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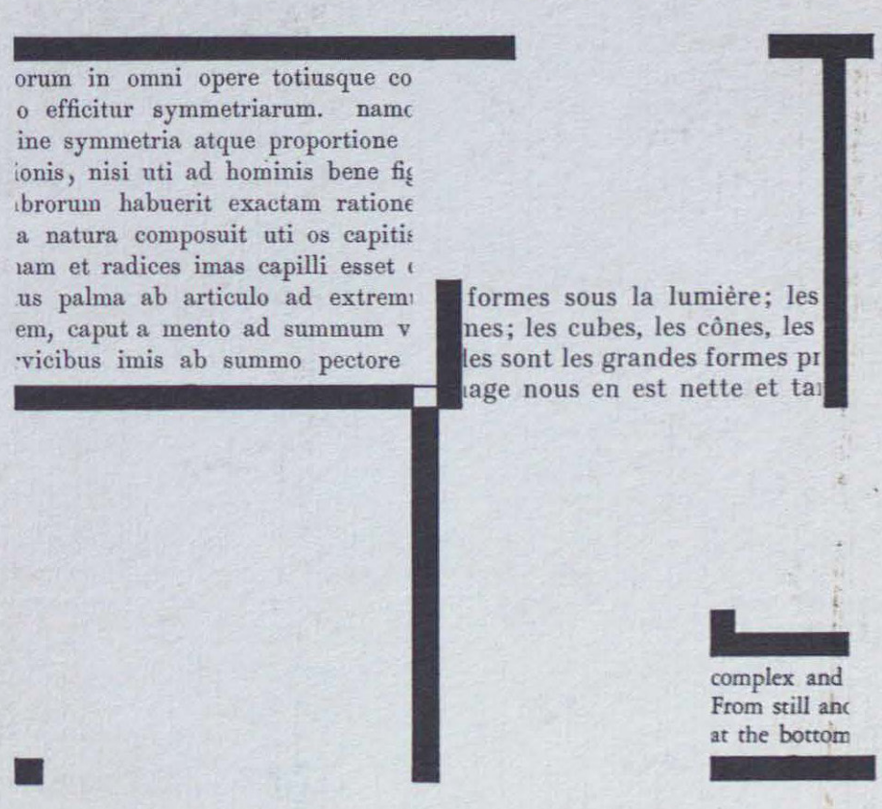

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Someone might tell you that's progress
but I don't know.
Probably the man on the bulldozer would
or the man who hired the bulldozer
would call it that

but I don't know if you
would, if you went out to see a forest
full of animals and insects and running water
and what you saw was a house
and some concrete
and a mailbox.

You probably wouldn t.

L. Collins

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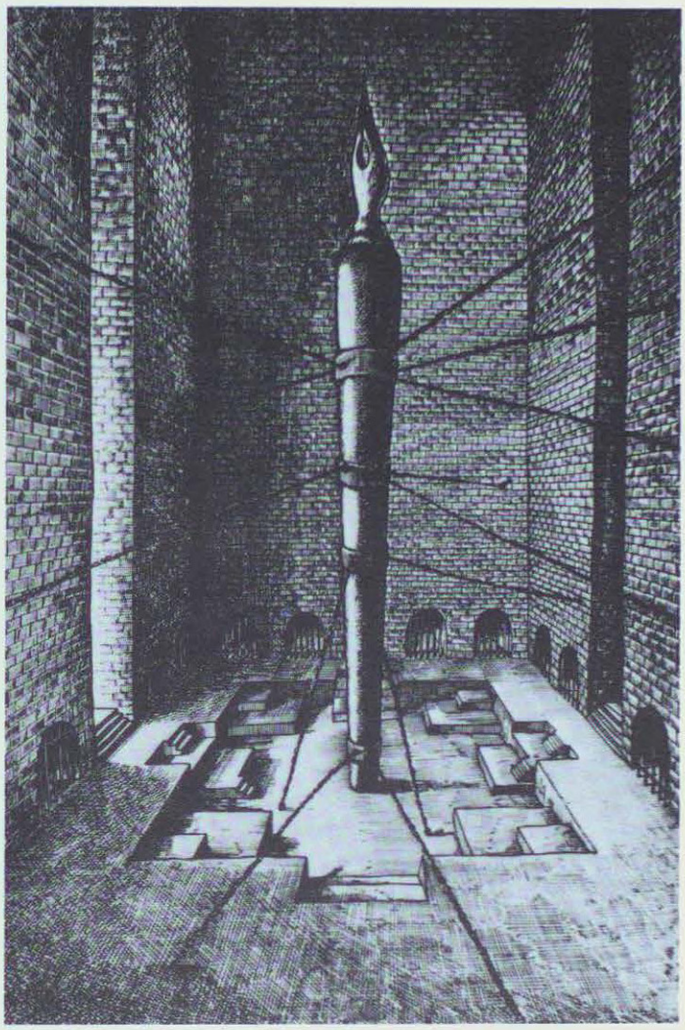

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EDITORIAL

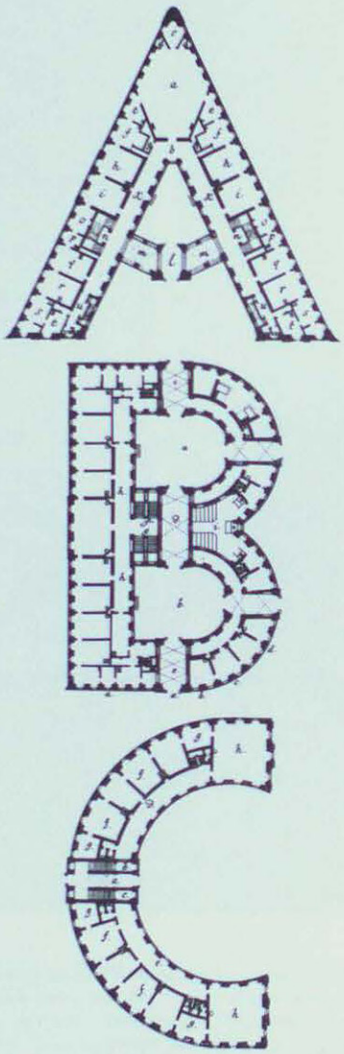
Since Vitruvius first put pen to paper, writing has had a profound influence on the course of architectural history. In much the same way that a drawing helps to communicate an architectural idea, writing is an important instrument in the development of architectural theory, in criticism and in architectural education. At another extreme, writing also has a direct influence on architecture - writing can also be *about* architecture.

It is not entirely surprising that the great Victorian novelist, Thomas Hardy, was trained as an architect. His carefully worded, long descriptive digressions create a clear image in the mind of the reader of a place, a building or a room. The image is almost definitive - one can sense the quality of light, the atmosphere, even the colours and textures present. With a few words (perhaps, in Hardy's case, a few more than a few) the writer has created or recreated that room in which the plot unfolds and the characters play out their roles. The writer draws upon his skills and talent to evoke that image for the reader; he is entirely in control of that which he has created.

The task of the architect is different. He shares or receives the image from the writer but he must actually realize it. The room he creates is back-drop, a framework in which life, over which he has little control, takes place. Whereas the writer can reduce his description to a few words, particularly where the description is easily associated through a common experience, the architect must transform that image into a built reality. The writer *synthesizes* the pieces needed to communicate the image while the architect must *assemble* all the pieces needed to created that image.

It is this assembly, the translation of an image into a built form, that troubles architecture. The Romantic movement of the past two centuries remains a laughable excursion in architectural taste. On the other hand, its disregard for the conventional functions of architecture in favour of a pure expression of emotion marked a critical point in the evolution of architectural inspiration. Hand in hand with all the other forces that created it, literature also affirmed itself as an important source of inspiration. Unfortunately, this necessarily implied that the development of a universal architectural language was interrupted by introspective and personal expressionism. It was an architecture that spoke loudly but in an unfamiliar dialect. Each commission was burdened with the expression it sought, progressively exaggerated by new technical resources.

Piranesi's drawing as well as the drawings by Gandy of Soane's *Bank of England* in ruins are familiar romantic images. They declare an architecture of a certain level as an autonomous creation, devoid of life function. It is an extreme and indefensible statement. But it is important in revealing the emergence of emotion through experience shared by the viewer and the architect. It is an evocation of memory and, as in literature, feeds off the associations of that memory. One need not have been an architect to have been impressed by these drawings.



J.D. Steingruber, Architectural Alphabet

Language is the basis of both literature and architecture. Assembling letters into words, words into sentences and sentences into paragraphs is a remarkable human invention. The ability to use these abstract characters, words and sentences to stir emotion, to communicate ideas and to awaken memory is very nearly incredible. Architecture, using a language that is conventional or not, that is at once its own and that of all humanity, shares this same potential. The translation of an image into an architectural realization, from one language into another, is a critical issue. The language of architecture either has too small a vocabulary or too limited an interpretation.

Steingruber's *Architectural Alphabet* is a purer, if less serious, excursion into the relationship between architecture and language. Besides the absolute folly of the excruciating detail in these plans, there lies a warning. Architecture and language both serve functional and emotional needs. The architect can be a poet or a copy writer, but it is his responsibility to ensure that he is understood. There is no humour in Steingruber's Alphabet for an illiterate.

by Mark Poddubiuk

FORUM

Letters

Under the banner of 'Western Canadian Approaches' *THE FIFTH COLUMN* Summer 1983, pp. 26-28, Roger Kemble has created a confused and flaccid argument for a personal methodology. He mixes politics, history, sociology, behavioural psychology and organic visions of natural determinism – all drawn from the mythology of recent Modernism – with architecture and urban design. It is this last subject we wish to address, especially since it is now his consuming interest.

Mr. Kemble states that '*the essence of urban architecture is public space*' and '*the essence of urban space is the manner in which it is enclosed*'. The project which he then uses to illustrate his concerns, the Kingsway project, reveals instead much in common with other recent modernist work in Canada in its egocentricity and its failure to make a public space. It refuses to use its building mass to define the street edge and devotes its most important street frontage, Kingsway, to parking. The secondary street which also borders the project, is treated to incidental relationships with townhouse fronts and a large landscaped area. The drawing itself indicates *no* concern for the making of public space; not even a line indicates the other side of the two streets, much less the context of buildings along those edges. There is not a single section or perspective drawing showing the containment of public space; surely what is not drawn is not of concern to the architect.

Mr. Kemble appeares to have at least a superficial enjoyment of Georgian architecture but to have missed the essential characterisitcs which give it its power; the relationships between the building typology and the morphology of the public spaces. The proportions of the great squares, the composition of the garden crescents and the street sections were all the concerns of the public-minded architect. Thus it is the exterior form and detail of the facades which define these public spaces and which makes them appealing to this day. In the Kingsway project the terrace fronts mimic the curved form of a crescent but do not make a public space, which in this case is subverted to the family's biological need for sun in the garden. Perhaps Mr. Kemble could study a local example of modern-day Georgian terrace housing, the False Creek Townhouse project designed by Peter Cardew when he was with Rhone + Iredale, which provides both an edge to the public space and sunshine for the back garden in admirable fashion.

Mr. Kemble's attempt to provide a lesson in political history as justification for his selection of form further confuses the issue. He states that the terrace house typology is essentially democratic; one wonders what there is more inherently democratic about the type than the hotel or apartment type which forms much of the fabric of Paris. Furthermore, he seems unaware that the *Royal Mile* is thus named because it was commissioned by the King and that it was London's attempt to outdo or at least measure up to the *Rue de Rivoli* in Paris. And finally, these are *palace* facades, behind which exist many doors to many houses, all subordinate to the bourgeoisie's desire to evoke the lifestyle of the aristocracy. Democratic? Hardly.

For in the practice of architecture in Vancouver there are rare possibilities: because it is located in a superb natural backdrop, the potential exists for an extremely powerful dialectic between that setting and the urban form. In its current state, however, Vancouver can at best be described as *suburban* and it will remain that way as long as architecture like Roger Kemble's Kingsway project is exemplary of Western Canadian Approaches.

Pauline Fowler
Leo DeSorcy

Intellectual jousting has always frightened the life out of me. Yet as an architect with pretentions to write and to be an artist,I must be prepared to take rampant criticism no matter from what direction.

Nevertheless the voids in my knowledge and education stand gaping. All I can say is that only through passionate dialogue may I learn. Heaven knows I've given enough criticism myself, why should I be shy in taking it. I am of course referring to the letter of November 14, 1983 from Pauline Fowler and Leo DeSorcy.

I am pleased that these two western letter writers share with me an admiration for Peter Cardew's work. I first made known my pleasure of his False Creek townhouses, and their Georgian reference, in *The Canadian Architect*, July 1980.

For an appreciation of how Georgian architecture came about, refer to Sir John Summerson's book on that subject. It does not indeed come about from a quasi-democratic process much in contrast to European planning of that time. In the same vein, I doubt that the *Royal Mile* was created in response to their *Rue de Rivoli* . Indeed revitalization works on this latter street were carried out in 1850-2-5. Admittedly it existed before then,but hardly in the same class as *Regent Street* which was completed before 1825. More likely the envy was vice versa.

As for my own work, I regret it seldom lives up to my theorizing but I keep trying. As for the Kingsway project I would caution any student from giving an in-depth critique on the basis of a small birds eye view. In fact the amended surface modulator, more commonly known as the build-to line, is in effect on the Kingsway facade. There is a public space there too. Look more closely.

Anyway I appreciate Fowler's and DeSorcy's response. In all the twenty years I have been trying to set up some intellectual discourse on architecture in Canada, this is about the third response I've had. Mostly my work is greeted by a dull thud. Obviously they have lacked interest. Thank you anyway. You haven't heard the last of me and I hope I haven't heard the last of them.

With appreciation,
Roger Kemble

Layout by Nathalie Fredette

Mississauga: A Posthumous Glance

by Georges Bulette

Le projet pour un Hôtel de Ville à Mississauga consiste en un exercice académique tirant profit de l'intérêt renouvelé pour la forme urbaine traditionnelle, la réappliquant de façon simpliste et sans discernement.

C'est un ensemble indépendant, conformiste et implosif, dépourvu de toute signification précise quant à la forme du centre urbain duquel il doit faire partie intégrante. Conçu dans le contexte du débat actuel sur l'architecture urbaine, ce project n'est en fait qu'un mélange informé issu d'un urbanisme plus traditionnel qu'il essaie d'égaler et de la planification moderne qu'il dit rejeter.

Assuming the Regional Municipality of Mississauga has cause to exist as such; that urban sprawl and functional zoning have any continuing need to be administered; that the establishment of an urban centre to a dead stretch of this kind has the validity to be considered; the Project for a Mississauga Regional Municipal Hall – as manifest in the competition proposals and the competition programme itself – is an academic exercise capitalizing on the current renewed interest in traditional urban form, uncritically reapplying it in a pedantic and simplistic fashion.

The field of the chosen site – largely vacant or underused land, a large shopping scheme, high-rise office buildings, some very wide roads – can be said to solicit two types of responses: implosive and explosive. Both are valid reactions to the bleakness of the surroundings.

The implosive response consists of an entity closed in upon itself. Its significance lies in that, standing alone, it disassociates itself from its bland entourage whose friendship it does not seek and strives to be its antithesis. It is a hermetic response.

The explosive response – while still attempting to be antithetical to its surroundings – is not self-referenced but rather seeks to generate potential relations with its future context and serve as a catalyst for its development. It is dynamic and multidirectional and a primary element.

To build an urban centre from virtually nil, its nucleus must be the result of an explosive reaction. When this nucleus is a major civic building in which accessibility is of fundamental importance the proper choice is unequivocal.

The chronological element of an undertaking of this nature is crucial. As the first physical manifestation of a broader project, the nucleus must be able to remain alone – undiminished – until, if ever, its immediate vicinity becomes properly built up. It must allow its external spatial nature to be transformed by the future building it is to generate. It must allow these subsequent buildings to contribute to and consolidate the spatial structure of this new and evolving urban enviroment.

The nucleus, therefore must be a purely freestanding constuction that permits itself to be enclosed and redefined by the fabric that engages it. This is not to say that all building types considered monuments be freestanding. A building is freestanding according to its social importance and strictly subservient to the demands of the context and the opportunities it provides.

By an additive process, the chronological nature of the undertaking is embodied in form. As an anchoring point of reference, the nucleus serves as a culmination point where multiple and diverging images, axes, and directions come together since it was the point of origin. The absence of a complete general plan – even if never implemented – is a compromise and could deny considerable coherence in the ongoing formulation of the problem.

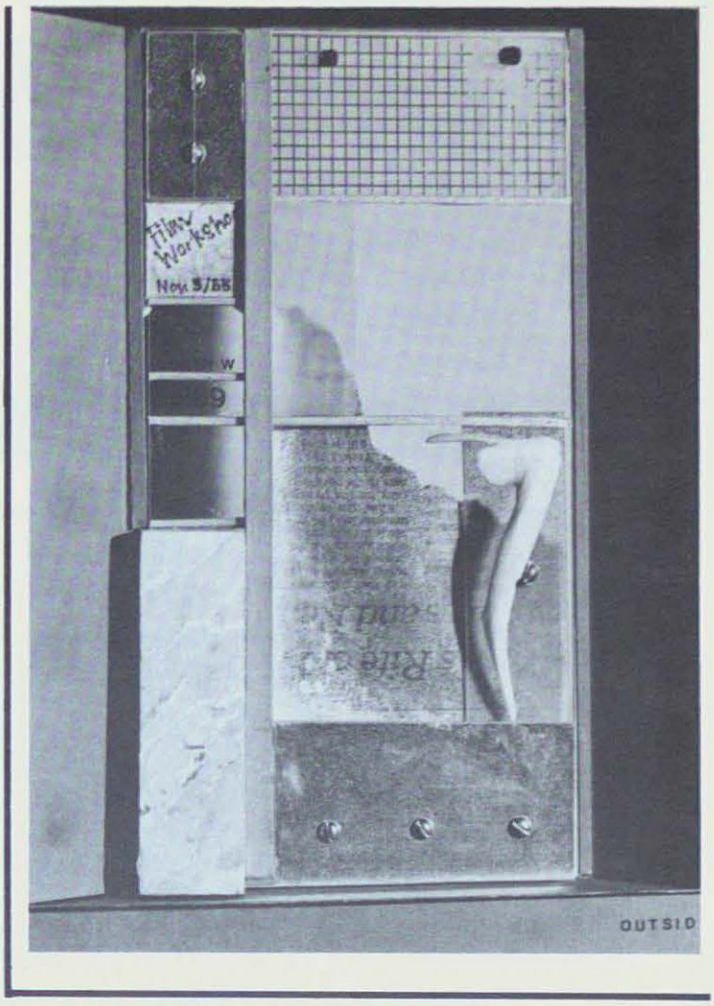
The Mississauga Regional Municipal Hall Project is a conformist, implosive, freestanding package of an infill nature with minimal generative power and devoid of any precise significance as to the form of the urban centre it is to be an integral part of.

It is static, uniaxial, unidirectional; fixed in the bondage of its own plaza. Its rigidity suppresses the role of later buildings in altering external spaces and deprives the whole of much dynamism. Proposed urban space is seen as an integral part of the building and the project thus becomes an entity unto itself.

The potential offered by such empty surroundings is virtually ignored, a deplorable fact, especially when one considers that legal and economic factors – such as land ownership and property lines, for example – can be manipulated by the political authority intent on building the project. The lack of a specific plan for the entire centre – or at least an early phase of it – is an oppurtunity missed and an indication of the impotence the project engenders.

In Mississauga – as elsewhere – genuine progress is an inoperative term. The Mississauga Regional Municipal Hall Project negates its own good intentions and is thus regressive. Conceived in the current discussion of architecture of the city, it is, ironically, the bastard child of the more traditional urbanism it tries to emulate and the modern city planning it professes to repudiate, rendering the project ultimately insignificant.

The WOMEN'S CULTURAL BUILDING COMPETITION



La récente compétition consistant en la conception d'un ***Centre Culturel pour Femmes*** *a permis de questionner l'architecture en tant que moyen d'expression et d'étude de la culture des femmes. Un certain dilemne inhérent au programme s'en suivit, à savoir si le Collectif se devait d'être exprimé par un édifice unique ou plutôt consister en une série de vignettes représentatives. Cette problématique, nommément le rôle d'un tel Centre au sein de la ville, s'est répercutée dans l'élaboration des projets. Il est en outre difficile de discerner les aspects particulièrement négatifs d'un status quo patriarchal des principes architecturaux propres à l'environment urbain. A cet effet, certains des projets lauréats peuvent notamment être perçus comme préjudiciables, voire contraire à l'intention première qui visait à représenter et susciter une culture feminine distincte.*

This is the first of two articles concerning the recent competition for the Women's Cultural Building Collective Headquarters held in Toronto during the summer and exhibited at the A.R.C. Gallery in November 1983. The competition was the first public event sponsored by the Women's Architecture League, a group founded in Toronto in the spring of 1983. This article describes the genesis of the competition, the process of its development and jury selection, followed by a discussion of the results of the competition and the issues addressed by the entries. The second article focusses its remarks on the five winning schemes.

Layout by Guy St.-Arnaud and Ellen Leibovich

A Genesis of the Competition

by Alison McKenzie

The Women's Cultural Building Collective Headquarters Ideas Competition was seen as an ideal vehicle for exploring issues of interest to the nascent Women's Architecture League last spring. The competition, it was felt, would force the question of identifying the place of women in the predominant culture, a culture whose norms and values have been structured and sanctioned by men. The ambiguity of the title was itself suggestive. Was it women building culture? Or a women's cultural building? Or, was it building women's culture?

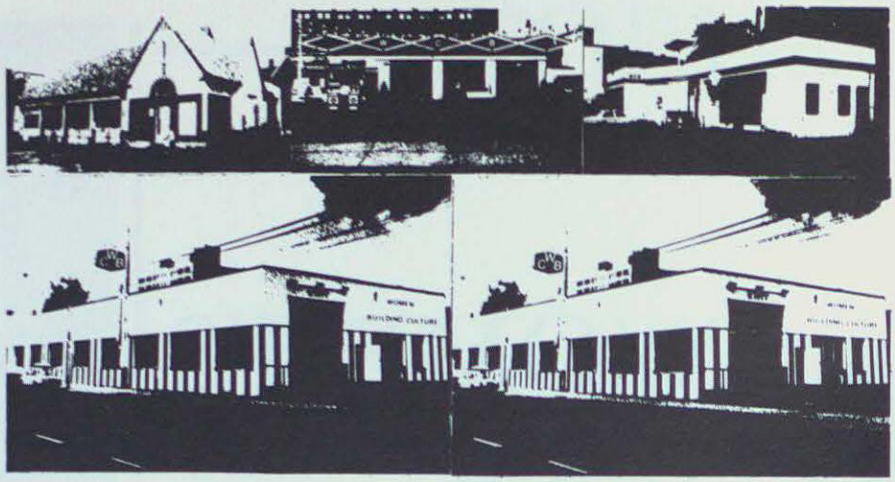
On a more practical level, the WCBC provided the competition with a client, albeit a notional one. Interviews with five WCBC members constituted the brief, which itself served up the problematic of feminist representation.

At every step the Women's Architectual League's desire was to reduce issues to first principles in order to lay bare preconceived assumptions. As a result, the choice of site and the drawing requirements as well as the programme were left up to the entrant. This accounts for the diversity of entries received. It also precluded the selection of any grand prize winner. In retrospect even the title *competition* seems a misnomer.

The jury members were chosen for the broad range of concerns they would bring to bear on the work. In addition the WAL felt that they would be sympathetic to the intents of the competition and familiar with the issues it addressed.

"... getting away from patriarchal ideals or monumentality, dominance and power..."

The Sinclair-Walker project



The seven member jury was composed of practising architects and cultural producers. Of these, two were representatives of the client group, members of the WCBC: Kerri Kwinter, writer and critic, and Kate Lushington, a theatre artist who previously spent two years in architecture at the A.A in London. Three were architects with no affiliation to the League: Odile Hénault, editor of the architectural periodical *Section A*, Montreal; Lorna McNeur, practising architect teaching at Carleton University School of Architecture, Ottawa; and Susana Torre, an architect in private practice in New York and professor at Columbia University. A representative of the Women's Architecture League was included, Ellen Allen, an architect in private practice in Toronto, as well as one independent cultural producer, filmmaker Anna Gronau.

The judging took place over a weekend in October. An informal discussion of the work was held with the judgesand the WAL that weekend, followed by a panel dicussion during the two-week exhibition at A.R.C. Gallery, in Toronto in November. Transcripts of the judging sessions have been prepared and are available at Ballenford Books, Toronto. A complete catalogue of the twenty-eight entries, including written critiques, is presently underway and will be published shortly.

The WCBC headquarters proved to be a paradigm for the larger issue of the identification of women's place within culture. As the introduction to the brief states, "*The Headquarters is intended to be a place where women can meet as peers, either as they exist at present within a larger male culture, or as part of an equal role in public life.*"

It was anticipated that the competition would address the following issues:

What is the nature of a women's collective and what are its architectural implications.

What relationship exists between the Women's Cultural Building and its larger context.

What can the architectural expression of the Women's Cultural Building offer to its larger physical and cultural context.

This discussion will primarily consider the ways in which the entries addressed the relationship of feminism to the status quo. The variety of responses quite clearly if at times inadvertantly pointed to the problem of giving women's culture architectural expression.

At one extreme, there were those schemes that were so enmeshed in culture as it exists that there was no problem. The task was simply to design a building, an institution with its programme of fuctions: a women's club. At the other extreme were a number of schemes which identified the city as it exists with the negative connotations of patriarchy and had to infiltrate it, transform it, or dispense with it altogether in order to make room for feminine culture. In between these were two projects which used new and subversive ideas but failed to recognize or exploit their ramifications; projects which tried to posit new forms to represent women's culture or ressurect symbols from ancient matriarchal cultures; and projects which tried to render the problem legible without attempting architectural embodiment.

The IKOY architect's entry, from Winnipeg, was a scheme that raised eyebrows and issues. It seemed ideologicallly intact, an example of the very hermetic *male* mainstream work which the League had been founded to explode. Then if such was the case, why had they bothered to enter the competition with what was obviously a serious entry? Was it in fact delivered deadpan, a mainstream joke? Clearly it was architecture that concerned itself with its own fetishes and treated the WCBC as it would any other client; it could well have been a club or art gallery except for certain programmatic gratuities like a day-care centre and a rooftop running track.

The project could be criticized in its own terms: as the independence of the component building systems was stated in lieu of an aesthetic, what accounts for the building's strongly formal resolution? Surely this is incongruent to the author's statement that "*technology is dealing with the form and function of each component -the Building as a whole is a discovery- not the product of an idealized pre-conception*". However, this scheme is particularly interesting for this discussion in its absolute avoidance of the issues of the competition. It raised issues simply by serving up the status quo intact.

