



Roger Breton



Roger Breton

REGIONALISM

A Discussion with Kenneth Frampton and Trevor Boddy

*Kenneth Frampton received his architectural training at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London. He has worked both as an architect and an architectural historian, and is at present Professor at the Graduate School of Architecture and Planning, Columbia University, New York, and a Fellow of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies. He is the author of numerous articles and publications on the history of the Modern Movement, including the influential *Modern Architecture — A Critical History* and *Modern Architecture and the Critical Present*.*

*Trevor Boddy is an Edmonton architect who has studied at the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary's Faculty of Environmental Design. He has written and lectured widely on architectural history and criticism and works as a consultant on heritage planning and urban design. His publications include *Modern Architecture in Alberta* and he is working on a theory of historically based regional design, *Sources for a Prairie Architecture*.*

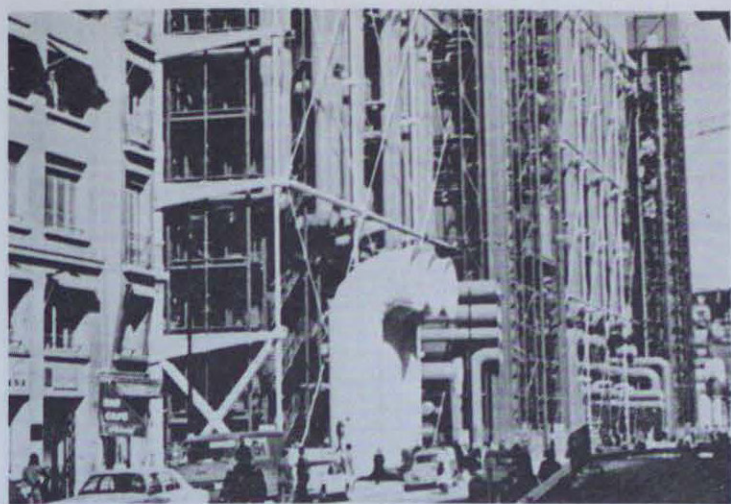
Both Trevor Boddy and Kenneth Frampton were in Montreal in May, 1983, to take part in the international Symposium, 'Architecture et Identité Culturelle' held at l'Université de Québec à Montréal. They kindly consented to take part in a discussion, dealing with the topic of Regionalism, with the Editorial Board of THE FIFTH COLUMN.

TFC: I got into an argument with someone who is not involved in architecture when I said I was going to do an interview on Regionalism and all that it implies. And right away they just flew back at me. They said, "Regionalism is just another thing that architects reinvented for themselves. It's not something that's every really gone away and it's unavoidable." And after arguing for two hours over it, I really began to wonder in my own mind exactly what is regionalism and why are we making a plea for it now? It can be seen in purely physical manifestations, I

think, if we're talking about materials, or it can be seen in visual forms. I think that what you are talking about is something considerably more.

Frampton: Or less. I don't know which. Well, I don't know where to begin.

First of all, I use this phrase, 'critical regionalism', which I borrowed from Alex Tsonis. Actually, I once invented an even worse phrase, 'unsentimental regionalism', but then I read an article by him where he uses the term 'critical regionalism', and I thought it was better. It's an article called "The Grid and the Pathway" and it appears in *Architecture in Greece*, I think, two years ago. It is an article on the work of a Greek architect, who is very active today, by the name of Dimitri Antonakakis; actually, it's a couple, Dimitri and Suzanne Antonakakis. This article, which was osten-



Architectural Review

sibly written to introduce their work, was also a discussion of regionalism in Greece and critical regionalism. Or, in the course of discussing regionalism in Greece, Tsonis made the distinction between regionalism and critical regionalism. I thought that the term 'critical regionalism' was convenient, useful and much better than a term which, in any case, I hadn't dared to use in public, 'unsentimental regionalism'. Nevertheless, I think critical regionalism is awfully close. On the other hand, I don't know how to talk about certain preoccupations without giving it some kind of node around which to structure this preoccupation. OK, that's the first step.

The second step is to say that for me there is a reason behind this, a subtext. Why did I get involved in all this, in any case? Perhaps it's an over-reaction. But, at least in the North American situation, it became rather clear to me that there was this sort of very polarized discourse between high-tech on one side — although there is a very primitive school of high-tech in the United States compared to what is happening in England — and what I referred to, perhaps with somewhat unfair perjorative implications, as a kind of scenographic reduction of architecture to a scenography which makes a very gratuitous, or parodied, use of historicist motifs.

Boddy: Is that synonymous with what you speak of as populism? Do you mean the same thing by those two things?

Frampton: Yes, I do, really, because I have identified those two things together. Again, of course, like all of these kinds of shorthand, it needs a lot of qualification. I use the term populism because it seemed to me that the ideological arguments made by people like Charles Jencks and Vincent Scully, in perhaps somewhat different terms, were more or less populist. They were riding on a wave of reaction, an understandable wave of reaction, to a kind of reductive modern architecture, and a very brutal kind. I personally felt very unsure that what was proposed as the alternative was not also, in its turn, equally reductive. And although it appeared not to be, at a kind of surface level, when you penetrate inside, often you find the same reduction, or a kind of reduction compared to, let's say, Frank Lloyd Wright. I'm not pleading for a Frank Lloyd Wright revival, exactly.

It's not without significance that Frank Lloyd Wright is very ignored in the North American continent. I should be precise; I would say there is a kind of consensus of establishment criticism which is, by and large, very careful not to talk about Frank Lloyd Wright. I was talking to (Thomas) Howarth just now, and I said that in the debate we had inside the Institute in New York, where Peter Eisenman set me up as a kind of fall guy, I had to justify my resignation from the Venice Biennale on the occasion when Paolo Portoghesi presented his whole number on the *Strada Novissima*, on *The Presence of the Past* and all that. And during the course of my presentation, after he had presented, I suddenly had this inspired moment, at which I said, "There is an absent ghost at the Post-Modern feast." Then I paused, and I said, "And the name of this ghost is Frank Lloyd Wright." Well, I think I scored a point on that occasion which I rarely have had the pleasure of scoring to

"The perpetual cult of the avant garde, the perpetual change of that which is art in the twentieth century...requires a building which destroys art."

quite the same extent. And some measure of that is the fact that Scully, in answering me, said, "You're quite wrong about that. Venturi began where Frank Lloyd Wright left off." I think you'd have say that to reduce criticism and the perception to such a vulgar, demagogic level — to say a thing like that is not worth really responding to.

Boddy: Could you go back and fill in the two reductionisms: the reductionism of populism, which would seem to be, in your case, a reductionism down to images and what you were saying tonight about shallow images alone constituting architecture. What is, then, the parallel reductionism of Modernism itself?

