicate, the answer is by no means as straightforward as it might seem.

**The First Corridors**

In the fourteenth century, in both Spanish and Italian contexts, a *corridor* referred not to a space but to a courier, someone who as the word’s Latin root suggests could run fast. A *corridor* might have been a scout sent behind enemy lines, a governmental messenger, a carrier of money, or even a negotiator arranging mercantile deals and marriages.\(^6\) He could also have served on the battlefield, sending reports between commanders and officers.\(^7\) This was the meaning of the word as used by Dante in the line, “Corridor vidi per la terra vostra”:

\(^6\) See Sebastián de Covarrubias Horozco, *Tesoros de la lengua Castellana o Española* (1611), ed. Martín de Riquer (Barcelona, 1943), p. 363. See also Domenico Milco, *Il proprinomio historico geografico e poetico* (Venice, 1676), p. 59, and a document dating from 1574 that read, “Li Octo proposti et electi per la Coritore e Priore sianno confirmati all voce delli fratelli balontandoli” [the Eight (council members) proposed and elected by the coritore and priors were confirmed by voice by the balontandoli brothers] (quoted in Francesco Molinari, *Gli Istituti Pii della citta e dell’antico Ducato Della Mirandola: Memorie e documenti* [Mirandola, 1882], p. 91).

\(^7\) See *La obsidione di Padua del MDIX* (1509), rpt. in Giuseppe Carducci, *Scelta di curioistà letterari inedite or rare dall secolo XIII al XVII*, ed. Antonio Medin (Bologna, 1892), p. 98.
I have erewhile seen horsemen moving camp,
Begin the storming, and their muster make,
And sometimes starting off for their escape;

Corridors have I seen upon your land,
O Aretines, and foragers go forth,
Tournaments stricken, and the joustings run,²

By the seventeenth century because of the increasing dominance of French culture the word had become obsolete and was replaced by *courier*. But by then the imprint of the word *corridor* on architectural language had been irrevocably set, primarily as a military term referring to spaces in fortifications that enabled rapid communication with troops.⁹ Giovanni Villani’s treatise on the history of Florence, the *Cronica universale* (1324), refers to such a *corridoio* on the city walls of Florence.¹⁰ A *corridoio* could also serve

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¹⁰. Giovanni Villani (1275–1348) was a historian of Florence and a Florentine government functionary who authored this twelve-volume history of the city. “Ma aggiunsevi per ammenda gli arconcelli al corridoio di sopra” (Giovanni Villani, *Cronica*, 8 vols. [Florence, 1823], 4:227).
as a secret way in and out of a castle or palace, such as the one that was built connecting the Vatican and Castello S. Angello, which the pope could use in times of trouble.\(^\text{11}\) Equally famous is the corridoio in Florence (1565) built by the Medici to connect the Palazzo Pitti on one side of the Arno River with the Palazzo Vecchio on the other side. It was placed at the level of the upper floors so no one could see into it as it crossed over streets and along the Arno River Bridge (fig. 4).\(^\text{12}\) At its entrance, an ingeniously designed room with several fake doors was used to slow down anyone who might

would like to thank David Friedman for this citation. It is possible that the corridoio originated with the crusaders, who, often fighting against great odds, needed to move soldiers rapidly about the fortifications.


\(^\text{12}\). The French king Francis I had an underground corridor built between his palace and the residence of the aged Leonardo da Vinci. William Garrard in his book *The Art of Warre* (1591) writes, "there shall be an Allie of 6, foote large, to receive the Souldiours which shall passe the great Ditch, to mount upon the Corridor of [the] Counterscarpe" (quoted in Charles Augustus Maude Fennell, *The Stanford Dictionary of Anglicised Words and Phrases* [Cambridge, 1892], p. 285).
have gained surreptitious access. Similar corridoi were built in Parma (1550s), Vigevano (1490s), Urbino, (1490s), and other places.\footnote{A corridor—mentioned as such in the contemporary literature—was built in Parma to connect Palazzo della Pilota with a late medieval castle that was incorporated by the new Farnese rulers into a single palace complex. Though clearly not public, it was more than just an escape route, as it was “nobilissimo e capacissimo.” Designed by Francesco Paciotto, it was built for Ottavio Farnese, duke of Parma, who gained control of the city in 1551. It was completed around 1598. A visitor wrote that the “corridore . . . è una parte del palazzo, che si è disegnato di fare, che sara nobilissimo e capacissimo, di qui abbiamo veduto il modello” (quoted in Helge Gamrath, Farnese: Pomp, Power, and Politics in Renaissance Italy [Rome, 2007], p. 138).}

The point to take away from this is that corridors were not found in the inside of palaces or villas. A palazzo was entered by means of an andito, which derives, of course, from the word andare, “to go” or “to walk.” One would never have “run” into a palazzo. The andito usually led to a camminata, a “walking place” or to a passaggio, which, if it was placed along a courtyard might have been called, from the fifteenth century onward, a portico and sometimes a loggia. In Venice the central hallway of a palace was known as a portego, which, like portico, comes from the Latin root portare. One was expected to “carry oneself” with dignity. Another word for an entry that came into fashion in the fifteenth century is vestibulo.\footnote{“Non era camminata di palagio / là ‘v’eravam, ma natural burella / ch’avea mal suolo e di lume disagio.” [It was not any palace corridor / There where we were, but a natural dungeon, / With floor uneven and unease of light.] (Dante, Inferno, canto 34, ll. 97–99; trans. mod.).} Neither Andrea Palladio nor Sebastiano Serlio used the word corridor in any significant way (fig. 5).\footnote{Palladio used the word once, but only to describe external, upper-level connecting balconies. See Andrea Palladio, I quattro libri dell’architettura (Venice, 1601), p. 16 and The Four Books of Architecture, trans. pub. (1738; New York, 1965), p. 40.} In fact, they rarely even had anything akin to hallways in their designs given that villas were always composed of tightly interlocked rooms. Even the radically enlarged Pitti Palace (1550s) built for the grand duke Cosimo Medici had no internal corridor. If corridors existed they were secret and for the most part not drawn into published plan. Such was the case of the coritore at the Palazzo Barbarini (1627–33) that, as documents indicate, went through the kitchen to the piano nobile.\footnote{A document from 1678 states, “Coritore nuovo sotteranio che dalla cocina segreta passa all’Appartamento nobile” (quoted in Patricia Waddy, Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces [Cambridge, Mass., 1990], p. 399 n. 373). In the Dictionnaire de l’Académie française (1694), a corridor is defined as a “termes de fortification” and also as “especie de gallerie estroite qui sert de passage pour aller à plusieurs appartements” (Dictionnaire de l’Académie française, s.v. “corridor,” portail.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/dico look.pl?strippedhw=corridor&dicoid=ACADt694&headword=&dicoid=ACADt694).}

The emergence of the corridor into architectural daylight begins in the seventeenth century. A 1644 sketch for a palace by Felice Della Greca, a
prominent architect practicing in Rome, shows a coritore leading—and quite astonishingly—straight from the building’s entrata to the giardino in the rear.18 Taking the place of what would have been an andito, it had no overtly recognizable military purpose. Instead, it was clearly used as a status symbol, emphasizing the importance of an owner who wanted to make the impression of needing to be kept abreast of world events by fleet-footed messengers.