The number of schemesthat posited the opposite approach, refuting the city and its institutions as they exist, can be accounted for to some extent by the attitude put forward by the WCBC members in their brief. Some of the members spoke of the intrinsically subversive activities of the Collective; others spoke of getting away from "*patriarchal ideals of monumentality, dominance and power...of reclaiming the city.*" The problem with this stance, as some members recognized, was that it left the Collective without a "*place as a symbolic housing of a collective function.*" Almost all the members anticipated new formulations of public and privae spheres. This included, in

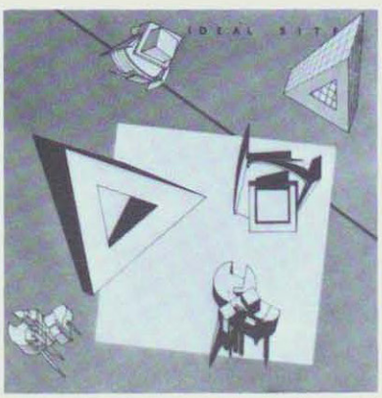
almost every case, the provision of space for child care as well as for work and performance in the Headquarters. One member envisaged a kitchen where twenty might cook at once: a marvellous inversion of the kitchen-as-cell, where the traditional symbol of woman's bondage becomes a place of public celebration.

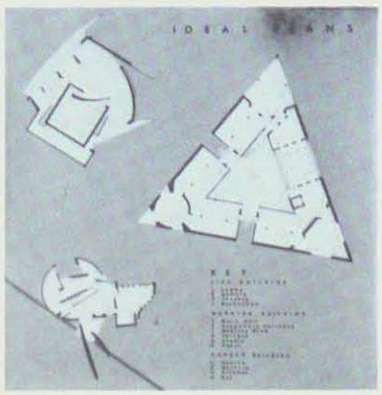
The desire for informality, for a non-intimidating atmosphere in the Headquarters expressed by the members interviewed produced a predisposition for schemes that had no architectural *face*. This seemed to belie a mistrust of representation, of the semiotic dimension of architecture. Representation seemed comfortable only when pared down to a single element, e.g.the Door project (Shim/Sutcliffe), or when it co-opted an existing and thereby familiar cultural image, e.g. the Gas Stations project (Sinclair/Walker). In the former, the predicament of the artist is suggested by means of the two faces of the door, private work versus its public representation, but in no way does it specifically address the condition of the women artist. It could be inferred, as one of the jury members suggested, that inside and outside referred respectively to the traditional and potential loci of women. The latter project did not subvert the semiotic codes of gas stations, it was consumed by them. The scheme paired nostalgia - the stations renovated for the collective were all vintage Hansel-and-Gretel moderne, or fifties examples - with apparent economic viability. This combination was unbeatable, particularly for the WCBC members on the jury. The proposal, however, left nagging questions. In the end it seemed the very paradigm for the problem of women's representation. It was *making do*; it borrowed an existing cultural image for itself without declaring itself; GULF simply became WCBC. It provided space without disturbing prevailing ideology; even a billboard or a new facade would have changed this reading. Women have remained faceless culturally precisely because of this scavenger mentality. Scarcity of means, however, should not imply cultural impoverishment, nor should it cloud political intent.

The Concrete Bunker scheme (Owen) posted the extreme critical position in this regard. The scheme takes the WCBC members at their word and provides space devoid of architectural representation and is quite literally underground.

One of the most interesting of the infiltration schemes was the Arbor (Blanchaer). Where most of the network projects inserted monuments or WCBC buildings within the existing fabric of the city in order to render the problem of women's representation active, the Arbor proposed the transformation of the city. The author writes: "*an Arbor represents the theoretical development of the collective where the house stands as the backdrop for the search for a new identity. The Arbor, a non-object, is the antithesis of monumentality (man's image of his own place in society).*" The Arbor grows to encompass the whole city, whereupon the original house is left as a ruin, a reminder of the past. Another infiltration scheme, the Wedge scheme (Moskowitz) proposed entirely new forms to represent women's culture, including buildings entitled *the amoeba* (a place of transition), *the wedge, etc.*, all located in Toronto Harbour.

Those schemes that accepted the city as it exists and reinterpreted the forms within it did so either by changing the relationship of the building to its context or by inventing new architectural forms. The former type did so in one of two ways. Some schemes responded to the subversive aspect sought for the Collective by making the space of the Headquarters invisible (out of public view) while providing a provocative presence on the street. The Door project already mentionned did this, as did the Robinson scheme, which made use of the vacant upper floors of commercial buildings. In both schemes, the rationale is framed in economic terms only- vacant space -is cheap space and not as a polemic. The schemes that proposed a highly visible institution changed its contextual relationship by, in many cases, increasing the transparency of the institution to the garden, e.g. in the Taylor/Hazell scheme.



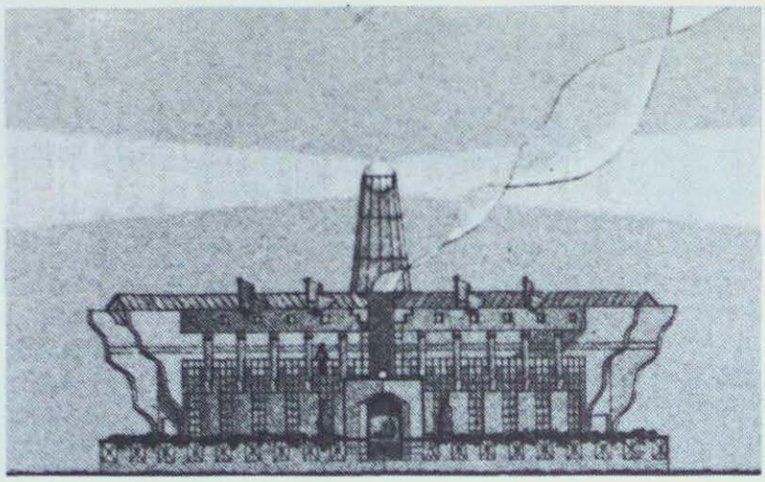


"... getting away from patriarchal ideals or monumentality, dominance and power..."

The Blanchaer scheme

"... getting away from patriarchal ideals or monumentality, dominance and power... "

The Brooks scheme



The invention of new architectural forms within a specific headquarters building in the city was attemted in some projects: the women's club given a dash of feminist expressionism. The Chapman/FitzJames scheme dealt with the image of women in culture by literally taking masks of complicity, social caricatures of women, as facades to the building. The Brown/Storey/Heywood scheme placed three buildings on the site, the City Building, the Working Builing and the Garden Building. The authors propose the device of the Omphalos and the *"use of the disjuncture and uncertainty to create a new spatial order"* in their project.

Two schemes which took their cue from the brief in regard to new forms of social organization (the Laundomat-Bar) are, interestingly enough, both on the same site. This is more than a coincidence. The site itself engages the issue of private and public, located as it is at the intersection of Queen Street (art scene/commerce) and a residential street. One scheme (McAuliffe) literally grafted the typical Toronto row house onto the public areas of the Headquarters; the other (Romaine) posed the dual nature of the Headquarters in a poetic manner as a place of private reverie behind a high wall-cum-do it yourselfer's flashing screen to the city beyond.

The Snakes and Ladders scheme (Firth/Spiegel) did not attempt an architectural embodiment. It chose to outline the historical predicament, obstacles to growth, and potential theatre (literally) for women's culture. The scheme raised the essential issues of the competition,but given that it did not attempt architectural expression one might have asked more of it at a conceptual level. One could not, in fact, play the game, since in a sense, the game board was an ordered collage and not a game plan.

As the foregoing discussion illustrates, the problem of feminine representation in culture is a complex one, one not fully resolved by the competition. The reluctance of the WCBC members to imagine an appropriate positive embodiment of themselves and the focus of the entries on either issues or architecture, attests to the problem. The predicament poses four alternatives in my view. The first position would be that women are lacking a symbolic language - in architecture as in culture - and it must some how be made anew, *tabula rasa*. Otherwise, one can subvert existing architectural codes of representation in order to expose their ideological underpinnings. If, however, one simply co-opts existing structures and cultural images for the WCBC, its identity is rendered invisible. Without the essential ingredient of ideological rupture in this project, the Collective can hardly help being absorbed into the status quo as has been demonstared. The third option is infiltration. The network schemes proposed the systematic transformation of the city by means of symbolic devices. Finally, and perhaps most profoundly, are the schemes that reexamined the relation of public and private in order to come up with new forms that engaged both domains within the representation of women's culture.

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A Critique of the Five Winning Schemes

by Graham Owen

The following text was presented as part of the panel discussion held in conjunction with the exhibition of entries to the ***Women's Cultural Building Competition*** *. It was, and is, intended as the opening statement in a debate that may now occur in a wider forum.*

The Women's Cultural Building Competition raised the fundamental issue of whether architecture is an appropriate medium for the *examination and expression of women's culture* . In both the published programme and the judging, the consensus of opinion in the Women's Cultural Building Collective appeared to be against the idea of a headquarters building designed specifically for their own use. The feeling seemed to be that such a building would institutionalize the Collective, and thus negate the possibility of their acting subversively. Indeed, they themselves would presumably be more readily subverted by dissenting factions once the Collective was installed, and therefore represented, by a single building.

The WCBC members interviewed in the programme imagine the physical analog of a sustained subversive role as a kind of storefront network; a popular anti-institutional decentralist icon of the late 1960's left liberalism, making a reappearance here. In both instances, but more conspicuosly in the case of the Competition programme, there is a kind of subtext of nostalgia or romanticism about the city, a *nostalgie de la boue*, nostalgia for the mud, or for a kind of watered-

down demi-monde. The city is seen almost as a forsaken landscape, to be infested rather than possessed. In a sense, it is an aesthetic of dispossession, since the city as collective intellectual construct is seen as an artifact of male culture. Authenticity (of sentiment, or of action) is assigned to the street. This is not the street as public realm, dignified and gracious, such as one might find in Otto Wagner's Vienna or Daniel Burnham's Chicago, but something closer to the street life of William Burrough's *Junkie.*

The result of this is an attitude to the city in which traditional notions of public and private become blurred and hence, so do traditional relationships between building types within the structure of the city, the structure that had hitherto given them meaning.

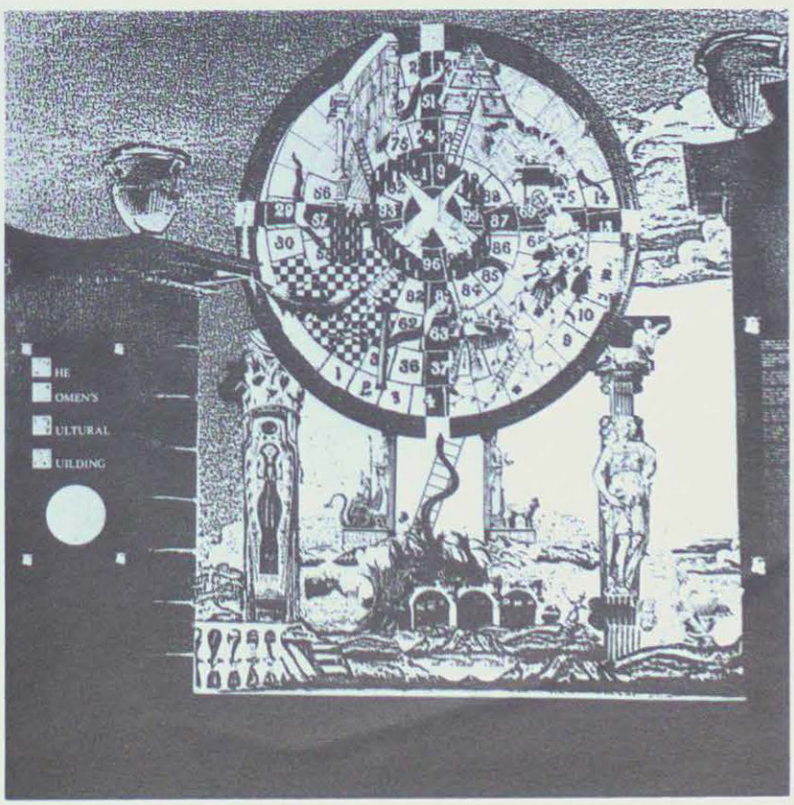
This state of affairs has several important consequences for the competition entries. For instance, some of those that propose a single building are put in the predicament of falling between typological stools.They appear ambiguously as fabric or institution, but ambiguously in a negative sense, in that they benefit neither from the anonymity of the one nor the singularity and idealized form of the other. If indeed the Rationalist idea of the city as an entity with a clear and precise conceptual structure is taken to be a construct of patriarchal culture, then conceivably any project that set out to disrupt the conventional relationships of that structure could be considered anti-patriarchal in intent, but perhaps could not be considered anything else other than incoherent. Novelty in architecture, which is explicitly asked for by the programme, is unlikely to be availabe if architecture is understood as an autonomous and closed formal discipline subject to its own internal rules.

Of the winning entries, two would fall into the category of the single isolated building, as opposed to the network: that of James Brown, Kim Storey and Peter Heywood, and that of Ken Brooks. The Brooks scheme, a floating amphitheatre-cum-lighthouse, deals with the question of the WCBC's relationship to the city by removing the building from the city altogether.

What makes this scheme particularly intriguing is the presumably unintentional number of readings that one can make of it. The lighthouse conventionally marks a point to be avoided, yet in the Brooks scheme this point is always changing position. One is reminded of the Sirens in Homer's Odyssey, luring sailors to grisly deaths. Although the scheme is referred to as *the steadfast description of a purpose,* this purpose seems to be constantly changing, with consequent implications of ideological instability. In this scheme, the answer to the WCBC's programme is seen not as a mechanism of integration, such as the storefront network, but rather a more pronounced physical segregation; one thinks of a kind of floating Ellis Island or worse, a kind of Alcatraz.

Although this particular cultural colony can move, its designated destinations - the Harbourfront, Ontario Place, the Premier Dance Theatre, Olympic Island - are all manifestations of state-sponsored mass entertainment. Thus it is implied that women's culture is to be regarded as another form of mass entertainment, ideologically operated by the welfare state. The Women's Cultural Building thus becomes conceptually equivalent to the floating discotheque paddle-steamer that follows a similar itinerary around Toronto's waterfront during the summer, and it does appear that the project is intended for summer use only, since its amphitheatre is left uncovered.

Both the Shim-Sutcliffe and Sinclair-Walker schemes fall into the network category. The Sinclair-Walker project, involving the re-use of a number of existing innert-city gas stations as neighbourhood women's cultural buildings, raises some particularly provocative implications, perhaps uninten-



" ... getting away from patriarchal ideals or monumentality, dominance and power... "

The Firth-Spiegel entry

tional, but relevant nonetheless to the question of how women's culture is to be represented architecturally and urbanistically. If, as the authors propose, all personal motorised vehicles could be removed from the centre of the city, the shells of the automobile infrastructure would be kept in place, rather than be replaced by (ideally) new construction that would take advantage of the reappearance of the pedestrian city, or (realistically) by new construction that would take advantage of the developable value of the sites. What comes out of this is an apparent attitude of economy and expediency which acts as a mask for the same kind of nostalgia referred to earlier. At the same time, there is the problem that women's culture comes to be represented by the remains of corporate franchise chains, with the consequent implications of homogeneity, habitual consumption and centralized control, all of which go against the notion of the network as a countercultural device.

In trying to determine whether this is indeed a real problem with the project, one might compare it to the transformation of Roman temples into Christian churches. Although the pagan origins of the temple might have been seen as a problem, what made the transformation possible was, as Perez d'Arce puts it "*the appropriation of the symbolic value of the temple as a sacred building*". Thus there is the question of the relative power of the gas station's reading as part of a network to the power of its reading as an element in a corporate chain.

The Shim-Sutcliffe entry takes risks similar to those involved in the Sinclair-Walker scheme. It proposes the rehabilitation of storefont properties into a WCBC network, each serving a different function. In each case , the presence of this network is announced architecturally, by means of an elaborate front door, whose narrative content deals with the public persona and private struggles of the artist. This entry and Carl Blanchaer's (proposing an arbour applied symbolically to an expanding network of buildings taken over by the Collective) are probably the most successful and intelligent of the network projects. However, the fact that it is unclear whether the Shim-Sutcliffe door is to be a single artistic work in each case, an object or a mass produced item (since it is the same door in every location) renders its representative meaning ambiguous. There is also the question of why the door would specifically represent the WCBC and not just any artist's collective. The Blanchaer scheme, although architecturally even more minimal, is symbolically more specific. Once the arbour-clad network has been established, the first building occupied (a detached house, symbolic of domestic labour) is to be demolished, leaving only the arbour as its ghost. All three schemes propose deliberately minimal interventions, and raise a nagging question: if in this competition the best architecture is the least architecture, was it really an architectural problem in the first place?

The third and final category, represented in the winning entries by Kathryn Firth and Susan Spiegel, is that of the metaphorical project. Instead of seeing the object of the exercise as the production of an integrated architectural project with a symbolic dimension, architecture or architectural elements are used metaphorically to refer to conditions or sentiments outside architecture itself. The scheme calls to mind Cavino's *Castle of Crossed Destinies*, where Tarot cards are understood as a metaphor for life; and since the cards contain all the possibilities of life, life may be seen as a metaphor for the Tarot. In this project, architecture has become the figurative layer of a Snakes-and-Ladders game, just as the imagery of feudal culture served as the figurative reference for Calvino's Tarot set. Paradoxically, since this entry deals with architecture as a deliberately removed symbol, standing for something more than for itself, the scheme can be read as a subtle commentary on the unavailability of architecture appropriate for the specified purpose. Architecture is extraneous to the specified purpose of expressing women's culture.

Graham Owen is a recent graduate of the School of Architecture at the University of Toronto.

" ... getting away from patriarchal ideals or monumentality, dominance and power... "

The Shim-Sutcliffe entry / Inside

Structuralism: An Alternative Methodology for the Architectural Historian

by Frances Schmitt

Le discours structuraliste en tant que méthode d'analyse critique se veut une alternative à la dialectique Hégelienne. Alors que ce second modèle d'analyse propose un mode d'investigation chronologique où styles, mouvements, personnalités déterminantes et influences sont clairement identifiés, le théoricien structuraliste, lui, formule son analyse architecturale en termes d'entité culturelle. Toute construction est donc soumise à un système d'équilibre où chaque donnée du cadre économique, politique, culturel, typographique ou scientifique viendra contribuer à l'articulation du projet architectural. C'est donc ce processus de conception (et non pas son expression finale) qui oscille entre deux pôles, la cause et l'effet, les conditions du milieu et leur intégration architecturale, que l'historien structuraliste veut cerner.

Unlike Hegelian art history, structuralist art history does not aim for a history with names, styles, schools, or geniuses as categories, but rather for one of ideological contradictions. It neither traces personalities, building influences, semantics nor the unfolding of the *'zeitgeist'*, nor does it bracket history chronologically or on the basis of stylistic affiliations. Structuralism proceeds solely on the grounds of how architecture functions as a problem solving process. It is the history of ideologies and accounting for the expression of these ideologies in concrete reality. A number of important hypotheses about the nature of culture and architecture are basic to the structuralist approach to history. These hypotheses are exemplified by the following structuralist writers:

All the intellectual activity of a given period obeys the law of a certain code of knowledge.

Michel Foucault

All cultural activity may be understood as communication. This communication may have many forms including sound, gesture and symbol.

Umberto Eco

Architecture as a product of cultural activity communicates through a unique language, (based on representation, symbol, space, plan, etc.). This language can be understood by the architect, the client and the user.

Christian Norberg-Schulz

Architecture as a product is determined by the problems of the building process itself. This process is governed by the rules of the period. These rules which define the code are not rules of style or technology but the rules of the ideology of the culture.

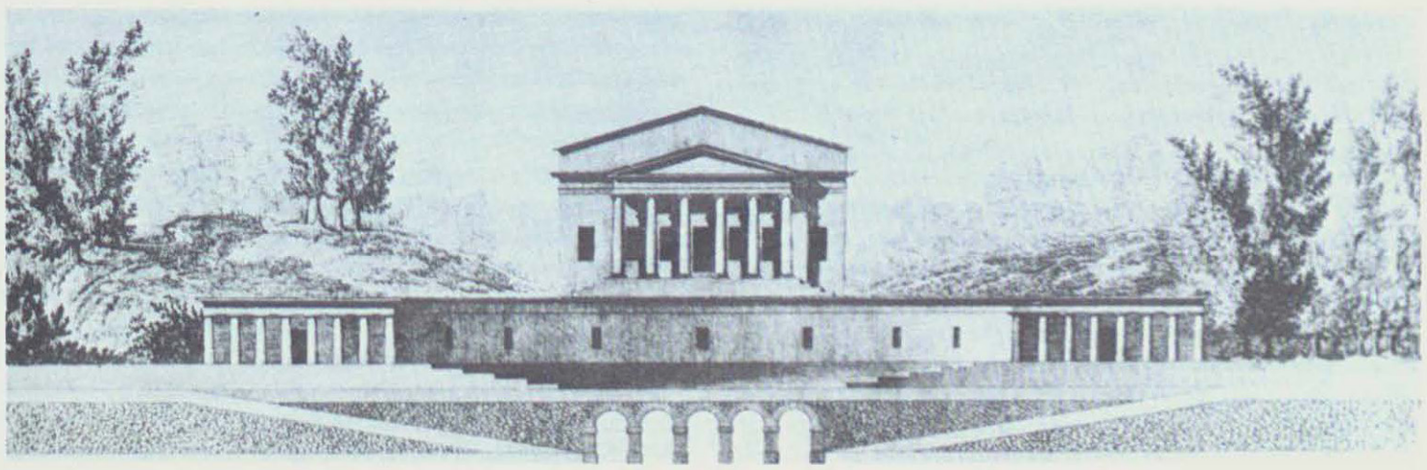
Demetri Porphyrios

The structuralists define architecture as a cultural product. A building may be seen as a solution to certain environmental problems posed by economic, political, cultural, topographical and scientific elements - the problems and the solutions are always in flux. The structuralist historian is concerned with the relationship between the problem and the solution and in order to study this relationship the historian has to analyze the *process* of building; he is not concerned with the building as a *final expression* of that process. To objectively investigate the question, "*Why has a building, from a particular period, a particular form?*";[1] a new method to describe a building had to be developed in a logical and structured way.

The structural methodology of architectural history is based on the theories of structural linguistics - these theories were introduced in Prague in 1929.[2] They were originally proposed as a radical and innovative methodology for the study of language. Traditional linguistics was seen as too narrowly focused on analyzing isolated facts and linear historical development. The same criticism has been made against traditional architectural analysis.

Broadly defined, structuralism is the study of the elements which constitute a linguistic system and, more importantly, of their mutual relationships. The relationships between the elements form the structure of the system. The focus of structuralism on the relationships and not on the elements themselves came out of the notion, expressed by Michel Foucault,[3] that the elements themselves were, in reality, arbitrary.

The application of structural methodology to all disciplines, including chemistry, psychology, biology, economics and architecture is based on the supposition made by Levi-Strauss that *all* aspects of human culture may be interpreted as systems of signs. One person alone has no culture. When two people come together their first action is to communicate



Layout by François Emond

M. Gallet, Ledoux

through sound, symbol or gesture. In other words, culture is communication.

Structuralism, in this sense, has the same boundaries as semiology, "*To communicate is to use the entire world as semiotic apparatus.*"[4] And the structuralists use semiology in order to describe and analyze the building process. However, while the semiologist focuses on the psychological effect of the signs on the behavior, roles and moods of the users, on the intentions of the client and on the expression of the architect through sign analysis, the stucturalist focuses on the rules that have allowed the signifiers to be appropriate to the problem the building is attempting to solve. Some structuralists believe that semiological analysis alone has not been able to explain architecture sufficiently.[5]

For instance, Austrian architectural critic Rudolf Kohoutek blames the degeneration of architecture,to a level of discourse which is wholly concerned with the consumption and articulation of sign and media, on the development of semiotics. He states that:

Some architects may consciously design with these semiotic tools but others may see their selection of building elements as quite logical and consistent... Post-Modernism designates architecture as a language-making it presumably less austere and better fitted to the aesthetic tastes of the general public and more individualistic than the predominant mass-produced architecture which used the industrial aesthetic. [6]

With this criticism in mind, structuralists who take this position are opting for an absolute rejection of the idea of a semiotic value in architecture. Demetri Porphyrios clearly lays out the methodological approach that the structuralist historian must follow . The first task is to identify the underlying principles of design and execution. These formative rules which make it possible for any building to be produced, they call the building's '*problematic*'. The problematic is revealed through the study of the plans, sections, elevations, spatial relationships, decoration, materials, proportions and composition of the building. [7] After isolating these principles the central question is, "*What is the ideology which allows for these principles to be conceived of in the first place?*"[8]

The ideology or '*field of knowledge*' in which the architect is operating must be defined in order to answer this question. The ideology consists of man's perception of the *total* interrelationships of *all* aspects of his culture. So the historian is faced with the megalomaniacal task of studying a culture in its entirety. Once the culture has been analyzed, and this analysis includes all the disciplines such as economics, philosophy, science, politics, *etc.*, he must then determine which discipline dominates or determines the building process.

After discovering the design principles and the governing rules of the age, the historian attempts to map out where and when these concepts reoccur in history and how they change from one architectural discourse to another. This map may be neither confined to one geographic area, nor does it necessarily exist in only one time period. For example, modern eclecticism follows the same principles as late 19th century Austrian architecture because in both situations economics is the determining rule for the building process; ornament is tacked on because it is seen as an architectural *extra* in the budget and not an essential element of the building.

The periodization of architectural history will thus be based on these ordering and signifying principles.[9] In the studies of Rob Krier we can see the manifestation of this approach - he is exploring the notion of typologies. This is a very different approach to architecture from the Hegelian one.

In Hegelian thought, the architect "*in the very act of creating simply represents the* ***idea*** or ***zeitgeist*** *in sensuous corporeal form.*"[10] In contrast, architecture for the structuralist represents the peoples' vision of themselves. Their conscious and unconscious collective knowledge is translated into concepts and principles. The final built form does not necessarily express a notion of *higher spirituality* but may indeed express *economic considerations.* This conclusion is somewhat closer to the Marxist view of architecture which tried to secularize Hegel's thesis by replacing the supremacy of the spirit with that of matter. However, while the Marxist view of history does not allow for deviation within a culture from the dominant ideology, the structuralists look for concurrent and opposing ideologies. The architect is controlled by his cultural ideology because it determines the rules which underlie the principles of his design. (Marx believed that art is only occasionally ideologically based and that this connection is apparent only when there is an overt class conflict or dominance which demands that the autonomy of art is neglected in favour of a moral philosophical or political message).[11] These ideologies exist within the boundaries of all aspects of human culture - the architect functions within these boundaries. His discourse is on this *field of knowledge,* which includes the economics, politics, tectonics and themes of his own time. The rules which govern the expression of this discourse are unknown to the architect. The structuralist attempts to find these objective laws which govern human activity, "*in order to understand how human beings in western culture have attempted to express or make sense of what is* ***other*** *about being human*".[12]

In this attempt to reveal the intentions behind architecture, a profound knowledge of all disciplines is necessary. Without this solid understanding of a world view of the structure of beliefs that constitute the foundation of thought and action, any speculation about the meaning of architecture becomes superficial.[13]

Most traditional historians have tried to explain buildings by relating them to a cultural context and by revealing their relationships to other buildings, styles and movements. Some historians have attempted to deal with ideas, but only through the veil of their own ideologies.

