

M. Anderson

THE FIFTH COLUMN

volume 1, number 3

SPRING 1981



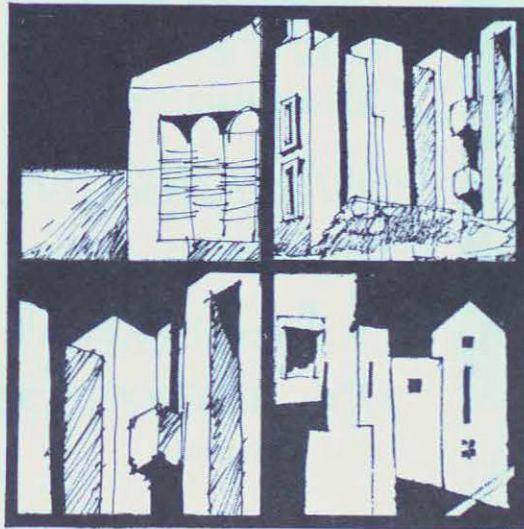
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BIG ARCHITECTURE

THE FIFTH COLUMN

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The Editorial.

Architecture is a field of varied directions. At once, it is a field requiring dexterity in the technics of building - a knowledge of all construction methods, and at the same time it is the most important (to our mind) visual and social art. Architecture is profoundly complex. As students of this field, we find ourselves continually asking the question, "What am I learning in the school; why **this** and why not **that**?" Our future role in the profession always seems uncertain, quite definitely due to our own attitudes about Architecture, those dominant in the profession, and those at the Schools.

Upon entering a school, what one expects to get **from**, or put **into** Architecture is affected by previous personal biases (rare in these days of flaccid pre-university educational development), or by the School's early expectations placed upon that very impressionable student. Generally, an initially 'non-directed' student will remain exactly so in a 'non-directional' School, and upon leaving, will be instantly swayed by the predominant demands of the architectural profession. At this time in Montreal, a 'puppet-draughtsman' is what the profession wants, and probably will get. As time passes, these graduates will become 'puppet-architects', clocking in promptly every day at nine and out at five. Surely, this is wrong. Historically, a student of Architecture has been well-rounded - fluent - in its language of arts and science in order to leave School as an artistically skilled, socially conscious, technically proficient Architect.

Architecture, indeed, **was** a highly respected profession. We now feel that a School's objective of creating Architects or architecturally-aware individuals has lost its clarity.

Unfortunately, present-day pre-university education does **not** tell prospective students what Architecture is about. As a result, the majority of these students expect nothing from a School as 'Architecture' becomes reduced to eleven block letters on a university application form. There are those, however, who **do** care about the field. They are in the minority, and although their numbers may grow during the educational process, they remain in the minority, and are thus profoundly different from the students who simply wish to get through rather 'get into' Architecture. The administrative system's dedication to serving a middle-of-the-road majority becomes a hindrance to the minority's growth and evolution.

"Ah, but what the market wants..." has become too important a directive within the Schools of Architecture. It is akin to Law Schools producing lawyers solely proficient in medical malpractice suits because of these cases' notoriety. To that non-directed, 'get-through' majority, a School's - "All of our students get hired" - measure of performance becomes

In This Issue:

their educational credo. We not only think that this is wrong, but tantamount to a crime against Architecture, borne by these students and administrations which engender and share this attitude.

It must be certain that Architecture is not simply a trade. Architects cannot, or should not, be packaged and stamped as 'artists' and 'technicians'. architectural technology schools produce technicians and institutes of paper architecture produce artists. The profession today seems to thrive on and hope for the production of specialists (mostly technicians) from our Schools of Architecture. The abhorrent vision of a Skidmore, Owings and Merrill draughting room is the embodiment of this narrow professional attitude. Skidmore and Merrill are dead, and to be sure, few employees of 'SOM' have ever seen Mr. Owings - anonymous workers, anonymous architecture. That reality is with us here and now in Montreal. It is here, for the most part, because of an attitude that starts with students, continues with the School and contaminates the profession. It **can** change, but the Schools and the students they produce must alter their attitudes in order to foster that change, and, hopefully, make the big 'A' in 'Architecture' mean something. □