The epitome of this was the false corridor that Francesco Borromini built in 1635 in the Palazzo Spada in Rome (fig. 6). Bernardino Spada, who was made a cardinal in 1626 and served as an important papal negotiator, had bought the palace in 1632 and hired Borromini to bring the building up to date, which he did by adding the corridor. Since only 8.5 meters of space was available for it, Borromini designed it with an optical illusion to make it appear significantly longer. Often discussed in the scholarly literature as a “witty entertainment,” the most basic fact is overlooked, namely, that it

is a corridor, and all that it implied, that is being portrayed. Placed on cross axis to Cardinal Spada’s reception room, it is lined with Doric columns and vaulted in a Roman, coffered style; it has all the appearance of a grand—and one has to add, modern—entranceway into the palace even though it is all illusion. Clearly Cardinal Spada wanted to have the proper attributes of power, and in this case the illusion served just as nicely as the real thing. Bernini’s corridor that led from his famous colonnade in front of the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome to the Scala Regia (1663–66) would become the ultimate example of corridic display.

These early palace corridors were show pieces and not an integrated aspect of palace design. So the question arises, When was the corridor integrated into the architectural program? When was it no longer something grafted onto an older building but part of the working nomenclature of the architect? It was Francesco Borromini who made this transition by designing the first example of what one could call a corridic building, namely, the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri (1637–50) (fig. 7). The corridors form a large rectangle with a chapel clamped in the center and the rooms of the institution lined up along the perimeter. The length of one of the corridors was extended to link to the entrance and as a result cut across the entire site. It separates the Oratorio from—yet connects it to—the preexisting church and its associated rooms next door. Borromini brought corridic logic to perfection at Sant’Ivo alla Sapienza (1642–50) where the


20. The use of the word corridor to describe these spaces is a modern convention. The documents relating to Bernini’s designs talk of braccio (arm). This according to Tod Marder who has worked extensively on Bernini’s architecture.
U-shaped corridor system with its three entrances and coordinated staircase determined everything about the building, form, circulation, and program (fig. 8). One could compare it with the design for the Collegio Romano, the center of Jesuit education in Rome that was begun just a few decades earlier in the 1620s under the direction of Giovanni Tristano. The contrast is striking. Whereas the Collegio consists of a series of Renaissance-style courtyards linked relatively arbitrarily to each other and placed in awkward relationships to the church, Sant’Ivo’s courtyard and church are subservient to the corridor system around which everything is organized.

The corridic revolution had now begun, but it was by no means widespread. Its first consistent articulations are in the context of the Counter-Reformation as Borromini’s commissions for the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri and Sant’Ivo alla Sapienza might actually indicate. But it was during the massive building campaign of the Jesuits who built churches and colleges throughout Europe and in the New World that we see the corridor as an integrated—and labeled—part of the architecture. From the middle of the seventeenth century onward, we consistently find corridors running from a guarded street entrance into the depth of the college and its apartments. Significant is that they are labeled in the official plans. Not to be confused with a conventional cloister passageway, these spaces encode the building with the terminology of couriered messages, international power brokerage, and, by implication, Counter-Reformation alliances with Rome. They link the institution to the outside world in both real and symbolic terms. The shift in emphasis is real. In the old medieval and Renaissance system, one entered basically through the andito into a courtyard and from there into the building. In the new system, one enters directly into the building; the courtyard is still there for light, air, and tranquility, as at the Jesuit college at Dubrovnik (fig. 9), but it is no longer a primary circulation space. This corridic revolution—and the creation of a circulatory system distinct from the courtyard—spread to much of the new monastic construction, especially in Austria and Germany, such as the Abbey of St. Florian (1686–1751) in Linz.

In an almost magical moment of transliteration, from walking to running, and from local politics to world politics, a new architectural element was born. The corridor emphasized not the dignified pace along an andito

21. Giovanni Tristano (active 1555–75) was a leading Jesuit architect of the time who also worked for a period on the design of the Gesù, the Roman mother church of the Jesuit Order.
but a pace that was much more purposeful, a pace, one has to add, that was of a modern dimension.

In seventeenth-century Italy, the corridor, therefore, had two identities: a virtual one that could be appended to a palace, as at the Spada, and a real one in the Counter-Reformation colleges and monasteries. Image and form were not yet conjoined. But it was only a matter of time. One of the most spectacular examples was the corridor painted by Andrea Pozzo beginning in 1680s in the Collegio Romano. As at the Spada Palace this was an addition, but it was also the first attempt to elevate the corridor into high architecture. Linking the Church of the Gesù to the rooms where St. Ignatius had lived, the walls and ceiling of the previously unadorned passageway were decorated with trompe l’oeil frescoes of classical architecture that framed pictorial dramatizations of the saint’s life and times. This was one of the earliest examples of the decorated corridor.24

24. Another example where the corridor served as a space of representation was at the Palazzo Corsini (1736) by Ferdinando Fuga. It was commissioned by Bishop Neri Corsini (1685–1770) on behalf of his uncle Lorenzo Corsini, who had became Pope Clement XII in 1730.
The English Corridoor

About the middle of this staircase there was a corridor leading directly to the King’s room. Gudden placed some of his keepers on the steps above leading to the tower, and himself stayed with the rest below, so that no one could be seen from the corridor. “Suddenly,” writes Müller, “we heard quick footsteps, and a man of imposing height appeared from the door of the corridor, and spoke in short, broken sentences with a servant who stood near, bowing low.  

The shift from an andito to a coritore, and then from a military term to an architectural one, might have been too subtle or perhaps even too regional to have had any lasting effect had the word not been carried to England. Even so, it was not adopted in any wholesale manner. Instead it was used only in elevated commissions such as the huge Castle Howard (1698) built for Charles Howard, third Earl of Carlisle. Designed by John Vanbrugh, it has a great square hall with the principal apartments directly behind it. One stretch of space, labeled corridor in the plan, cut across the front of the hall and curved around toward the side wings (fig. 10). A second corridor ran behind the hall to connect to the residential wing. It might seem that long thin buildings by necessity required corridors, but this was not the case at the time as is easily proved if one looks at any number of other houses and palaces of that age. Petworth House, for example, despite its vast frontage, had no corridors apart from the usual cramped passageways in the servant’s quarters. People moved, as was typical of the age, from room to room or along enfilade doorways.

So why do corridoors appear in this building? It could be explained circumstantially by the fact that the English in Vanbrugh’s generation had a fascination for things Spanish. The English translation of Don Quixote and the culinary dish “Spanish olio,” a mixture of meat and vegetables, had become all the rage in London. Vanbrugh even wrote a play set in Spain, The False Friend (1709). Perhaps more significantly, he was well trained in the military arts and rose, according to our sketchy knowledge of his life,
to the rank of captain. But the *corridors* of Castle Howard have to be understood within a more specific perspective. Howard was a prominent figure in the politics of the age; he was a minister for William III (1650–

31. One also has to take into consideration that in the late seventeenth-century military terminology had begun to spread in common language; see Robert Williams, “Fortified
1702), member of the Privy Council, and also was briefly Lord of the Treasury. William III, a Dutch aristocrat, ruled England together with Mary II and allied himself with the Spanish against the French, who had invaded Holland in 1672. He always maintained close relations with Spain, signing the Treaty of Madrid in 1670 and the Treaty of Windsor in 1680 and another in 1685, all aimed to rid the Caribbean of French buccaneers. The treaties also formally launched the English Caribbean expansion with Britain taking formal control of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, thereby establishing a strong foothold in the lucrative sugar industry. The warm relations between England and Spain paid off with a victory for both in the War of the Grand Alliance against France. The war came to an end in 1697, one year before the commissioning of Castle Howard, which means that the building served purposefully and ostentatiously as a proclamation of England’s arrival on the world stage. One of the attributes of an empire was a courier system or at least its nomenclature.