Rafael Moneo in his article "The Contradictions of Architectural History" states that:

Architectural history is so overlain by contradictory interpretations that, ***'any attempt to a linear, continuous reading of history'****, now seems absurd. Structuralism has opted for a different methodology which views the history of modern architecture as a fragmented ruptured discontinuous reality. It suffices to pursue a theme, a school or an architect but it is not necessary to fit all the pieces of the historical puzzle together.*[14]

Frampton's critical history applies some aspects of structuralist methodology. He classifies architects by the symbolic codes or principles they use - hence such headings as ideology and representation, or abstraction and empathy. Architects as different as Louis Kahn and Buckminster Fuller are found in one classification. His history does begin to allow for contradiction and concurrency in that he allows for more than one ideology to exist within one time period. The problem with the structural analysis of history (and Frampton himself admits he was unable to achieve a truly structuralist understanding of his material)[15] is that it demands too

much of any one person.

Tafuri, in his "Theories and History of Architecture" states that:

The true problem is the identification of a structure specific to a period of history and in order to define it the historian will have to hypothesize a unity... he must try to discover intrinsic analogies between such overtly disparate phenomena as the arts, literature, movements, **etc.** *This effort, laudable in itself, is virtually impossible for one man to handle and he will inevitably have to rely on secondary information and no man can resist the temptation of either ignoring or slightly deflecting such lines as refuse to run parallel.*[16]

One of the few historians who have come close to producing a totally structuralist work is Erwin Panofsky. Levi-Strauss calls Panofsky a *'great structuralist'* because he is:

A great historian and also because history offers him, at the same time, an unrivalled source of information and a combinatory field in which truth of the interpretations can be tested in a thousand ways. His is the marriage of history, sociology and semiology.[17]

The value of approaching architectural history by the structuralist method may be that:

1. It allows the historian to include buildings and theories that contradict the dominant trend of a certain period without destroying the fundamental logic of his theory.
2. It helps the architect to understand why he is using certain forms, why they are appropriate and what they mean.
3. It is attempting to develop a descriptive method of analyzing architecture that is not based solely on interpretation but on a logical empirical structural method .[18]

A thorough history of architecture using structural methodology and semiotic tools is a long way from being written, but this methodology does offer an alternative way of studying all cultural phenomena. In his article,"Classicism is Not a Style", Demetri Porphyrios attempts to analyze classicism in structural terms.

Classicism is seen as an ideological approach to form and not as a set of stylistic elements (i.e. columns, capitals, cornices and pediments). Orthodox modernism and the architecture of Greece both express a classical ideology. The Greek temple has become a universal image of civilization. Architects of orthodox modernism such as Rietveld and Le Corbusier used pure geometries in the belief that they too would be universally understood. Both architectural discourses express the idea that *'civilized men speak the same language'*.

Unfortunately this Utopian vision of modernism was lost and the concept of a universal egalitarian civilization was transformed into the ideology of *'conciliatory culture'*. Porphyrios suggests that the ideology of industrial capitalism (our present dominant ideology) turned universal egalitarianism into universal consumerism.

This new ideology has, unfortunately for us, no collective ontological myth. An ideology without a mythology leaves a culture barren. The cultural crisis of our era is apparent in the frantic searching for novelty and cultural symbols by Post-Modern architects. This false reconstruction of culture is manifested in built form in two ways. Firstly, in the work of groups, like Archigram, whose aesthetics are made out of service and functional elements of industrial kitsch and, secondly, in the Post-Modern school of signs and symbols stolen from classical and vernacular architecture, which uses these elements for the fast and easy consumption of culture.[20] The Post-Modern rhetorical figures of speech are not used in order to incite us to reflect and thereby gain knowledge of our situation but rather to satisfy our appetite for culture in the way McDonald's satisfies our appetite for a good meal.

Prophyrios calls the rule governing capitalist architecture the *'Principles of the Decorative Shed'*. The ruling discipline in our epoch is economics. The building process is dominated by economic concerns and the *"budget for architecture is divided into three layers - pragmatics, technics and semantics - all three independent budgets can be shifted around in a game which is aimed at minimum cost"*.[21]

Prophyrios suggests that to free the architect from this economically dominated ideology, so he can satisfy his society's yearning for an authentic culture, the architect must:

...slowly construct an ontology of building that would contain a mythology of the building process itself. This would be a return to classical ideology which understands classicism not as borrowed stylistic finery but as an ontology of building.[22]

Working within a classical ideology the architect can, *avoid the pitfalls of Post-Modern pluralism because it may throw light on the architect's reasons for doing what he does by going beyond what architecture shows in order to examine what it hides.* [23]

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J. Coplans, Andy Warhol

Notes

1. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Intentions in Architecture*, (M.I.T. Press, Mass. 1981), p. 23
2. See David Robey's introduction to structuralism in *Structuralism: An Introduction*, (Claredon Press, Oxford, 1972).
3. Herbert Dreyfuss, *Michel Foucault* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983).
4. Robey, p. 59.
5. Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, (Harper and Tow Pub. Inc., New York), p. 176.
6. Kenneth Frampton, Ed., "A New Wave of Architecture", (Published by *Architecture and Urbanism*, Cat. 13, March 26 - May 3, New York, 1983), From the essay by Rudolf Kohoutek, "Architecture Beyond Eclecticism", p. 25.
7. Demetri Porphyrios, *Notes on the Methodology of Architectural History*; "Notes on a Method", *Ad Magazine* #51, 6/7 Ed. Demetri Porphyrios, p. 95 - 104.
8. *ibid.*
9. *ibid.*
10. *ibid.* Gombrich, *Hegel and Art History*, p. 82.
11. *ibid.* Stephen Morawski, *Marxist Historicism and the Philosophy of Art*
12. Christian Norberg-Schulz, "Heidegger's Thinking on Architecture", *Perspecta 20* (Mit Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1983), p. 62 - 68.
13. See Carlos Perez Gomez, "The Potential of Architecture as Art" (from *A.D. Magazine*, #52, 7/8, London, editec by Papdakis), p. 55.
14. *ibid.* Rafael Moneo's article, "the Contradiction of Architectural History", p. 54.
15. Kenneth Frampton
"I have to admit that on both accounts I have been as consistent as I would have like to have been, partly because all the material has not been studied to the same degree of depth", p. 8.
16. Tafuri, p. 203.
17. *ibid.* (see reference for an explanation of Panofsky's relation to Cassier, who introduced the possibility of seeing architecture as an independant *"universe of discourse... with its own meaning that can be understood starting from the structural laws inherent to is"*), *p. 184 - 7.*
18. Norberg-Schulz, p. 23.
19. Demetri Porphyrios, ed., "Classicism is Not a Style", (*Arch. Design*, London, AD 5/6, 1982) from an essay by the same title, p. 51.
20. Demetri Prophyrios, "Classicism is Not a Style", p. 53.
21. *ibid.* p. 56
22. *ibid.*
23. Tafuri, p. 176

MEDITATION ON ARCHITECTURE AND THE WORD

by Alberto Perez-Gomez

The precondition of meaning is not an intellectual or associanist operation. Meaning *appears* firstly in the world of everyday life, the world of the vivid present which is at arm's length *here and now*. All universes of discourse, including architecture and language, have their common roots of meaning in that world, in which we are engaged primarily through our embodied perception. In the realm of primordial realty, most explicit in the world of primitive people, the order of words and the order of building have profound analogies. The sacred mountain which was the pyramid created a place for the deployment of ritual, and action that followed closely from the order of myth. The myth articulated reality in the universe of language while architecture did the same in the universe of the physical world. The distance between the things of the world given in our experience and their names was very short, immediacy was crucial to meaning. Similarly, the circle of stones at *Stonehenge* was the circle of the heavens, the universe of man reflected in a cosmic place.

Plato already realized that writing brought about a loss of memory. The clarity which language and architecture seemed to gain from a greater distance from the perceptual reality of lived experience came about through the loss of connections. Thus Vitruvius (already a late-comer in this development), could rationalize the reality of architecture and talk about its materiality, its proportions and requirements, keeping mostly silent about the archetypal human situations or rituals which the architecture necessarily framed in order to be meaningful.

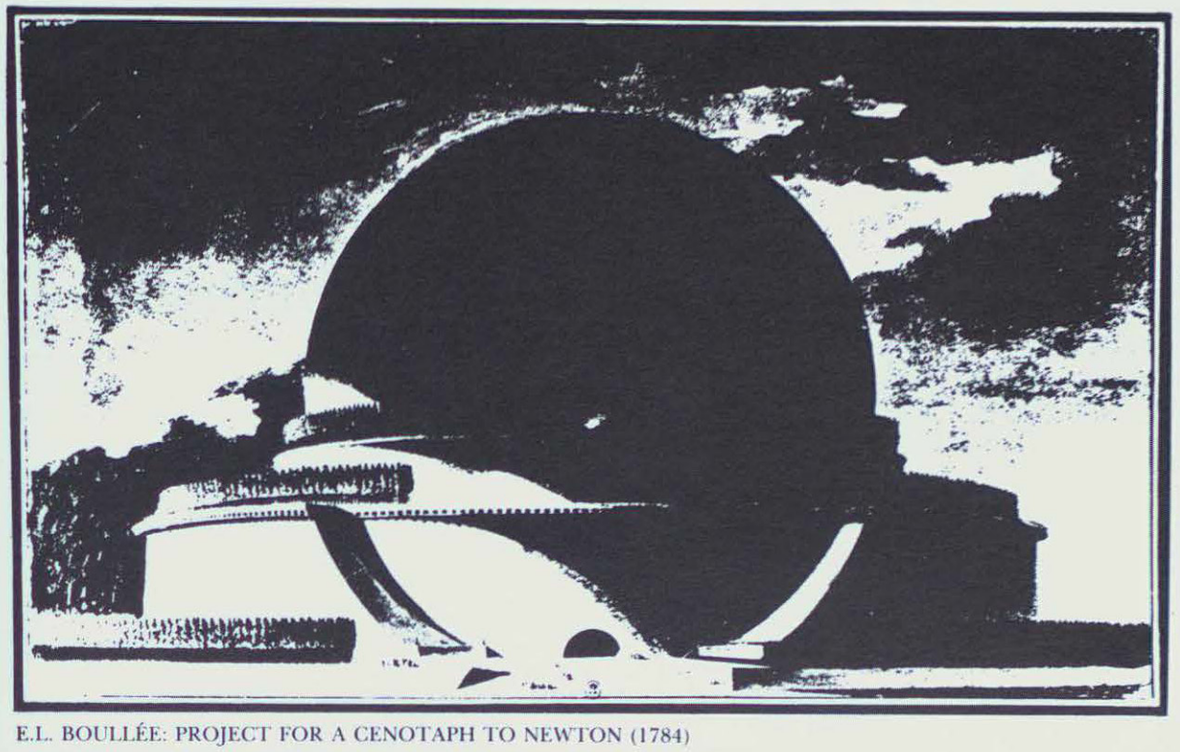
The development of architectural theory spanning from Vitruvius to the end of the 18th century can be perceived as an ever increasing rationalization. This was, of course, not a linear development. It is clear the Suger's *Gothic Theory of Architecture* was in fact a theology, and that even in the 18th century a *mythistoire* founded a rational theory that still fulfilled its inveterate task as a metaphysics of architecture. The process initiated with Vitruvius, however, seemed to culminate with Durand in the early 19th century.

Following the development of this process through architectural treatises, this insistence on the importance of theory, *i.e.* words, to ellucidate the reality of practice, becomes explicit during the Renaissance. Ever since architecture became a *liberal art*, its possession of a specific theory has been considered essential. The prescriptive dimension of theory was present very early on, but the words were meant to justify a practice which was meaningful, as it framed a residual ritual, a surviving public life. The rationality of the treatises, therefore, is not to be confused with positivistic reason. The rationality of architectural treatises from the 15th to the 18th century is still the rationality of perception, at one with the architect's poetic intentionality, a *mimesis* of the rational order of a harmonic cosmos.

Reason became insufficient to ellucidate the meaning of architecture towards the late 18th century, this is particularly evident in the writings of two well known French architects, C. N. Ledoux and E. L. Boullée. In contrast to the sharp rationality of their immediate predecessor Abbé Laugier, Ledoux and Boullée point out that previous theories of architecture addressed *the scientific part* of our discipline, not its true essence. Their writing is no longer a *prose* in its intention to refer directly to the reality of *praxis* (like Vitruvius, Palladio or Laugier), but a *poetry* creating its own reality that related metaphorically to their architectural visions.

It is well known that this condition of self-referentiality become a paradigm of modern art and architecture. Reason itself, functionalized and uprooted from reality, was systematically applied to the material aspects of architecture until it was reduced to engineering. In Durand's writing, positive reason become an instrument of control and domination

Layout by David De Santis and Gail Greenberg



Jean-Marie Pérouge de Montclos, Etienne-Louis-Boullée

E.L. BOULLÉE: PROJECT FOR A CENOTAPH TO NEWTON (1784)

in an architectural theory reduced to prescriptive rules, devoid of interest in meaning and metaphysics.

By the same token, many architects became suspicious about the relevance of such theories transformed into methodologies, and the links between literature and architecture appeared more clearly. The sharp distinction between prose and poetry, between the first truly scientific, non-speculative, specialized and reductionistic use of words and the word understood as belonging in an autonomous universe of discourse, in a metaphoric connection to the primary world of perception, is at the very origin of the romantic reaction. Science (like Newton's cosmology) could no longer be simultaneously a poetic thought and a philosophy. To the eyes of the Romantic Victor Hugo, architecture in the traditional sense, as an embodiment of knowledge, as a symbolic order revealing the essence of reality, could no longer exist. Building had become prose. The text in which he posits the fact that the *book* has killed architecture is well known: the *Encyclopédie* embodied in a gothic cathedral was lost forever. Victor Hugo disclosed a dilemma that still haunts contemporary architecture.

The romantic novel however, was intentionally referential; subjectivity was glorified and forced to bridge the gap between man and the world. And a referential architecture in the modern world devoid of cosmos and ritual, where knowledge is perceived as an open-ended task governed by positive science and technology, was obviously at a disadvantage. We cannot be surprised any longer at the many failures of 19th century historicism. Flaubert was perhaps the first author to recognize the power of the self-referential world of literature. In more recent developments one can hardly fail to realize that through its emphatically self-referential world, the French new novel violently recovers the engagement of the reader and draws from intersubjective meaning as given in our common perception of the world. See, for example, Allain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*, where an objective world is described precisely through geometric coordinates, avoiding in the narrative any explicit human polarization through feelings or opinions. Modern architecture, when successful seems to have a similar effect, which, if understood superficially, is bound to seem paradoxical: witness Ronchamps.

Today we know that the word cannot reduce architecture, that systems cannot prescribe it and that theory and history have become the same body of knowledge only relevant *vis-à-vis* what we make *i.e.* our design questions. Living in a world of words, the architect has problems understanding that his primary universe of discourse is architecture itself, not information about buildings. A building or a theoretical project is not *read* like a book. Embodied perception is more profound and significant precisely because it is not articulated in the way language is. Without wishing to deny some illuminating connections, we must still emphasize that the understanding of buildings as *texts* can be a dangerous fallacy. As knowledge, a piece of architecture is obviously more like a gesture or expression of a time, place and worldview, and less like a piece of writing. The intended *'metaphor'* is never *read* literally, but the intellectual articulation of the architect's intentions through a statement that, *in the nature of mytho-poetic thought*, engages his intended intervention in the world at large, is still crucial.

Alberto Perez-Gomez studied architecture in Mexico and received a PH.D. in History and Theory from the University of Essex, England. He is currently the Director of the Carleton University School of Architecture and is the author of the recently published book ***Architecture and The Crisis of Modern Science*** *(MIT Press). He is the recipient of the* ***1983 Alice Davis Hitchcock Book Award*** *of the Society of Architectural Historians.*

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there....

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower whose top ***may reach*** *unto heaven....*

And the lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do:and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech....

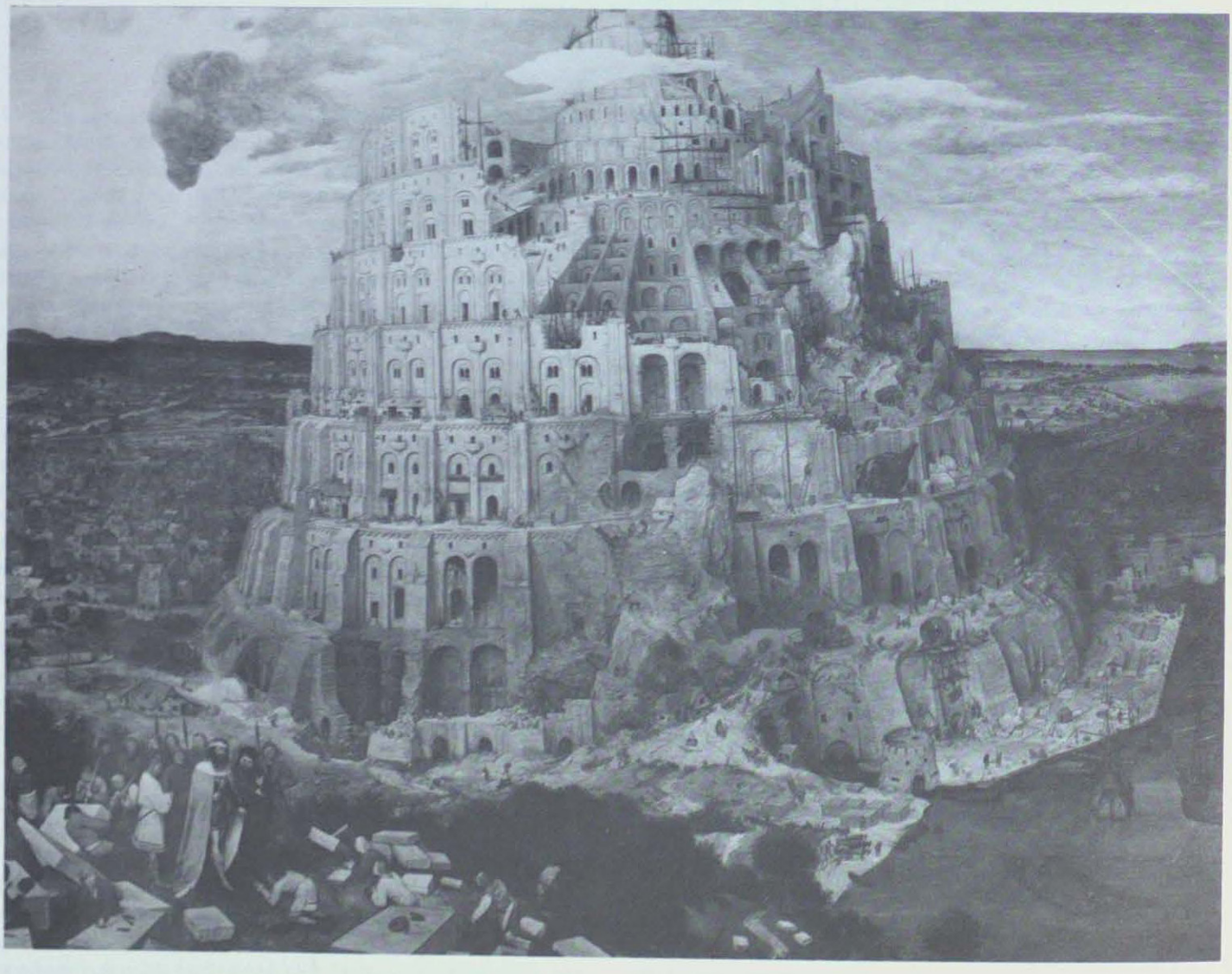
Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth....

Genesis XI: 1-9

Some Thoughts on Architectural Criticism
Bruegel and Babel

by

Ricardo L. Castro

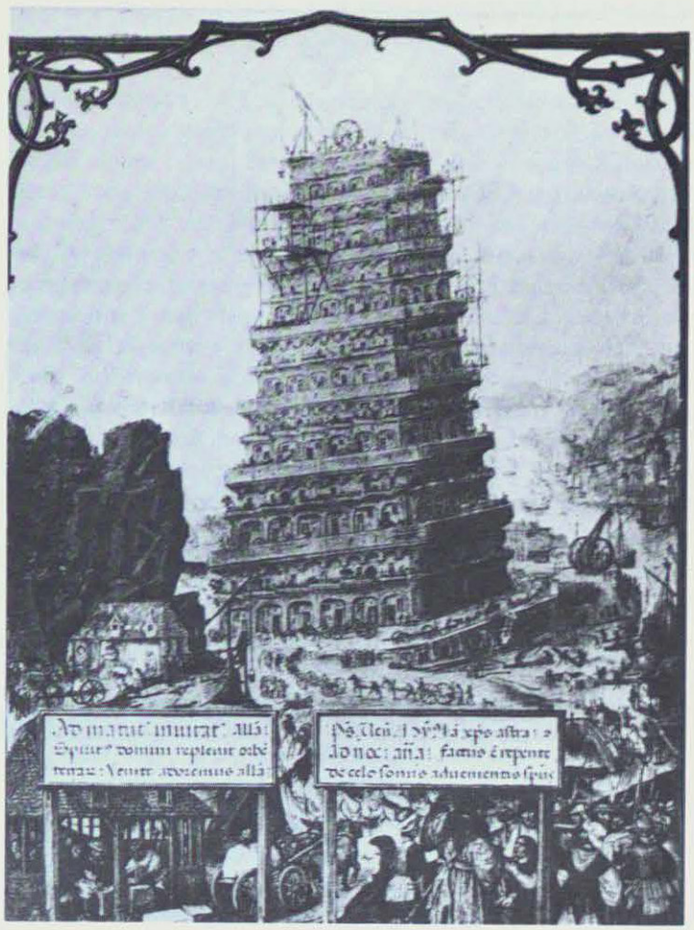


Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Layout by Steve Leckie

Figure 1. Pieter Bruegel The Elder. *The Tower of Babel*, 1563.

La peinture de la Tour de Babel par Pierre Bruegel l'ancien sert de leitmotiv pour une analyse critique, laquelle utilise plusieurs niveaux de référence. À travers celle-ci la Tour de Bruegel se révèle comme un projet d'architecture. Les cadres de référence utilisés n'étant pas une doctrine mais plutôt un discours dans le domaine de l'existence physique, constituent une base de réflection et d'action future. Ils sont finalement des outils conceptuels, et non des mécanismes à toute épreuve, pour aborder la critique architecturale.



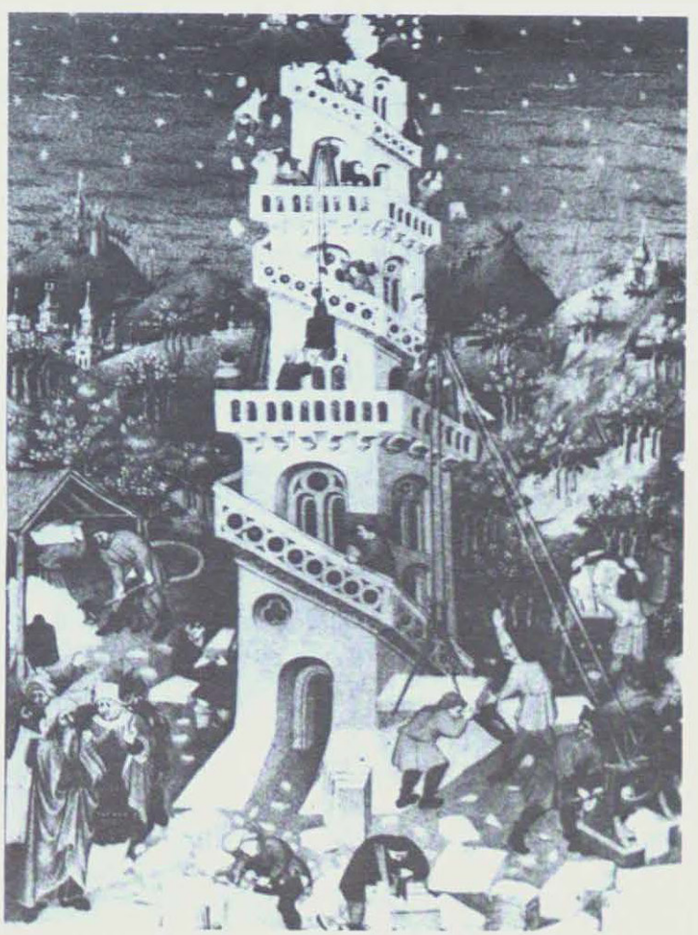
Pierre Bruegel L'Ancien, Charles de Tolnay

Figure 2. *Grimani Breviary. The Tower of Babel.*

The conflict described in the Biblical story serves to illustrate the general situation of the contemporary critical discourse in architecture. There are two levels in the myth of Babel. One deals with building intentions: to build the highest, most perfect architectural artifact, which the tower and the city represent. The other alludes to the process of communication among the builders: the critical discourse itself. It is in the latter that the conflict is manifested. It consists of the paradoxical confusion produced by the simultaneous operation of various conceptual systems which in the end hinder the materialization of the builders' dreams. Thus, despite the available technological means, the Babel builders can neither fulfill their intentions, nor can they proceed with their critical discourse.

The *Tower of Babel* has been a significant leitmotiv throughout the iconographic history of western art. Thus, the Tower was depicted in the *Grimani Breviary*, and in the *Duke of Bedford's Book of Hours* in the early 1500's (Figs. 2-3). The painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder, probably inspired by the latter two, produced two magnificent paintings and one ivory miniature (now lost) on this theme in the 1560s. In the eigtheenth century, Etienne-Louis Boullée, the revolutionary French architect, executed several drawings which made a strong allusion to the Tower (Fig. 4). More recently, the Italian-American architect Paolo Soleri has referred to Babel in some of his evocative utopian projects.

It is, however, Bruegel's first painting of the Tower of Babel, realized in 1563, which interests us (Fig. 1). In this masterpiece we have a dramatic representation of a building. The painting, besides its artistic merits, can be considered as one of the first visionary architectural schemes of which there is a record. Its significance, however, derives from the fact that, unlike many of its contemporary works, it constitutes a prime example of the critical discernment of its author. Bruegel takes on the role of a painter, technician, and architect whose imagination, as pointed out by Walter S. Gibson, one of his historians, "*allowed him to transform even the most banal ideas of his age into powerful and unforgetable images.*"[2] The Tower



Pierre Bruegel L'Ancien, Charles de Tolnay

Figure 3. *Duke of Bedford's Book of Hours. The Tower of Babel*

of Babel, in Christian thought, has served as a symbol of confusion. As explored by Bruegel it is a statement of titanic struggle.

To examine Bruegel's vision of the Tower I shall use four frames of reference. They relate to the ecological, social, operational-experiential, and perceptual levels which define any architectural object.[3] In linguistic studies the state of the language at any given time is considered to be a cross-section of its development over time. The state at any one time is synchronic; in its passage overtime it is diachronic. We can place the previous frames of reference in a synchronic context. We are then permitted, with the necessary research, to place them in their diachronic, that is historical, dimension. If we can succeed, this will provide a solid foundation for the creation of a critical scenario where past and present concerns and events are selectively and comprehensively understood, defining a sound base for future actions and predictions.