Frampton: Well, it is this tendency on the part of some very distinguished people — let us say, Norman Foster, who just recently got the RIBA Gold Medal, Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, and I suppose there are others — to reduce architecture to a manifestation of production, of a kind of transparent economic production.

Perhaps this is best told in the form of a parable, also. Richard Rogers gave a talk in London. Alan Colquhoun made a kind of critical public challenge where he said that the use of the colour on the pipes on the back side, or front side, whichever it is — I suppose it doesn't have a front or a back — of the Centre Pompidou, was decorative. And then Rogers immediately responded and said, "No, it's not decorative at all, because each colour indicates another substance." It is quite easy to see that that reply is inadequate and is a kind of quasi-moral, quasi-functionalist position which doesn't mean very much. What difference does it make? Why is it of functionalist importance that they should all be in different colours? In other words, obviously it is decorative. Yet, the position of Rogers, in particular, and, of course, of that whole school is to reduce it to a kind of technical fact. In defending Centre Pompidou, Richard always compared it to the Eiffel Tower.

So that is a kind of reduction in the sense that it is an optimization of the technical fact, to such an extent that the environment in which you look at art is prejudiced by that. My experience is that you wander in the space; of course, you can see the art, the art is there. But out of your peripheral vision, you constantly see the struts of the tubular steel and all the rest. It's a nervous environment. Ultimately, you could make the argument that it is an environment that is destructive of art. That thing, at its best, is an information machine and works at its best as an information machine, as a library or a bookshop or something. That's where all the action is. And if you compare it to the old Musée de la Moderne in Paris, there is no kind of tranquility in which one can just be with the art, where once can just wander around peacefully. Somehow, the whole set-up is much more nervous.

Boddy: But would not Rogers, with his Modernist hat, his Modernist ideology in place, not just say that? The perpetual cult of the avant garde, the perpetual change of that which is art in the twen-

tieth century, in fact, requires that, requires a building which destroys art.

Frampton: Oh yes, I think he would say that. I had an interesting discussion, it was not elaborated because I am not really capable of carrying it very far, but I do know a little bit about this critic you might have heard of, named Jean Boudrias, with a woman called Monique Hein, who I think is an art historian who teaches at a place somewhere in Montreal, who said to me, "You and Boudrias would have no point in common." Then I raised the question, which she said she had recently discussed with somebody, whether one can still look at an intellectual like Boudrias as a critical figure at all. It's not fair to say that he celebrates, but he stresses the privatisation of society, the reduction of things to images, for example. It is very much a part of Boudrias' apocalyptic theme. My feeling in that regard is that it becomes increasingly difficult to practise the culture of architecture in any kind of critical or refined way if you simply take this kind of apocalyptic position.

You see, I think it's no accident that if you take photography, cinematography, some kinds of media art — in those fields, there is no withdrawal from the modern project, the *avant gardist* project. I don't think it's an accident that that is the case. Whereas if you take literature, music, architecture, painting — there is a very evident reaction in all these fields. I think it's no accident that there is a reaction in these fields and not in the fields that were produced, as it were, by the twentieth century, by technology. There is no need for them to react. They are it; they are the leading edge. Whereas all the other fields are threatened, and so, therefore, they react. Well, in that sense, of course, you can say that my whole critical position is also a reaction. But it's a reaction which I like to think has political aspects to it, although I don't wish to suggest that I think that this political effort can have any kind of global impact. So, in a sense, it's also a sort of resignation, a sense of holding operation, a sense of resistance. The juggernaut of technique, universal technique, is in the saddles, it's obvious. It would be totally unrealistic to imagine that it can be, in a global sense, challenged. In that sense, architecture is not essential to it, of course. Architecture is a marginal field in relation to its project.

There is this very interesting essay of Jurgen Habermas which was given in Frankfurt two years ago — actually, there is a very beautiful journal, which I can entirely recommend, called *New German Critique*, published out of Ann Arbor, by the German department of Wisconsin. In it there's the English version of Habermas's address, which was given in Frankfurt two years ago, on Post-Modernism, and he begins with the Venice Biennale. He begins with the whole architectural situation. And he makes a kind of criticism of neo-conservative philosophers and cultural post-modernism as being reactionary. He says a very beautiful thing there. I can't remember the exact words, but he says that the frictions or social disturbance brought about by the process of modernisation was not called into being by modernist intellectuals. It's a very beautiful phrase. The alienation which people feel as a result of super-development, of what happened to the city, to thousands of other cities. You can say, "This is the architect's fault." Certainly, architects have played convenient roles in relation to this demand, let us say, but I am not convinced that the super-over-development and the rapacity of development, to say that that is the architect's fault, is just plain ridiculous. Architect's oscillate between megalomania and guilt. It's completely absurd.

TFC: And what point are at we now?

Frampton: I feel that one really has to make an effort to kind of resensitize ourselves in relation to the possibilities of architecture. And also to try to find some kind of scalar, or method, with which to deal with the present situation. I had a very interesting discussion with Siza during this (symposium). I said that just recently I was at reviews at Columbia and I began to sense that the work was very disappointing — let's put it that way. I felt that, underneath, why all this work was disappointing was because there was no

"...there is a sort of dialectical relationship possible between typology on the one hand, and topography, on the other; or, if you like, typology and morphology, if you want to talk about the urban situation."

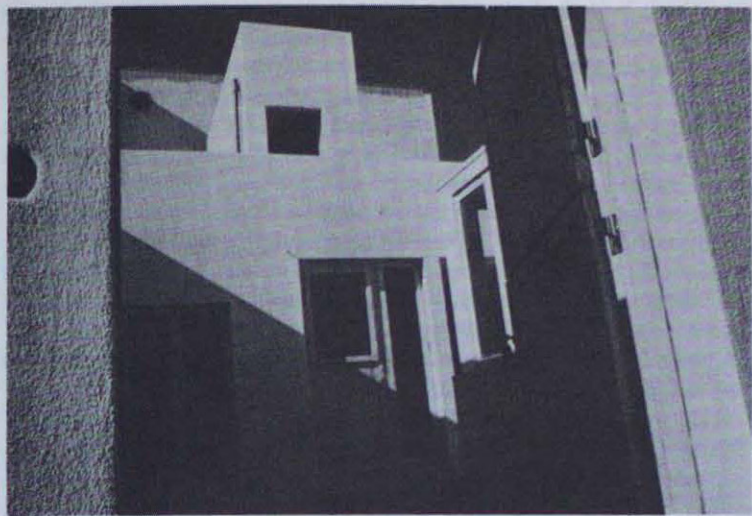
methodology anymore. Somehow or other, the bombardment of the field by all this imagery had even reduced the faculty to a state of confusion about "What are we doing? What do really think is of value?"