The same is true for the even grander Blenheim Castle (1705–24), which was also designed by Vanbrugh, though this time with the help of William Hawksmoor (fig. 11). It was an unusual building as its construction was mandated by Parliament to celebrate England’s victory over the French in the gigantic, winner-take-all battle at Blenheim, Germany. The victory cemented England’s global ambition, with the building a monument to both the victory and to England’s imperial future. Fittingly, the building had corridoors leading from its huge main hall to the residential chambers. The drawings in Colen Campbell’s 1715 Vitruvius Britannicus prove that these corridoors were unusual insofar as Blenheim Castle and Castle Howard were the only two buildings among the dozens featured in the book that had them. With their combined military and the political symbolism, the corridoors demonstrated, in the language of architecture, England’s

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32. The word itself was so novel that during the design of Castle Howard, the Duchess of Marlborough, the wife of the building’s patron, inquired about its meaning. Vanbrugh replied: “The word Corridor, Madam, is foreign, and signifies in plain English, no more than a Passage, it is now however generally us’d as an English Word” (quoted in Charles Saumarez Smith, The Building of Castle Howard [London, 1990], p. 54). The casualness of the explanation should not belie the implications of this innovation.

33. It is thought that Hawksmoor designed the Berwick Barracks between 1717 and 1721.

34. A similar and also innovative corridor was added to the state room section of the Dublin Castle. It connected to the private rooms and was used as the ceremonial route for the privy councilors to use on their way to the main entrance to the council chamber. It was badly restored after a fire in 1941. See Edward McParland, Public Architecture in Ireland, 1680–1760 (New Haven, Conn., 2001), p. 110.
usurpation of the technology associated with its new status as a colonial empire, namely, speed and connectivity.

It was left to Robert Adam in a house now known as Luton Hoo (1772) in Bedfordshire to tame the *corridor* and coordinate it with the ideals of Italian planning (fig. 12). The house was designed for John Stuart, third Earl of Bute (1713–92). On the accession of George III in 1760, Stuart became the king’s privy counselor and for a while even prime minister (1762–63). Reputed for having arranged the marriage between George III and the German Princess Sophia Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, he was also called upon in 1763 to negotiate a peace treaty between England and France that ended the Seven Years’ War and established England as the world’s chief colonial empire. Stuart was, in the old sense of the word, a *corridor*.

Luton Hoo, which served as Stuart’s retirement estate, was meant to commemorate his international career. A wide corridor—now spelled

with one o in the plans—cuts across the central axis and cleaves the house into two. It terminates at both ends in grand staircases. The integration of the staircases with the placement of bathrooms, powdering rooms, and service stairs was innovative, but as modern as it looks today it would be a combination that would not be seen again at any level of frequency until the nineteenth century. To remind ourselves of the unusualness of the design we can compare it to John Carr and Robert Adam’s Harwood House (1759–71). Though not unsimilar in layout, the passages around the two courtyards are not meant to be traversed by the house owners but only by the servants.

John Stuart was considered one of England’s leading botanists, and his extensive library with some 30,000 volumes—one of the most complete scientific libraries in Europe—dominates the entire right flank of the design. This was more than just a personal passion. Botany had not only risen to a science but was also an element of national discourse; the study of plants, seeds, and climate had become an essential element of colonial agriculture. The other side of the house contained a suite of reception and dining rooms, so that we have the social on the one side and the epistemolog-

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35. The building was transformed by Robert Smirke in the 1830s.
The corridor, in other words, does not bring one into the depth of the building as at Castle Howard, but serves as a type of internal walkway. Unlike the earlier generation of corridors that led from the outside to the inside—whether in real or figural terms—this corridor connects two different insides to each other. Set apart from the rough and tumble world of politics, it was a protected space for restricted social interaction; it was a within in the within, a place where polite society could exercise its colonial dreams.

The Dark Corridor

The eighteenth-century English flirtation with the *corridor* was not matched in France, where one rarely sees the word anywhere on a plan other than in the servant’s quarters, in theaters, in hospitals, or, as we have seen, in religious establishments. As a 1769 dictionary states, “les corridors sont particulièrement en usage dans les Communautés religieuses.” In domestic situations, they were a rarity. The primary circulation in a bourgeois *hôtel* went either along courtyards or through rooms. The bigger the *hôtel*, the more courtyards were needed. A project for a *grande maison* (circa 1780), designed by France’s leading architect, Claude Nicholas Ledoux, maintained this convention (fig. 13). The principal rooms were arranged in the form of an H around two large courtyards. It would have been anathema for Ledoux to have a corridor in the residence given that the spatial alignment of rooms was less important than the degree of intimacy that was created by the succession of antechambers. For this reason, the definition of the corridor in Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* (1751–65) was far from neutral. It was not only inappropriate for a residence but was also a “source of noise for the rooms opening off of it and, therefore, no longer in use except in upper stories of

37. Another precedent, evoking the still very distant uses of the corridor in the twentieth century, was the Gloucester Infirmary (1761), where we see the emergent institutional culture adopt the manner of the grand house, radically simplified and modified, of course. Here the corridor links the two wards; the central hall has become the chapel with the operating room above it on the first floor. It was designed, so it has been argued, by Luke Singleton. The design was made around 1756. Patients were admitted in 1761. See www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=42309


39. Another comparison can be made with the Palazzo Corsini (begun in 1736) in Rome, which has galleries connecting important spaces and serving to define the structure’s overall geometry. Though here too there is a corridor, it is little more than a service ally squeezed into the fabric of the building.
buildings meant for storage or in convents." As a result, the French made no significant contribution to corridic modernity. But they did contribute

to the emergence of what we today would call privacy. It is often assumed that
the corridor played a part in this, but the situation in France proves this wrong.
What it shows instead is that the idea of the corridor and the idea of privacy
were in the eighteenth century two separate developing modernities.