Ecological

Bruegel's interpretative vision illustrates a powerful technical development. As such, the Tower emerges out of what must have been a half imaginary, half real Flemish landscape of the sixteenth century. This duality is emphasized by the fact that the building rises from the surface of earth, land and water, reaching into the skies. Babel evokes a silhouete which, in its dominant massiveness, diminishes the surrounding landscape. Its physical materiality is supplied by the rock which constitutes both base and shaft. Bruegel elicits through this apparent geological depiction the experience of hilltowns, mountaintop monasteries and Alpine landcapes acquired during his travels through Italy and France. The Tower itself can be understood as the result of the technical transformation of the plain's geology into basic construction materials: brick masonry and bonded stone veneer. De Tolnay, a well known critic of Bruegel's work, says:

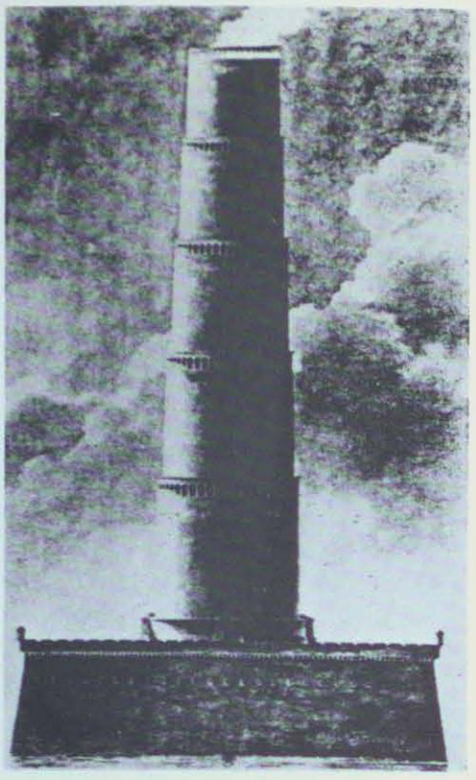
Une impression illusoire nous fait attribuer d'abord cette oeuvre à l'unique effort de l'homme, — en vérité elle n'existe que par l'appui de la nature.

He continues:

Les travaux de la tour ne sont pas arrêtés comme dans la miniature du Duc de Bedford par l'intervention du ciel sous la forme d'anges armés, c'est la nature même qu'impose ses limites à la volonté humaine, limites plus concevables encore si on replace l'édifice dans l'ensemble du paysage: la vaste plaine que l'oeil prolonge à l'infini la rapetisse. Le récit biblique reçoit ainsi un sens nouveau celui de la toute puissance de la nature, qu'aucun des imitateurs de Breugel n'a comprise.[4]

Nature collaborates but sets limits. On the right side of the painting, near the horizon, we perceive the subtle juncture between sea and plain. It is enhanced by a winding road which marks the edge of the dyke, or *polder*, that technical accomplishment which has been the source of life for the people of the lowlands. Its counterpart, on the left side of the painting, at about the same level, is the aqueduct, evocative, like the rock, of other landscapes. It defines the edge of the gothic city, and like the polder is a source of life, their fundamental difference being that one drains and the other carries water.

Bruegel's scheme shows a deep understanding of natural and technological processes and their human significance. The latter even includes seafaring activities, as shown at the lower right corner of the composition. This might explain why he was commissioned to depict the canals linking Brussels to Antwerp, a project which was hindered by his premature death in September 1569. His knowledge and experience in construction matters is best expressed in his



Etienne-Louis Boulée, J.M. Pérouse

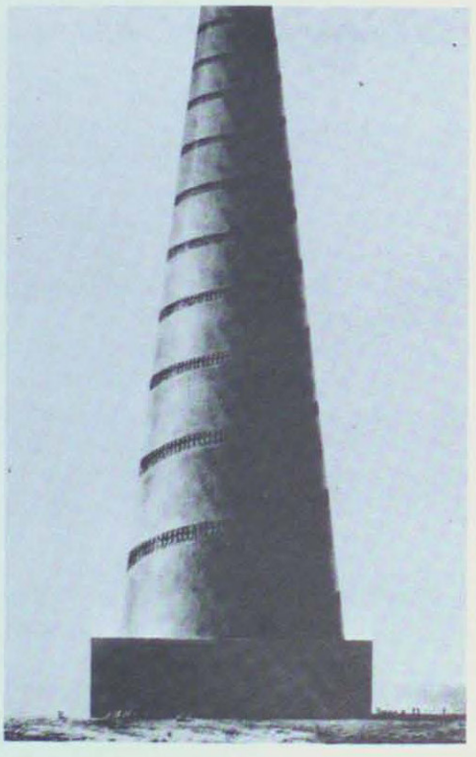


Figure 4. Etienne-Louis Boullee. *Project for a Spiral Tower.*

treatment of the top of the Tower, which he has left open. There, febrile construction activity aided by machines, pulleys, capstans, formwork, scaffolding, unveils a structure which resembles a Roman Colosseum but reoriented to its outer surface. Various studies on the artist have shown a solid foundation for this vision. His travels throughout Italy and France gave him a detailed knowledge of Roman construction and building technology. His Alpine experience and stay in Rome in the early 1550s must have impressed him so that one of his early commentators remarked that *"travelling through the Alps, he had swallowed mountains and rocks, which upon*

his return he put back unto canvasses and panels."[5] Ultimately Bruegel's early conception of man's place in nature is an ecological view which occurred before ecology as a science existed.

Social

Bruegel was a keen observer of society and his paintings and drawings have been regarded as a kind of social commentary. His iconographic world is made up by many images of actuality. They are, as De Tolnay says, *'premiers essais de jounalisme'*.[6] Looking at the painting of the Tower this aspect seems to be less exploited. Nevertheless a closer inspection shows that on the bottom left corner of the painting a group is being lead by an imposing figure. We know it is Nimrod, who according to the expanded version of *Genesis* by Joseph Flavius in *The Jewish Antiquities*, was the instigator and supervisor of the Babel project. Nimrod's presence in the painting, besides its relation to the biblical account, is probably a commentary on the social structure of the epoch. Consider some of the stonemasons who have stopped their work to pay tribute to the monarch while others continue their activities nonchalantly. All of this happens while the construction proceeds in the background. There is no apparent conflict or tension between all these individuals. This is probably an allusion to the independence of the guilds and the craftsmen of the time.

Bruegel's scheme may be considered as a symbol of progress with positive connotations, a kind of celebration of humankind's resourcefulness and inventive urge. Bruegel's work takes place at the height of the Flemish Renaissance, when some biblical accounts like this one acquired special relevance, a time when all the modern languages and some of the ancient ones were still considered direct descendents from the builders of the Tower. As remarked by Gibson:

> *This....belief must have been particularly attractive in Antwerp, where dictionaries and other books were published in many tongues, and where in 1566 Plantin began preparing the* ***Polyglot Bible****, a monumental work in six languages, including Hebrew and Chaldean. And in a time of religious strife, Bruegel's picture of the Tower of Babel probably reminded viewers of a bygone age when all men shared a common faith and purpose.*[7]

Operational/Experiential

Bruegel's Tower of Babel is an unfinished scheme. Construction has gone for a long time, so long that a town is beginning to grow at its base and is creeping into the shaft. Time and the elements have left their patina on the surface. These signs give us clues that we can read and interpret. The Tower resembles a cathedral, a symbolic structure, but it also makes us think of utilitarian buildings like bridges, aqueducts and amphitheaters. Bruegel's scheme can be considered as an example of civic monumental architecture, but one that is definitely inhabitable. Already some of the builders' cabins and huts perched on the ascending street of the tower show the act of dwelling in a primitive stage. The enormous structure is envisaged as a monumental circular Roman *insula*. Bruegel has taken the license of changing the morphology of the Roman prototype. His urge is both utopian and real. Thus, imagining the project in its planimetric dimension, the Tower has a strong resemblance to some of the ideal cities proposed by Francesco di Giorgio Martini circa 1500 (Fig. 5). It is conceivable that Bruegel knew these projects. In his scheme, the formal pattern not only determines the street layout but also governs the plan forms of the dwellings. In the Flemish landscape where land is an extremely valuable commodity, Bruegel's Tower is logical in its economical use of space. It constitutes a forerunner of the visionary architectural projects as conceived in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by thinkers and architects like Charles Fourier, Andre Godin, Vladimir Krinsky, Moisei Ginsburg, Le Corbusier, Paolo Soleri and Aldo Rossi.

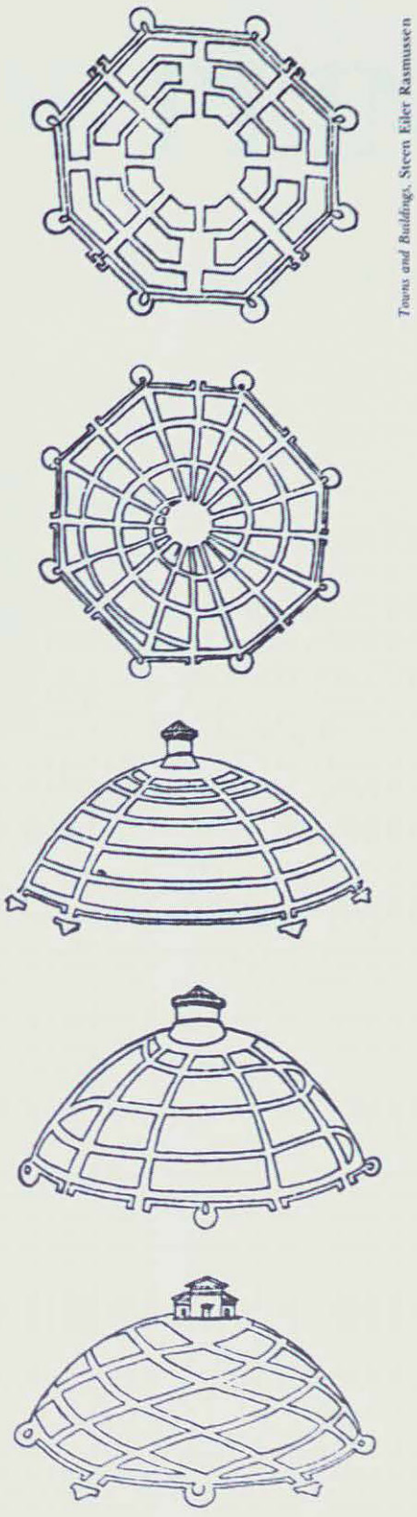
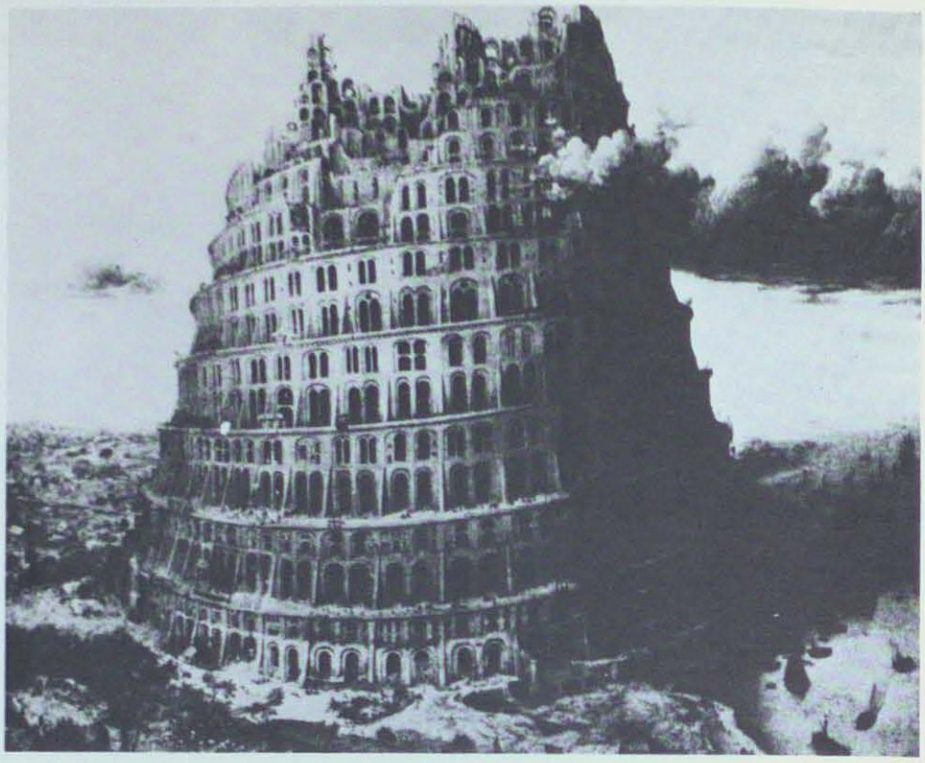


Figure 5. Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Plans of Ideal Cities.*

Perceptual

The Flemish School of painting is prominent for its detailed portrayal of landscapes and everyday life. These painters were aware of how light modulated and transformed objects. This was an important event in the development of our environmental consciousness. Bruegel was part of this school. We are not surprised to find this preoccupation re-



Pierre Bruegel L'Ancien, Charles de Tolnay

fig.6 Pieter Bruegel The Elder. *The Tower of Babel*, second version

flected in his work. His treatment of the Tower of Babel was no exception. It was ultimately light that revealed the architectural artifact in its monumental scale and articulated each one of its parts. Through the use of various drawing methods, including superposition, atmospheric and linear perspective, the painter-architect was capable of conveying the vastness of the Flemish landscape from an imaginary view point. Hardly any mountain formation in such a landscape can be observed that would permit such an elevated station point.

Bruegel's portrayal of the Tower cannot be grasped at once. It is necessary to read it from side to side in the horizontal, vertical and diagonal senses. Each object, figure, and feature eventually leads to the completion of the puzzle. Item by item each element reveals an encyclopedic preoccupation with the object that will only crystallize two centuries later in the work of Diderot and in the Napoleonic Code.

This broader categorical survey reveals Bruegel's detailed vision in a fuller perspective. First of all, Bruegel's Tower of Babel can be considered as a visionary architectural project. Inquiries into his other works would eventually provide more information to support or refute this hypothesis. In 1568 Bruegel executed a second painting of the Tower of Babel (Fig. 6). New aspects are apparent in the second version which merit additional inquiries, notably the exclusion of Nimrod's cohort, the radical new treatment of the Tower and the elimination of imaginary landscape elements like the rock. His first Tower was like a painting partly developed from the landscape genre, depicting buildings and landscapes together with human activities. His new scheme resembles more of a purely architectural study in which much of the anecdotical detail has been left out. The building pierces into the clouds which appear menacing. They cast a strong shadow onto the right side of the Tower and the now scaled down harbor below.The elevated vantage point is now more metaphysical than real. The appearance of the structure is hermetic and shut. We do not know if it is in ruin or a project in the last stages of completion. This new scheme alludes more to Romanesque sources than to the Roman influences of the first Tower. Thus, it represents a more definitive stage of Bruegel's architectural urge which borders on surrealism.

Criticism today

If one aspect must be stressed it is that any artifact is the result of many layers of action and thought. Architecture is no exception. Much of today's criticism is the result of a narrow and idiosyncratic approach which critically isolates the architectural object. Our present situation reflects the circumstances of the biblical Tower of Babel. We could improve our critical discourse by adopting a more holistic approach. The frames of reference which we used to examine Bruegel's work, not being a doctrine, but a discourse on areas of physical and other existence, constitute a point of departure and reflection for further action. They are conceptual tools and not foolproof devices for approaching the critical task.

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Notes

1. I am indebted to Professors Stuart Wilson, Pieter Sijpkes and Ms. Maureen Anderson of McGill's School of Architecture for their criticism.
2. Walter S. Gibson, *Bruegel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 7.
3. These frames of reference were proposed by Robert S. Harris in a paper entitled 'A Model for Designers', Eugene: University of Oregon, 1973. (Mimeographed.)
4. Charles De Tolnay, *Pierre Bruegel L'Ancien* (Bruxelles: Nouvelle Societe d'Editions, 1935), p. 33.
5. C. v. Mander, *Het Leven der Doorluchtighe Nederlandtsche en Hooghduytsche Schilders*, ed. H. Floerke, Munich 1906 quoted in Piero Bianconi, *Bruegel* (Bologna: Capitol Editions, 1979), p. 13.
6. De Tolnay, op. cit., p. 18.
7. Gibson, op. cit, p. 97.

THE VILLAS OF PLINY

Reflections on the Exhibition by Its Guest Curator

by Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey

Les lecteurs du numéro précédant de ***THE FIFTH COLUMN*** *ont eu un aperçu de l'exposition* ***Les Villas de Pline****. Ce texte ne reprend donc pas l'analyse de certains de ces points mais se concentre plutôt sur trois aspects qui se sont révélés importants au fil des siècles: l'émulation comme modèle d'étude; l'essence du classicisme en architecture ainsi que le lien entre les oeuvres littéraires, comme celle de Pline, et leur influence sur l'architecture.*

Depuis leur rédaction vers l'an 100 après J.-C., les descriptions architecturales de Pline furent maintes fois immitées ayant apporté à l'écriture architecturale une dimension littéraire contrairement à l'approche plus technique de son illustre prédécesseur, Vitruve. Ces textes nous sont parvenus grâce aux transcriptions des moines de la période médiévale, reproduisant inlassablement les écrits de Vitruve et de Pline, non pour le caractère théorique mais plutôt pour le vocabulaire spécialisé qu'ils employaient.

Les idées de cet homme d'état Romain se sont donc dispersées graduellement à travers le développement de villes comme Montréal. Artisans et planificateurs de certaines régions montréalaises du début du siècle (Verdun, Maisonneuve) ont indirectement subi ces influences. Cette correspondance idéologique est l'aboutissement naturel d'un processus d'émulation et d'un commun attachement aux modèles classiques, transmis d'une génération de bâtisseurs à une autre.

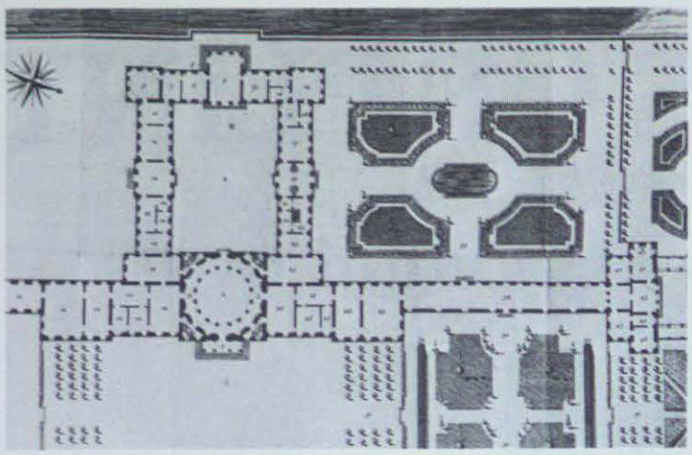
"...the 1982 program was constricted in such a way as to avoid a question of style. In 1982 an attempt was made to stress the transcendent relevance of classicism to all times and places without direct reference to the antique orders of architecture ***per se****."*

Layout by Gina Sarafidis

Readers of the preceding issue of *THE FIFTH COLUMN* will have seen reviewed the exhibition *The Villas of Pliny and Classical Architecture in Montreal* (Musée des Beaux Arts de Montréal, October 14 - December 11, 1983). It is not my intention to repeat any of the points already made in that detailed analysis. Rather I would like briefly to dwell on the three aspects of the show that emerged more and more strongly as time went along, almost to the point of taking on an independent direction of their own. The three aspects are: emulation as a model for study; the essential nature of architectural classicism; and the relationship between literary works, such as Pliny's Latin letters, and their influence on architecture. Dealing with these points in reverse order, let me begin with Pliny the Younger as an example of writing about architecture.

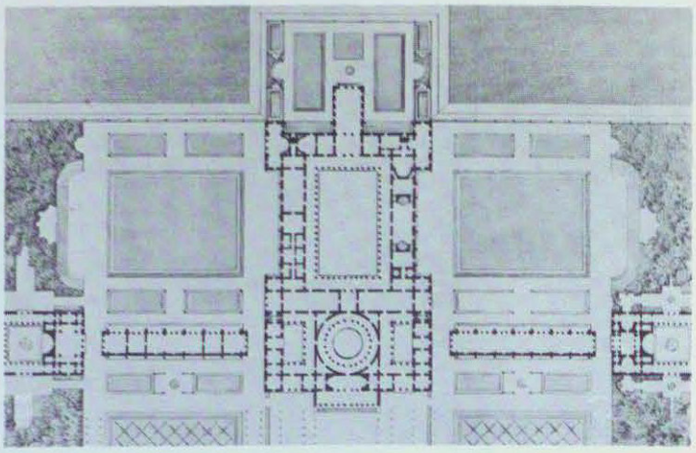
Ever since he put pen to parchment around the year 100 A.D., Pliny's evocative architectural descriptions have had imitators. This is not surprising. As far as is known, Pliny virtually invented the idea of writing about architecture from a literary standpoint, as opposed to the more technical one of his great predecessor, Vitruvius. Medieval monks working in their *scriptoria* are to be thanked for the fact that Pliny and Vitruvius's texts survived. Again it is a question of writing; the physical act of writing in this case. The monks laboriously copied out Vitruvius and Pliny by hand, not because they were interested in their architectural content but on account of a specialized architectural vocabulary they used.

Only with the early Renaissance did the imagery the words conjured up begin to be reassessed. The Italian humanist Michele Vieri leads us to believe that Pliny's letters were his bedside reading. The Florentine poet Poliziano not only imitated Pliny's epistolary style but also contributed to the intellectual climate that had made possible the first reconstruction of a villa in the antique manner, built for Giovanni de'Medici at Fiesole around 1458. Another Medici patron, Cardinal Giulio (later Pope Clement VII) asked Raphael to design for him the *Villa Madama* on the outskirts of Rome as a free interpretation of Pliny's house in the countryside near Ostia. And Raphael in turn wrote his client a letter describing the villa-to-be in Plinian terms. Meanwhile the first printed edition of Pliny's letters had appeared in Venice in 1471. Vincenzo Scamozzi was the first to publish an architecural rendition in 1615. By the very end of that century the antiquarian Jean-François Félibien des Avaux had contested Scamozzi's reconstruction and come up with one of his own. In 1728 the



Collection: Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Center for Architecture

Jean-François Félibien des Avaux, ***Laurentine Villa Restitution***, plan, 1699. Engraving from Félibien's *Plans et Descriptions.*



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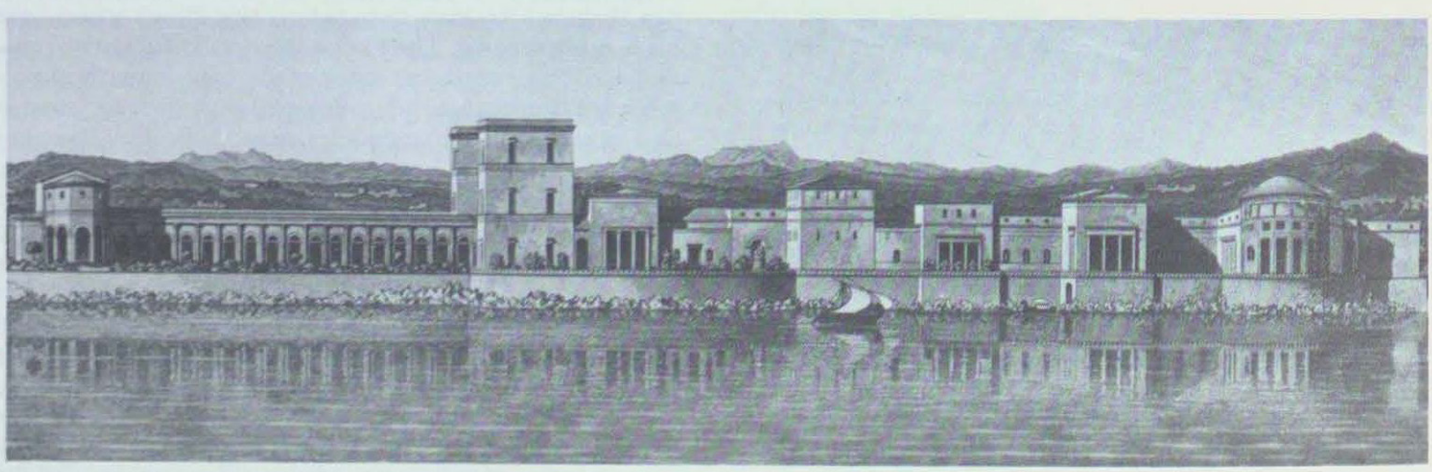
Amable Macquet, ***Laurentine Villa Restitution***, plan, 1818. Engraving from J.-F. Boucher, *Le Laurentin.*

English scholar Robert Castell had read not only Pliny but every other Roman author on villas and had attempted a synthesis based on all their texts. A hundred years later, the archeologists Luigi Canina had created his kind of synthesis, this time between the literary and the recently discovered archeological evidence. Louis-Pierre Haudebourt followed Canina's lead by referring to Mazois' book on the ruins of Pompei, but he did so in the form of a surreal dream sequence written in a romantic prose reminiscent of Chateaubriand. Finally, in 1852, Jules-Frédéric Bouchet assembled the whole array of previous writings and reconstructions, including Haudebourt's of 1838, and arranged them according to the comparative method. It is this same methodology that has been pursued right down to the present in Pierre Pinon's contribution to the catalogue *La Laurentine et l'invention de la villa romaine* (Paris, 1982).

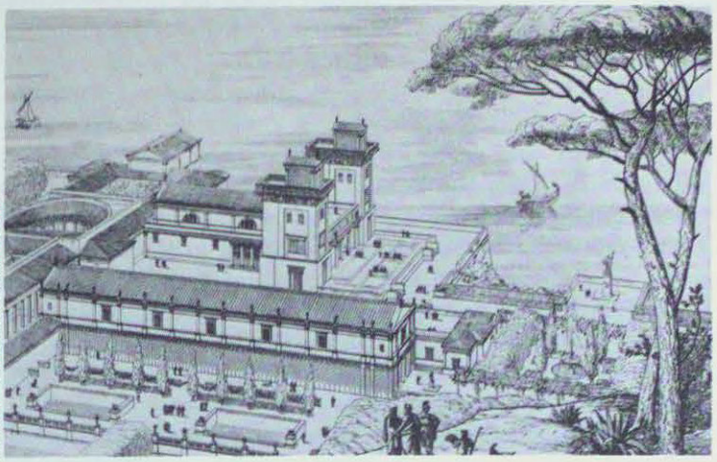
As time progressed the approaches to the Pliny texts obviously became more analytic and critical. The amazing thing that remains unchanged is the unbroken chain of writings, each one relying on the other. Thus Pliny's letters represent a literary tradition with its own rich historiography. More ink has been spilled on their account than over just about any other single group of buildings unsupported by archeological finds. What could be a better proof of the power of mere words! A sizeable literature has been founded on the hypothesis that Pliny's villas were actually built. For a long time this supposition was taken on faith. It now seems more likely, however, that Pliny's descriptions were based on his imagination.

