

Tanner Lectures November 2017

The Tanner Lectures 2017 were delivered by Jan-Werner Muller, Professor of Politics in Princeton University, on 15 November 2017 in the University Law School. His ambitious topic was “Architecture, Public Policy, and the Ideal of Collective Self-Determination.”

He began by explaining that he is a historian and theorist of architecture rather than a practitioner and that he is primarily interested in the connection between the built environment and politics. Specifically, how might we think about the relationship between democracy and architecture as well as public spaces? If we start from the familiar phrase “form follows function,” what form best expresses democracy? And if architecture is obviously and intimately connected to finance, will it always be in thrall to power?

Professor Muller then turned to what may seem the most obvious form of “democratic architecture,” namely, a built environment that is the result of a democratic process. He then distinguished between representing democracy on the one hand and facilitating democratic practices on the other. He then outlined the difficulties of representing democratic principles and/or “the people” and contrasted this problem with several successful examples of how particular spatial arrangements can help democracy. This is especially the case if the latter is understood to have a dual nature: a central location for generating collectively binding decisions, and a space that allows for the formation of public opinion. He then discussed in some detail how that duality might be translated into the built environment, both historically and in our time, paying particular attention to the question of what the criteria are for designating a space “public.”

He concluded by posing and offering a sceptical response, to the question that has received much attention from media commentators, whether the Internet/virtual space might replace actual physical space in fulfilling a number of functions that are basic for democratic practices.

Finally, it should be said that Professor Muller was a notably fluent and engaging speaker who neither read from a script nor notes. A video of his performance is available on the [Clare Hall website](#).

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