The corridor as a significant design element was to remain rare in
France, even into the twentieth century. Beaux Arts architects held firm to
the Palladian courtyard tradition. They consistently used words like galleries, colonnades, arcades, colonnades couvert, or dégagement, but never corridors. The absence of the term is significant. Whereas a corridor could have rooms on both sides and emphasizes speed and efficiency, a gallerie always had rooms on only one side and a row of windows on the other. A gallerie was a space for viewing the garden and later for viewing paintings, for pleasant conversation, and, importantly, slow ambulation.41 Beginning in the eighteenth century, the French would begin to translate corridor as couloir, which was an old word meaning a water drain or sieve with clearly very different—and not positive—implications.42

In England, meanwhile, in the throes of its own Palladian revival, the
corridic innovations at Castle Howard and Luton Hoo remained a rarity.43 In fact, by the turn of the nineteenth century the corridor came to be equated not with the world of international power brokerage but, if anything, with the nocturnal wanderings of old men in creaky mansions and with anxious perambulations in the dark. Rarely used in architectural discourses, the corridor seemed to be headed toward extinction.44 Jane Austen never mentioned corridors in the great houses that form the backdrops of her novels, only galleries and passageways. The Carlton House (circa 1795) had a corridor, but it was out of sight in the residential suite. As late as 1864, Robert Kerr, author of The Gentleman’s House, positioned the corridor lower in status than the French-derived gallerie because of its “utilitarian character.”45 The corridor did survive, however, as a curiosity in a garden where it conveyed a military affectation; otherwise known as a

41. In German, the prevalent word was Gang, which like andito is related to walking.
42. See Nouveau Dictionaire Français-Italien et Italien-Français (Geneva, 1677), p. 197.
43. Walpole constructed in Strawberry Hill what today would be called a corridor, but he called it a Passage.
44. Though today scholars claim that panoptic prisons have corridors, Jeremy Bentham called them galleries. They were, however, no doubt corridor-like, but one has to remember that they were not circulation spaces but optical spaces, in essence free of circulation.
45. Robert Kerr, The Gentleman’s House (London, 1864), p. 169. An example would be the Henry Latrobe designed Wyndham House, Salisbury, from the early 1790s. It had a servant’s corridor on the second floor that was, however, remarkable in having skylights.
pergola, it consisted of a long trellised space covered with vines that connected the house to the gardens or stables.46

The corridor’s persistently negative—and still rather foreign—associations hindered its progress into respectability even at a time when civic architecture in England was beginning to develop. Well into the 1820s, courthouses did not have corridors or hallways. Lawyers and clients were expected to meet in nearby inns or coffeehouses.47 Even grand buildings, such as Schloss Wilhelmshöhe in Kassel, Germany (1792), the U.S. Capitol (1793), the Massachusetts State House in Boston (completed 1798), the Glyptothek in Munich (designed in 1815), and the English Post Office in London (1823) had no corridors insofar as their prototypes were for the most part French or Italian. The King Edward’s School (1838), designed by Charles Barry, better known as the architect of the English Parliament building, similarly had no corridors. With this in mind, the reemergence of corridic space in the mid-nineteenth century is all the more remarkable.

The Return of the Corridor

[The barracks] are compact and well built, and are arranged on the corridor system, i.e., all the rooms open on to corridors, running the whole length of the building.48

To follow the story of how the corridor acquired architectural legitimacy we will have to return to military history and go back to France where in the 1770s a new building type emerged—barracks—constructed at first not for the common soldier but for the elite cavalry regiments. An early example dates from 1770 at a military camp near the town of Saumur, where a clearly labeled corridor defines the form of the entire H-shaped building (fig. 14).49 Apart from a rather modest entrance element representing the administrative centrality of the regiment’s organization, there is no “space” in the building other than the corridor and its associated rooms. Unlike earlier corridors, which stood in the shadow of a church or of a suite of regal state rooms, this one was the all-defining and autonomous element of the design. It is an antimetaphysical space that cuts soldiers out of the

46. It was used by Humphrey Repton (1752–1818); see John Claudius Loudon, The Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture of the Late Humphrey Repton, Esq. (London, 1840), p. 551.

47. Corridors could be found on the lower floor to connect offices, but this was driven by a need for the rationalization of space rather than by civic purpose.


natural order of life and family to reconstitute them into a new social order. This is, in other words, the first purely corridor building in the history of architecture and clearly the prototype for the modern corridor building.

Prior to the late eighteenth century, barracks were rarities. Soldiers bivouacked in the field or requisitioned the houses of citizens, much to the frustration of the Americans, for example, who listed this as a grievance in their Declaration of Independence. During the American Revolutionary War, the English did eventually build barracks, but this was due more to the need to house large numbers of soldiers than because of any sort of ideological intent. The idea of the barracks as an ideological statement

50. Sir William Blackstone, the noted lawyer and Parliamentarian, maintained in 1765 that the soldiers should live “intermixed with the people” and that “no separate camp, no barracks, no inland fortress, should be allowed” (quoted in William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. [London, 1904], 2:147).

emerged only during the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic era when it was tied in with the ideals of the nation state. The military vocation, which had been linked previously to the very definition of aristocracy and its blood lines, was no longer considered solely a privilege of birth but now an attribute of citizenship. The definition of courage also went through a transformation. It was seen increasingly as a personal attribute, something that needed, however, to be organized in concordance with a larger purpose. The French, of course, had been on the forefront of this, but it was not long before these ideas began to affect cultures elsewhere.52

Initially the English were generally skeptical about the value of barracks since it appeared to some to lay the groundwork for military autonomy. But the English were soon swept up in the transformations of the time, and in 1792 George III obtained the consent of Parliament for setting up the barracks as an institution in the military command structure.54 The Fethard Military Barracks for a horse-mounted regiment (Fethard, Ireland, 1805) and the grand Waterloo Barracks (London, 1830s), built by the Duke of Wellington, are only two of the more prominent examples. The barracks idea soon filtered its way down into the infantry. Not all barracks had inner corridors, but so many did that in Germany the term Barackenstil was used in the nineteenth century to refer to buildings—usually hospitals and schools—with inner corridors.55

The corridors that defined these buildings were purpose-driven spaces, every inch focusing on the task of bringing man, building, and nation into a single optic. They were spaces in which the modern male citizen’s relationship to the state was being molded. In this context, the corridor became quasipublic, stamping uniformity out of diversity and purging the male of societal softness. G. W. F. Hegel seems to have given the perfect description of this in his Philosophy of Right (1822) when he states “personal individuality and its particular interests . . . pass partly of their own

52. See Matthew McCormack, The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England (Manchester, 2005). McCormack discusses the changing meanings of independence from the British civil wars to the First Reform Act of 1832. The key shift was in who was thought to be capable of independence; once a state accessible only to legislators and those of rank, it came to consist of inner qualities considered critical for “the electoral citizenry, and even the national repository of ‘manhood’ itself” (ibid., p. 56).
53. In the decades prior to the French Revolution, the world in France was divided between aristocrats, the clergy, and everyone else, the latter group known collectively as the Fifth Estate. In the Napoleonic era, the term Fifth Estate disappeared, and people came to be known as citizens tied conceptually to the state and to its successes and failures. Each citizen was potentially a member of the corps, a piece of the body of the state.
55. See, for example, Moritz Pistor, Anstalten und Einrichtungen des öffentlichen Gesundheitswesens in Preussen (Berlin, 1890), p. 228.
accord into the interest of the universal. . . . The individuals recognize by their own knowledge and will the universal as their own substantive spirit, and work for it as their own end.”

**The Corridic Episteme**

On the other side of the corridor, we have Courts without end—half-a-score of them, that is, with as much difference between them as in the same quantity of oysters: some a little bigger than others, and differently marked on the shell; but very much alike in tout ensemble after all.