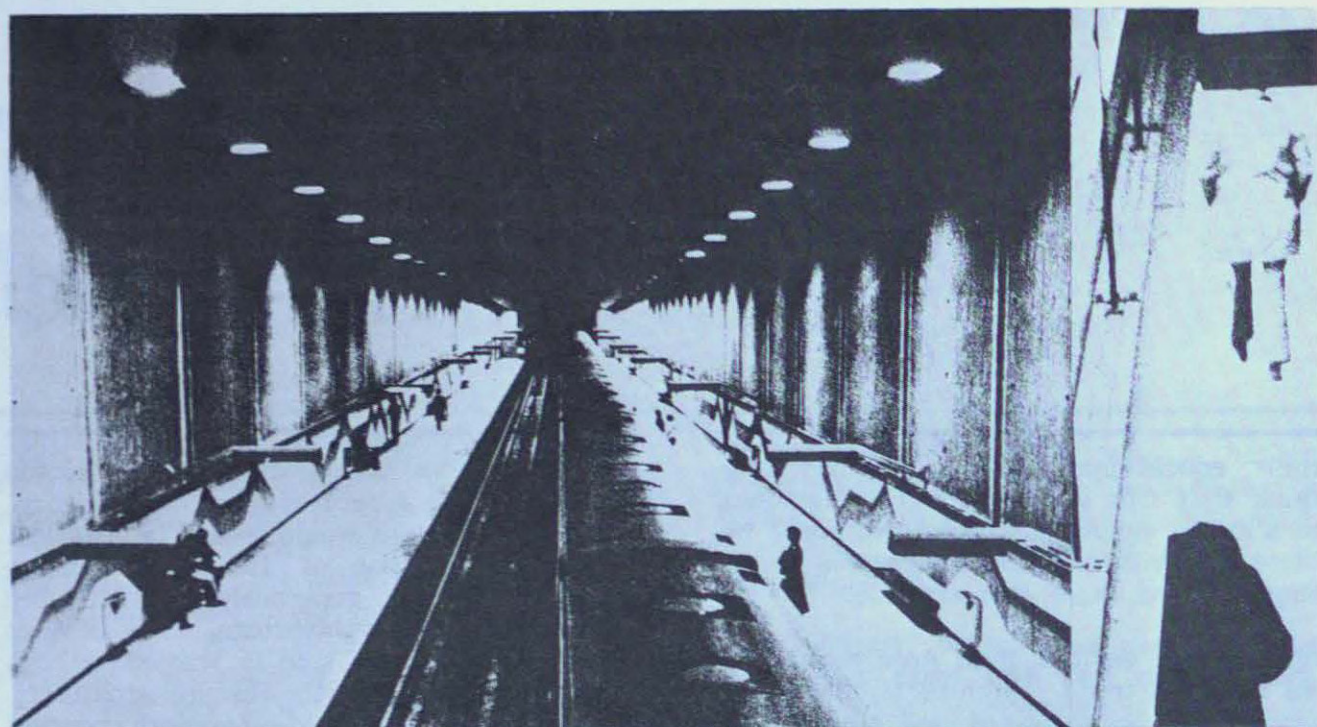
WMP

If discussions of Bigness were restricted to the single aspect of awe-inspiring size, those discussions would indeed be limiting. The third issue of **The Fifth Column** focuses on the generously multi-faceted theme of **Big Architecture**. The obvious question of sheer size is studied through the work of currently obscure architects. John Ostell of mid-nineteenth century Montreal and Raymond Hood of pre-World War II New York were both the 'biggest' architects of their respective time and place. The 100 year span of their works, culminating in Hood's Rockefeller Center underline the complete transformation of the concept of Big Architecture from the 19th to the 20th century. The contemporary reactive state of flux is exposed in the physically and ideologically big work of Riccardo Bofill and the Taller de Arquitectura.

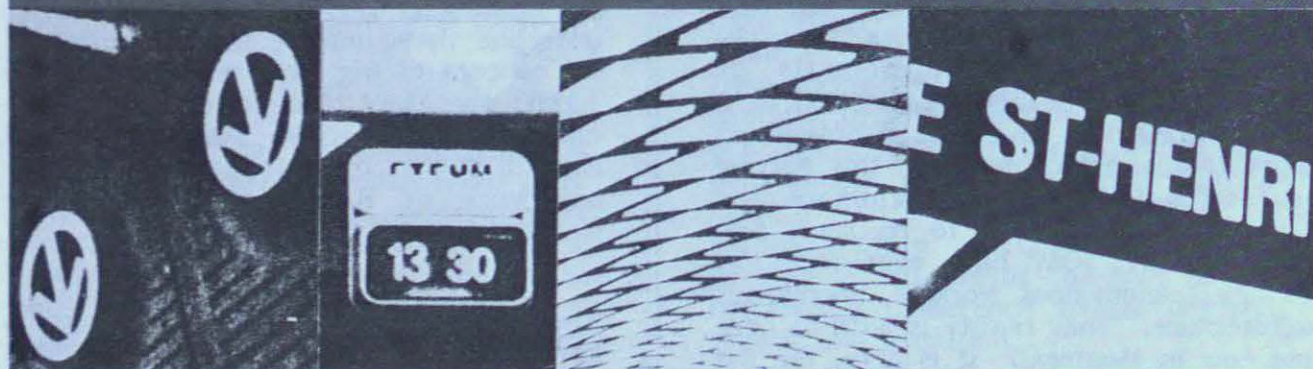
The second face of Big Architecture is reflected in the Montreal Metro, whose magnitude comes from its conceptualization and impact - a subterranean Master Plan which added a new dimension to an expanding city in the 1960's.

Finally, without stretching a flexible theme too far, few, if any, would deny the 'Bigness' of Art Historian and Architectural Critic Vincent Scully, whose far-reaching and emotive influence is profiled by distinguished Historian and Theorist, Peter Collins, in this issue. □

NG



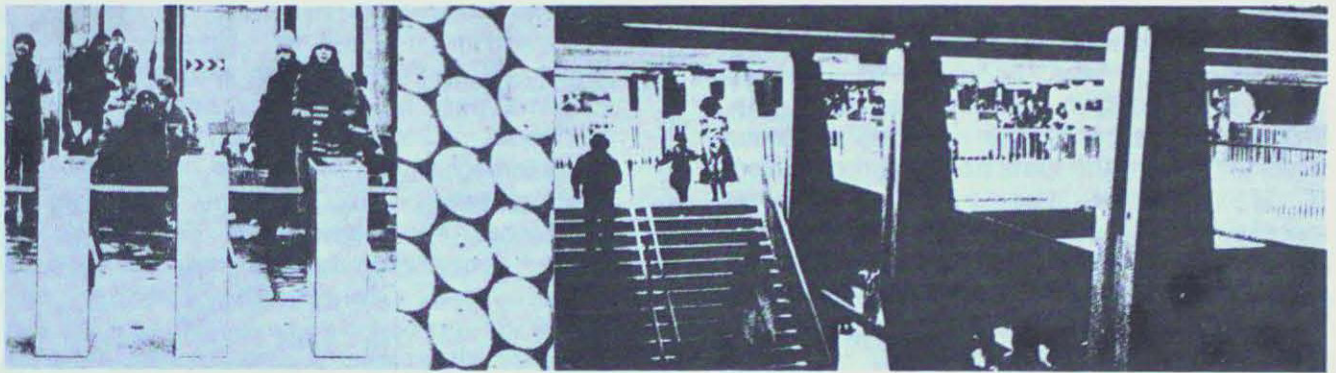
GOING UNDERGROUND



by Nathan Godlovitch.