It was a much too big a project for the level of the students, but Michael Schwartz gave an extension to Carnegie Hall in New York, which was on a sort of rather narrow piece of the other block, in which he wanted to have a Centre for Contemporary Music, and then studios, and god-knows-what. A sort of semi-highrise building which was to be mixed use. And they had a fifty foot frontage. They got very hung up about how to deal with this question, about how to represent contemporary music. A big, horrible, sort of elephant trap for students. In any case, what was very clear was that they had no feeling — I'm being, I suppose, very patronizing — at all for what is a public foyer; what is a reasonable space in which people should enter before going into a concert. So, some people cut down the fifty foot frontage to twenty feet. Instead of thinking it would be reasonable to optimize the frontage, they started to reduce the frontage, and then fill it full of columns and staircases and god-knows-what.

It suddenly occurred to me that maybe, and, of course, this is the Italian argument, typology is the one method that one can really still work with, in terms of inscribing history in a more profound way, but inscribing it in terms of images. But then I had this talk with Siza, and it's something that I had been feeling my way towards because, at some point, I had been trying to write the thing I gave last night, but I had never really got it together correctly. It occurred to me, in fact, you could say that there is a sort of dialectical relationship possible between typology, on the one hand, and topography on the other; or, if you like, typology and morphology, if you want to talk about the urban situation. So that one takes a kind of type and then one is aware of the fact that this thing has to be mediated, or reflected, by the full level of the context into which the type is set, which also must mean, to some extent, that it has to be mediated by the specifics of that programme rather than any other.

Boddy: And including images, surely?

Frampton: Well, including images, but you see that already I would argue that the typological history of the foyer of the Opera in Paris, and the foyer of Perret's Champs Elysee, and the foyer of... I don't know what; we could go on — Royal Festival Hall, maybe — these images, these volumes and their architectonic rhythm, and all that, and their progressive thresholds, are typological deposits. They're not just images but one can start there. I don't think one should end there, but I think if you start with the image first, then you have nothing to anchor it to; you're just there floating with these things. That is the difficulty about the present situation.



Alvaro Siza

So, when talking to Siza, it was gratifying for me that he thinks that that is the way he works and he thinks it's the only way to work — this idea of transformation of types which are transformed under the impact of circumstantial things such as topography, such as geology, such as urban morphology, such as something specific to that programme.

Boddy: Now, can you turn the full circle and reconcile the transformation of type with what you first spoke of about regionalism. Are the two methods compatible? Do they work at the same level?

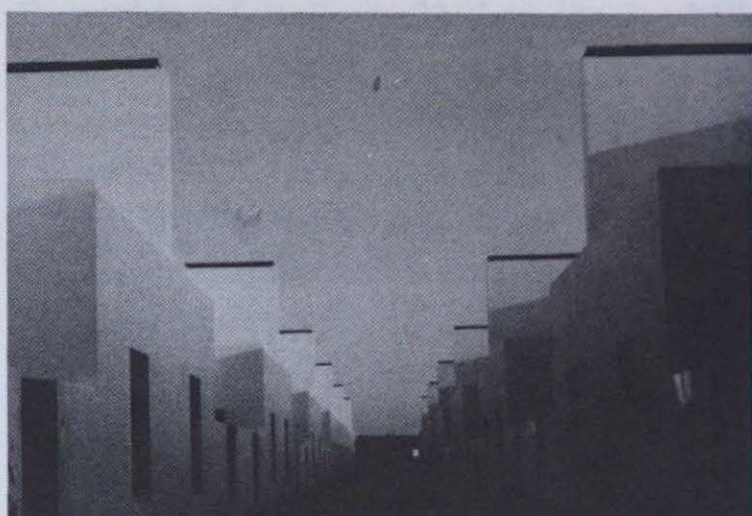
Frampton: It's a hell of a problem. And I don't think I have an answer to that, not, perhaps, a very clear one. But if you say that what I have just described can be taken as a point of departure, then it seems to me that sensitivity towards light, sensitivity towards surfaces, towards detail, towards material, towards sound, towards air movement, that one can try to develop these things as components which are to be experienced not totally by the eyes. Now, I realise that there is a sort of over-determined aspect, in making this argument the way I do, I suppose it's a kind of over-compensation in some way, or you could say it has a certain exaggeration, let's say. You see, I don't really think a vernacular really exists.

You know this very beautiful parable of Loos that appears in this essay, titled *Architecture*, written in 1910. It's a beautiful essay, in which he says, "Well, here I am." He describes a mountain countryside, a lake and all the rest of the surroundings. He says that a state of harmony exists between the buildings, the farm buildings, and the barns and the cottages and the countryside. There's such an order that they do not look as though they are man made, but they look as though they are from the hand of God; that is, of course, they look as though they are natural. Then he says, "But what is this? A modern villa, an unwelcome scream." And all the harmony of the scene that he has described is destroyed. And then he says, "And why is that? Because the villa is designed by an architect. Is it a good architect or a bad architect? It doesn't matter; next to the throne of God, all architects are equal." And then he says the shocking thing, "Because the architect comes from the city and has no culture." Very deep.

Boddy: That sounds like Ivan Illich.

Frampton: Of course, it should: clear. But you see, it's more ironic than Ivan Illich, because Illich starts to fall into utopic, global propositions. Loos doesn't do that number and I think that that's where he's clever. He makes it clear that, in a sense, all these urbanised people, and they are all urbanised people, are uprooted. In that sense, it means we don't really have the vernacular any more. And he does that in a very beautiful parable, also.

He then says, "A peasant builds a roof. And what kind of roof? It's the same roof that his father built, that his grandfather built, that



Alvaro Siza

his great-grandfather built." Then he asks the peasant a question, "Is it a beautiful roof or an ugly roof?" And then he answers for the peasant, "He doesn't know. It's the roof." I mean, that's vernacular. We use this word 'vernacular', as we use this word 'regionalism'. Therefore, in answering this question with which you began the whole thing, this 'regionalism' is what Michel Freitag, as I understood him, said yesterday. To evoke this 'regionalism' is to evoke a strategy, a kind of critical strategic position. If you try to concretise it, of course, it's a mirage. You fall into kitsch, or you fall into this demagoguery again. By implication, I would be a little critical of your (Boddy's) presentation, though I think you took the presentation with much more modesty than I did, and with a certain open-ness, 'that this might not be', you put it very tentatively. But that's the danger, that one will fall into something which can just be manipulated, but which isn't really something that we can cultivate, a level of a complexity which could be enriching — it risks not being able to be cultivated to a level which would really be enriching. So, I am uncomfortable with the word 'regionalism' or 'critical regionalism', but I don't know where else to stand at this moment.