By the 1820s, the elements of the modern corridor were beginning to come together as a spatial extension of the nation-state and its ideals. Added to this was the development of the decorated corridor that made the corridor no longer just a passage but a destination in its own right. The corridor’s transition into the secular world took place, however, in England with two of the most celebrated commissions of the time, the redesigning of Windsor Castle and the construction of the Parliament Building.

As to the first, it was begun in 1824 (finished around 1840) under the architect Jeffry Wyatville, who unified the disparate elements of the building by means of a 170-meter-long Grand Corridor; it was so richly ornamented with furnishings and paintings that “a day or two might be spent pleasantly” in this space, according to one nineteenth-century description.

If this corridor, used for private occasions as well as public receptions, whetted the appetite for such spaces among the English, it was the new Parliament Building in London that was the true watershed (fig. 15). Begun in 1834 and worked on for the next thirty years, it contains not one but several well-furnished, named corridors: the Commons Corridor, the Chancellors Corridor, the Lords Corridor, and so forth.

Though these corridors were planimetrically linked, they were each a discrete element with staircases at the ends that allowed monitors to control entry and exit. It was a brilliant solution to an important and emerging problem in mid-nineteenth

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58. The pronunciation of the word was debated, namely, whether the accent was on the first or last syllable. See “Corridor,” in *A Vocabulary of Such Words in the English Language as Are of Dubious or Unsettled Accentuation* (London, 1797). The house for the fifth Duke of Argyll, designed in 1803, was a rare exception, but its owner was a field marshal and commander in the English army. For an image, see John Harris, *The Architect and the British Country House, 1620–1920* (Washington, D.C., 1985), p. 176.
60. It was designed by Charles Barry and August Welby Pugin. The inspiration for the corridors most certainly came from Barry.
century English society, how to allow different classes to spatially coexist in the same institution. The building, of course, in the Gothic style is often discussed as the epitome of the English attempt to redefine its center of gravity through its historical associations. But if the outside of the building is purposefully historicist, the spatial planning of the interior is all modern. If anything, the corridor was an imprint of the increasingly complex social structure of Victorian society, introducing social stability and, very importantly, enforcing a sense of decorum in the insides of a public building. It guaranteed that everyone was in their proper position; awkward contacts with people outside of one’s peerage were kept to a minimum. The corridor organized the world into different, but parallel corridic universes.61

The building that best represents the new episteme is the Royal Courts of Justice, designed by George Edmund Street (1870) (figs. 16–17). On the outside, the building has all the appearance of a hulking medieval castle, and most history books emphasize this aspect of its design. The inside is a different matter all together. There are not one but four different corridic systems. A private corridor for the bar circled the building

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61. Prestige corridors were soon to be found in the grand houses of the Victorian elites, mimicking the new corridic institution. Barry began to use corridors in some of his house designs, such as in Walton for the earl of Tankerville (1837) and Bridgewater House (1846) for Francis Egerton (1800–57), who was a patron of the arts and a politician with alliance to the Conservative Party. In 1847 he was elevated to the peerage as Earl of Ellesmere.
between the courts and the central hall. Judges were provided with their own corridor, one half level higher than that of the bar that gave direct access to the raised daises on which the judges sat in the courts. The judge’s corridor could be accessed from their carriages and entered via a magnificent staircase, paneled in wainscot. Another corridor accommodated attorneys. The public had its own corridor, which con-

connected to the upper galleries of the courtroom. Each corridic element had its own set of entrances, staircase, and monitors. This building, in short, was a corridic machine.

Its design has to be seen in the context of the Reform Bill of 1832, which began the modernization of English society, as well as the 1846 County Courts Act and the Judicature Acts of 1873, all of which tried to make the court system more streamlined and more easily understood while at the same time expanding its reach. The old system of church courts was closed.
down and replaced by divorce and probate courts. The new court system also administered the increasingly voluminous legislation dealing with property, bankruptcy, succession, copyrights, patents, and taxation. The design of the building also reflects the rise of the legal profession as a social subset with its own “circulation system.” As to the public, it too now began to take on a degree of importance and was no longer viewed merely as a bothersome horde. The word civilian, brought over from France in the early nineteenth century, entered English parlance by the mid century. The civilian, one could say, was that part of society that was outside the corridor and its culture of expertise but that was, nonetheless, impacted by the decisions that took place within the corridoric institution. It is thus not incidental that the use of the word expert changed during this time as well. Prior to mid-nineteenth century, a person was, generally speaking, “an expert in” a particular field. By the midcentury, we have the first recorded use of the word as a noun. The corridor was the space of expertise just as it was an instrument of surveillance, channeling and defining people into its spatial regimes.

Corridors soon became standard in town and city halls, in state houses and in governmental ministry buildings in both the U.S. and Europe. Typical was the new United States Mint Building built in Philadelphia in the late 1890s under William Martin Aiken, the designer of dozens of government buildings. According to one description: “The vestibule is highly ornate, the corridor extending through the cross-section from east to west is finished in richly variegated marble. . . . The floors are of messanine [marble], the symbolic panels in the vestibule of glass mosaic. The ceilings are finished in white and gold.” Even the U.S. Capitol Building was outfitted—retrofitted—with a set of grand corridors with marble floors, custom-designed Corinthian columns, and vaulted ceilings painted with themes of law and governance (fig. 18). The space linked the congressional library, the diplomatic reception rooms, and various governmental offices. The Italian artist Constantino Brumidi, who established

63. This astonishing fact is from the Oxford English Dictionary, 2d ed., s.v. “expert.”
65. In 1852 construction began on the ornately decorated Brumidi Corridors on the first floor of the Senate wing in the U.S. Capitol. They were part of a new wing constructed by Thomas U. Walter. They are named after Constantino Brumidi, who created the paintings on its interior. Another example is the Town Hall of Leeds, England (1858). On the outside, the building has many of the conventions of historicism. We see grand columnar screens with Roman Corinthian columns. Its tower is a reference to the Hellenistic monument of Halicarnassus. But inside there was a new phenomenon, the corridor that allowed—or at least hoped to indicate—the swift communication between the lawyers and the courtrooms.
Figure 18. The Brumidi Corridors of the U.S. Capitol Building, Constantino Brumidi, Washington, D.C. (begun 1852). From www.flickr.com/photos/mr_mayer/2881719250
his reputation painting for the Vatican, was called in to make the frescoes on the walls and vaults. It took him twenty-five years. One of the purest corridic buildings of that era was the Rhode Island State Capitol (1895–1903), designed by the firm McKim, Mead, and White, where there are two vaulted corridors flanking the central hall (fig. 19). These corridors—and they are labeled corridors and not galleries—are intersected by two cross-corridors that as an ensemble define the shape and program of the entire building. The central domed hall is clamped into place by these corridors. In these corridors, which served as an in-between space in the modern political system with qualities that intermixed the private and public, a new breed of individuals was born, the “lobbyists,” who inhabited and animated this corridic world. A contemporary wrote:

In the Latin *lobby* signifies a covered portico-pit for walking, and in the Capitol at Washington the lobbies are long, lofty, and lighted corridors completely enclosing both halls of legislation. One of the four sides of this Lobby is guarded by doorkeepers who can generally be seduced by good treatment or a *douceur* to admit people to its privacy, and in this darkened corridor the lobbyists call out their members and make their solicitations.66

66. George Alfred Townsend, *Washington, Outside and Inside: A Picture and a Narrative of*
Needless to say, the lobbyists exploited corridor ambiguity for both good and bad. John Beattie Crozier wrote disparagingly in 1901 of “the necessity of lubricants and persuasives to smooth the way [of politics]; and [thus] the appearance in due time on the scene, of the Lobbyist, stalking up and down the corridors of Congress and the State Legislatures with bags of gold on which to draw at will.”67 C. P. Snow’s famous Corridors of Power (1964), which traces the attempts of an English MP to influence the country’s nuclear weapon’s policy, could serve as a coda, expanding the corridor’s metaphorical reach into the popular imagination.68

It was, of course, not only civic buildings that had sumptuous corridors but the new generation of corporate headquarters that borrowed the corridor element to add the building’s prestige. Such was the great corridor of the Cunard Building in Liverpool (1915).69 The ground floor was divided by a skylit corridor six meters wide and sixty meters long, all in a Doric marble motif.