On Friday, October 16, 1966, an official assembly gathered forty feet below the surface of the City of Montreal. From a 500-foot long chamber of grey ceramic tiles, at the request of the Mayor of Montreal, the French Minister of State blew a whistle, and a new transportation system which heralded a city's apex was rolling. Forty-four seconds later, the first blue and white train hummed into the Berri-de-Montigny station to the applause of the high-level entourage and the music of a brass band. As a

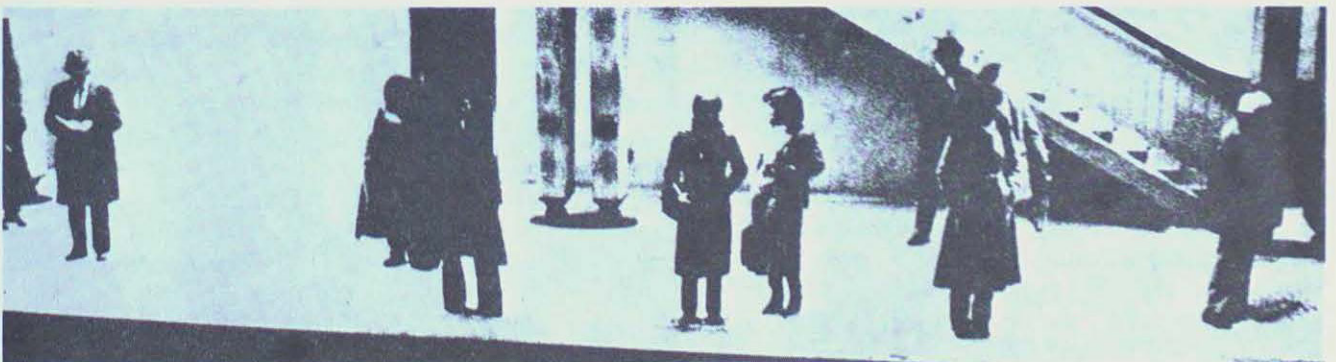
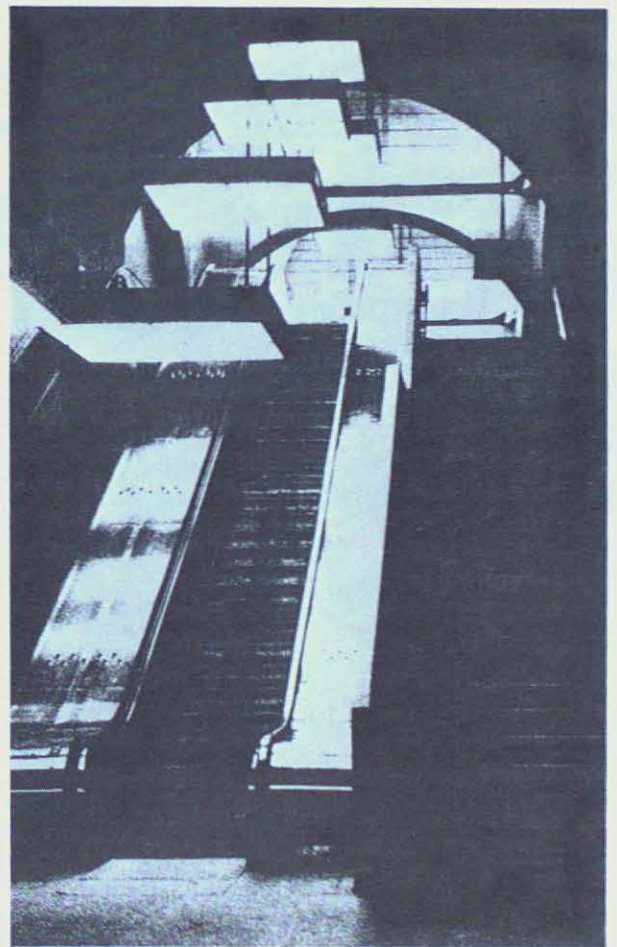
television audience watched, the Archbishop of Montreal gave a baptismal blessing and three days later, when the Montreal Metro system opened to the public, a fifty-year dream was transformed into reality. Today, in the subway's fifteenth year of operation, its incredible impact on the city and its people is yet to be taken for granted. "It's the most beautiful subway in the world," exclaimed Mayor Jean Drapeau - a seemingly pretentious statement from an exaggerative man, though few have



disputed this claim.

Dramatically, the original sixteen mile underground network with its twenty-six stations and associated protected promenades introduced a schism into the personality of Montreal's core. The city's downtown streets were just beginning to suffer the consequences of the commercial boom which had induced most of the irreflective rapid development. Greystone landmarks made way for an elusive **Manhattanesque** fabric of diversity and congestion without consideration for planning or control. As even Sherbrooke Street and McGill University succumbed to cancerous expansion, the Metro was growing below, meticulously based on a master plan.