Boddy: I'd like to go into that a bit. I know, certainly, going through the issue, *Modern Architecture and the Critical Present*, when it came out, and going through your essay a couple of times, that was a very troubling phrase.

Frampton: Critical regionalism?

Boddy: Yes. And non-sentimental regionalism would have been equally troubling. What I see, in fact, in your position, is that the rhetoric of the argument propels one towards what is, without a doubt, a romantic position. A position charged with romanticism in the formal sense, thinking back to Rousseau, the nature of response to landscape and to nature, small-r romanticism. And, also, almost inevitably, tied up with this romanticism is an element of sentimentality. Now, to have reached that breach, to look in, and to see kitsch below, and to pull back and say, "Oh no! We must have an unsentimental regionalism. We must have an unromantic regionalism." We must have, what I would hold out to be a contradiction of terms, a critical regionalism. I think that regionalism is, by its very nature, a romantic notion. In the final analysis, after the rhetoric builds you up, you pulled back from that precipice. Do you want to describe that decision and, perhaps, talk a bit about critical regionalism *vis à vis* romanticism? Your talk tonight could have been given by William Morris to the Arts and Crafts Society in 1981.

Frampton: Except I think that there is one difference. I think that it's true that the critical tradition is double-edged, and a lot of people have said that; that is, the critical tradition of Pugin, Morris, and so on, is double-edged. There is a critical aspect and there is also a regressive and reactionary aspect. That's clear. Ruskin, the same story. So, in that sense, I am in that line, without a question.

"My feeling is that you should try to develop a generation of younger people and architects who have, somehow, the equipment to take a subtle approach to this problem, at the level of the discipline itself. Hence, emphasis upon specificity of material, the quality of sound, the possibility of having fenestration that isn't all sealed, the possibility of resisting."

You see, the difficulty with modernisation and the reason why I think there is a great deal of anxiety, altogether irrespective of architecture, completely, is that, it's quite obvious, and we live with it all the time and most of the time we forget it, but the capacity exists to destroy us tomorrow, all of us. And this capacity exists as a consequence of modernisation. This is the triumph of Western Cartesian instrumental reason. Most of the time, we forget it, of course, otherwise it would be impossible. Clearly, this is a buried, repressed element, heavily repressed.

We have a rather violent relationship with nature. Western technology has a somewhat violent relationship with nature. You could say that that same violent relationship is quite manifest in the rapacity of development. It is rather clear that many people who are very real, not romantic at all, who are, after all, speculators, developers. Many of them, by the way, are not Canadian. The triumph of the multi-national corporation: What could be more abstract, more Cartesian, distanced and universal than that? And others that participate in the same ideology but are, let's say, lower level members of the same, they aspire to such power but don't have it — speculators. Well, you can say there have always been speculators, but what's interesting is that the bourgeois class of speculators, in the case of Haussmann's operation in Paris, not only profited from this operation but lived in it. Nor is it the game of the other level of gentlemen I tried to allude to. One of the problems is, of course, the production of objects which are really abstractions from beginning to end. If they could make the profit in some other way they would. It's just an accident they happen to be buildings. They're not interested in living in their buildings and they're never going to. Moreover, they're not ultimately interested in the quality of life in these buildings. They see them as abstractions which will sell for certain prices and return a certain amount of money. This is a pretty violent operation. It's not mediated by those positive aspects of bourgeois civilization, which I think are still quite, for all the exploitation, readily detectable in the bourgeois city, and clearly, of course, that city for which Leon Krier has so much nostalgia.

So, in the face of these things, one response has been the response of Manfredo Tafuri, quite clearly: communism. A Marxist response which — also, I'm vulgarising his position — in the end, is someone who is withdrawn. Today, he says, and I think he's going to stick to it, "Forget about the Modern period." As far as he is concerned, until all of that is sorted out, in some kind of decisive, fundamental historical change, meaning the end of capitalism, there is no point in discussing it any more. Now, I'm probably vulgarising his position, but, in any case, at a certain date, that was the effect of his position. My theory is that for intelligent, critical minds, that's a rather demoralising position.

I will admit that there is a certain romanticism to my position, but what I am trying to do is to build a threshold, or some kind of base,

on which it is possible for a few people to stand, to make works which have a certain level of sensitivity and do not fall into a kind of media conditioning, which is also another aspect of that universal technology which is the universal technology that is closely integrated with the multi-national corporation and, say, the most advanced forms of technology you can imagine. I don't think I'm alone in this regard, because, if you take a country like Japan, some of the most intelligent young Japanese architects have decided to withdraw. They will only build houses, in fact, and those houses are totally introspective. They're introspective because, as far as they are concerned, the modernisation of Japan is an apocalypse with which one can have nothing to do. These defended little houses are microcosms that sit, absurd as they are, in this apocalyptic scene. That's romantic, but...

Boddy: What's the difference between that and the 'dome-zone', Sixties counter-culture architecture?

Frampton: The only difference between these, I think, is that it is possible in some kind of effective nature, in relation to the site it's perhaps not very much, except that there is an effort there to make rather pungent statements. 'Dome-zone' culture is not pungent. It participates in this kind of floating, nomadic anarchy which is very exposed, I would say, to the rapacity of the whole thing.

Boddy: Are not the houses that are created in Japan subject to speculation, swarmed by the very forces which they are rejecting?

Frampton: Let me come at that another way. I had a very interesting discussion with Salmons, for example, and you saw his presentation. I wanted to say it publicly, and now I regret that I didn't say it. Let me go through the whole thing.

Very recently, I looked at two books that have been produced in Barcelona; they are on Basque architects, Luis Pena and Jose Antonio Coderch. Coderch has been practising architecture for forty years in Barcelona. And in that book, which is some little book on his work, there is a residential project in an area of Barcelona which is called Saria. It consists of eight-storey brick apartment buildings, built for a middle-class level, no question, a relatively comfortable middle class. The way these rooms are modulated in the buildings, in terms of the appropriateness of the very proportions and dimensions of these rooms to their probably furnishability, and the way they are then related in terms of a kind of convenient proximity to other things, and the sizes of bathrooms, and all the rest of it, and their terraces, and so on and so forth, had been worked on very heavily, to bring them to some kind of level of harmony. Perhaps a better word is appropriateness, refined appropriateness. Apart from this, it is all very well-built. I looked at this thing, and I had never seen it in person, and I thought that why is it that it is not possible to find those plans in England or in the North American continent; or difficult, let's say.