The corridors in these various buildings served several purposes. They defined the aspirations of a civic society under the presumptive enlightened leadership of its elites. They represented the epistemological revolution that was taking place revolving around office work and governmental organization. But they also represented the growth of the private sector and of bourgeois culture in general. Corridors often posed questions of etiquette and in particular about men and women, leading Emily Post in 1923 to write, “a gentleman takes off his hat and holds it in his hand when a lady enters the elevator in which he is a passenger, but he puts it on again in the corridor. A public corridor is like a street, but an elevator is suggestive of a room, and a gentleman does not keep his hat on in the presence of ladies in a house.”70

Das Korridor

Despite the development in England and the United States of the decorated corridor as a space of political and professional socializing and

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69. It was designed by the firm Willink and Thickenes.
representation, it was not adopted for schools and universities that continued to be built around large rooms and halls, usually on a so-called pavilion model. A recent scholarly book on English schools built in the colonies prior to 1900 shows not a single plan with a corridor.\(^7\) Needless to say, the French would never have put a corridor in a school. The schools designed around 1900 by Roger Bouvard (1875–1961) had long school rooms facing onto courtyards.

In Germany, however, where the word *Korridor* was assimilated into its language in the second half of the eighteenth century, the reception was unambiguously positive, so much so that at the end of the nineteenth century the corridic episteme underwent a major expansion of its significance. Why in Germany? Perhaps the fascination with England played a role. Another factor was the distant relationship to the Beaux Arts and its antipathy to the corridor. At any rate the *Korridor* became a key design element in Germany’s new generation of universities. Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s Bauakademie building in Berlin (1832–36) serves as a convenient datum. Though it had a circulation hall around a courtyard, one would be hard pressed to call it a corridic building. The circulation hall is in the style of an enclosed courtyard loggia and wraps itself so tightly around the courtyard as to leave it as little more than a vestige. But beginning in the 1860s almost all of the major universities and research institutes—and there were many—had long, generously scaled *Korridoren* that quickly became an essential aspect of the institutional framework of German academe for decades.\(^7\)

The Berlin Poliklinik (1870) and the Physikalische Institute (1880) are particularly elegant examples. The latter is a U-shaped building with the operating room at its center opposite the entrance. The corridors that emanate from the lobbies of these buildings tie all the spaces together. There is another aspect about these corridors that is important. Though clearly within the purview of the upper classes, these spaces were celebrated as social mixers.\(^7\)


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\(^7\) See, for example, the Chemical Institute, built around 1866 in Berlin by Gustav Konrad, Heinrich von Gossler, and Albert Guttstadt. For the plan, see *Die Naturwissenschaaflichen und medicinischen Staatsanstalten Berlins* (Berlin, 1886), p. 161.
This was a modernity of a brand new type, democratizing to some degree the more restricted corridors of the English and Americans. No similar corridic revolution took place in English universities, and in France the first academic corridor—la galerie Richelieu—was built at the Sorbonne only in the last years of the nineteenth century. The grand academic corridor was also quite alien to the university culture of the United States. Admittedly, McKim, Mead, and White designed a sumptuous, marble clad Ambulatory Corridor for the Loeb Library of Columbia University (1896). But it was no Korridor in that it circled around the main hall. McKim, Mead, and White did use the corridor in some of the university buildings that they designed, but because these buildings were basically conceived as pavilions, which was the popular form of university building in the United States at the time, they cannot compare to the grand German Korridoren. The notable exception among U.S. universities was the 1913 design of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which—modeled specifically on the German university—featured a wide corridor that soon was nicknamed “the infinite corridor,” which ran through the entire building. For decades, until the construction of the Pentagon (begun in 1941), it was the largest corridic building in the world. The Lomonosov Moscow State University (1948–53) designed by Lev Vladimirovich Rudnev brought the tradition of the sumptuous academic corridor to a close.

The Modern, Ventilated Corridor

The problem with all corridors, regardless of how grand, was ventilation. “There is,” according to a report on the Hounslow Barracks, “a narrow corridor running from end to end down the centre, while from it, on each side, open the men’s rooms. . . . To a person unused to them, and entering such rooms from the fresh air, the smell is unbearable.” Throughout the nineteenth century, studies were made of ventilation with doctors decrying the increasingly common use of corridors in hospitals and prisons. “The corridor,” according to one researcher, “by communicating directly with two or more wards having deficient ventilation, allowed one ward to ventilate itself into another, and thus they became the

75. Though the building was designed by the Beaux Arts–trained architect William Welles Bosworth, the corridor was the product of the engineer John Freeman, one of the country’s leading civil engineers, who traveled to Germany to study their academic buildings before proposing his design for MIT. See Mark Jarzombek, Designing MIT: Bosworth’s New Tech (Boston, 2004), p. 33.
means of a general contamination” of the whole building. The evils connected with corridors may be seen . . . in almost every hospital in London.

The common solution was to use staircases as the lungs of the system. An 1899 injunction by the leading designers of schools also wanted corridors to be “of liberal dimensions” and “have an abundance of light and be cheerful in aspect,” adding that “it is also desirable to give to them such decorative features and large proportions that they may express the noble purpose for which the school building stands.” This was certainly the aim of the airy Korridoren that appeared in German universities with broad staircases that brought air up and light down. To avoid the build-up of foul air, the ceilings were usually made an extraordinary five and a half meters high.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the large-scale ventilation machines that were beginning to be developed were a natural fit with the corridor building. The engineer of the seventeen-story Manhattan Life Insurance Building (1894) set the example by creating a system with basement fans that pumped air through large metal ducts that ran up along the elevator shaft and then branched off into the floors along the corridor. The totally enclosed corridor was finally possible and its advantages were immediately applied to a wide range of buildings. Techniques were advanced so rapidly that in The American Scene (1904–5) Henry James is greatly comforted by walking the “long, cool corridors” of the Presbyterian Hospital in New York, even if they are “halls of pain.” He admired “the exquisite art with which, in such a medium, it had so managed to invest itself with stillness.” A leading physician in Germany could now argue unambiguously in favor of a corridor plan since it allowed for better ventilation and also for more personal treatment with two patients to a room than the standard pavilion model with its jumble of interior spaces.