Parameters were imposed where necessitated by function while form and aesthetics were regulated only by permissive guidelines. The station became the realm of architecture. Each station individually composed, Metro-design became a prestige project resulting in an amazing variety of colour and form throughout the network. Arguably, this variety is the basis of the

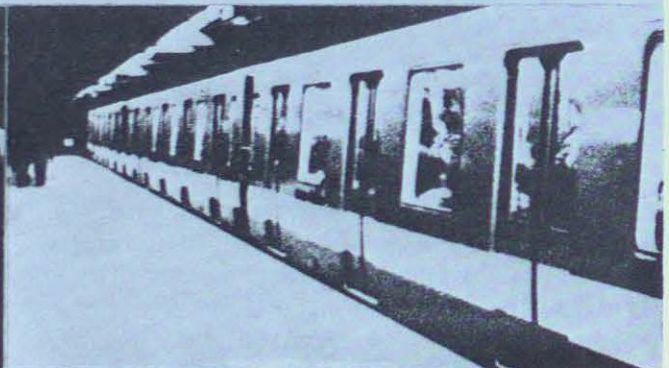
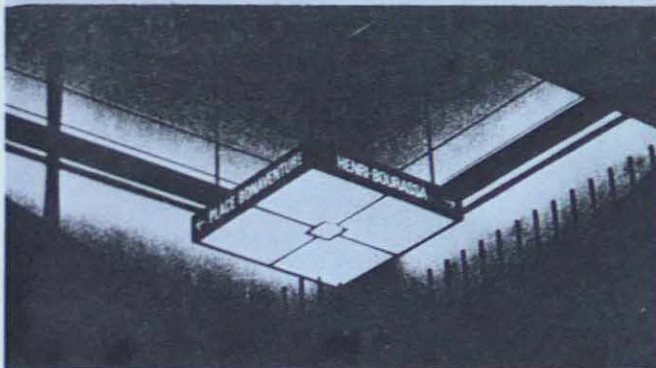
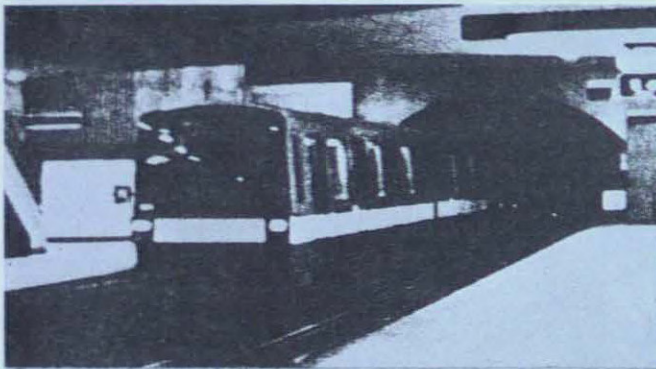


Metro's main appeal, beyond the albeit impressive ultra-tech rolling stock and operational systems.

The treatment of subterranean environment is handled in a novel manner, differing from the palatial ornamentation of Moscow or the rigidly uniform porcelain 'glimmer' of the original Toronto installations, both considered model systems of their times. Metro architects considered the pedestrian moving through space more akin to his outdoor surroundings. Materials are sympathetic to the wear of urban transit. Resilient

transcends the diversity encountered from station to station.

Since 1976 twenty new stations serving extensions have been added to the network. Changes of economy and style dictated changes from the mood of the original twenty-six. Ceramics are limited to floors and some wall decoration as naked concrete and glazed brick have supplanted tile as the predominant interior treatment. Often, as at Place-St-Henri and Lucien-l'Allier, interior designs attempt to suggest the context of the outdoor environment. There are two



ceramic, metal, brick, stone and concrete are articulated in the most successful stations to recreate the rhythm of the city street as experienced by the pedestrian, providing pockets of space, nodes of movement and sometimes wildly dramatic variations in scale and envelope height. Success comes in avoidance of the mundane (particularly the 'lavatory' style typified in Toronto) and the pretentious. The Metro undoubtedly bears the appearance of a subway, yet a unique overall character and image has been thoughtfully developed - clearly recognizable to the commuter - which

related digressions from the nature of the initial installations. The current emphasis on the presence of daylight (often achieved through very indirect means) at platform level is in conflict with the subterranean atmosphere developed in the older stations where only Champs-de-Mars permits light penetration to the tracks. The 'airy' feeling of the most generously sky-lit stops (Agrignon, Jolicoeur and Prefontaine) plays against the brooding qualities of the dark, cavernous stations typified masterfully at Bonaventure and Peel. Extensive daylighting can alleviate the sometimes oppressive claustrophobia,

a result of the system's permanent technical inability to leave its protective tunnels (the rubber-concrete traction system must be kept dry).