Regardless of whether the villas of Pliny really existed, they have created an architectural legacy at least as important if not more so than the literary one just discussed. Starting with the glosses Medieval monks wrote on their Pliny manuscripts the fine points of Pliny's exact meaning have continued to be debated. The greatest controversy has centered on whether the Laurentine Villa had a circular courtyard, as was believed in the Renaissance, or a *D-shaped* one, as more modern philologists have contended. Architects have fortunately tended away from these details of interpretation and have exploited the vagueness of language to their own artistic ends. But with few exceptions they have also tended to respect the antique style of architecture the villas would have been constructed in, supposing them to have ever been built. Such a bias was perfectly normal for the Renaissance but it became less so with the passage of time, especially with the advent of the Gothic revival in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, in 1818 a *concours d'émulation* held at the Ecole des Beaux Arts used Pliny's letter to Gallus for its program without even bothering to specify columns or trabeation, so obvious was the choice of style. All three front-running contest-



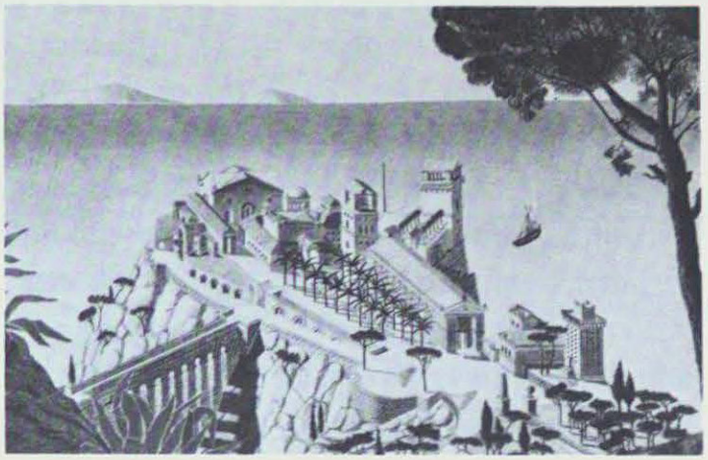
Collection: Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Center for Architecture

Karl Friedrich Schinkel, ***Laurentine Villa Restitution***, elevation, 1841. Lithograph from Schinkel's *Architektonisches Album.*



Collection: Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Center for Architecture

Jules-Frédéric Bouchet, ***Laurentine Villa Restitution***, perspective, 1852. Engraving from J.-F. Bouchet, *Le Laurentin*.



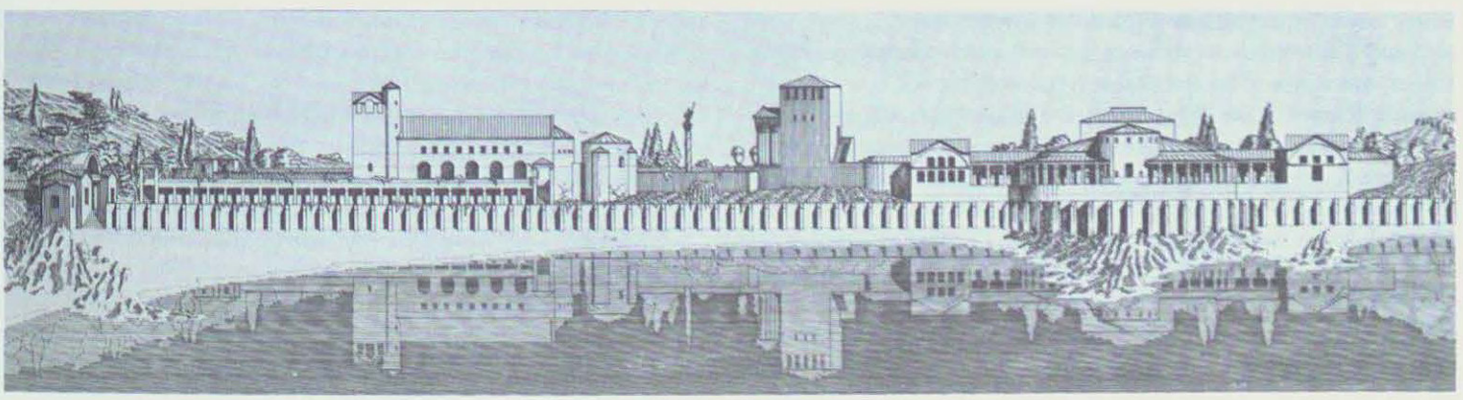
Collection of the architect

Rita Wolff after Léon Krier, ***Laurentine Villa Restitution***, perspective, 1982.

ants came up with remarkably similar plans featuring a round column-lined court backing onto a rectangular peristyle garden and a large wing extending out onto the seashore. The similarity suggests the students had some illicit foreknowledge of one another's schemes. More remarkable still is the resemblance that these plans have to that of Félibien. Amable Macquet's plan is the closest, most derivative, of the three. Inevitably one questions a teaching system that fostered Macquet's reliance on past precedent. Yet the 1818 competition was clearly the model on which the 1982 *concours* was based, and out of which grew the original Paris exhibition. It would, nevertheless, be incorrect to see that show, let alone the Montreal one, solely as a plea for Beaux-Arts methods. In fact the 1982 program was constructed in such a way as to avoid a question of style. The reasons were far different from what they had been in 1818. In 1982 an attempt was made to stress the transcendent relevance of classicism to all times and places without direct reference to the antique orders of architecture *per se* .

Léon Krier, one of the foremost participants in the Paris *concours*, made clear his personal interpretation of classicism during a lecture in Montreal this past October which was followed by a group discussion held at McGill University. For Krier, classicism has to do with a state of mind above all else. It involves a recognition of history without enslavement to it. Insofar as the villas of Pliny represent time-honoured tradition they may, in his view, justifiably be explored again in a spirit of fresh enquiry. Like his predecessors, Krier knows his Pliny well, almost word for word in some instances. That knowledge, coupled with an awareness of such previous reconstructions as those of Félibien or Bouchet, has prompted Krier's wish not to replicate Pliny if it does not suit him. To Krier's way of thinking the actual surroundings at Ostia are uninspiring - flat, marred by gas stations and cheap seaside pizzerias. These banal realities have little to do with the *ideal* Pliny villa as Krier sees it. That villa exists somewhere off in metaphysical mid air. It is like a rhetorical figure of speech from one of Plato's dialogues, akin to the Good, the True and the Beautiful. Therefore Krier does not feel constrained to respect the letter of Pliny's description by situating the villa anywhere in particular. His rocky promontory combines recollections of the Adriatic shoreline near Sperlonga with the bluff on which his native city of Luxembourg is located. Krier's villa is more than a rich man's retreat. It is a humanely proportioned city in miniature, an ideal state or republic in which master and servant live in supposed harmonious balance with one another. Balance, harmony, proportion, variety without confusion, these aesthetic concepts are key to Krier's classic design. In this sense he was right to intimate that style as such was irrelevant. He chose to prefer mixing

David Bigelman, ***Laurentine Villa Restitution***, elevation, 1982.



Collection of the architect

"Sometimes the stacking up of influences could be clearly seen, as if the architects themselves were standing on one another's shoulders to form an imaginary human pyramid... the cumulative effect of all the disparate images collected together in one gallery space was to stress the way in which architects have learned from each other."

antique and Palladian elements. But he implied his villa might have been expressed in a gothic manner. Or it could have been neo-Carolingian with a touch of Schinkel as in the case of David Bigelman; or sheathed in light reflecting glass as in the skyscraper rendition by Justo Solsona. The essence of classicism, then, is to acheive what the ancient Greek philosophers advocated as the ideal mean between extremes. Pliny's villa descriptions take on just this classic philosophical mantle. They reconcile in delicate counterpoise architecture with nature. The buildings sound as if they were neither too big nor too small. Rooms were set aside for winter or summer. The halls could ring with noisy reveling at the same time as it was possible for the owner to experience the tranquility he sought. The extent to which this basic classicism of Pliny is understood and respected marks the measure of success of any restitution attempted. It suffices to capture the essential classicism of Pliny's villas while perhaps avoiding repetition of the formal classicism of the past.

Examples from the past are, of course, unavoidable and at the same time instructive. Emulation of the past as a positive thing was amply demonstrated in the Villas of Pliny exhibition. The space between displays was left as fluid as possible in order to enhance movement between the various objects. The Melvin Charney construction, *Pliny on My Mind*, took into account and defined certain lines of sight without obstructing them. Didactic panels and labels describing books, photographs or drawings in the show made cross references to other works exhibited in different parts of the installation. Throughout the show the visitor was invited to become actively involved in tracing instances of emulation at work. Small clusters of objects formed pools or eddies off the mainstream in which it was possible to become engrossed. Sometimes the stacking up of influences could be clearly seen, as if the architects themselves were standing on one another's shoulders to form an imaginary human pyramid. At other moments, as in the case of a photographic sequence of temple fronts illustrating Montreal classicism, the relationship to Pliny's villas appeared to be more tenuous. Even so, the cumulative effect of all the disparate images collected together in one gallery space was to stress the way in which architects have learned from each other.

Emulation is the will to aspire to and excell the example of others. As such it has always been fundamental to the creative artistic process. The academic system of education recognized emulation and tried to fashion it into a hard and fast program of study, sometimes with counter-productive results. But the excessive zeal with which the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* pursued its goal does not obscure the underlying humanistic role history plays in the arts. It is a force that can liberate rather than stultify true innovation. It interconnects disparate, seemingly unrelated persons and events by defying geographical distance and the passage of time. A case in point relates to the Villa Madama. Raphael designed it in 1516 as an imaginative conflation of Pliny's tuscan hilltop villa and his seaside one with the circular courtyard. Less than a generation later, Palladio was inspired to draw the Villa Madama's plan. John Soane and Thomas Hardwick, two English students in Rome, did so again in 1778. Their French counterparts Percier and Fontaine followed suit during the next decade. In 1915, a young Canadian in Rome, Ernest Cormier, made a similar measured survey, probably unaware of how many others had preceded him to the site. After returning home, Cormier designed the Université de Montréal and his own house on the Avenue des Pins partly in subconscious reference to his Italian experiences. To understand Cormier fully is to grasp that his sources stretch back to Percier and Fontaine, Palladio and even Pliny, not to mention an indigenous tradition of building villas on Mount Royal that shares in a generic way many of the same aspirations as those expressed by Pliny centuries earlier.

Through a process of gradual, capillary action as just described, the ideas of a Roman statesman with a fertile literary bent have infused by direct and indirect means an entire city like Montreal. Artisan builders and city planners in such parts of the metropolis as turn-of-the-century Verdun or Maisonneuve are hiers to Pliny without perhaps ever having heard his name. The ties come about as a natural outcome of emulation and common adherence to classical design principles. The influence is transmitted by something like a laying on of hands; metaphorically speaking architect touches architect, builder touches builder. Much the same sense of continuity was generated by the Villas of Pliny exhibition itself, with so many examples gathered from the past and the present, all relating to the same theme. It took on the aspect of a giant *concours d'émulation* in which all the contestants had tried the same experiment of finding a classic new Plinian solution, only to learn that their solutions had in turn been superceded. Within a year, Krier's Laurentine seacoast promontory had become the *parti* for Erich Marosi's restitution which was subsequently added to the original paricipants' work brought from Paris. The process of emulating Pliny has gathered a momentum, or will-to-form, all its own. The works of art, exhibited side by side, seemed to enter into a dialogue across the ages. In a strange way it was as if the walls spoke.

Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey is Associate Professor of Architectural History at Queen's University; he is presently the Director of Study Programs at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal. He was the guest curator of the exhibition **Les Villas de Pline**.

Architecture perceived through JOURNALISM

Dans le cadre des activités de ***l'Archifête*** *qui se sont déroulées en mai dernier, l'école d'architecture de l'Université McGill organisait un séminaire sur* ***L'Architecture Perçu au Sein du Journalisme****. Ce séminaire fut inauguré par une conférence de Joseph Giovannini, critique d'architecture au* ***New York Times****. Le jour suivant M. Giovannini participait à une table ronde aux cotés de Esmail Baniassad, Doyen de l'école d'architecture du Technical University of Nova Scotia; Trevor Boddy, architecte et critique à Edmonton; Susan Doubilet, rédactrice de* ***Progressive Architecture****; Odile Hénault, architecte, critique, et rédactrice de* ***Section A*** *à Montréal; Mark London, architecte et critique à Montréal; Pierre du Prey, Directeur du programme d'étude du* ***CCA*** *à Montréal et professeur d'histoire de l'architecture à l'Université Queens; Frank Renevier, architecte, critique, et collaborateur au* ***Nouvel Observateur*** *et* ***Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*** *à Paris; Larry Richards, Directeur de l'école d'architecture de l'Université de Waterloo; Jean-Louis Robillard, Directeur de l'Archifête et rédacteur de* ***ARQ*** *à Montréal; Norbert Schoenaeur et Radoslav Zuk, professeurs à l'école d'architecture de l'Université McGill ainsi que Ricardo Castro, assistant professeur à l'école d'architecture de l'Université McGill et animateur de la discussion.*

As part of the ***Archifête*** *activities which took place in Montreal last May, the McGill School of Architecture organized a seminar on the subject* ***Architecture Perceived Through Journalism****. The seminar was opened by a lecture on the title subject by Joseph Giovannini, critic and architectural journalist of the* ***New York Times****. The seminar continued the following day in a round table discussion between Mr. Giovannini and the other invited participants, including the following: Esmail Baniassad, Dean, School of Architecture, Technical University of Nova Scotia; Trevor Boddy, architect and critic, Edmonton; Susan Doubilet, Senior News Editor,* ***Progressive Architecture****; Odile Hénault, architect and critic, Editor of* ***Section A****, Montreal; Pierre du Prey, Director of Study Programmes,* ***CCA****, Montreal; Frank Rénevier, architect and critic, contributor to* ***Le Nouvel Observateur*** *and* ***Architecture d'Aujourd'hui****, Paris; Larry Richards, Director, School of Architecture, Waterloo University; Jean-Louis Robillard, architect and critic, Editor of* ***ARQ****, Montreal; Norbert Schoenaeur, Professor, School of Architecture, McGill University; Radoslav Zuk, Professor, School of Architecture, McGill University. The moderator for the round table was Ricardo Castro, assistant professor, School of Architecture, McGill University.*

Trevor Boddy : To begin with, I do have a question, a line or topic that we all want to comment on that was implicit in Joseph Giovannini's talk last night. That is the whole issue of the political engagement, the political involvement, and the political pose of the architectural critic. I was really quite thrilled by your description, the latitude you were allowed at the *Herald Examiner*, and the commitment you made on issues such as the library demolition and others. I am very much impressed by that. I know my own brief, unhappy relationship with daily newspaper architectural writing is that I was told that I could be the critic of a journal as long as I never said anything negative, that I said something very nice about large development companies, that I took a very soft pose. These were the conditions laid out by the editor for my engagement. I said no, I cannot be a critic under those terms. Were you in a special situation? Surely most daily newspaper architectural writers do not have the latitude you were allowed?

Joseph Giovannini : I think it was a special situation for three reasons. Firstly, they had no firm expectations of what an architecture critic should do, not having had one before. Secondly, the *Herald*, which is a Hearst newspaper, is not based in Los Angeles and does not have any particular ties to L.A., to the L.A. power establishment. Had I been writing on the *L.A. Times* there probably would have been more implied problems and certain delicacies. The *L.A. Times* has a large amount of real estate downtown and so there is a certain responsibility coming with that. On the one hand, they did not know what to expect. On the other hand, as a result of my writing, I was able to give Los Angeles something that the *L.A. Times* was not, something one could appreciate from a journalistic point of view. What I wanted to imply last night was that each writing situation is different and that in a real life situation you have to realize what your limitations are and push it to the maximum. At the *N.Y. Times*, I am not a critic. The subjects that I can push are more topical in nature such as sexism in design, the American dream and nationalism. From my point of view as a writer what I want to do is address issues which are serious and deal with them intellectually so that the whole subject is not an issue of fashion but of meaning.

Suzanne Doubilet : I've heard rumours that at the *N.Y. Times* there is the problem that the architecture critic, Paul Goldberger, is expected not to attack developers too heavily. That's one of the reasons that they were happy with Paul Goldberger. He goes along with that. Now, it's probably inflammatory to ask such a question, but do you feel that there are limitations at the *Times* of that sort?

Giovannini : I think that one of the problems and one of the virtues of newspapers is that, unlike television they are local institutions and they are integrally tied into the city. Many newspapers support the local industry. It is my understanding that the theatre critic a couple of years ago was fired because he took a very strong, frequently negative stance against what was a local industry and also a Times Square industry. I think the editors of the *Times* are concerned with the content and make their views known. In terms of development, Ada Louise Huxtable took a very strong stance on these things. I don't know if these parameters have changed. She had become an institution.

Doubilet : And that was why she was rumoured to be able to do it. They were not all that happy about it at the end and were relieved to have Paul Goldberger.

Giovannini : I honestly don't know about it and even if I did, I don't know if I could comment on it.

Layout by Richard Dulude

"I think the professional public generally still has a lot to learn. Once they leave school, the education should be part of their practise."

Ricardo Castro : You are raising an issue now. I would like to ask you, being in a very special position in *Progressive Architecture*, a different kind of publication with a different kind of approach, how does it compare?

Doubilet : Well it's quite different. First of all, we don't have political affiliations or expectations of any sort. On the other hand, we are national and we cannot respond as immediately to a local situation. We have to treat the whole country, and to a degree, international subjects. We can't be as effective on preservation items as a city newspaper can. We have other obligations and people often ask us about these. We have advertisers.Do we publish buildings that for example, such and such an elevator company that advertises in *Progressive Architecture* is featured in prominently? The answer is that we don't, but the pressure is there. There is no question that Dover Elevator would love us to feature a building where their elevators have been used. It's something that we always have to resist.

We have another pressure and that is from the architects themselves. Architects would love to be seen in our magazine. We have a competitor, mainly *Architectural Record*. We don't want to necessarily publish every building Michael Graves has done, but on the other hand, if we slight Michael Graves, will he give us the next building? We have to not worry about that. We have to say what we honestly believe; either criticize it or not publish something that Michael Graves has done because we don't like it. These are our pressures - advertisers and architects.

Giovannini : One thing that has not been mentionned in national publications is the competition for material. A single house which may be of national interest is fought over by *House and Garden, Architectural Digest, Architectural Record* and *Progressive Architecture*.

Doubilet : It's a very strange pressure because it's almost anti-journalistic in a way. Journalism, the rules of journalism, say publish what you want as soon as you can. Yet we are at the mercy of an architect who gives us the plans and let's us into the house. There have to be agreements - unwritten agreements. This is very strange and not particularly journalistic in nature.

Boddy : Would you not say that the present situation in the architectural press comes perilously close to violating principles of freedom of speech. I am thinking of exclusive rights for the publication of projects done between two glossies. If you publish in one you don't in the other. As a critic and a consumer of architecture, I object to that. There is something dreadfully wrong in architectural critical circles if we cannot have the major publications taking on the same project, and maybe writing with different opinions. Could you explain how that policy came to be and how it is applied?

Doubilet : It's not a matter of exclusives actually, it's first rights. In terms of a private residence, the architect or the client is the one that has to let us in to see the house. On the other hand, in the case of a museum which is in the public domain, we are not at the mercy of the architect. We can go and have the photographer take photographs and that's fine. We sometimes do. For example, *Record* published Michael Graves' *Portland Building*. He gave them first rights. The only reason we wouldn't want to publish it is that we normally don't publish something that has already been given exposure. We might comment on it in the news section, for example, but we don't feel that it's necessary to use our glossy pages to show more photographs...I agree that we all should get out there and say something about it. That's why we did the *Portland Building* , for example. We thought it was important. Even though they already used eight of their glossy pages, we used another eight of ours to talk about it. I will agree that there is something un-journalistic about waiting, about ignoring.

Odile Hénault : But then I think we are really talking about consumer magazines in a case like this. We are really putting the issue on the consumer aspect of an architect's office. Will that office subscribe to *Record* or *Progressive Architecture*? I think we are excluding the kind of magazine like *Archithese*, for example, in Switzerland, which was trying to achieve a different kind of discourse which would enhance the profession, bring some thinking into it. How much thinking are the articles in the *N.Y. Times* or the articles in *Progressive Architecture*, forcing the profession to do? We are talking about two publics. One is the general public and the other one is the professional public. I think the professional public generally still has a lot to learn. Once they leave school, the education should be part of their practise. How can we achieve this through magazines? Is this being achieved through a magazine such as *Progressive Architecture*?

Doubilet : Well, you can answer that. I think that *Progressive Architecture*, our type of, as you call it, consumer magazine, I think is more of a professional magazine, has infinite latitude to instruct and cause debate. We also have the possibility of expressing graphically, which the *Times* practically doesn't. But that doesn't mean that we don't have the opportunity to...

Hénault : But do you do it? I respect *Progressive Architecture* for many reasons. But do they take the opportunity, such as it is, and if they did, would they not publish buildings that have been published elsewhere? One of the problems here is that architects relinquish their rights. For example, to put ourselves in the Canadian scene, I tried to publish the *Museum of Man* and *National Gallery* projects. We finally came down to the fact that the architects had signed away their rights to let anyone publish them. If they gave their brochure on the National Gallery or the Museum of Man or if anyone published it, they would be penalized.

Doubilet : Joe would know the rules in the States. You did an article on patenting drawings, did you not?

Giovannini : Well, that really is an unfortunate situation. If I understand the Canadian situation properly, the condition for entering the competition was that you had to relinquish the rights. As soon as the architect legally relinquishes the rights, there is no recourse for him whatsoever. That is done for reasons of control on the part of the client.

Hénault : Well, then what about the question of freedom of the architectural press? How would the *Times* react to a situation like this?

"Architects are an extremely bad clientele. The practising architect doesn't or almost doesn't read. He has developed an attitude of visual stops."

Giovannini : There is no recourse in the sense that it is a legal issue and a moral issue. I don't know what the political maneuvering was behind...

Doubilet : It struck me, observing from New York, that that competition was run in a strange way - kept under wraps. I don't know what the legalities would be in the States, but I think that the public pressures would be too overwhelming to let something like that occur...

Giovannini : The real story, from a journalistic point of view, is not to analyze the buildings themselves but to analyze the premises of the competition and the controls that the government had over it, to discuss it and to raise it as an issue. Perhaps by pressure of embarrassment the government would have to see to publication. That is how the press is probably capable of...

Jean Louis Robillard : I'd like to come back to what you said about how a periodical enhances thinking in a profession. Within the experience of *ARQ*, the response that I have is that architects are an extremely bad clientele. The practising architect doesn't or almost doesn't read. He has developed an attitude of visual stops. The only clientele of a periodical is the academic, the student, the teacher...the intellectuals who also publish, who reread their published stuff, and who in fact have developed a medium of exchange. Most periodicals, I think *Section A* is the same, are in fact just an exchange between a very small elite. More practicing architects are reading Joe's articles in the *N.Y. Times*, than are reading anything that accompanies the description of a building or any editorial in *Progressive Architecture* or other magazines. If we would really treat them as such or understand them as non readers, then most of our periodicals should start switching towards general public reading; architecture magazines like decoration magazines, which with all respect to the quality that we would like to maintain, be very informative to the practising architect...

Castro : Doesn't that level of different publications exist already?

Doubilet : Are you saying that all periodicals should be oriented to the lay public?

Robillard : No, I think *Oppositions* should remain *Oppositions*.

Doubilet : But *Progressive Architecture* should become *House and Garden*.

Robillard : It's a touchy subject.

Doubilet : I would be in favour of having *Progressive Architecture* on more newstands. I dearly would love it. That way, my aunt wouldn't say, "*Oh, you work for an architectural magazine. **Digest?***" Instead she'll say, "***Digest or Progressive Architecture?***" But I would love it for other reasons. Last night, listening to Joe's talk, the ability to wax philosophical on a broader plane appealed to me very much. Of course, we can do that in *Progressive Architecture* as well. I think that *Progressive Architecture* would appeal... some of its issues would appeal to a lay public. Certainly the lay public has become more informed and interested in Architecture. However, it would enhance the problem of the consumers' orientation of it. We would have to choose to feature building projects that are very attractive to the average person. That would force us even more into the consumer situation, which I don't think would be a good one. After all, it's very expensive to distribute and we would have to gear our advertising somewhat differently. The elevator advertisers are not interested in having the suburban housewife read their ads.

Hénault : I think if this happens, if we keep *Oppositions* and make *Progressive Architecture* into *House and Garden*, we will then have to create another type of magazine - one that appeals to the public but isn't as stiff as *Oppositions*. Somehow we have to feed the architects that belong to the public, that will read this type of writing and maybe will try to enhance their own practice.

Robillard : The examples are in extremely fixed categories. The experience of those who produce magazines (and the writers) involves a lot of idealism. Here in Quebec the magazines are based on idealism and a lot of fun; there is a lot of gratification for us to be able to take a theme and get good collaborators. We want to do it in a very serious manner. This is the community we want to awaken and it's not happening. After three years I question myself profoundly on that subject. I don't know how I will tackle the next three years. I'm amazed by the extreme apathy that is found in the architectural community.

Doubilet : I'd like to address something that you mentioned before, that architects and the reading public flip through and look at pictures. We assume that it doesn't smell that good. We should be more intellectual. They should read words more. How do we get them to read the words and think? However, it is not such a dirty side of it. After all, architecture is appreciated mainly through the visual sense. Architects are attuned to that and it is not a bad thing, though we tend to say *'the glossies'* as if they were a little nasty. What we should try to do is make more points, intellectual points through the visuals, not just make them pretty pictures - I think that is the problem. I don't think we should stop writing intelligent words because nobody reads them. But I don't think we should be ashamed that we depend highly on glossies. We should, however, put forth another or more interesting message than *'Pretty, Pretty'*.

Hénault : In fact, we all wish that we had the money to pay for the glossy pictures. I think a magazine that tries to do it is *Casa Bella*, where it's not glossy but it's in colour. I'm sure it's more expensive than *Progressive Architecture*.

Doubilet : Yes

Hénault : And the projects are complete. There is an attempt to give a slightly different edge.

Frank Renevier : The situation in France is very different. First, I would like to explain that, in France, the average man has no interest in architecture. As far as I know, in America you have quite a lot of people reading architectural criticism. For instance, in very small daily newspapers you can have an architectural critic. It's very different in France because you have only the magazines. The mistake of the magazines is that they are too architectural when they are talking about architecture. The problem for the critic in the daily newspaper is that they are too casual; they do not have the knowledge to

"The mistake of the magazines is that they are too architectural when they are talking about architecture."

have a professional approach to technical matters, to design. I must say that I understand deeply why the average man has no interest in the architectural information. It is probably because there is no relationship, there is no link between the space he is used to living in and the pictures, the stories that we are providing in this information.

We are, on one hand, going to ask some architects to deliver some information - pictures and words about some projects already constructed. On the other hand, we are going to send a journalist on the site, to try to describe what's going on. Then, without comment, we are going to bring the two together. We have already done one. It's incredible. It's two worlds. It doesn't fit. I think that the architecture critic must represent not the common picture that the people have in their head, because they have no knowledge, but their needs.

Robillard : A real image of life.

Hénault : Where did you publish this comparison?

Renevier : We are going to do an exhibition in Paris.

Doubilet : I don't quite understand the comparison, or how you set up the comparison. One is the architect's intent and the other is the reality?

Renevier : Sometimes they do fit.

Doubilet : But how are you doing it? The photographs that the architect supplied and the photographs that you take are compared, is that right?