80. See “Power and Heating Plant, Manhattan Life Insurance Building,” American Steam and Hot-Water Heating Practice (New York, 1895), pp. 212–17. The architects were Kimball and Thompson and the engineer Charles Sooysmith. It was demolished in 1930.
81. For attempts to solve this, see Transactions of the American Society of Heating and Ventilating Engineers 18 (1912): 398–400. The society was formed in 1895. Ducting in building came on gradually. Even the fifty-seven-story Woolworth Building (1910–13) in New York had ceiling heights between twelve and twenty feet and had no ducting.
83. See Ernst Beyer, “Die Heilstättenbehandlung der Nervenkranken,” Zentralblatt für
Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast (1903) was one of the largest ventilated hospitals in the world to that date. Giant ducts worked their way in the basement along the corridor to the various wards. The mission of the system was not only to warm and humidify the air but also to clean it of the soot in the outside air.  

George Widdows, a fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects and county architect of Derbyshire (1905–36), used the new ideas of ventilation and hygiene to create a novel form of school that instead of having big halls, as was typical, had instead long “marching corridors” which allowed for indoor exercise when outdoor space was unavailable or during periods of inclement weather. One of the first schools of the new type was the Durnsford Elementary School at Wilbeldon. The corridor, as its name implied, was not used for exercises in the contemporary sense but for drill practices and synchronized motion. “At the end of the course the graduate should, with a little special training, be able to execute with ease most of the marching orders regularly performed by the infantry company. . . . [These gymnastics taught] good discipline, quick response to command, better carriage; and also to make the pupil feel that he was one unit of a group and must act in harmony and unison with his classmates in order to secure success.” Hundreds of such schools were built across England. The “marching corridor” made it to the U.S., of course. But for William Butts Ittner, who designed dozens of schools across the United States, it had the added advantage that it served as a social space (fig. 20). In 1922 he wrote:

It is a delight to linger in the corridor, since on the second floor it is a veritable art gallery. . . . Altogether the school is a miniature democracy; high school students and primary pupils mingle in the most natural manner about the building and grounds. If training

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84. For a discussion, see Hermann Lenhartz, Der moderne Krankenhausbau vom hygienischen und wirtschaftlich-technischen Standpunkte (Braunschweig, 1908), pp. 46–47.


86. “George Widdows’ Schooldays (with Apologies to Tom Brown!),” www.about derbyshire.co.uk/cms/people/george-widdows-schooldays.shtml

87. “A new Board[ing] school has been opened in Central-road, Blackpool. . . . The building is of two floors, with a marching corridor 12 ft. wide in the centre of each floor, having the classrooms grouped round it and entering directly from it” (“General Building News,” The Builder 82 [1902]: 401).
for the citizenship is a fundamental in education, the training, although to a certain extent incidental, is certainly in evidence.\(^{88}\)

By the mid-1930s the corrodic revolution was in full swing, reaching its apotheosis in the 1960s in schools, apartment buildings, and office buildings, where its former importance as a space of prestige and social differentiation gave way to generic linear spaces that facilitated the easy distribution of people and mechanical systems through the building. Its reception was still positive. According to one researcher, the corridor “helped reduce social stress because it gave a wider choice of spaces that were better defined as to ownership.”\(^{89}\) Furthermore, unlike the more formal encounters in the state house corridors, in the context of the corporate office, a new type of corrodic socializing developed, namely, “corridor conversations.” They were routinely praised. In 1971 a scholar noted that “important occasions for listening, apparently, are corridor conversations, exchanges of ideas over lunch, chats at cocktail parties . . . where senior

\(^{88}\) William B. Ittner, “The School Plant in Present-Day Education,” *Architectural Forum* 37 (Aug. 1922): 50. Ittner (1864–36) was an architect practicing in St. Louis and commissioner of school buildings for the Board of Education. Ittner served in that position until his resignation in 1910. He continued as consulting architect to the board until October 1914. In addition to the fifty school buildings in St. Louis that Ittner’s firm produced, there are hundreds of school buildings in over twenty-five other states.

men in the department get together with those whose work is being evaluated.”

The Anticorridic Movement

Modern materials, abstract detailing, and the low ceilings of the post-World War II corridors put an end to the idea of corridor grandeur. Stripped of its vaults, frescoes, paintings, statues, and marble floors, the corridor, despite various claims still in its favor, slowly become a flash-point—one of many, of course—of what was wrong with modernism. Hospital designers instead of seeing a space of hygiene and order now complained that corridors “interfere with normal verbal communication due to their characteristic acoustical properties.” Educators, instead of praising the corridor’s regimenting and democratizing potential, now complained that corridors were a symptom of mechanized learning. Environmental studies instead of proving a corridor’s social effectiveness now proved that they were isolating and stressful and that students who lived in corridor buildings “tended to withdraw socially” and “frequent mental health clinics.” Sociologists, instead of seeing a tradition of personal interaction, saw only dark strips of wasted space that brought out the worst in people. Long narrow corridors and secluded stairwells were to be shunned, so one psychologist advised, since they elevated the levels “of crime, drug use, vandalism and rape.”

The first generation of anticorridic buildings came, however, not from England or the United States but from Germany, where architects in the anxious post-World War II era were looking for a socially open approach to office design in opposition to the American corporate model. The Bürolandschaft (office landscape), as it was called, aimed to create a non-hierarchical environment that, so it was hoped, would allow for an increase in communication and collaboration. The floor plan of the Osram Offices in Munich designed by Walter Henn in 1963 featured a vast open floor with a chaotic jumble of desks. A few years later, the Dutch architect Herman Hertzberger designed the innovative Centraal Beheer office building Apeldoorn, Netherlands (1972) also without any halls and corridors. The building consisted of a series of interlocking blocks around open courtyards that

made it impossible to walk in a straight line for very long. Instead of enclosed hallways one had to walk near to or even around desks. Walls were at a minimum, allowing one to see people in a variety of activities. The office workers, so it was hoped, would always be in touch with the pulse of human activities.

The critique of the corridor quickly expanded into mainstream architectural practice. The 1972 book titled significantly *New Schools* shows a consistent aversion to corridors and halls. The “open plan” school, “composed of broad expanses of enclosed space unbroken by walls,” became all the rage. Instead of spending money on “walls and doors,” so it was argued, the emphasis should be on furniture and carpeting (fig. 21).94 Old-fashioned schools that did not fit this profile had their corridors and schoolroom walls removed. The Austrian-born theorist and educator Christopher Alexander added grist to the mill. In *A Pattern Language* (1977), which was—and still is—required reading in many schools of architecture, he argued that the rationalism of the modern age has “so far infected the word ‘corridor’ that it is hard to imagine that a corridor could ever be a place of beauty, a moment in your passage from room to room, which means as much as all the moments you spend in the rooms themselves.”95 In 2002 professionals were still warning architects that “spaces should be designed as streets, squares and buildings as opposed to corridors, foyers and rooms.”96

The corridor received its most devastating critique from the English historian Robin Evans, who in 1978 argued that the corridor was instrumental in the nineteenth century in changing England from a society that had esteemed social interaction to a society built around the principles of privacy and personal segregation. It played a significant role he argued in “obliterating vast areas of social experience.”97 More appealing to him was the Italian Renaissance villa, which he felt was a place where people had once intermixed in the interior spaces. Evans begins his argument by discussing an altarpiece of the Virgin with the saints clustered around her, presumably to show us—by means of her maternal gentleness—just how far we have deviated from the principle of human interaction. As to the origin of the corridor, he attributes it mistakenly to the ascent of Puritanism. Evans’s pietistic and Italianate leanings are unmistakable.