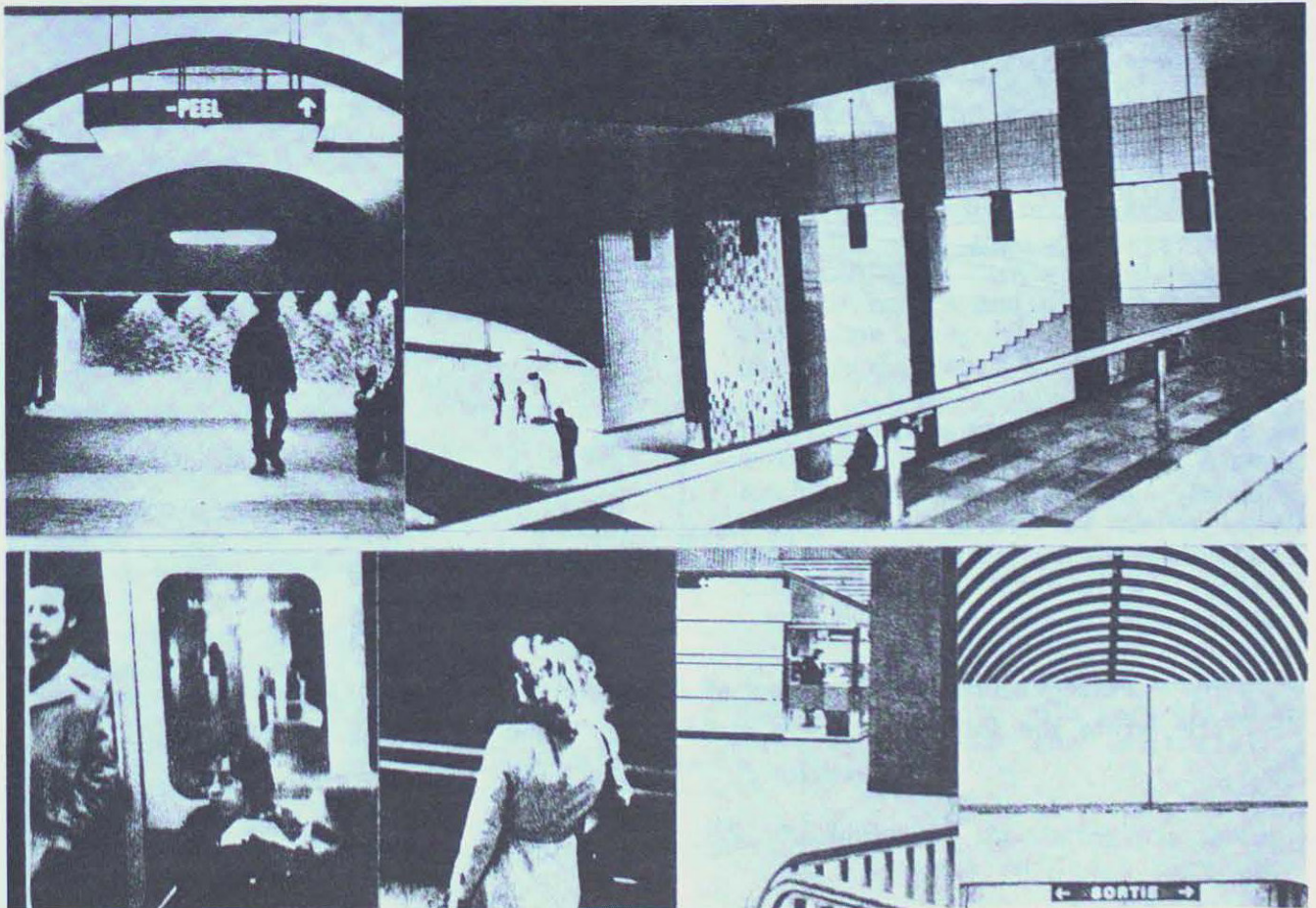
The second related departure from original design concepts is found in the openness of view and circulation encountered in the new stations, opposing the 'corridor' architecture of earlier work. This new approach again combats feelings of excessive enclosure, while the strong senses of linearity and directionality of older stations seem conducive to an implicitly linear and directional transit system.

The overall success of the Montreal Metro is beyond question. To travel the Metro is still to discover an orderly, yet exciting world far different from the directionless chaos encountered above. Much like the concurrently conceived Expo '67, the Metro packages the correct proportions of uniformity and variety,

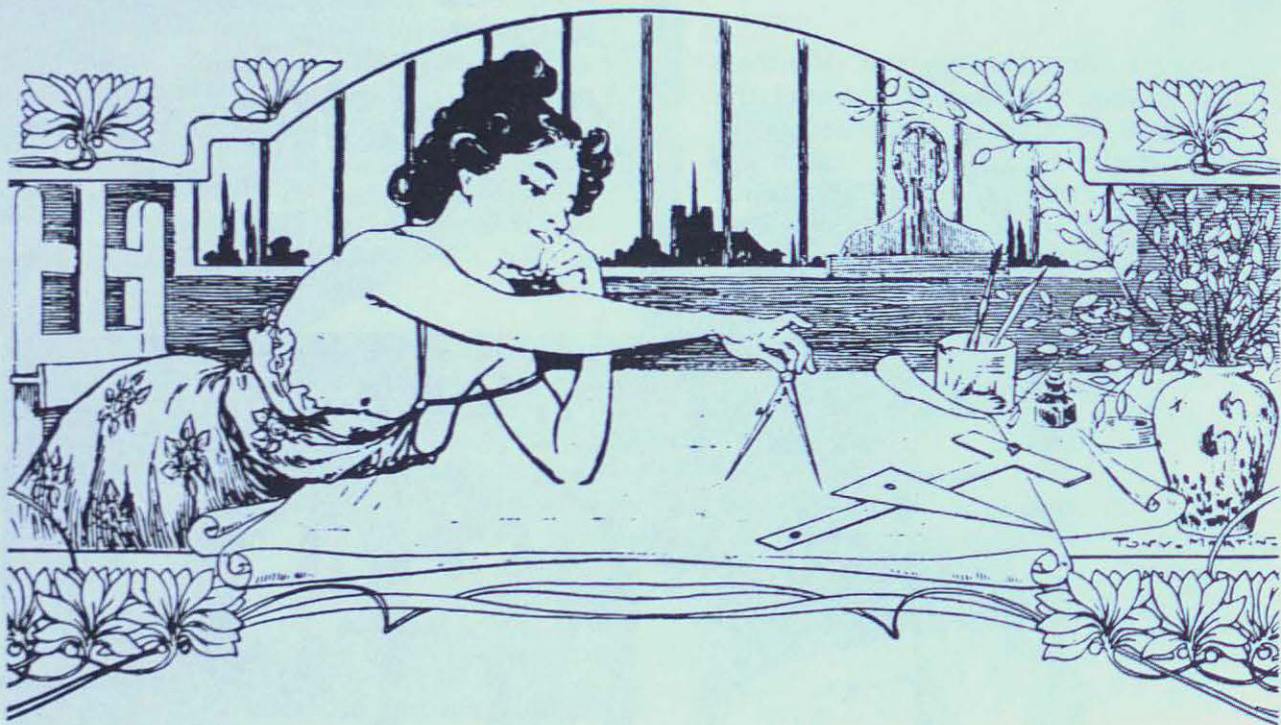
recognizing the vital contemporary role of high-technology. The end-result is a highly functional yet emotionally evocative sub-city - a system not merely to be ridden, but to be experienced. □

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THE HISTORIAN AS AN ARTIST



by Peter Collins.