Then, I jumped from this and I went to Houston and I saw Pelli's Four Leaf Towers, which are apartments designed by speculators and he simply wrapped the buildings in this skin. The crudity of these plans... well, it's hardly worth talking about. Of course, there are no terraces; the whole thing is hermetic because that's... what? Uneconomic? In any case, they are sixty storey blocks, they're not eight, of course. The point is, they are four hundred thousand dollars apiece. I was asking some Spanish students, "What do you think, in '68, those apartments in Saria cost?" And they hazarded a guess that they were probably something like the equivalent of two hundred thousand, at the most, maybe as low as a hundred twenty thousand dollars. Then, I remembered, in the anthology of Gillo Dorfles on kitsch, there is a very beautiful article — I thoroughly recommend it — by Vittorio Gregotti on kitsch and architecture in which he talks about "the slums of the rich piling up outside our cities". And Four Leaf Towers in Houston is slums of the rich.

Then you have this funny thing. You have this stuff by Salmons, and I went to Salmons and I said that the difference here is, and this is a cultural difference, very deep, which is also very hard to do

anything about if you don't have it, that my feeling of the North American continent, and I think it's also true in England, is that people do not build with the sense that they are going to stay there and that they are going to leave these apartments to their children. No, they have the idea that they will buy this house and then they will sell it and they will buy another house and so on and so forth. They already have this idea that this is a commodity; it is not where this family is going to live. Such is the impact of mobility.

In more, somewhat backward cultures, backward like Barcelona, which sometimes is very modern, or Bogota, you have a class that still has this idea that they will put money into this thing and that their children will take it and all the rest of it. So, what I'm getting at is that I feel this fundamental loss and it makes the whole business of being an architect extremely difficult. In a certain sense, you could say that Cesar Pelli is imaginative, or let's himself be imaginative in the game of being the big architect. Cover the thing with a curtain wall, get paid a fee. But what is the object? It is the slums of the rich.

It reminds me of a Jewish joke where Jews are selling sardines to each other, and one day one of them opens up the sardines, and then is furious to find that they're rotten. He calls up his friend, and says, "Hymie, you sold me rotten sardines! What are you doing? We've been doing business for years!" And then the man says, "You mean, you opened them up? You idiot or something? They're not sardines for eating, they're sardines for buying and selling!" In a sense, these apartments built in Houston are not apartments to live in, they're apartments for marketing purposes. They're not doing so well, at the moment, because they can't sell them at four hundred thousand dollars apiece.

Boddy: But, Kenneth, what is the fundamental difference between that commoditisation of architecture and some of the stuff Kagan showed us. When you see that dreadful, dreadful mile after mile stuff, it is commodity, it is produced by agencies under economic regimes towards ends, it is disposable, it is dreadful, it is all of them.

Frampton: It's not easy to respond to that challenge...

Boddy: I just don't think it's a tenable position, in the last few years of the twentieth century, to reject, totally and out of hand and out of nature, the commoditisation of architecture. One must, in fact, deal with it.

Frampton: But how do you deal with it? What do you do? Do you dress it in bits and pieces to make it look more palatable? What do you do? The question is what do you do with the reality of this? It's a big question. My feeling is that you should try to develop a generation of younger people and architects who have, somehow, the equipment to take a subtle approach to this problem, at the level of the discipline itself. Hence, emphasis upon specificity of material, the quality of sound, the possibility of having fenestration that isn't all sealed, the possibility of resisting.

The trick that's being worked now is, in my opinion — again, paranoia and conspiracy theory — that I think that it's no accident that the schools of architecture are in such a mess and that the priority set for the society on the schools of architecture is so low. At some point in the history of architecture schools, in the name of economy, American Ivy League schools decide, "No more five year programs. We're going to do it in three years, just like we do law and all the rest of it." And they are allowed to do it. It's hard to say who is the authority, ultimately. But still, there is no disagreement; everyone follows suit. OK, school is alright, but you finally get finished in offices, so it doesn't matter. Something happened in that jump, in terms of the way architecture is banded about as a *métier* which has a real density in it. And I think that what I find disturbing about Drexler's *Transformation* show or Jenck's position — the specificity of the discipline, in terms of the way you make things. There is still the main potential to articulate things in ways which are rich and nuanced and liberative.

The last time I was in the Toronto School of Architecture, I could not believe the level of the work, to such a degree that I asked myself, "What is the explanation? What is the explanation for this abysmal incapacity to think about architecture?" I didn't ask anybody that question, and I can't answer it myself. I'm just left with a kind of total blank.

Boddy: But surely the situation in architecture schools is one result of the ideological situation; in fact, a lack of paradigm reasoning, a notion of how one approaches or formulates the paradigm. And perhaps, getting back to regionalism, that's why I think a well-defined, workable notion of regionalism could help in this dreadful fix we're in, in this dreadful confusion.

Frampton: Well, here we're agreeing about it, except that, as soon as one touches it, we both experience this, but in different ways, although it comes down to the same thing. As soon as you try to touch this issue publicly, then you are somehow strangely caught. You are forced to ask you, yourself, and then, of course, the others ask, "Well, what is it, exactly, a realistic cultural policy of this period?"

Boddy: So I can use it Monday morning.

Frampton: Yes. So, in that sense, we are in the same boat.

Boddy: Although, for example, we differ on the issue of historicism. I see it as a possible option for forms of regionalism. You would seem to reject it out of hand; *ipso facto*, historicism, or you call it manipulation of images, is not a possible strategy for a regionalism.

Frampton: Well, I am very preoccupied with this idea of transformation, that it has to be worked on, it cannot just be taken like that. This is my position because I feel that it has, somehow or other, to reflect the dialectic, if you like, or the tension of the historical moment in which it is made. Now, that makes it a little bit less accessible; this is a *maison du patriote*, therefore, *signant... pip... pip... pip...* that's a *maison du patriote*, I'll buy it — that's it. The trick is turned.

Boddy: But the issue here is not the source of inspiration, be it historicism, be it a concern for light, be it a concern for sound, but, in fact, the quality of the depth of analysis by which it is done. Surely there is terrible, dreadful, 'shlock' kitsch historicism; there is also, let's say, in token, deeply thought out, profoundly analysed historicism, and to deny it as an option for architects, I think, is an over-reaction. And I can see why you have taken that position, given the Charles Moores of the world doing daffy theme parks, *etcetera*. I can see why one has to, as I put it before, pull back from that precipice, with the teeming sea of populist kitsch below, yet, I think it is going too far. I think, in fact, what you are arguing for — so much of your definition of regionalism could be repackaged, and I could go through history and show other, similar analyses — what you really, in fact, are arguing for is good architecture. And I'm not sure if regionalism is a bit of a red herring in this entire discussion, because you seem to be arguing for a well-thought-out, sombre, controlled, deeply sensitive architecture. Surely, that is what Salmona's architecture is.