Renevier : Exactly. But they are not from the same angles and they are not searching for the same effects. Normally, most architects are trying to show off their design, not always showing the concrete situation. Before I would say what I think of a building, I must ask what it is built of. What is the technology? Is there any improvement or innovation in that field? Then I accept the aesthetic consideration that we are used to putting on a level of priority.

Doubilet : Then you have to remember, and this is a very big limitation in a magazine that depends on photographs like ours, you have to remember that there is architecture and there are photographs of architecture. Neither the architect's photographs nor your photographer's photographs tell the whole story and sometimes they are both very misleading.

Castro : Larry Richards spoke some time ago about the whole notion of a secondary reality that is produced by the media. We are talking a little bit about that whole phenomenon - the electronic media is the magazine. It is *House and Garden*. It is *Progressive Architecture*. It is probably less so the academic periodicals. They are starting to produce the secondary reality in which we are all living. I would like to throw that question to Larry Richards.

Larry Richards : Naturally it's been on my mind while listening to these responses. I don't know how one gets around that. I don't think that there is any way to get around it. I think that what one has to do is to find ways to expose it and understand it, to draw it in to the whole process. This example of people looking at the same thing in two different ways is quite interesting. Of course, it becomes absorbed itself again. In a way there is no escape from it. In this case, you said that it is going to be an exhibition and not put in a journal, so that makes it a bit different. I don't have any answer at the moment about how one deals with that. I think it is interesting to try to deal with it a lot more. Some journalists have, but I don't know much that is discussed. I would like to ask Susan how much it is discussed and I think that there are some examples in *Progressive Architecture*. The one thing that I remember a few years ago is an *exposé* on how the various journals approached architecture. It was a kind of humourous thing, a very small example. But do you talk very often about doing that kind of thing, about exposing your own process? Or is that just a kind of no-no?

Doubilet : Well obviously it's not a no-no since we've done it.

Richards : How far would you go with that? Has anyone ever done an article where you are taking photographs of the people taking photographs of the room and what architectural photographers go through and how much money is spent to get the one fabulous picture? I'm not sure what that would accomplish.

Doubilet : It's certainly not against our principles. In fact, I mentioned the subject as being one that has to be remembered. There is a difference between photography and architecture. It might be an idea to discuss that. I think it comes down to a question of responsibility. To decide what we are going to publish, we look at slides and we also go and see the building. After all, you can make wonderful slides. We are conscientious and responsible and would not publish it. You can do a wonderful photographic essay on a terrible building. Our intent is to document the building as well. Even when we choose a building that we think is quite good we don't only show the *arty* photos. It is very difficult to show really becoming photos too and yet perhaps we should. We do at times. When you show the real facts, when you compare the architect's photos and the *real photos*, are those real also? It really comes down to responsibilty. It's wonderful journalism, I mean wonderful sensationalist journalism, to show the extremes. One could really push the extremes in photographs. It could be fabulous. Everybody would buy it up. Wonderful. But that's not being more responsible than only showing beautiful photos.

Boddy : I've got an anecdote and then a question, following along the lines of Larry's question. The anecdote goes like this. In 1980, I was talking to Philip Johnson in the Palace, in the *Seagram Building*. Philip Johnson is quite interested in the work of Douglas Cardinal. He stumbled onto his work in the late seventies and was quite impressed. In the course of my conversation with Johnson, he said, "*You know, that man has never been published in any of the glossies and I think that is a bloody outrage*". This is the way Johnson works. He looked at me and said, "*Young man, you write, don't you?*" Instantly, his secretary had Suzanne Stephens, then editor of *Progressive Architecture*, on the line. Johnson gets on the phone and says, "*I think it is a bloody outrage that you and the jokers over at* ***Progressive Architecture*** *never published this incredible young architect from Canada.*" That was the gist of the conversation. The outcome of it was that Suzanne said, "*Send me a package of photos and we'll take it to the* ***Progressive Architecture Editorial Meeting***". One of

"I think the most important point is that the public at large is not familiar with architecture... why would they be interested in criticism of architecture."

the most important architectural institutions in the world, certainly on the continent, is the *Progressive Architecture* Editorial Meeting. Careers have been created and destroyed in those meetings. Despite Suzanne's wanting to do the article and despite the personal endorsement of Philip Johnson, the idea didn't make it through the *Progressive Architecture* Editorial Meeting.

Doubilet : Our judgement was different than Johnson's.

Boddy : Could you describe the dynamic of that meeting? I am fascinated by the whole notion. By David Morton's description, they are often three day, dragged out, knock-down fights. People enter with favourite architects or projects and beat each other up until a victor emerges. Do you want to describe one of them?

Doubilet : Thank goodness it never lasts more than four hours. It just seems like three days.

Esmail Baniassad : I would like to ask what the purpose of this discussion is? If the purpose is to recollect some memories, that's fantastic. But is there in fact a critical edge to this discussion, as to the identity of journalism, of its place in architecture?

Castro : We are talking basically about the whole notion of how architecture is perceived, specifically through the media, in this case, through journalism - the written word or image. In that sense, the panel is contributing some of their experiences and probably providing a certain feel for the discussion of these things which I think are not usually put on the table.

Baniassad : I would be interested in somebody or the panel saying outright, what is the limit of depth to which they can take architectural discussion and at the same time, make a living?. It seems to me, by and large, that architectural literature, for whatever reason - the low level of intellectual activity of the professional or otherwise - lacks in critical judgement, certainly in critical content. It may be that it's suicidal for architectural journals to become overly critical, whether because they owe a debt to a developer or to some successful architect or whatever. I think it would be interesting for a panel to at least address that sort of an issue head on. Are there any limits of depth, for any reason, that journals or journalists have to observe? In fact, what we may be talking about are newscasters, and we are glorifying them too much by trying to make it appear that newscasters and illustrators are spanning the whole range of publications on architecture. Certainly in comparison to other subjects, we seem to be totally putting aside the critical side of publications.

Boddy : My response to your comment is that from my own experience I think the architectural critic is caught in a bit of a double bind. There is an urge towards *populism* - taking elements of architectural discourse, architectural principles, popularizing them or else taking them to a broader audience. In fact, talking to the public in a real sense, writing for the very popular magazines, often at, admittedly, quite a low level. Very simple issues; vast, complex things reduced to cliches, *etc...* there is an urge towards that. At the same time, there is an urge towards a very rarified academic level, which is really just elites talking to elites. I could write an article for the five or six people in Canada interested in certain theories and we could get together and talk about it. It seems to me that the rich area of architectural criticism lies between those two poles, between a rarified *Oppositions* level of discourse and the house sections of most newspapers. Somewhere between there lies a true architectural discourse. Now, the question is that, institutionally and economically, there don't lie many options, especially for those of us in Canada, for those of us who want to pursue it.

Baniassad : The practise of architecture is going to be served by some sort of occupation, those who are willing to do the critical analysis, making statements about buildings and the practise of architecture that the practising architect and the student of architecture finds important to go to. The question really isn't whether architects read or write. It takes a lot of time and energy and knowledge, beyond personal opinions, to bring out that sort of criticism. I really wonder if, in any editorial office or establishment, the investment that is required of a magazine to put out critical statements, to study standards, to study the range of information that is being made available, look at issues, take particular instances and universalize them, is being undertaken. The work is tremendously important. It really takes a research dimension to bring what we usually call journalism to the level that the practising architect and that student of architecture can begin to pick up and learn from.

Robillard : This is very true, except that, for architectural criticism to have any effect, it has to reach a population that will then join and either condemn or praise whatever building has been analysed. Even if you do this, if it's not read, not even by the architect who has done that building, then you're going nowhere. I think criticism must reach at least a certain number of people to be effective. I think it starts much more with the newspaper than with the specialized magazine. It doesn't have a sufficient circulation to make it efficient.

Norbert Schoenauer : I think the most important point is that the public at large is not familiar with architecture. If they are not familiar with architecture, why would they be interested in criticism of architecture? It seems to me that one of the biggest problems is that the public at large is not fed through the common media the problems about architecture. Most of you that know me, know that I was very influenced by Scandinavian architecture. What impressed me in Denmark, in comparison to Canada, is the following. You could not open any magazine, whether it dealt with food, clothing or whatever, where there was not an article in that magazine about an architect. After the public at large had gotten to know what architecture was about, then you could delve into criticism. I think there is a place for *Progressive Architecture* specializing in our profession, as a medical journal is specialized. Somebody told me that the best read newspaper in the world is the *National Enquirer*. There you read about medical issues, you read about Elizabeth Taylor's latest fling. It would be interesting if, in that magazine's content, you could read something about architecture. Then, the lay person would know something about it. They don't read *Progressive Architecture* but apparently they do read the *Enquirer*...

Robillard : It ties in with what Frank just said, how to in-

"In music and theatre there has been an ongoing tradition of criticism. In architecture, there hasn't."

terest them in their *milieu de vie*. If they are interested in their *milieu de vie* then they can carry on.

Pierre du Prey : I think some of these comparisons we have just heard with Europe though are bound to be to some extent odious because of the tradition that exists there. Not just for the teaching of the history of architecture and the appreciation of architecture but because the material is present and people are aware of it. I've just myself recently completed a tour of most of the major schools of architecture and departments of art that teach the history of architecture. One observation, at least as far as historians are concerned, that I think I can make without doing too much injustice to any one or any number of people, is that there is no tradition for a critical analysis of buildings, whether past or present, going on in the schools. It's dates, facts, names, images, mugging up for a slide test or something like that. There is an absence of this tradition of analysis and discourse. I think you are going to be constantly talking down, in terms of the level at which the editorial and articles can be directed, until such time as the level of interpretation can be brought up. I think the problem largely resides, at the moment, in forming in the schools of architecture - and certainly it is absent in the liberal arts programmes - an appreciation and a willingness to enter into this kind of analysis and discourse on the part of the students in general. Then you develop a kind of *cadre*, and from that *cadre*, who can appreciate a rather higher level of architectural journalism, from them down, something will percolate to the general public. If you aim at the general public, we will be wallowing in a dubious kind of discussion and criticism. One has to think a little bit in elitist terms.

Giovannini : I don't think there should be any verticality implied between the journalist writing for the lay public and the journalist who is writing for a professional audience. If you think of it as a horizontal situation, if as a critic or architectural writer you don't know how the building is put together or what were the architect's concerns, then you lose that audience altogether. Your writing is then written for a lay public and it's not a dialogue between the two. On the other hand, there are fashions of subjects, as well as architectural fashions, and there are fashions of ideas. There are also everyday living patterns that a writer can assess and evaluate and relate back to buildings. I think that a good writer establishes a dialogue between the two. What distinguishes the writer who is writing for a larger public is that he is taking into account the needs of the public as users as well as or instead of the needs as defined in theory in architectural circles. I don't think that either reading public should be ignorant of the other.

Doubilet : There is another point. This is not by way of an excuse but an unfortunate explanation. I don't disagree with what you're saying, but if you look at the history of architectural criticism in North America, it is not non-existent but has been very, very sparse. Perhaps, since the onset of Modernism there has been a tradition among architectural magazines to have absolutely no criticism at all, until the last decade or so. Architectural journalism became a matter of exposing buildings, period. The extent of editorializing was to choose what the editors felt was the best and to show it - only to describe it. This is evident in *Record*, post World War I, and early *Progressive Architecture (Pencil Points)*. There really was no tradition, unfortunately. In music and the theatre there has been an ongoing tradition of criticism. In architecture, there hasn't. Ada Louise Huxtable broke ground with real architectural criticism.

Giovannini : She invented the field in North America about twenty five years ago.

Hénault : I am not sure that I would qualify that as architectural criticism, maybe architectural comment, but not architectural criticism in the sense that Esmail (Baniassad) describes it.

Boddy : I think maybe we should define architectural criticism, an extremely rare beast, admittedly. Certainly *The Canadian Architect* almost never has criticism. It is architectural reporting. In most of the glossies, it is the same case. Most of it is reporting, it is in fact journalism - what the building is without any higher level of discourse, of analysis or interpretation. We need to get to a state of true criticism as hinted at in Pierre du Prey's comment. We really need to improve the level of discourse, to create an architectural culture of which criticism would be one component. We've got to start with reporting. We have to know the basic buildings, we have to understand them, a certain level of information - from that phase, true criticism will emerge. It is almost non-existent on this continent at this point.

du Prey : It goes deeper than that. We have to know how to write also. That's one of the basic problems in the educational sphere. People just don't know how to write. How can they criticize? Writing and thinking go together in the same sense that persists, at some base level, in the European situation which has just been referred to. I think that that pertains rather more.

Baniassad : This comment reminds me of Geoffrey Scott's distinction between two types of criticism. That is, the criticism that comes from a critic who is not a designer and the criticism that comes from the designer. Totally different viewpoints; the beginning is different, the end is different and the medium is different. I would be interested to know if the panel is interested in making that distinction in their work? Are they addressing that subject? Do they have any ambition to address that distinction? Success speaks for itself. As far as magazines are selling, we really don't need to worry. I do think that the criticism that comes from a designer addressing the process and act of design is a different kind of activity.

Giovannini : Among the critics here, who has an architecture background and who has a literary background? All of us are trained as architects or designers, is that right?

Hénault : It is a question of experience. The building of the environment as seen by the designer or by the non-designer. I think that the main difference between the two is that the non-designer will take a stand much quicker and much firmer than the designer. If you watch a designer trying to judge a building they often wait for the oldest and most respected designer to say, *"I guess it will do"*. Then they go, *"Yes, yes. I can see a dimension here and..."*. But they won't take a

"I think a lot of architects don't only conceive of the building on a site in the city but on the site of the printed page."

stand immediately. That is the big problem. That is why I can't get any critical articles.

Baniassad : The difference between the two is not whether one of them has a degree in architectural design or whether they make their living designing buildings, it's the point of view they assume when they are doing a piece of thinking or writing. The kind of criticism that comes from a designer and addresses the problems of design relates to the way people design, relates to the act of designing, relates to intermediate decisions...

Giovannini : We would all like to think we do that. I know in my architectural criticism, I interview the architect, but there are a lot of other considerations - the developer, the people who design codes... There are a lot of parameters, it's not only the designer. You have to arrange a lot of opinions before you arrive at your own.

Renevier : I am between the practise and the writing about architecture. From the inside, I feel that it is very simple to explain design. But most architects want to make a mystery of it. The purpose is to find out whether the architects want to fascinate with their work or want to explain, to share something. As soon as you try to share, people will respond to you.

Doubilet : You have generalized about architectural criticism, or architectural journalism in America. Beyond that general statement, there is a varying level. One article, perhaps, does approach what you are discussing more than another. Have you read some articles in American journals, magazines or newspapers that do satisfy you at least to a degree?

Baniassad : Whether they satisfy me or not is not the question. I think there are some quite adequate pieces of architectural criticism. By and large, they come out of critical studies in the hands of people like Silvetti and many other outstanding teachers. That is because they take several pieces of architecture and they relate the history of the type to the member of that type, that is the building of the moment. They do highlight various aspects of it - inside, outside. The drawings that come out of that sort of piece show the depth of analysis that's going into it. There is quite a bit of new drawing done just for the sake of that study. The piece that comes out of it is quite a piece of research. By and large, the judgemental side of it is very little. The descriptive and analytical side of it is quite a bit. After reading it one doesn't know only what the author should think but knows a lot about what one should think. They are truly informative at many levels. I think that is an acceptable method of critical study. Unfortunately, a sign of poor criticism is that it is one-dimensional; it informs the reader at only one level. We go away knowing what the writer thinks. I think one has to agree this sort of thing does not serve the cause of architecture. I don't think it's fulfilling for the author either.

Giovannini : I said in my talk last night that I would like to approach buildings as cultural artifacts. The reason that writers are read, over a long period of time and on a regular basis, is the breadth and depth of cultural reference; not only dealing with the building as a building and a form of analysis but in all its complexities. I would like to think that your description of what is desireable is what we have, as a unit, tried to do.

Another thing is this issue about pictures. When Susan Sontag wrote this book about photography, she did it without pictures altogether. She tried to re-establish an evaluation in words, re-establish the presence of words in a book. That presence had been bumped altogether by photography which is a major force in our appreciation of our environment. I heard an account of a woman who dressed herself in a mirror because she was going to be photographed later. She dressed herself to what she would be photographed like. She was not only looking at an image of herself, but she was thinking of a photographic image of that image. It was a compounded image. I've heard architects say, *"I didn't pay too much attention to that building because it is not going to be submitted for publication"*. I think a lot of architects not only conceive of the building on a site in the city, but on the site of the printed page. The secondary reality, the printed reality is the photographic reality, the printed reality in terms of publication. I think this phenomenon of the image replacing the reality is pervasive in our culture, whether we are listening to recordings rather than going to a concert or looking at pictures rather than going to see the real artifact. I think it's a real problem with buildings in architectural journalism. You absolutely have to see the building. A lot of people write from photographs and experience it in their minds. It's very unfortunate but it's pervasive in our culture.

The second thing is that we have talked about the printed media, but there is a vast phenomenon, the electronic media and the role of our subject, architecture, in electronics. I think if you are talking about television, you are dealing with a phenomenon that is non-*place* specific. As critics and writers on a newspaper, for example, it's appropriate to talk about buildings because newspapers are a local phenomena. A television network is not. I don't know what the role in a national television situation is for architecture, whether it can exist or not. It's quite possible that our critics are somewhat impoverished because television, as a secondary reality, has displaced our primary realistics, our built environment. We are living in the two, to a certain extent. In New York, people walk down the streets and talk about the buildings. They are real characters in their lives. In an increasingly televised culture, I am not really sure about the importance of a building because people have alternatives. One might address the possibility of an architectural journalism occurring with a nationally televised distribution.

Robillard : I think that it's on two levels. I think there are general architectural topics that can be dealt with in the same way as newspapers, in a debate for example - a way where the architect, the designer and the journalist are present. I kept seeing a show on television on the different arts and the theatre. There were different critics coming and giving their bits. Every time they had a block, they showed a film. These were French films on castles... publicity at the same time, but however they were produced, the thematic part of showing suddenly an *ensemble* has a lot of possibilities for the viewer to understand one point. Instead of having a critical point of

"I think the problem with magazines is that most architects look at what is published in the glossy magazines and begin to copy the superficial aspects."

view, it enhances the knowledge of what there is elsewhere. It starts first at this level, but films on castles in France could become films on thematic ideas of building, could become an explanation of styles, of tendencies, of ideas, depending on which level you set it up.

Giovannini : Is it possible that we are all missing the point by writing in these microscopic publications that have very little to do with reality?

Robillard : I think that the specialized magazines are very romantic about it, and after five years of working on it, I think we are missing the boat.

Doubilet : I think architecture is, or has been, missing the boat. Theatre for instance, has been written over the centuries, as has music. Perhaps architects, and not just the public, have been completely confused about what architecture is about in this century, what there is to understand and how you understand it. Therefore, we have written less about it, and the public is not interested in it. They don't know what to be interested in, they don't know what it's all about. We have been backwards about using 20th century ways of exposing ideas and physical things to the public. There aren't very many films about architecture. Cable T.V. in the States should be quite flexible in terms of the type of things they show. Very few show anything about architecture.

Radoslav Zuk : It seems to me that our discussion oscillates between two extremes. Certainly there are two kinds of architectural discourse. One is the communication with the public. The other is the communication within the profession. I think we are confused because too often we take the stance of the layman. Music criticism is for the layman. When musicians speak amongst themselves, they are not talking the same language. They are not talking about mode of expression or the impression that is given, but they talk about how a piece of music comes out. You have to make that distinction. On one side there is an enlightment of the public about architecture at a certain level and at another level, we have to have a discussion - where the architect begins to understand how architecture comes about and what is important in architecture. After all, it is an architect looking at the work of another architect - the visual becomes extremely important because a statement in drawing or in diagram , to another architect, means almost everything. You may need additional explanation to understand. I think the problem with magazines is that most architects look at what is published in the glossy magazines and begin to copy the superficial aspects. My appeal is for two distinct approaches, I think there is room for one and the other and let us not confuse one with the other.

Richards : On one hand, I would agree that there are two levels and that we confuse a lot of discussion unnecessarily. It is a bit of the chicken and the egg argument. My own interest right now is with the broader base, the public, the lay person. I have more confidence in more exciting things happening, things of substance happening within architecture, if there is more pressure put on the profession. I have more confidence in the public making demands at some point down the road. We will have to read more, think more, and be quick to respond. I think it would be interesting. I think there is a real challenge in the next five years in Canada, to find a way for architects, students, educators and journalists to be involved in a broader base way, probably through the electronic media, in a kind of interactive - T.V., home video, things that I think are on the horizon. The possibility of people at home being able to interact opens up a whole new level of things.

One other example that I just wanted to mention is an extremely successful example of public education, in the area of architecture, in a show which I believe it was on PBS about two years ago, *This Old House.* It was a long series, about twenty half hour shows about the renovation of a house in Massachusetts. Along EssyBaniassad'slines, the programme was incredibly well researched. They went through, in a very general way, giving the background of the house and then, over a long period of time, they showed all the changes, all the renovations. They talked with the workmen about their experience, about what it means to put a bathtub in place. They talked to the contractor and they talked to the client. Week by week, you saw it changing and unfolding - it took twenty half hour segments to do it. It was entertaining as well. I know a lot of people who had never thought of architecture, designing, building before but were drawn to that show and watched it every week. It was very carefully done and very thorough. It did all these things at the same time as well as being popular. Last night, you were talking about articles you had done that were part of a series of eleven or twelve chapters to a story. You tend to make a newspaper article read quick, there's only so much space. But if it's one often articles and you get drawn into it, then you can use something as fast as newspaper to get a broader base for it. My only point is that I think there is a greater challenge to do it with a broader base and after that the profession will respond.

Renevier : I would like to mention a very interesting program on Italian T.V. which was presented on the national network two years ago. The program was made by Renzo Piano, the Italian architect. The purpose was not to show architectural objects already finished or tossing theories around but to take some very important examples of Italian architecture, some from the past, some from the present, and to show them to the people. The program was happening at seven o'clock in the evening before the news when everyone is watching the square box. They were showing the building process. They were providing people with a new means of appreciating, understanding the physical, the concrete culture of architecture. I do believe from that experiment, that the architecture at the moment is too intellectual, it's *gardé.*

Mark London : People are interested in what they can use to help themselves. The purpose of architectural magazines, the glossies, is to a large extent, for architectural offices designing and churning out buildings to look at them and say, *"Oh, I can copy this window here and that there".* That seems largely what they are used for. Those magazines and architectural criticism in newspapers are somewhat broader, but both of them focus to a very large extent on the design of a very small number of new buildings and very often deal with very philosophical aspects of some detail, should it be treated

"I think that the sole means of improving the state of architecture is by appealing to the public."

quite this way or quite that way, should it be grey or should it be white, should we be copying this person and treating a column in that way? Things that really touch one tenth of one percent of the built environment we live in every day. There is only a relatively limited number of people that care whether a window is symmetrical or not symmetrical or some detail... Whereas everybody lives in the city everyday, they live in ordinary buildings that were not designed by great architects, that were never published in glossy magazines. Ninety five percent of the new construction in this city is unfortunately very ordinary. Nobody ever talks about those. Nobody ever talks about what's making our cities, changing our cities, what's already there, the dynamics of a city. Usually, when you get a critique of a building, there may be a mention of the neighbourhood. I guess there is more of a discussion of context in recent years. But it will focus in on the building as an object of art and it will be an artistic, philosophical discussion of the design. Very rarely, will it focus in on why that kind of building was built there, was it the right kind of building..., what was the effect on the people and the community - the things that really matter to people. When the plans finally come out of the federal proposal for the redevelopment of the Montreal waterfront, what is going to be relevant there is not an architectural critique of the design of the building, well I guess we won't be at that stage, but when we get to that stage, but fundamental questions. In the City of Montreal, when new buildings get built, it is not the detail design of the entranceway that is important but should a big office building be built on Sherbrooke or can it be built in another part of the city? What about suburban shopping centres and housing, the effects of changing of neighbourhoods? It's the *why* aspect of the built environment. I think by that you can reach a large part of the population because that's what really affects people.

Hénault : That raises the problem of convincing the editor of a newspaper. Let's take Montreal. If you want to sell a series to *Le Devoir* you have to crawl on your knees for two days and accept all kinds of humiliation, and get drunk at the end of both days in order to get your self respect back again. It takes you two and a half days to write and to do a proper job and you get paid fifty dollars. After two years, it has had a dampening effect. I very much agree that that's one thing to be tackled. I agree that pressure from the public will put pressure on the profession. That's the most important thing. When you go to Vienna, the people talk about the public of Vienna having a very good ear. I am sure that they are not born with any special talent. It's just that they have been hearing good music and they don't get up for a standing ovation, as we do in Montreal for every presentation at *Place des Arts*. They boo sometimes. In terms of architecture, to me, the problem is that we don't take a stand. In school, we don't have *critique* courses mainly because we have very strong professional practice courses that say that any one of you that attacks a colleague will be banned from the order of architects. It happens here and that's why some of us who making a living as critics, don't have a practise. The television media is very difficult for us because it is very present, very *actuel* and we don't take a stand. We deal with history. We organize symposiums. I can think of the *colloque* on *'The Orders'*. We deal with history because it is safe. The best lectures in the symposium we had were the history lectures. When we come to the present, the discourse breaks down, we are looking over our shoulders to see who will give the stamp of approval before we make a stand. I don't think that architecture is too intellectual. I think it hides behind quotations and a sort of gossip club in order to make statements that look like they are intellectual but they are really not thought out.

Giovannini : About your comment about essentially elitist buildings that deal with symmetries of windows or whatever. I think that they are interesting not only *per se*, because an exceptional building, or an exceptional person, is not only so in his own terms, but as models for the medium ground building. I think the quality of the language that they establish is extremely important for the image of the other ninety five percent of buildings. That's the reason why we look very closely at those buildings.

Boddy : I think the sole chance for the discussion of architecture and the enhancement of architecture lies with the public now. The profession itself is usurped by intellectual ambition and lost social responsibility. I think that the sole means of improving the state of architecture is by appealing to the public.

Hénault : Jane Jacobs did that. She really changed a lot of attitudes in North America. Beginning with a few articles and a book of statements and suddenly pressure, incredible pressure was put on the profession and they had to react to it.

Robillard : We have to remember that communication with the public does not happen in one day. Not only do you have to be professional about it, but at the same time you have to count on time. I think that a newspaper that goes out everyday, even if it's not always full, has something. It can take two years, three years but this is where it happens.

Doubilet : For example, your series of articles on the library in Los Angeles helped save the library, so it can be effective.

Giovannini : I think it would have been even more effective, in Los Angeles, and anywhere else, if on a professional level you had professional publications, if you have newspapers, if you have electronic media coverage, if you have Jane Jacobs' books, if you have this energy going on, so that you have reinforcing points of view that make the subject much bigger than the sum total of individual efforts. It is extremely difficult unless you have a monumental book by Jacobs or someone like Ada Louise Huxtable who had a powerful position. You really need reinforcing points of view on a repeated basis over a long period of time. In a Molière play, I think there is a line, *'I have been speaking prose all my life.'* I have a feeling that people don't know that the buildings that they occupy are architecture. People don't know how to spell the word, if there is an *'h'* in it somewhere. You were talking about creating a popular basis and I really do believe in the base of a pyramid. I believe the pressure is on the profession from the public.