Peter Collins is a Professor of Architecture at McGill University.
He wrote the following article in honour of Vincent Scully's 60th birthday.

Vincent Scully is undoubtedly the greatest architectural historian of the generation born in the 1920's. For over a quarter of a century he has been an inspiration to all those who have attended his lectures and read his books. Every year the largest auditorium in Yale University is packed with undergraduates taking his lecture-course on American architecture. They are drawn partly by the brilliance of his mind, partly by the acuteness of his sensibility, partly by the inspiring poetry of his eloquence, but mainly, I suspect, by his passionate sincerity and probity. His description of New England colonial architecture as "decency made visible" seems to me to express not only his view of what American architecture was in the past, but what he thinks it should be in the future.

Future historians will have to recognize that his lectures and publications are one of the principal influences shaping American architecture today. The nature and extent of that influence is something which will be assessable only in retrospect; but his insistence on an architecture of taut surface-patterns untroubled by structural systems, and adorned by whimsical details which "look as if they could be sliced off with a razor" conforms to current trends; and he certainly anticipated them.

All I wish to do here is comment on a description of his eloquence published in **Architectural Forum** twenty years ago: "quickly, surely, he translates visual images into verbal images". The relationship between "things", "pictures of things" and "verbal descriptions of things" has received considerable attention since these words were published. One of the leaders in this field of research is Roland Barthes, and his book **Systeme de la Mode** comes closest to providing us with guide-lines for studying the problem of adequately speaking about buildings. **Systeme de la Mode** is concerned with magazines specializing in fashions in womens clothes. More specifically, it is a detailed analysis of every issue of **Elle** and **Jardin des Modes** which was published between June 1958 and June 1959. The

general conclusion seems to be that the words have little intrinsic relationship to the pictures they accompany, and that the pictures have little intrinsic relationship to the clothes portrayed. The text is in fact simply an exercise in merchandizing, like the words which accompany advertisements in architectural magazines.

In architectural magazines a similar impression is often created by some of the comments which accompany the featured buildings. By contrast, Scully's words are always intensely apt. Occasionally the adjectives are so profuse, or the metaphors so unexpected, that it seems as if they are at times over-contrived. Yet every word proves to be just the right word, the only possible word in its context which could produce in the reader the thoughts which their author intends: thoughts which illuminate their subject with a magical intensity, and follow each other with such rapidity that attention never wavers.

It is in this respect that **The Earth, the Temple and the Gods** is the most distinguished book of its kind to be published in the English language since the publication of Ruskin's **Stones of Venice**. Scully was in no way influenced, either consciously or subconsciously, by Ruskin. But their writings share the same intense acuteness of observation both of nature and of architecture, and the same deep sense of the affinity between the two.

These qualities are also apparent in such a concise text as Scully's **American Architecture and Urbanism**. Describing the general layout of towns in New England, and with specific reference to the tree-lined streets in Litchfield, Connecticut, he writes of "the elm forest marching in dark pillars and arching and interlocking over all". Compare this eloquent metaphor with part of Ruskin's description of the waterfall at Schaffhausen:

"...while the shuddering iris stoops
in tremulous stillness over all,

fading and flushing alternately through the choking spray and shattering sunshine, hiding itself at last among the thick golden leaves which toss to and fro in sympathy with the wild water..."

and with Ruskin's description of St. Mark's square in Venice:

"...the vast tower of St. Mark seems to lift itself visibly forth from the level field of chequered stones; and, on each side, the countless arches prolong themselves into ranged symmetry, as if the rugged and irregular houses that pressed together above us in the dark alley had been struck back into sudden obedience and lovely order, and all their rude casements and broken walls had been transformed into arches charged with goodly sculpture, and fluted shafts of delicate stone. And well may they fall back, for beyond those troops of ordered arches there rises a vision out of earth, and all the great square seems to have opened from it in a kind of awe, that we may see it far away; - a multitude of pillars and white domes, clustered into a long low pyramid of coloured light..."

The stylistic differences are evident: differences which necessarily distinguish the works of different authors and the literature of different ages - in this instance separated by a hundred years. But the main and most important difference is of technological origin. Scully's medium is the commentary about photographs projected on a large screen. His mastery of dramatic declamation (whereby his spontaneous premeditated utterances possess a musical modulation and a passionate insistence transcending the bounds of rhetoric) requires that visible images be constantly before his audiences' eyes.

For this latter reason, more than for any other, I would question the accuracy of the statement quoted above, to the effect

that he "translates visual images into verbal images". This is no more true or characteristic of Scully's prose than an assertion that a musician "translates" a libretto into music. It may or may not be true that Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* was "an interpretation of the spiritual meaning and imagery of the Mass". But it is a fact that this music was, and still can be, widely appreciated by persons ignorant of the significance of the words, and even hostile to their meaning. In so far as the music is an "interpretation" or "translation", these terms can only be metaphorical. Words can be enhanced by music, and images by words, but enhancing is not translating, if only because once past the threshold of genius, the music or the words take on a complete artistic life of their own.