Now, if regionalism is something as simple as using the local brick, then, Corbu in Algiers was a regionalist, and one can go through the world. Where does one stop? It's got to be a deeper level of analysis than appropriating Bogota brick, *ipso facto* makes it regionalist. I think if you go through the other factors that make Salmona's work so profound, they, in fact, point at the fact that it's very good architecture, well thought out, deeply sensitive to the needs of the users, offering options, as we talked about before, about opening windows, and aspect and view and ventilation. I would like you to distinguish what it is, in your definition of regionalism, that makes it regional, and not simply a definition of good architecture?

Frampton: I think it is much more to do with the specificity of the place, and that, to me, would be the key factor. And then those aspects which are contingent upon the specificity of the place, that is, the transformation of the given topography, or the given morphology. I like this phrase of Siza's, 'transformation of reality', and then his later qualification of that, in stating that then the problem is to have a sensitivity to complexity of that reality. Then that reality, or 'placeness', is also the light. Then, of course, that can be challenged, in terms of a more hard-nosed response, which would say, "Well, what can you do about the light? What, exactly, specifically, can you do?" To which it's very hard to give a direct, concrete answer, just like that. Except, many buildings are designed and god-knows how much teaching I've experienced in which the question of the light and the sun were never discussed. For example, this business about light, I'm convinced of, of course. You could say it's subjectivity, but I don't think it is — because of the landform and the way the island is oriented — the light on the east side of Manhattan is entirely different from the light on the west side of Manhattan. Therefore, there is a specificity of place, in terms of being sensitive to that light.

Now, on those grounds, Michael Graves's Portland Buildings is a monstrosity. We have reached such a limit that even the people in that area have to say, "You must make these square windows that much bigger because we cannot put up with this business." And they did make it bigger. But even then, in that gray climate, what is the game, after all, in terms of light?

Boddy: But would not the same analysis say that, by the same token, Corbu's Unité d'habitation is good, because it does treat the different elevations in different ways?

Frampton: Well, indeed, but this is where there is great confusion today and this is where one falls into demagoguery. You take the name Le Corbusier and you put a red cross through it, *à la* Leon Krier. This is a level of primitivism which is destructive to culture.

Boddy: Now, be that as it may, would your analysis not result in the conclusion that Unité d'habitation is a pre-eminent regionalist building: sensitivity of proportion, concern with space adaptability, cross-ventilation, variety of unit type, differentiation of aspect, and certainly, control and manipulation of light with the *brise soleil*.

Frampton: Up to a certain point. There is a point at which it is also deeply committed into a kind of Cartesian project, of a certain kind of reason, where the isolated slab in the park is the manifestation of this enlightenment reasoning, this new world. That aspect of it, that uncritical commitment to *avant gardism*...

Boddy: I agree with you, but that seems to result in the fact that Corbu, *sans* the urbanism, is a regionalist.

Frampton: Indeed. Well, I think, it's very important that Maison Weekend, 1935, is a move in this direction. What is very poetic and beautiful about the Maison Weekend is the tension between modern materials and archaic materials; the two are there, they play off each other. And then there follows Seychelles, North Africa, and the Maison Jaoul.

Boddy: Even La Tourette, I would argue.

Frampton: Indeed. This is already a piece of auto-criticism. This is the dimension of this person in terms of his own development. This is where, to put a red cross through Le Corbusier, is the greatest kind of... Siza said yesterday that this reaction to Le Corbusier is just crazy. It's like pushing him out without seeing, it's like megalomania and guilt, it's like the complete opposite; he's either everything or he's nothing.

Boddy: In fact, what we have, also, among the commoditisation of everything else, of buildings and modern life, is the commoditisation of architects and architectural reputations. I think it's one of

"You take the name of LeCorbusier and you put a red cross through it, à la Leon Krier. This is a level of primitivism which is destructive to culture."

the most tragic things in our clumsy, club-footed discourse that we have today.

Frampton: Absolutely, I agree totally. The fact that Wright's efforts with the Usonian Houses, in terms of accepting the reality of the suburb and trying to raise this reality — I suppose you could say that it is a romantic perception — to a level of cultivation, which is at the same time economic, is something which I think people never realised. That is something upon which one could build, as opposed to just consigning it to the dustbin of history.

But you asked me quite complex questions about historicism, and then I wanted to ask you a question back. Who do you think, today, has manifested a building which is historicist and where the full dimensions of that historicism have been developed to a very rich level?

Boddy: That is a very difficult question. I would probably sidestep by pointing to the nineteenth century and saying, "Well, people did it then." That's no problem, from Ledoux on, to find people who were sensitive. Today, it's much more difficult. It depends upon what one means by historicism. If Riccardo Legoretta's use of the street wall, with Mexican colours, of elemental forms of traditional architecture, is historicist, then I'm fully in favour of it.

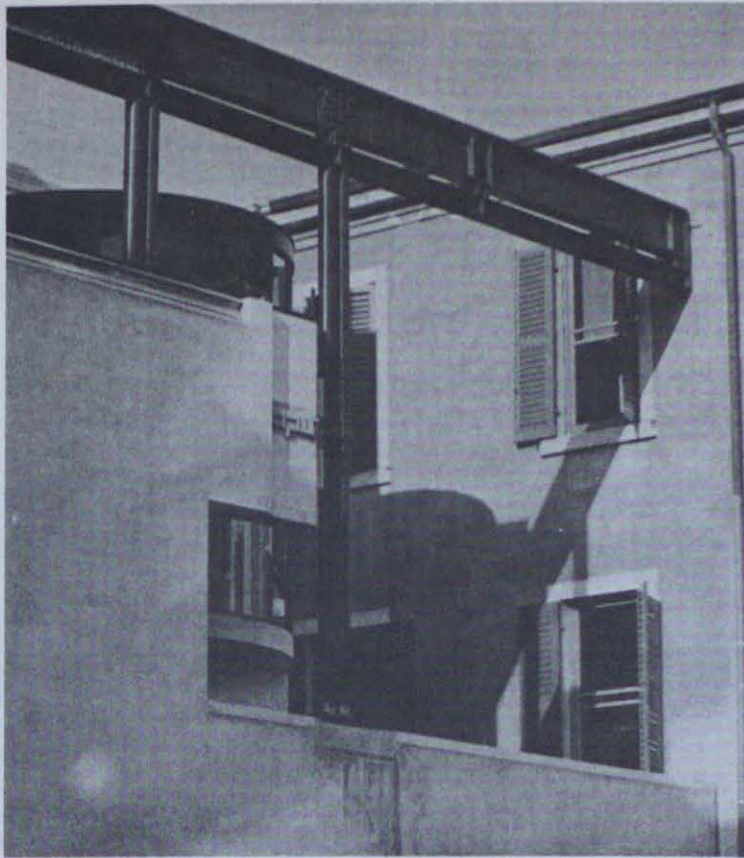
Frampton: And so am I. So, we have no disagreement there.