But the damage was done, and the corridor came to be associated with the shallowness of modernity rather than its grandeur. Today many archi-

tects will still try their best to avoid corridic space. At the new Scottish Parliament Building hardly any two office doors line up. Nonetheless, though the ideological supremacy of the corridor is no longer intact, it is certainly far from dead, and may one day even find an advocate.

Corridic Imaginaries

In this essay I have shown the corridor’s broad historical arc, from its initial obscurity into the mainstream and from its seventeenth-century position in the world of global empire to its twentieth-century position in the world of the global workplace while bringing to light the corridor’s
complex cultural migrations and transformations. I have also hoped to show that the corridor from its inception was an instrument of modernity, relating first to speed, then to power, then to the regimentation of masculinity, then to emerging Victorian social structures, and finally, in the twentieth century, to hygiene, industrialization, and the corporatization of life.

I would now like to address the issue of interiority and modernity, for the subtext of my argument is that the corridor is the site where these two concepts begin to overlap. But first we have to turn to Hegel, who defined interiority (Innerlichkeit) as the essential aspect of civilizational progress. Unfortunately for architectural historians, he never specified what that interiority in the modern age was to look like architecturally since he argued that the resolution was mainly in the discipline of poetry. This did not stop those interested in architectural theory from attempting to extrapolate the Hegelian argument into contemporary terms. Adding to the confusion was the tendency—latent within Hegel’s romanticism—to assume that interiority had to have psychological valences. Evans, for example, argued that because architectural space and psychological space are parallel they need to reinforce each other. Rational modernism and the corridor, so he felt, made that impossible. Sigfried Giedion, also heavily influenced by Hegel, was more optimistic about modernism but this was because the modernists used glass and large openings to obliterate the corridor and open up the building to the outside world both physically and, so he hoped, sociologically. More recently, Henri Lefebvre pointed to windows and thresholds as the key to architectural-philosophical meanings. Following Gaston Bachelard, it is not the civic or corporate buildings that he sees as holding the promise for fruitful interaction between humans but the conventional house, to be more specific, with windows, doors, attic, and basement. In all of these examples the corridor is either absent or a negative, and yet it is hard to discuss architecture’s modern interiority—in its alliance with the changing social and political realities from the seventeenth century onward—without it.

Let me state the problem somewhat differently. There are two ways to


99. Sigfried Giedion, who derives his argument very clearly from Hegel, sees the history of interiority as beginning with the Romans and then, after the Middle Ages, descending rapidly, ending in “the tragic history of the nineteenth century” (Sigfried Giedion, Space, Time, and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition [Cambridge, Mass., 1941], p. 562). Interiority was redeemed only with the likes of Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius.

address the disparity between the philosophical insistence on interiority (as a trope of romantic philosophy) and interiority as a topic in the context of architectural history. The first way, deriving from Hegel and reinforced by Evans and others, is that the corridor is a symptom of architecture’s failure as a philosophical project and that it is an evacuation of meaning that brought about the inglorious end to the humanistic ideal as embodied in the Palladian (aristocratic) prototype.

The alternative argument, which I am trying to make, attempts to decouple the history of the interior from these Hegelianist assumptions. This allows us to recognize that the corridor created meanings through its attachments to the flows of our modernity that are distinctly antielitist, antimetaphysical, and above all public. The seemingly persistent philosophical yearning for thresholds, windows, and views is, from the perspective of this alternative argument, an atavism lurking within the modern philosophical project. Philosophy wants to think antimetaphysically, but live metaphysically.

Admittedly, the corridor did not always rise to the level of a particularly “noble” revolution, allied as it was with the world of malodorous barracks, mindless bureaucracies, bourgeois politics, and the white-collar world of corporate management, but it stood, nonetheless, in dialectical relationship to the great halls of an earlier, aristocratic mindset. The corridor may not always have been on par with the great domes of old nor have demanded the same type of architectural detail as other types of spaces, but once it had been freed from religious and princely metaphysics it made possible a disparate array of structures: parliament buildings, state houses, school buildings, hotels, and office buildings that became the core—almost literally—of modern bourgeois, professional society.\footnote{If there was one type of work that was suited to corridor modernity from the late nineteenth century onward, it was the office worker and later the women in the secretarial pool—what we now call white collar. The term was first used by Upton Sinclair in 1919, but research in it only developed in subsequent decades. See C. Wright Mills, \textit{White Collar: The American Middle Classes} (Oxford, 1951).} And at the moment of its greatness, in the elegant and imposing corridors of the late nineteenth century, it was the intellectual and political space par excellence. The interiority of the corridor institution was not a sanctum or retreat from the outside world. There is no ounce of domesticity in the corridor. For that one has to look elsewhere. The corridor was a social place—and a socially defining place—that in its post-Victorian incarnations beamed its efforts out into the world at large in the form of codes, management procedures, bureaucracies, and scholarly publications.

Clearly the fracturing of the social fabric and the rise of individualism—the issues that concern Evans and so many others—needs to be explained
in the context of architectural history, but the corridor despite the problems of 1960s is hardly the culprit. In fact, until its demise, it created powerful cohesions that defined the modern world. The problem is that these cohesions were implicitly and explicitly opposite to those sought out by conservative forces in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Corridic cohesions were, in other words, not the family units that in the Victorian and post-Victorian age came to be so heartily championed but purely modern ones, built around the nation-state, class identities, bureaucracies, universities, corporations, hospitals, and travel. Each developed its own profile in terms of belonging, enforcement, monitoring, and surveillance, profiles that we today may want to challenge, but our critique has to start with the premise that the corridor was an armature around which a modern society could take shape beginning already with the first, pace-quickening corridor. There is a way to critique the corridor as an instrument of social surveillance, but to run back into the embrace of domesticity is not the answer.

**Corridic Futures**

Today we talk of corridors of power and of urban corridors, rail corridors, and pipeline corridors. In all this the meaning of the word—with its emphasis on speed—has managed to survive. What has also survived from its early associations with the Spanish Empire is the association of the word with modernity and the connection to the horizon. The word corridor manages to update itself with each escalation of reality, moving from body to building to pipelines. And it is also fitting that the word has left the field of architecture where it exists only as a residual to now enter the realm of the geopolitical, where, in fact, it was born. In the late nineteenth century, a corridor in a state house was the locus of the geopolitical. Architecture today can no longer contain or adequately represent the corridic energies of our age, which have moved into the landscapes of the city, industry, and global capital. We speak now of development corridors and migration corridors. The purpose of the corridor already back in the days of its inception, however, was to put power in the hands of those who control it. In the global world, where new centers and new peripheries are continually being constructed, new types of corridors are sure to develop. What had been locked into the interior of the building—the building serving as an expression of corridic mastery—works now at a megascale and perhaps outside the bounds of representation.