I sympathize with the plight of professors of English who, seeing their colleagues in other language departments busily translating English into French, Spanish, German or Greek, feel obliged to translate English into English. But some architectural theorists seem oblivious of the fact that academic English studies only began to flourish in England and America after World War I, and originated in Scotland as a "second language study" when that country was amalgamated to form the United Kingdom. The first person to teach it publicly was Adam Smith, who began doing so three years after the Scottish nationalist cause had been obliterated in the disastrous uprising of 1745. In France, the new academic discipline developed initially as a result of Louis-Philippe's educational reforms. Henceforth all Frenchmen, whether their mother tongue was Corsican, Alsatian, Provencal, Breton or Basque, had to learn to speak and write like Parisians. It was only after the Second Empire that the *explication de texte* was born.

Today, *explications de texte* favour abstruse techniques based on structural linguistics; and these techniques for explaining poetry are now being applied by historians and theorists of architecture to explain buildings. The trend probably

began when Robert Venturi wrote **Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture**; a book explaining buildings by reference to the literary theories of T.S. Eliot and William Empson. The trend has now developed by adopting methods developed by Roland Barthes. But whereas Eliot was himself a poet, Barthes is not; nor has he ever pretended to be one. What then is the role of architectural critics or historians who similarly make no pretence of being poets? What purpose does their work serve, and to whom should their words be directed?

Architectural criticism has recently been classified taxonomically in a bewildering catalogue of species and sub-species, all of which presumably serve some of the people some of the time. But it seems to me that the basis of any really meaningful verbalizations about architecture must initially reside in the explanations which, in any given era, practising architects give to their pupils. A teacher of design must, of necessity, be able to talk to them about what they are trying to do, and discuss with them what they eventually achieve. Since the drawings and models made in design studios are an essential and integral part of the process whereby all genuine architectural concepts get built, the words used to describe them are equally essential.

It is perhaps here that Scully's lectures and writings can most easily mislead the unwary. Consider for example his description of the way Thomas Jefferson designed Monticello, and of the complex intentions which he says, "prefigure forms which were to be characteristic of American architecture during its most original phase in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries". Jefferson, he tells us, took a Palladian prototype and then "thinned out" the containing walls, "pushed out" the columned porches on the entrance axis, "popped out" polygonal bays, and "thrust" the flanking wings underground to "embrace" the hill under its summit. The resultant mass, he concludes, is "locked in tense combat

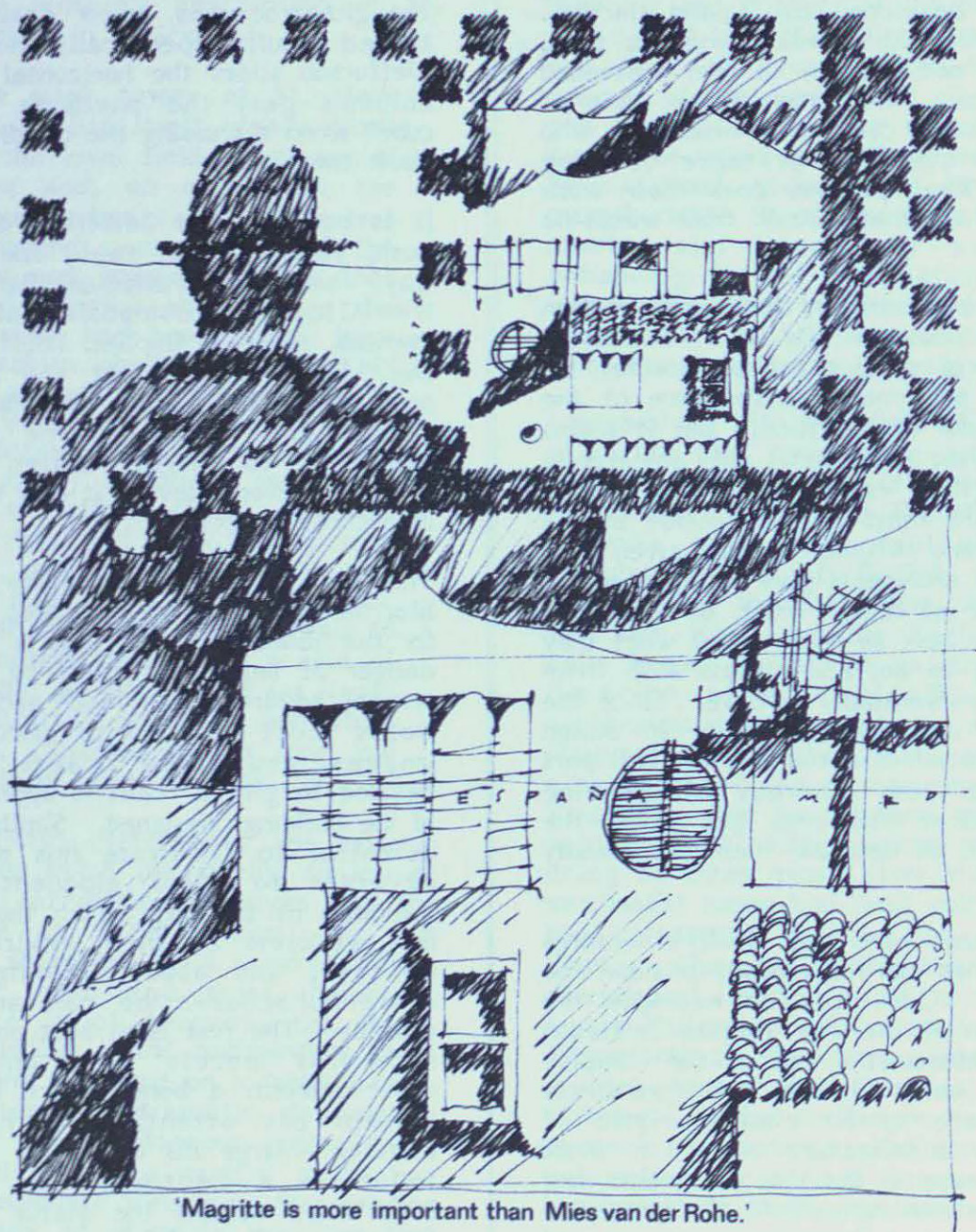
between vertical and horizontal". The reader may therefore be forgiven if he also assumes that the reason why the University of Virginia's library "swells", and its stairs "spill down to the lawn", is because these were Jefferson's actual thought-processes when designing it. Indeed Scully specifically asserts that "Jefferson slides the horizontal range of columns past the pavilion's restricted cube" when discussing the buildings which flank the library.