Amazingness and Incredibility

by Rebecca Chu

Les discussions dans le milieu de l'architecture cherchant à déprécier toutes oeuvres qui ne furent pas basées sur des précédents, dissimulent l'importance d'une approche culturelle. Ces oeuvres qualifiées de "provinciales" cherchent à redonner une direction aux phénomènes culturels. Ces derniers cependant sont perçus comme avant-gardistes et créent ainsi un déchirement entre le mouvement culturel et le mouvement à la mode. Plutôt que d'évoluer dans un contexte culturel, on forme à partir des oeuvres avant-gardistes les mieux reçues des icônes que l'on manipule par la suite à titre de gestes ou de symboles. Il est par conséquent très difficile de critiquer ou de synthétiser de tels travaux, laissant ainsi le provincialisme se perpétuer.

To get out, go in deeper Barthes

There is a certain set of emotions that surround the birth of an exotic animal for the first time in captivity. A hopeful and expectant silence should be maintained; better, a bright-eyed optimism for the future. The climate into which the animal's parents have been forcibly transported is harsh and unfamiliar; the infant's survival is by no means assured.

Culture mutates faster than nature, however, and in the case of culture, it is often only the mutant that can survive. Yet it is also often true that, in order to fulfill the expectations surrounding the transplantation of cultural breeding stock, the mutant is often mistaken for the native-born specimen.

In media and in casual speech, a widespread degradation of the superlative may be observed. A person or phenomenon may be designated *astonishing* or *extraordinary*, *amazing* or *incredible*, but nothing more. To offer no more specific judgement, no attempt to determine what gives rise to one's astonishment or incredulity, is to recognize the existence of what is observed, and acknowledge (approvingly) that it has some degree of intensity to which one is responding; but it is also to stop short of thought. It is an attitude that considers stupefaction to be an entirely adequate response to experience. Since a certain amount of slackmindedness is to be expected in any given population, this attitude would be of no particular significance had it not become so common, and had it not achieved such a high degree of social acceptability. Indeed, it almost comes to be expected.

The catch-all attribute that this attitude so readily perceives we shall call *Amazingness and Incredibility*. Clearly, as in any circumstance where consistent response occurs unaccompanied by reflective thought, and is triggered by social code or expectation, *Amazingness and Incredibility* are the stuff of which myths are made. (For the sake of brevity, we shall refer to them henceforth as *A & I*).

In the architectural milieu, such myths should be understood as a mutant form of culture. The idea of *A & I* denotes both a human attribute and an attribute of actual production. The sensibility to which the idea of *A & I* is central is one that informs both self-image and appreciation, and the environment in which it most readily occurs is that of provincialism. When the attempt is made to import culture from a more sophisticated milieu into a provincial environment, convulsions occur in the relationship between culture (of the less popular variety) and fashion. The question that concerns us is what happens to twentieth-century architecture's cherished myth of avant-gardism when it arrives in culturally provincial circumstances?

At least three kinds of provincialism may be discerned. In the first, one supposes the confines of one's immediate surroundings to be the limits of the world. A variation on this involves deliberate censorship of what comes from beyond those cultural *Pillars of Hercules*; a kind of self-imposed isolationism occurs, similar to that practised in Utopian settlements. The second variety of provincialism is wistful; beyond familiar horizons are seen glittering lights. But it is the third variety of provincialism that interests us most. Here, what are perceived as the cultural characteristics of a world beyond are *simulated* within one's immediate confines, and, by tacit agreement, the act of simulation is not recognized as such by those participating. A kind of miniaturization of the world takes place, and as in the miniaturization of physical things, certain anomalies occur that alter the nature of that which is miniaturized.

It is generally the intention of this third variety of provincial sensibility to *re-enact* those cultural phenomena of the outside world that are perceived as avant-garde. This re-enactment *simulates the presence of an avant-garde* within the confines of the provincial setting. What allows this third variety of provincialism to occur, rather than the first, is greater media input. But there is an inevitable time lag. The frantic attempt continues to be made, and engenders a number of identifying characteristics of provincial avant-gardism.

First, because styles arrive from outside fully developed, they must be assimilated wholesale if the simulation of simultaneity is to occur. At the very least, second-hand avant-garde exploits must be seen to be performed during the time lag between their original media presentation and the appearance, in the same media, of evidence that such exploits have become *passé* in their original milieu. The possibilities for criticism, and for critical transformation and synthesis, are

Layout by Kristina Pompura

thus severely limited, if not effectively negated. In their original milieu, however, avant-garde positions develop over time, and are generally more accessible in the everyday cultural context during their development. Their acceptance or rejection, by what audience, at what time, may therefore not be clear-cut. Media presentation, however, dramatizes the adventures of its chosen subject. In the provincial context, it follows that if a new received avant-gardism, intensified by this dramatization, must be assimilated instantly and wholesale, its predecessor must be rejected likewise. Sudden and convulsive inversions of fashion therefore characterize the cultural life of the provincial avant-gardist.

Secondly, because speed is of the essence, and because assimilation must occur uncritically, a certain cogitative economy must be practised. The most intense phenomena of any received avant-gardism must be elected as *icons*, which are then pressed into service as a shorthand of the image. In design and in writing, just as in presentation of the self, an avant-gardist posture can be quickly manifested and efficiently sustained by means of the practice of *icon-manipulation*.

Icon-manipulation is a kind of prestidigitation without product: it is the conjurer's *Prestos*! with no rabbit and no hat. It too is a simulation, a reference to something beyond; pure sign or gesture, rather than content. In popular culture, verbal icon-manipulation is what occurs in the texts of, say, *GQ* or *Interview*, and differs little from the strange spectacle of texts on architecture that choose as their model incompetent translations from the Italian. The process as it manifests itself in design is exactly parallel, and has the same effects on its base material. The most important of these effects is the aforementioned negation of the possibility of criticism. As a mechanism of the cycles of fashion, the icon-manipulation must serve fashion's requirements. One of these is that, once achieved, fashion must be *so visible as to be invisible*; that is (as Barthes might observe), culture aspires to be nature. Avant-garde fashion, moreover, unlike other aspects of culture, *cannot be talked about*; at the instant that it is acknowledged, it disappears. The cycles of fashion are inherently acritical. No intellectual operation is required to set or to follow fashion. The provincial avant-garde acts, in fact, as a policing body: if the capacity for instantaneous response to news from the outside world is to be maintained, certain avenues of research must be rigorously censored lest they linger too long.

For fashion, as manifested in icon-manipulation, promotes an *absolute interchangeability of ideas* rather than a cumulative structure. The space to be occupied by ideas, so to speak, is limited, like the surface of the body on which clothes can be worn; a new set of ideas ousts the old set entirely, the old set leaves no trace; or, if it does, it is a true contamination, an impurity,an embarrassment above all. Icons, as we are discussing them here, possess no *inherent* value but only transient value, as gestures appropriate only to a specified moment.

Ultimately, *Amazingness and Incredibility* define themselves as measures of the success with which a person or cultural event manipulates icons. This success depends in turn on the correctness of the icons used; the speed with which they are deployed after coming into currency; and the quantity in which they appear. To deal first with the matter of correctness: we have already remarked upon the necessity of a hermetic exclusivity in the changeover from one set of icons to the next. This process of censorship must be maintained as well during the reign of any particular set of icons. The metropolis, generally the source of avant-gardisms, generates high fashion but tolerates dissenting style; provincial situations insist on conformity to received fashion. Although fashion is a social necessity in the metropolis, it wields a far greater coercive power in the small town, which is at the point of an inverted pyramid of possibilities. This is of significance because Canada is - as far as culture is concerned - a nation of small towns. By and large, when its cities affect a metropolitan style (rather than conceiving of themselves, as is more usual, as unfortunate but inevitable economic necessities, in opposition to the rural idyll), they do so by acting as net importers of urban postures from elsewhere.

To get out, go in deeper Barthes

This suggests that, in the provincial context, eligibility for recognition as *amazing and incredible* depends on a certain *lack* – a lack of critical inclination, a lack of inclination towards independent research and intellectual reflection, a kind of active passivity. The *A & I* personality, then, is a kind of weathervane, capable of near-instantaneous changes of ideological direction whenever the winds from overseas and across the border themselves change; so near instantaneous, in fact, that he may be found ridiculing his own immediate past work. But, of course, this avant- gardism has no past nor future, *it has nothing but present*. Past exploits fall away like ash from a cigarette: the avant-gardist wants only to be the travelling glow. This avant-gardism has no future either, because to predict the changes in the wind would be to nullify the breathless immediacy of the present moment. There can be nothing more *en avance* than the avant-garde ... a true avant-

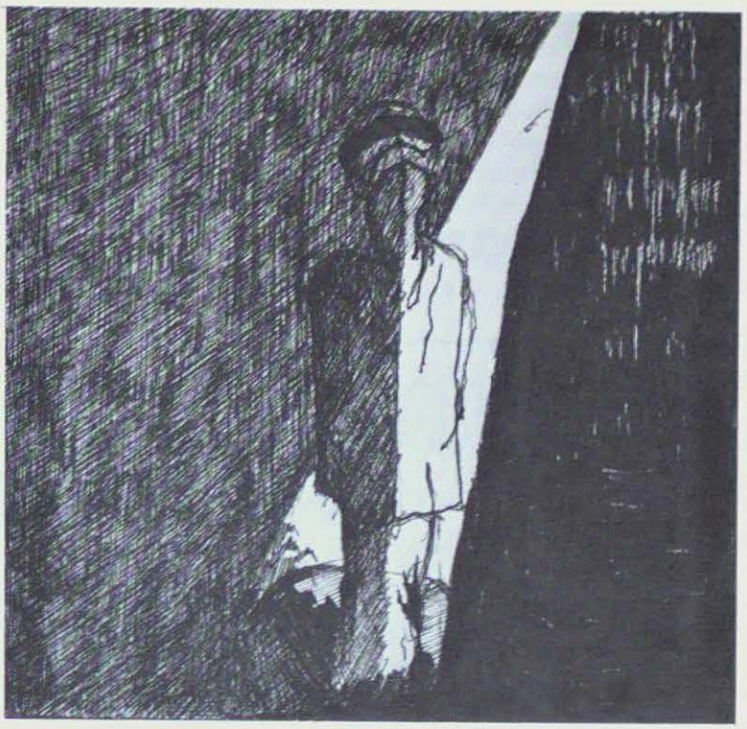
garde, however, defines itself in relation to history and a proposal for the future. Provincial avant-gardism is shorn of these dimensions.

Where *Amazingness and Incredibility* depend on the quantity of icons and the speed with which they are deployed, a collusion with expediency is revealed, and perhaps also the key to the true nature of avant-gardism in provincial circumstances. Where quantity is pursued, *parti* may disappear in a demented orgy of articulation. The project becomes, as a result, a forced assembly of icons rather than the expression of an ordering idea; a cacophony of parts whose hierarchy has all but dissolved into visual noise. It is an aesthetic of excess, a display of exploits of pure production. In its most extreme state, the project may present itself as an iconography of pure linework. Ultimately, it can be understood as nothing other than a demonstration of productive capacity; as an assertion of the marketability of one's labour. In such an assertion of pure technique, the architect always out-labours the world.

But since labour *per se* will not sustain any simulation of avant-garde activity, it must be masked by an intermediary myth, which is that of pure creativity. In this myth, the architect always takes the world by surprise. And genius, morever, knows no progenitor. *Amazingness*, in this manifestation, resists analysis once again. It is a necessary delusion that the project, in all its iconic density, is seen as springing full-grown from the forehead of its creator, without process or labour. A binary condition is proposed in order to categorize the characters who inhabit the architectural milieu: amazing/not amazing, right stuff/no stuff. As far as *A & I* as characteristics of the individual are concerned, either one has them or one doesn't; learning, experience, the development over time of skills and abilities, taste and judgement, do not enter into the matter. He who is *Amazing & Incredible* is *irreducible*; to attempt to explain him would be to undermine the most dearly cherished myth of twentieth-century architecture: that of individual genius.

The outward persona of the *A & I* character will alter with time, according to trends in personal style, but what it symbolizes remains essentially the same. In the 80's, the *A & I* character sees himself perhaps as a James Dean or a young Brando, a street-smart Kerouac type, deadpan but with a ready curl of the lip; at worst, a slightly more *déshabillé* member of the Roots Brigade. This image embodies a certain anti-intellectualism, a social phenomenon that necessarily recurs more frequently and persistently in provincial circumstances than does its opposite. For, in provincial circumstances, the intellectual is traditionally seen as charlatan, con man, liar. There is always the underlying implication of the academic as voyeur, the *A & I* character as authentic participant, as real man. But as has been suggested, verbal icon-manipulation is sometimes a necessary component of the *A & I* persona. The importation of European Marxist theory and criticism, in particular, precipitated the appearance of locally produced texts in which chains of iconic words and phrases, connected by a kind of expedient verbal glue, produced an aesthetically desirable opacity. At such times, verbal icon-manipulation, simulating intellectual activity but involving no actual criticism, discourse or exposition of a theory, allows the mythology of *A & I* to remain intact. In sum, youth and pure potency present themselves as essential, and in this way *A & I* define themselves by what they exclude.

Architecture has sometimes been described as an old man's game. The maturity of judgement, refinement of sensibility, clarity of ideals, and sureness of touch in the later work of a master are generally cited as evidence. But *A & I*, with its emphasis on youth and speed, proposes the *planned obsolescence of the individual*: the profession is renewed not by the research and exploration undertaken by its more mature members, but by the consumption of youth. Hence we obtain the myth of the *'hot young designer'*. Youth does, of course, have its real economic advantages to the shrewd employer: greater energy and stamina, lower salaries, fewer family ties, and – most importantly – recent emergence from a school of architecture. The school, typically, acts not so much as an education, which in the context of liberal idealism is thought of as liberating – a liberation that allows independant thought – and acts not even so much as vocational training, but as a *socializing experience* – socialization into acceptance of a particular pattern of labour. Canadian architectural avant-gardes, after all, tend to base their patterns of production on the



model of the school of architecture, with all its petty heroisms; and, as a consequence, absorb the tendency of provincial schools to promote a state of perpetual adolescence in their students.

To get out, go in deeper Barthes

This tendency on the part of schools has an effect both on mainstream production and on the would-be avant-garde. The process of refinement in a work of architecture involves considerable periods of time: witness the work of Carlo Scarpa, whose ruminative process of design might extend over several years for a single project. In the Canadian context, the economic facts of fee structure and the control exerted over the profession by the development industry promote, in the mainstream, the reduction of architecture to the most rudimentary styling. Where *A & I* depend on the speed with which a *design* is produced, the judgement is, in effect, made on the *lack* of subtlety and refinement in the work.

Hence the tendency, in the mainstream, for the *big idea*, the *concept*, the *bold statement*; in other words, large-scale pseudo-sculptural moves in the pursuit of *visual interest* with no attention to integrity in detail or in conceptual order, and a notable absence of intellectual context. A reading of Klaus Herdig's *The Decorated Diagram* suggests that these are the characteristics of a fifth-hand Harvard-Bauhaus postwar modernism, the legacy represented by the majority of Canadian senior designers today; and although these men will shortly become obsolete, and be replaced by the next generation of *'hot young designers'*, the situation will remain essentially unchanged. A new set of icons assimilated in school – icons that initially had some intensity and variety – gradually become cruder and more inflexible with constant re-use, and the process repeats itself ad infinitum.

In the provincial avant-garde, on the other hand, production depends on the continuous consumption and regurgitation of new icons – the image of *A & I* as pure potency. Typically, then, pseudo-avant-garde production in Canada has a tendency towards the *caricature* or *cartoon*. Both mainstream and pseudo-avant-garde ultimately lead, however, towards the same result: the Canadian architectural landscape reveals itself as a great used car lot of second-hand ideas.

This is not to suggest, however, that originality or some kind of regional authenticity are, in and of themselves, desireable or even possible in architecture. Nor is it to deny the importance of the energy and inspiration that are generated by formal research into hitherto unmined areas. Architecture is defined by and is made out of its own history: the issue is the quality of critical intelligence involved in its making. Originality is not the primary issue in the work of, for example, Stirling, Torre, Scarpa, Koolhaas, or that of Isozaki in the mid-70's; in these examples though, one finds a concern with and respect for the history of the discipline, such that when references are synthesised they undergo a process of critical transformation. One finds, further, self-critical tensions within the work that recognize (but do not necessarily seek to express) the conditions under which cultural production must proceed at this point in history. In addition, there is evident in such work a sense of materiality absent from icon-manipulation (since icons are pure image, and have no necessary material presence, hence the ease with which they degenerate into caricature or cartoon).

But the historically illiterate architect (still, it seems, the dominant species in Canada in spite of the events of the past twenty years) is doomed to repeat the mistakes of history as soon as the unfashionability of those mistakes begin to fade. This will occur all the more quickly in a cultural milieu that has no *tradition of criticism*; that is, a cumulative body of critical ideas, rather than a simple interchange of patricidal polemics that are themselves second-hand. In such a situation of historical illiteracy, the repeated mistakes of history will not be recognized as such. Until such time as a continuous and truly critical discourse can be established, provincialism will perpetuate itself, and the choice will remain the same: amazingness and incredibility, or self-acknowledging banality – a choice that is really no choice at all.

Rebecca Chu is a recent graduate of the Faculty of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of Toronto.

L'histoire de l'architecture a fait valoir l'influence de certaines théories et valeurs ainsi que de certains styles sur le design architectural, mais elle n'a pas su traiter la nature de la relation entre la théorie et le design. Il est fondamental de questionner l'existence même d'une telle relation et dans l'affirmative, d'en examiner la cause et l'effet. Est-ce que le design découle de la théorie ou la théorie du design? S'agit-il d'une relation simultanée ou de deux entités dissociées? Une chose est certaine, la théorie se réfère nécessairement à l'action ou au produit de l'architecture. →

Tout au cours de l'histoire, ce sont les théories et les idées qui ont donné aux architectes une raison d'être à leurs oeuvres. Malgré leur influence sur le cours de l'histoire de l'architecture comme tout autre aspect de l'histoire de l'homme, elles ne peuvent pas en elles-même être transmisent littéralement dans une oeuvre architecturale. L'architecture dans son expression concrète est issue des propriétés rationnelles et irrationnelles de notre esprit. D'autre part, la théorie est structurée entièrement selon un modèle logique et rationnel. Néanmoins si la théorie était un exercice intellectuel non rationnel, son application se devrait de suivre une certaine méthodologie.

THEORY AND DESIGN IN ARCHITECTURE

by Craig Applegath

Architecture has been variously conceived of throughout its history in terms of its formal, spatial and visual qualities, its mathematical and metaphysical properties, its response to function and purpose (however defined), its transcendent manifestation of God, the spirit of the age or culture, and of course in terms of its role as a didactic political tool.

When one takes a step back and views the history of architecture (at least western architecture) in this fashion, as a roll call of theories, ideologies and styles, one wonders what it is about this phenomenon of architecture that leaves it so susceptible to such a wide degree of interpretation? Certainly there are those that would maintain that there is only one ultimately valid theory or style of architecture, and that all others are either wrong, misguided or not fully evolved. This Monist position is of course exemplified by a number of the contemporary fundamentalist doctrines, for example, structuralism and rationalism. In fact, some would go so far as to say that architects in general hold this position, as Anthony Jackson contends:

...The fact that no rules have ever been proved to be necessary or sufficient, that most rules are mutually exclusive and therefore suspect in their own validity, or that the history of architecture itself is sufficient evidence that both theory and design are conditioned by time and place, has done nothing to dampen the enthusiasm with which architects hold to their belief in the existence of some ultimate and external authority.[1]

The opposite vantage point, the pluralistic position, would of course relate any particular style or theory of architecture to a particular context, to the situation from which it sprang. This point of view, however, has both its advantages and disadvantages: it does obviously accord with the vicissitudes of history without requiring the desperate intellectual contortions required of Monist theories in order for them to appear plausible - if only to their adherents. But, though it may be a helpful postulate for the historian or critic, the perception of architectural theory in such relativistic terms does leave the architect in a somewhat ambiguous position. If all ideas, values, and theories are of equal or relative value, and there are no absolute, universal principles of design, then on what basis can an architect predicate his design?

Maybe the discussion of the history of architecture in terms of the ascendancy of particular theories, styles and values has somewhat missed the mark in dealing with the question of the nature of the relationship between theory and design. Fundamental to this issue is the question of whether or not there is indeed a casual relationship between design and theory, and if such a relationship exists, what is cause and what is effect? Does design stem from theory, theory from design, or is the process reciprocal? Or, is it also possible that the two are mutually exclusive? One thing is certain: architectural theory at some point necessarily refers to either the act or artifact of architecture. Though it may derive or borrow its ideas from other sources, the final theoretical product will *ipso facto* refer back to architecture.

On the other hand, it is reasonable to argue that the act of design need not necessarily be based on a conscious theory of architecture. This in not to say that theoretical issues have not the power to influence the act of design. Indeed, theories and ideas have had a significant influence on the course of architecture throughout its history. Certainly in many cases ideas have been the fulcrum about which styles have turned. One only has to look to the changes in direction that architecture took at the beginning of the Renaissance, under the influence of the notions of a rebirth of antiquity, to appreciate the power of an idea. Theories and ideas have historically given architects a *raison d'être* for their work. However, though ideas and theories have always had the potential to influence the direction of architectural history, as they have had in every aspect of human history, they do not in themselves translate into architecture - rather, the act of design in architecture is a creative act that is mediated by both the rational and non-rational parts of our mind. Theory, on the other hand, is formed and structured only along rational and logical patterns. Even if one were to argue that theory can be non-rationally derived, the logic of its application must nevertheless follow some sort of methodology.

If architectural design does not necessarily derive from theory, but is the end result of a so-called *creative process*, then what is the possible nature of this process? Certainly the rational aspect might follow a logical procedure or theory to derive a possible answer to whatever fact oriented problem is at hand, but what about the creative non-rational aspect? It might be postulated that architecture is brought about through the creative application or adaptation of non-verbal design conventions, punctuated by infrequent bursts of insightful invention - that themselves have the possibility of becoming new conventions. Here the term conventions refers to the non-verbal, internalized rules, methods and strategies of assembling the myriad of elements that go into creating architecture of any type or style - from rules on how to propor-

Layout by Michael Bray

tion a wall opening or defining the nature of light in a space, to the manipulation on a larger scale of plan, form, and space. Certain variations of these conventions, for any number of reasons - social, psychological, aesthetic - are adopted or learned by an architect, consciously or unconsciously. These are then rationalized for the sake of his or her sanity or vanity in the various guises of beauty, truth or spirit. They are given meaning and value through the various philosophies of structuralism, functionalism, expressionism, historicism, regionalism or any of the other *'isms'* in general currency at the time.

theory is defined, architectural values and conventions become defined with respect to that theory - at least insofar as the propagandists of the theory are concerned.

Criticism, the active aspect of theory, plays a supportive role in the establishment or maintenance of a particular set of conventions or styles. It can be at one level an explanation or exploration of those architectural conventions and their meaning employed by an architect in his design; at another level, it can be an evaluation of an architect's success in employing these conventions. If such an evaluation is carried

"The central function of theory is to serve the dual role of both making sense of what it is that the architect ***is*** *doing, and, at the* same time, giving definition to what it is that other architects **should** be doing."

Such a conception of the act of design seems to accord reasonably well with the fact that the majority of architects of whatever stature, and associated with whichever style or movement, usually cannot translate into an intelligible verbal form just what it is that they are doing, or why they are doing it. Yet this fact in no way seems to hinder them in designing architecture. Moreover, even when one examines the theories and architecture of architects that espouse some particular theory of design, it is many times impossible to reconcile the theory with the artifact. This leads one to view the notion of a direct connection between theory and design as being rather questionable.

But what then of the origin of theory itself? It has been argued that theory is not directly translatable into design. However, is design the basis of theory? It would seem that in many cases theory arises out of the desire to explain the nature and significance of existing design conventions or to give meaning to the emergence of new conventions. It is most often the architectural critic or historian that, recognizing something new or different, may canonize a particular set of design conventions by formulating an appropriate explanation of *theory*, or by defining a *style*, and there by giving a transcendent, legitimizing meaning to the collection of conventions used by one or more architects.

Thus, architectural theory becomes the verbal attempt at the formulization and ordering of non-verbal design conventions with the intent to attach to them an intellectualized meaning or *raison d'être*. Indeed, there has been a long-standing tradition in the history of western architecture for architects and theoreticians alike to describe formal and spatial phenomena in terms of verbal constructs, most often in terms of analogies with other intellectual disciplines. This tendency has had far-reaching consequences as, in turn, the analogue has become the basis upon which we judge the quality and validity of the architecture itself. Even though analogies drawn from disciplines other than architecture, whether it be from music, literature, science, politics or art, may possibly shed new light on our understanding of architecture, it will necessarily be a coloured or filtered light. Whatever its basis, however, it becomes apparent that the central function of theory is to serve the dual role of both making sense out of what it is that the architect *is* doing, and, at the same time, giving definition to what it is that other architects *should* be doing. Moreover, this dual role gives any particular theory a certain momentum and validity, for once a out with reference to, or in the sphere of the values implicit in the conventions used, or explicit in the theory stated, the exercise seems possible and maybe even useful. However, problems arise (as sometimes new insights do) when the set of values reflected in the criticism are different from those values on which the design was predicated: it is one thing to judge a classical Renaissance building by its adherence to, and manipulation of the Greek and Roman orders, or its supposed mathematical implications; it is quite another to judge it by its picturesqueness (a 19th century romantic concept) or its experiential qualities (a 20th century behaviorist notion). Ironically, however, though it may not be *fair* to *judge* a design by values foreign to those of its original conception, we may sometimes have the possibility of unknowingly creating the impetus for new conventions by reading a design through a distorted lens - one that distorts the original meaning, but may provide a new and more interesting meaning.

Therefore, to sum up, in the preceding discussion it has been argued that the act of architectural design is distinct from and not necessarily dependent upon any particular theory of architecture, though indeed the two may be mutually supportive. It has also been argued that it is the purpose of theory to both give meaning to, and legitimize the use of, certain design conventions employed by architects. Though some might argue that denying architectural design of its basis in theory is tantamount to denying the significance of the act itself, as well as the relevance of theory, it might be more reasonable to suppose that there is something inherently significant about the act of architecture itself, something which may indeed be the basis for the continued attentions architecture receives from theoreticians. However, if the act of architectural design is really at its core a creative act - a creative manipulation of design conventions - then maybe the real question of importance is not that of the relationship between the act and the theory, but rather that of what indeed is this thing we call *creativity*. Ah! but that is another question altogether.

Craig Applegath is a final-year architecture student at the Technical University of Nova Scotia, and a graduate (B.Sc.) of the University of Toronto.