Boddy: It's certainly dealing with images, and populist vernacular images at that, and I think it can be done at that level. But once again, I think that the Bob Stern appropriation of ridiculous ornament, poorly understood and grossly misapplied, is the paradigm of how to do it wrong, and what is bad, evil and dangerous about historicism today.

Frampton: It is also interesting that he, of course, is now reacting to his own position. He, at least ostensibly, says that he wants to now do classicism, and looks to Allan Greenberg to tell him to do it. What that will produce, I don't know. He's rather intelligent, in his own game, so to speak; he's really moved away, or at least has the verbal intention, from the gratuitous business to kind of being a 'gent'. We'll see. I don't know what he'll make of it.

Boddy: It's an extremely difficult issue and I don't think we're as far apart as we might think. I do object to the wholesale buying and selling, appropriation of architectural imagery, their reduction to TV images, the plastering on of facades. I was down at Complexe Desjardins and there are two constructions of entrance ways. Did you see them? The absolute worst of the flaky post-*Strada Novissima* post-modern colour, an entrance which is not an entrance, a little *objet* full of cute little voussours and funny little crenellations. I was abhorred when I saw that. I went down with Peter Rose, and I was accusing Peter Rose of, in fact, doing them. I took that back right away because I realised that Peter Rose is too smart and too good an architect to have done that and then we looked at it and it wasn't.

That bothers me, the historicism that was appropriated there has absolutely nothing to do with Montreal, as well. It was straight out of the glossy magazines, circa '79-80. In fact, if someone had gone to the trouble of studying the grammar of ornament of Old Montreal, had really looked at those nineteenth-century cast-iron warehouses, I would have forgiven them. In fact, I might have even supported them. Perhaps you would, too. Perhaps I have over-characterised you as so pointedly anti-historicist: perhaps



P/4

"I think Scarpa is the only person, really, to follow Wright in a way that's fully interesting."

there are situations where they can go forward.

Frampton: Certainly, your Legoretta example...

Boddy: Or in Botta, your own examples from the essay. There's no doubt he's referring to polychrome traditions in that part of the world. He's understood them and he has reiterated them wonderfully in different materials. And that is the only example, which is also interesting, of the series of projects you helped put forth as regionalist which does make that explicit reference.

Frampton: To colour, you mean?

Boddy: To colour and to overt historical form. Perhaps to type in some of them, but not to exaggeration.

Frampton: Well, in the Lumignano farm, for example. You see, Scarpa is someone who interests me a lot, and Scarpa was Botta's master. I think Scarpa is the only person, really, to follow Wright in a way that's fully interesting.

In the Lumignano farm, you know that thing where he extends the barn in the forecourt in the front of the house, then the tiles are the same and I suppose the timber that supports the tiles is the same. But the major truss structure, which then supports the rafters on which the tile are hanging, is welded steel, not wood. It's welded steel, but then, of course, the way the steel pieces are put together still makes some allusion to traditional truss construction. That jump is very interesting and important. I think it then both speaks of a continuity and then, also, it speaks of its own historic moment, in a very manneristic way. I think Botta got all of this from Scarpa. For example, Botta used polished plaster, which is a technique I think they still know how to do in Italian Switzerland, some technique where you put the dye, coloured dye, into the plaster, and then you bring the surface of the plaster with some kind of very highly glossed level, which all sounds, in itself, not all that interesting, ex-

cept that it gives an effect like gesso, of the colour glowing from inside the material.

In Morbio, I don't know what it is — I'm going to ask him, actually, because it really interests me — he has used a wash on the concrete inside, in the hall, which is a kind of Pompeian red. This is not Pompeian red paint; this is some kind of wash that goes onto the concrete and there is this curious sensation that there is some kind of veil, which gives the concrete the quality that the colour is also coming from inside. Still, it's concrete and not painted concrete. It's very delicate. That, I think, is deeply interesting. This kind of thing is the way I think we can really make something.

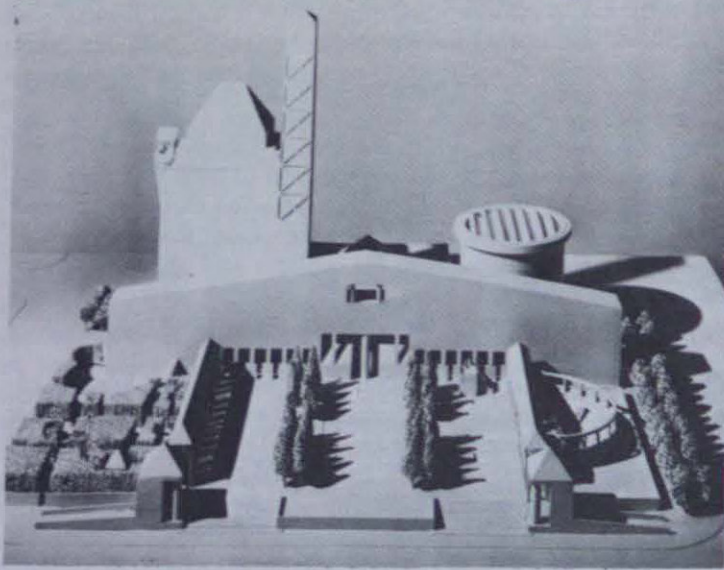
Then again, another conversation with Siza. I've long been an admirer and I'm more of an admirer than ever. Actually, I've not ever seen his buildings, I have to admit. I'm going to go and see him this summer, or kill myself. But he told me something very interesting that happened in Berlin, the story of Bruno Taut's buildings, painted in polychrome. They decided to repaint. They match the colour, but they have to use, or they do use, because it's available, a plastic based paint. They put it on the building. In a year or so, the building starts to rot because, they discovered, it can't breathe. Then they have to go to East Germany to buy paint that's not plastic paint, because they can't buy, in West Germany, any kind of paint but plastic paint. Then you see, suddenly, the connection between multi-national corporations, creation of markets — "You all have to buy this stuff or nothing" — and culture. This is where you can really touch it. If one tries to think like that, one can sort of try to get oneself back to some way of working.

TFC: I just have one other question, talking about megalomania or guilt, as you mentioned before. What is our Mississauga City Hall?

