

If you consider the history of Canadian architectural education, there is something subtly ironic about publishing an issue entirely devoted to work done by Canadian architecture students on programmes of "Studies Abroad". Perhaps too subtle now since most of us have quite quickly accepted our present forms of architectural education and so easily forgotten how it all began. Actually, it was not until well into this century that most architects practising in this country had ever studied in Canada.

For quite a long time the majority of buildings being designed and erected in this country were the work of architects who, if academically trained at all, received their education either in the United States or, as was more likely, in Great Britain or France. The outcome of this is well known if not so widely recognized: many of the buildings which first came to characterize "the Canadian style"—the Châteaux hotels, the neo-Gothic government buildings—were less an outgrowth of the accurate perception of a "budding" young nation's distinct character but more a reaction to the superficial peculiarities of an unknown land.

The more perceptive of our forbears in Canadian architectural practise understood that this paradoxical situation could only be an impediment to the development of a truly Canadian architecture or architectures. Percy Nobbs, eminent Montreal architect and second director of the McGill University School of Architecture, vocalised this concern in a lecture presented to the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1924. He pointed out that the solution to this problem must reside in the development of our Canadian schools; the inference being that locally trained architects would be in a better position to deal with local issues.

So here we are, over sixty years later, the products of by now well established Canadian systems of education, some surely as well established as any abroad, and in the current trend for historical retrospection, off we go to Europe in search of the roots of our architectural heritage. But, are we really any better prepared to deal with the issues raised by such a quest into unknown territory were our forbears? Like Joseph Conrad's adventurous Marlowe in *Heart of Darkness*, as we set off on our own voyages of discovery, we would do well to bear in mind that what is important is not what we see on our travels, but how it affects our perception of our own society on return.

As the future architects of Canada's second century, the cities we will build in are being formed right now. Few and far between are our "Roman Forums" where we must tread lightly or disturb the sleep of History. By and large the context we must deal with is that of a society younger than the industrial revolution. (Any airplane view of a typical Canadian city will give testimony to the fact that most of our cities only really started to grow after steel and glass were the accepted technology.)

Furthermore ours is a society in which, at least for the present, the majority of people will continue to choose to live in the suburbs. The sort of nostalgia for a "lost urbanism" which architects are now so fond of does not mean as much here as it does in, for example, Berlin or Beijing, where something was really physically lost. In Canada it is more of a lost opportunity. To misquote Ogden Nash: "their reminiscence is our remorse."

The Modern Movement has taught us that an architect's vision alone cannot usually change social ideals. If Canadian

society aspires to such ideals as the suburban lifestyle then we cannot ignore this, no less than we can ignore any other aspect of our society that is bound to affect the way people will want to live and work. The Mississauga City Hall is one contemporary project that attempts to deal with such a particularly North American issue as the suburban ideal, since by its references to the rural origins of the area the proposed concept pinpoints one of the symbolic elements basic to the "suburban dream".

If the programmes for studies abroad are to be worthwhile to the Canadian student, it is essential that they encourage an understanding of the relationship between an architecture and its society so as to clarify why architectural forms evolve as the appropriate expression of a particular society at a particular time. Hence, their validity may be questionable at another time or in another place even within the same society. As Northrop Frye has said, "it is a gross error in perspective either to detach the cultural from the historical past or to confuse the two." Lateral studies between a society and its architecture or its architectural expression in one period as compared to another are thus a clear requisite for a comprehensive study. For instance, major revolutions, social and technological, are the basis for the difference between Versailles and the works of the French government of 1985. A complete historical study of French State architecture might deal with the architectural tradition that created Versailles, but should include an analysis of the social and technological changes which have led to the present forms being adopted to represent similar functions. In essence we must adopt a selective approach to history. Since there is no question of accepting the entire history of architecture as the basis for our studies, a tradition must be abstracted which can be associated with contemporary Canadian social values and thus used to substantiate those values.

Although almost all the programmes of studies abroad offered in Canadian schools of architecture are alike in that they include travels to one or more of the great urban centers of Europe or Asia, they vary considerably in length of time and type of participation. The studies range from relatively brief excursions by a few students on a particular pilgrimage to term long "studies abroad" of entire classes of students, usually in conjunction with a foreign university or college. Consequently the work produced also varies, from the spontaneous sketches inspired by a first view of a well known landmark to the studied analysis of the more obscure discoveries. Obviously then, not all studies abroad can be structured to allow for the type of analysis suggested. In any case, the approach described towards historical studies need not be limited to studies involving travels abroad. The basis for this understanding of the relationship between architecture and society must really be rooted in the history courses being taught in our schools here in Canada.

One last remark: A currently popular conception of Canadian society advocates that the country's cultural strength resides in the diversity found in its different regions. Thus it is in the development of strong regionalist approaches to architecture that we begin to exhibit an understanding of our society. What this notion also suggests is that if we are going to do any studying "abroad", it might be worthwhile to do some of it within Canadian borders, exploring our diverse regional heritages.

-Susan Ross