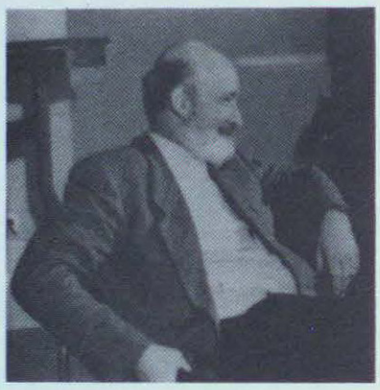
Notes

1 Anthony Jackson, 'A Canadian Architecture: Delusion or Reality?', *The Fifth Column*, Vol. 3, No 3/4, 1983, p.4.

An Interview with Vittorio Gregotti

Vittorio Gregotti is an architect practicing in Venice. He is currently an editor of **Casabella** *and was a former member of the executive council of* **Lotus**. *He teaches a design course at the School of Architecture in Venice.*

Vittorio Gregotti was interviewed in Milan for ***THE FIFTH COLUMN*** *by Katherine Dolgy. The interview was conducted in Italian and the transcript was translated by Walt Sandulli and Luigi Ferrara.*



TFC : In a recent article for *Casabella*, you refer to *"my generation and particularly the* **Casabella** *group of the fifties that must be attributed with the guilt and the merits for the reanimation of a discussion with regards to the importance of Loos and the lack of the same for Gropius."* You say that *"from that moment Loos' critical fortune has not stopped growing."* This is interesting in the power that it infers for the journalist in architecture. What exactly is the extent of that power in your opinion?

Vittorio Gregotti : I think that in the case of Loos there has been, especially in Italy, a certain type of positive opinion in recent years that is due to two fundamental facts. The first is that my generation was the first to begin to reflect, to think about the modern movement no longer as being a unified entity, but rather as something which basically was composed of many different, independent ideas. And that maybe it was interesting to understand what happened in the twenties and thirties, more than just analysing what were the similarities between diverse ideas of that period.

We also wanted to analyse what separated these ideas and to understand from that, the diverse components of what became known as the modern movement. One of the principal components of that movement was the thinking of Loos, and that which in Loos' work expressed the ideas of other architects active in those years who were related with the modern movement, in its classic definition - relations of a complex, not a simple nature. For this reason, in 1958 we dedicated several issues of *Casabella* to the problem of Loos and the reasons why this strange person was part of the modern movement, not only as a precursor, but as a person who contributed in an original and diverse way to the formation of a modern way of thinking.

From that moment on, the fortune of Loos in Italy, and also abroad, was very important, very large. It was understood that even if Loos was not utilizing the classical instruments of the language of modernity, he managed nonetheless to keep alive the important concept that there was a link between the traditions and history of architecture in general, and specifically of architecture to its particular locus. In this sense, we think that the fortune of Loos is justified, even though, as I said in my article, we certainly are not able to consider him as a great architect. There were many architects that had much more talent. But no one else has had the capacity to keep alive this particular and original concept of modernity.

TFC : What do you feel had the most influence on the *Casabella* group of the fifties and the architectural theory and criticism that was to come from them?

Gregotti : I think there always develops, when something begins to fade away, a certain thirst that cannot be quenched.

Layout by Marianne Nguyen and Vincent Den Hartog

*"I think that the position of **Casabella** in the eighties has two important functions — The first is to correct a general tendency in the practice of architecture over indulgent in images and inattentive to the ideas of construction... The second is that I would like to refer to as the contextual aspect."*

In our case, we needed to develop historical perspectives because history and criticism were not very secure. There was not much left of a modern movement to which we could refer, but we started to criticize, and from this criticism came the need to think theoretically - not only to reflect on history and theory, but also to use these as instruments in design.

TFC : And the *Casabella* group of the eighties, of which you are a distinct member, has what role to play in the current architectural discussion?

Gregotti : I think that the position of *Casabella* in the eighties has two important functions. The first is to correct a general tendency in the practice of architecture overindulgent in images and inattentive to the ideas of construction. When I say *inattentive to the ideas of construction*, I don't want to want to sound as if I'm talking about an architecture of technology. Technology is something which interests few people today. Architecture is no longer a technical miracle, but I should say that there is a tradition in the profession that should be preserved; that is, a sense of the substantiality of the materials which one works with. This is the first aspect of architecture that *Casabella* strives to sustain.

The second is that which I would like to refer to as *the contextual aspect*.That is, the basic condition that we find ourselves in today, especially in Europe. I believe that here I should make mention to the fact that *Casabella* is fundamentally a European magazine which does not concern itself, for example, with the very important problems of places like the third world, where the specific conditions of working are tied to regional traditions and history. We are always confronted with the problems that are around us - and context has an importance that we must take into account. When we act, we can no longer maintain the idea that architecture is the problem of constructing an isolated object, an abstract model, but rather of constructing a very substantial object that has an important relationship with what existed before it - necessary relationships that grow from the context and are not just stylistic relationships, of course, but ones which suggest, which permit the new intervention to have a particular relationship with what existed beforehand. This relationship becomes the fundamental element in the construction of architecture. This is the position of *Casabella*.

TFC : What do you feel is the relationship between *Casabella* and other architectural magazines, for example *Domus* or *Abitare*?

Gregotti : We have in *Domus* an example of a position exactly opposite to ours. This is not to say that we don't believe that *Domus* is an excellent commercial magazine, because it has many great qualities. It is a magazine that has always had the tradition of being in vogue; that is to say, a magazine that follows taste and which changes gradually, not only in architecture, but also in art, furniture, *etcetera*.Furthermore, the director of *Domus* has taken a position with regard to architecture, comparatively speaking, that is radically different from ours.This is a position which maintains that architecture must find an audience or community, and along with that, represents a lifestyle linked to the populace, to the ideal of the banal, to what people are in actuality. Whereas we are a more moralistic magazine who would like to think of what people should be like and not only of what they are. This is why we are a different type of magazine.

*"We have in **Domus** an example of a position exactly opposite to ours... . It is a magazine that has always had the tradition of being in vogue."*

*"... **Lotus** has paid more attention than **Casabella** to the problems of history and those problems concerning certain themes bound up with literature, memory and other problems of this dimension."*

I do not think *Abitare* can be compared with us because it is a magazine that has different objectives. This can be seen in the way in which it positions itself in the magazine market; that is, it is not a magazine for specialists, but rather for a larger audience that has an interest in the problems of interior design.

TFC : And what is the relationship between *Casabella* and *Lotus*?

Gregotti : I have been for a long time one of the directors of *Lotus*, and as a result of this *Lotus* had a long period in which we tried to express the same philosophy as in *Casabella* . In the last two years, while I have been occupying myself with *Casabella*, *Lotus* has paid more attention than *Casabella* to the problems of history and those problems concerning certain themes bound up with literature, memory and other problems of this dimension. However, I certainly believe that *Lotus* is an excellent and important architectural magazine,

one that is very interesting, and one in which you can find discussions concerning, as we say, larger and more important issues.

TFC : There has been a lot of discussion lately on the inadequacy of the Italian architectural teaching situation. Giorgio Cucci describes its problems at length in *Casabella*. Both Leon and Rob Krier have described it to *THE FIFTH COLUMN*. Leon Krier said, "*My brother has now two hundred and fifty students in Italy. Some professors have a thousand students. It is completely meaningless and the outcome is tragic.*" He refers to this as "*industrial education.*" What is your experience in this regard teaching at the School of Architecture in Venice?

Gregotti : Certainly this is always something that makes foreigners wonder. In my design course in Venice, I currently have three hundred and forty students, a number that would be completely crazy for an American or German university. Well, I think it is necessary to discuss many different elements when considering this question of quantity. The first is that the number of people in Italy who go to the university is due, above all, to the problem of youth unemployment. This youth unemployment that causes the universities to be packed, is a result, on the whole, on the fact that there are not many possibilities for work. This produces a tendency among many to prolong the waiting period before working by attending university. This is a very negative fact - a fact that is bound up in the economic problems that we hope will straighten themselves out.

The second aspect is that in Italy, like the rest of Europe, there was, in 1968, a great push towards general education, and from this arose the idea of attending university not to obtain a profession but to be more educated, to have a greater quantity of general information. A profession was something that came later. I think that this was a mistake, not in an ideological sense, but in the sense that no society, especially Italian society, can permit themselves the luxury of a service such as general university education.

As concerns quantity, I have said this before and I will say it again; there is undoubtedly a certain limit at which it becomes very difficult to work, especially in something like design, in which a personal rapport is as important as teaching. I think, however, having had some experience in American, German and Swiss universities, that a certain quantity of students is important. This need not be too few, because when there are only ten or twelve students the capacity for interaction between students diminishes. This does not mean that one should have our number, which is an absurd number. But, I think that a certain minimum number of students is very important for constructing an environment of collective learning.

TFC : Is there a student whose work has had an exceptional effect on you?

Gregotti : Yes, certainly. I must give a small explanation here. The school at Venice has nearly all of Italy's most important architects: Gino Valle, Aldo Rossi, myself, and the historian Manfredo Tafuri. There are some strong personalities and this creates, in a certain sense, some groups of students following the various professors in diverse ways. I personally have the habit of taking some of my pupils and working with them. Many of my pupils work in my studio in Venice; others in my studio in Milan. Some have become assistants and work with me at school. This is an attempt on my part to create a certain *school* based on particular principles, and not on the imitation of certain models. On the whole, I think that is positive because it constructs a system of dialectics between various positions that serve to clarify the debate make it better.

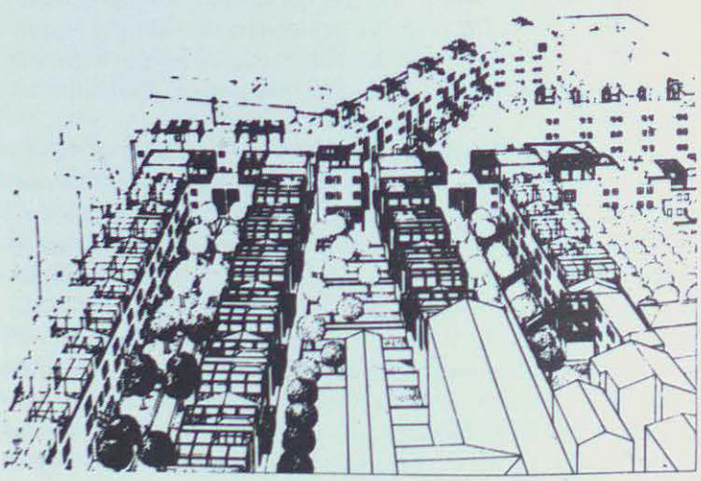
"... Canada needs to express itself more — in the magazines — to have a stronger presence."

TFC : What are you currently working on?

Gregotti : At this time, I am working on a competion for the Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, for 1992. It is a beautiful competion, in which Stirling, myself, Isozaki, Bofill and Moneo were invited to work on. However, there is one project that I am working on which, in my opinion, is more interesting. I am going to build - here in Italy it is very difficult to build - for the city of Venice, in its historical district, a series of dwellings. I am also working on something interesting in Milan - the reconstruction of a railroad zone in the central part of the city, on the side near the Triennale, which involves a great deal of urban design. All three projects have a scale of great dimension; and in all three projects the principles with which you design cities figure to a great degree.

TFC : Do you know of any work that is now taking place in Canada and do you have any opinions on it?

Gregotti : No, frankly I do not know enough about the situation to give an opinion. In this I must be sincere. Actually, this is an accusation on my part because Canada needs to express itself more - in the magazines - to have a stronger presence. It is a big nation which has a rather minimal international presence. I think it is very important for you to have a new presence in the general debate, in the international debate.



Katherine Dolgy is a fourth year student at the School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of Toronto. She has written for various Canadian magazines, and is the Toronto regional editor for **THE FIFTH COLUMN**.

Walt Sandulli is an American writer currently living in Italy. Luigi Ferrara is a fourth year student at the School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of Toronto.

Murdoch Laing Design Competition

McGill University School of Architecture

Winning Project: Hal Ingberg

Summer 1983

Program Extracts

"$1,300., for the design of a medium cost city house, established by the late Mrs. Florence B. Laing in memory of her son (formerly a student in the School of Architecture) who was killed at Courcelette in 1916 while serving with the 24th Canadian infantry Batallion. Awarded in a competition held during the summer prior to entering the B.Arch. program."

Assignment:

The design of a double house for two families who wish to live together in the historic precinct of Montreal. One section of the building is to be occupied by an architect, his wife and his three children, aged 11, 14 and 16, respectively. The other section will be occupied by his parents, who have recently come from Italy to settle in Canada.

Privacy from the street and between dwelling units must be provided. The designer must bear in mind that in the event that this cooperative arrangement between families cannot be continued, the parents' unit will be rented out, and the limited common facilities will be appropriated by the owner.

The building will be owned by the younger couple. Both parts are to function as totally independent units. The only facility common to both units shall be an internal outdoor space, in the form of a court garden, a roof garden or an open atrium and a basement area.

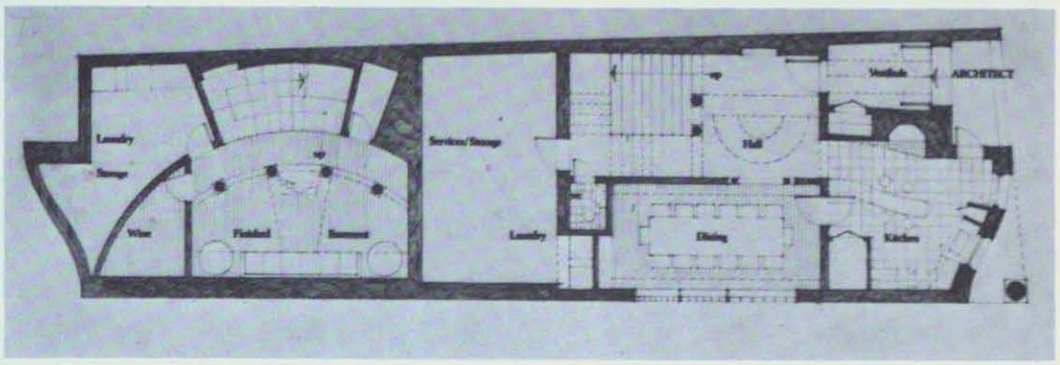
The Site:

An empty lot on the east side of Rue Saint Gabriel, between Rue St. Paul and Rue de la Commune. The lot measures approximately 6.5 m. by 27 m. and has three sides facing streets. The land slopes down 3.2 m. towards the harbour.

Urban Design Considerations:

The building site must be seen as an integral part of a city block situated within a neighbourhood that is to be rehabilitated and possibly transformed into a new entity. The building must express its strong visual relationship with its immediate physical context, without mimicking its neighbours. It must express its contemporary function, and despite the strong contextual requirements, it must be seen as a modern architectural statement.

The building should help define and reinforce the streets on which it sits. It should be sympathetic to pedestrian movement, animate the street environment and respect the scale of its neighbours.



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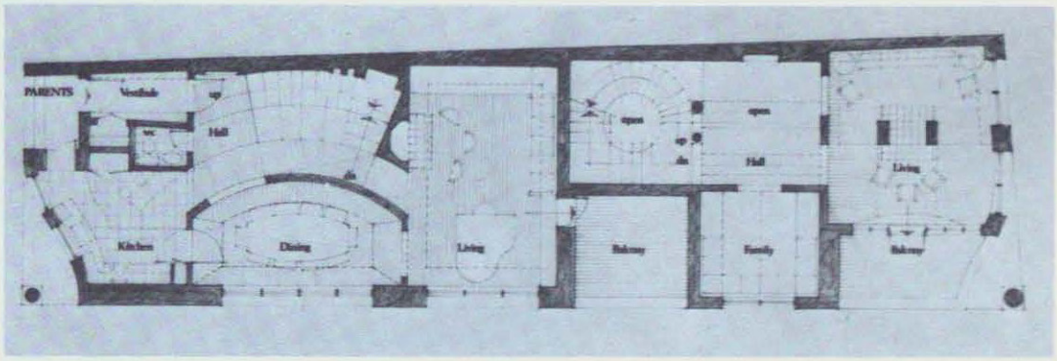

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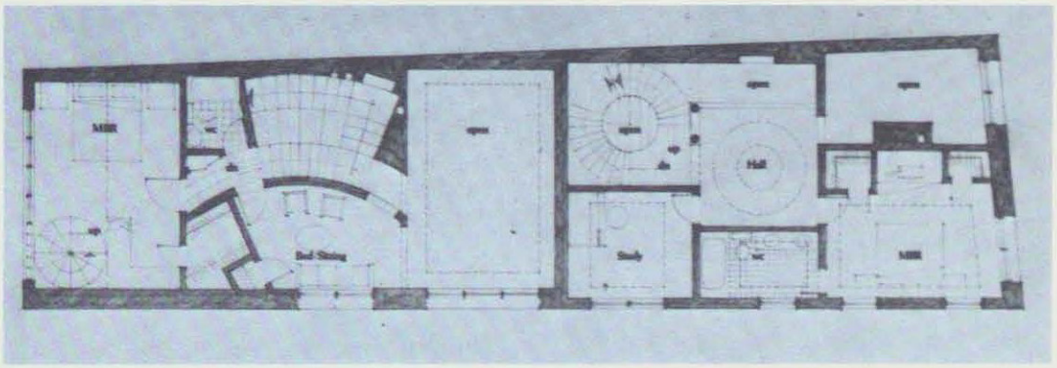

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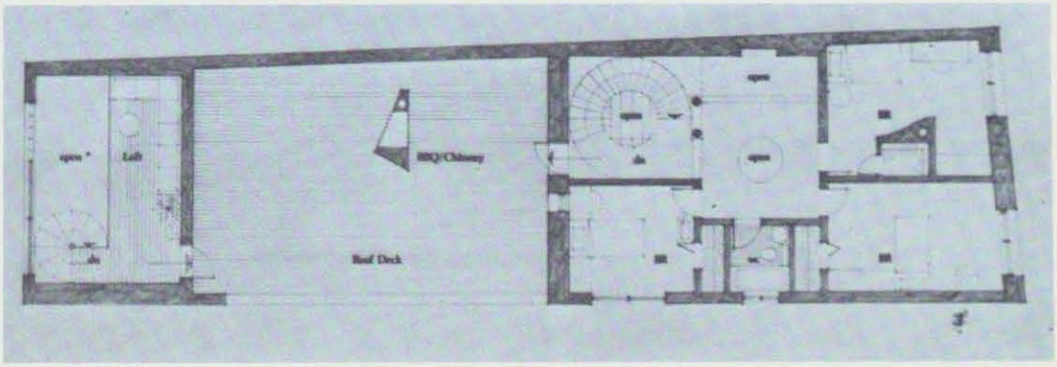

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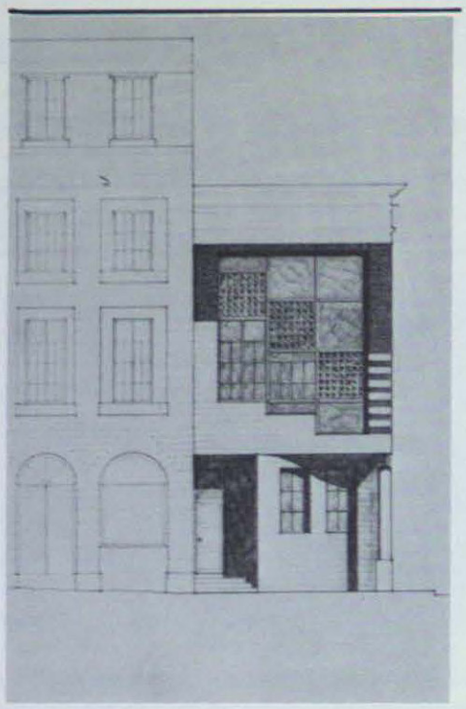
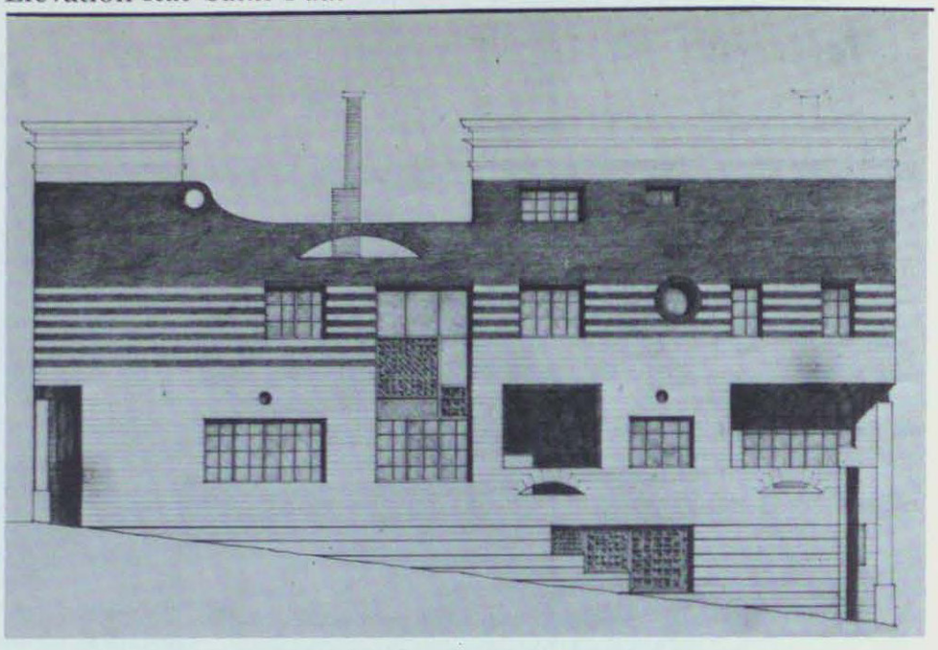
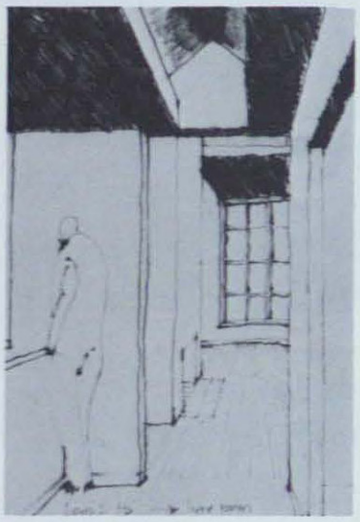
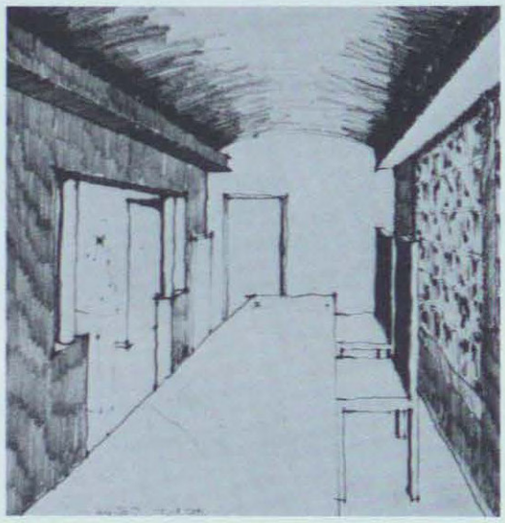


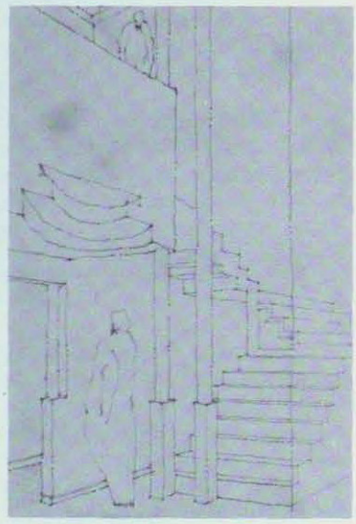
Elevation *Rue Saint Paul*

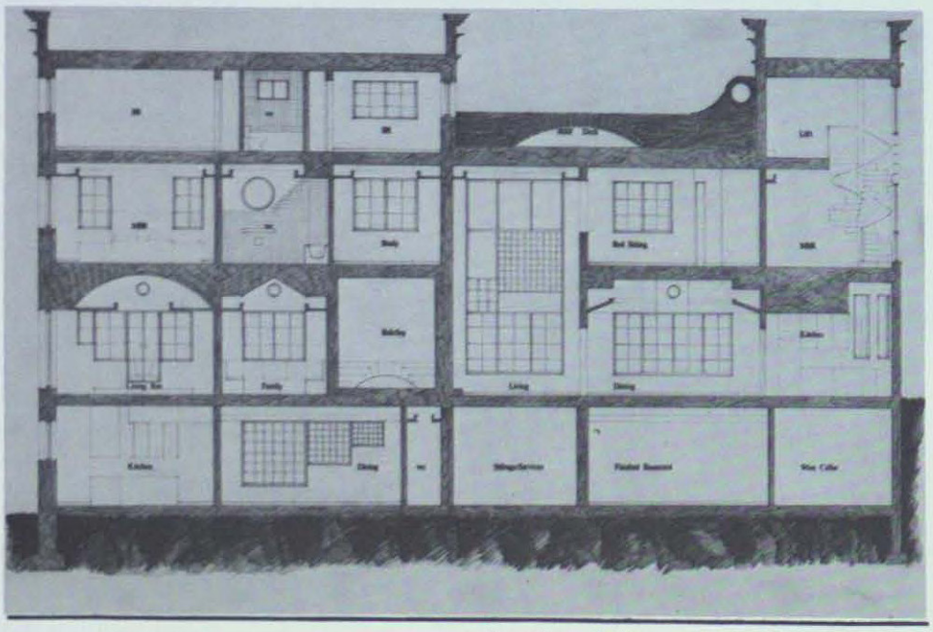
Elevation *Rue Saint Gabriel*



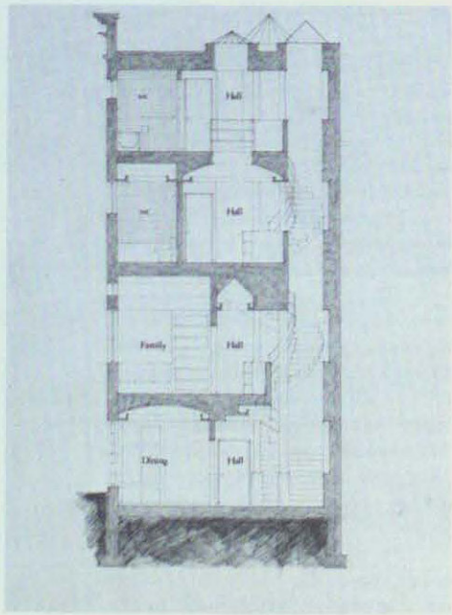








Section *Longitudinal*



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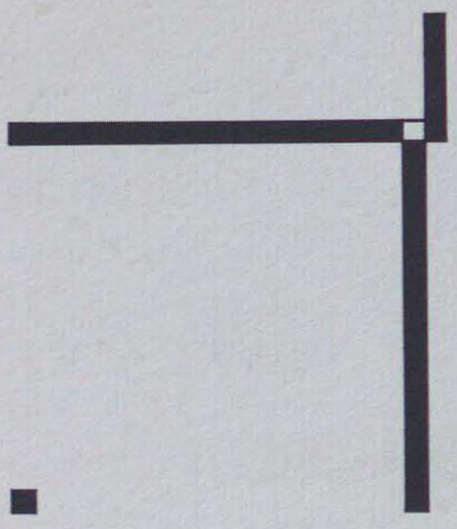
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