Frampton: I asked for that, didn't I? Actually, what you (Boddy) had to say about Mississauga is very interesting and I had never really looked at it like that before, and it certainly is very encouraging to look at it like that. Also, you didn't say, which Odile Hénault referred to, is the other aspect of it, in a certain sense. This is a very presumptuous thing to say, but I do know Ed Jones very well, I also know that, at a certain point in London, he became very influenced, extremely influenced by Leon Krier. So, certain aspects of that building are very influenced by Leon Krier, and a number of projects Ed has done before.

First of all, the competition conditions were really set up to produce a classical, or symmetrical, operation, on a very difficult site because there is this monster shopping thing and these high-rises already compromising the situation from the beginning. So, I think that the solution is an extremely good solution, from the point of view of its richness, volumetrically, and also in terms of meeting all the specifics of the programme. I personally hope that they will re-work, rather heavily, in order to give a less schematic reading to all these sort of historical motifs because they are schematic, I think. If they are converted like that into working drawings, they will remain a little graphic, I think. So, if they can develop — somehow integrate — those references with the way the thing is built, and, therefore, change them in that process, or refine them, then I think they will have to come to something and that building will become more and more interesting.

Boddy: I, for one, would like to see, if not removal, then whole-scale reduction of the Krieresque elements. The things that were implicit in George's programme, the arcade around the base is perfunctory and redundant and shouldn't be there, the pergolas, much of the treatment down at the grade level is not well thought out. Granted, it was implicit in the programme, but I think it should be changed. It's one of those cases where that programme has generated a good solution; now, one throws away the programme and adapts it to the final need. I think some of the severity, the Ledoux formality, strength of that main facade needs to be tempered. It could be quite appalling and rough.



"...Mississauga City Hall at least attempts to make reference to the place of its creation. Mississauga City Hall is a regionalist building."

One thing I did in my essay for Rizzoli, a theme I developed for the book, was a comparison-contrast, typical Banister Fletcher technique, with Grave's Portland Building, because they are very similar. Similar programs, similar size; in a sense, new cities, searching for identity, wanting a civic symbol. Even qualifying, as I have, the Krieresque elements, I think the Mississauga building is far more profound, although I think it will have a fraction of the impact. It is, in fact, a more difficult building, and a more complex one spatially. It took me many times through to understand how those interior spaces connected — in fact, how a city room, a sense of space, on the interior, was created in a quite wonderful way and yet the building does work at the level of moving people, moving materials and goods.

Once again, this gets back to the sad state of architectural discourse and, perhaps, the commoditisation of architects; there are no easy, hang-onto images generated by Mississauga, whereas there are at Portland. One looks at those bloody keystones, the vousoirs, the colour and the temple on the roof, and one's got it. You can walk through any bloody architecture school in the world right now and see legions of young women and men attempting to imitate that, without having the courtesy to Mister Graves and to his building to have understood how he arrived at those elements and, in fact, understanding his sources. It's just, as you said, appropriation of images. It's buying and selling of images; sticking them on places they don't apply.

I think that one of the great strengths of the Mississauga building is its local reference and having the guts to make rural references. We all want to live in world cities. It takes great guts on the behalf of urban, sophisticated architects to take things like barn silos, those sort of things, seriously and, in fact, as a repertoire for inspiration in architecture. I think, for example, it's far more profound than Piano and Roger's appropriation of industrial imagery. In fact, it has something to do with the society which has produced Mississauga, which, by and large, was rural by birth, has come to the city, maintains links, often family links, back to the countryside. It is, really, quite a wonderful analysis. It's an interesting point of comparison, those two buildings.

Frampton: Yes, I would agree with your comparison. The thing about the Graves building is that it's very emblematic. It's sort of use of Ledoux — in a way, he does relate to Ledoux — the emblematic element of Ledoux is there. And I think you're right that Mississauga is less emblematic and more volumetric, more

concerned with the creation of a public realm. But, of course, you have to say also that the program was already more concerned to create the public realm.

Boddy: Be that as it may, even strictly at the level of imagery, the imagery of Mississauga City Hall at least attempts to make reference to the place of its creation. Mississauga City Hall is a regionalist building. Whereas Portland did not, although Graves attempts to justify, saying that this motif and that relate to that, the colour came from the surroundings, all this bafflegab.

Frampton: You've seen Portland?

Boddy: Yes, I've seen it.

Frampton: The amazing thing about Portland is that the two adjacent buildings on either side, which are by the same architects, dated 1907 and 1914, one is the City Hall proper and one is the County Law Courts, have provision for pedestrian linkage through their bodies, so to speak, between the park and all that. Therefore, it seems to me that a really profound, contextual statement on Grave's site would have been very wise to have followed the same thing, and to have made some kind of galleria going through and to have brought the cars underneath some other way. That's what's implied by the scheme, of course, because it has its entrance on axis on the outside, of course, it's nothing of the sort. In that sense, it's a really disturbing, very curious building, publicly. And the *parti* — not understandable; turn the shops outward, instead of in on themselves to consolidate them, making cafeteria space, so-called on the plan, an eating terrace, but who would ever want to eat there?

Boddy: And the whole notion of that dreadful parking garage entrance on that wonderful park, the nicest space in the city. It's a tragic shame.

TFC: Getting back to Mississauga, what came first, the regionalism you speak of or the reference to Krier's school at St. Quentin-en-Yvelines? Which was the first image? Which was really the most important?

Frampton: It's very hard to say, I think. Absolutely.

Boddy: I think you have to go behind both and go to Baird's programme and the line of thinking it generated. I entered the competition with a group of people and I know that programme well. It was bloody frustrating to work with it and, especially knowing George personally, those little light bulbs would go off and, "Oh no! That's what it's going towards." So, it was a massive generator of notions, of what is an urban building and what is this room doing. It was the first progenitor of the building. Very early on was this rural reference element, the inspiration of the barn silo, *etcetera*; that was in quite early. I think that was one of the original *partis* on behalf of Jones. And a lot of the formalist stuff...

Frampton: What you call the Waldorf Astoria.

Boddy: Yes, the Waldorf Astoria, the chateau stuff, that's Kirkland, once again, tempering Jones. I would gladly see that go. I could do without that stuff, along with the Krier stuff, and I think it could still be a marvelous, powerful and, I hope, influential building.

Once again, getting back to Kenneth's earlier question, you do grasp for adequate examples of regionalism, now, especially ones that are profound and do it on more than one level, do it in more than the use of Bogota brick, do it more than Douglas Cardinal curving curvilinear buildings set against the prairie landscape. This is a very crude, simple regionalism, if you want. I hope and pray that there is a deeper level to it. If the concept has got any validity and any application, it must. That's why a building as complex and as rich, and there is no other word for Mississauga City Hall but rich, especially as it has been transformed since the competition, as rich a building as that bodes well for the concept.