It is possible that Jefferson did indeed push, stretch, slide, swell, and in other ways manipulate Palladian, Baroque and Neo-Classical compositional motifs. Perhaps, as Scully implies, Louis Kahn did the same thing. But the Herculean anthropomorphism which pervades Scully's vocabulary seems to me of little relevance to solving design problems today, however relevant it may have been in ancient Greece.

Thus Scully's marvellous ability to infuse life, meaning, and his own deep affection for the buildings of the past is in serious danger of being misapplied by his most fervent admirers. To teach architecture, words must be used to discuss visual images, and visual images must be devised to give a realistic approximation of the buildings designed. Similarly, it is essential to illustrate this process in reverse: to speak eloquently about buildings of the past which the lecturer has studied in their environmental context, and about buildings whose design-processes he can accurately describe. The rest is at best poetry, and at worst merely entertainment or advertisement: a bonus which helps the student pay attention, or helps the lecturer enlarge his clientele. Once or twice in a century, this totality sometimes attains the status of great literature, and we should pay homage to the uniqueness of the talent which, by using architectural masterpieces as its raw material, can create such marvellous and memorable sequences of words that these become works of art in their own right. □

RICCARDO BOFILL y el TALLER de ARQUITECTURA

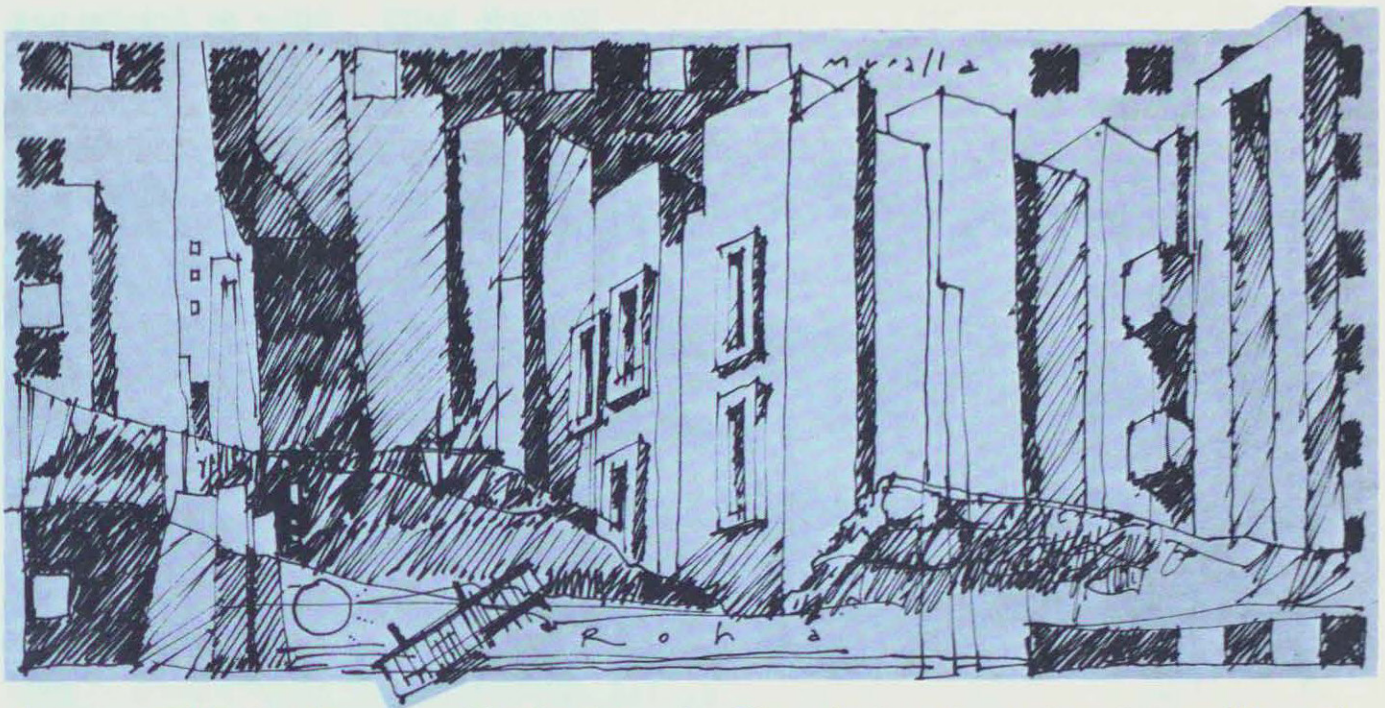
by William Mark Pimlott.



'Magritte is more important than Mies van der Rohe.'

Fantasy as a generator of Architecture is a notion which is purely romantic to most of us. Gaudi, Finsterlin and Mendelsohn were architects whose dreams, whose passionate outbursts, were translated into images of Architecture. We think of

Gaudi as the only one who could pull off the feat of **building** these architectural fantasies. He still holds our astonishment at his achievements. More often than not, the fantasy we create, so filled with emotive energy in conception, is



degenerated in its physical realization by the "meddling" of pragmatism, engineering and the "real world".

In Barcelona, Spain, Riccardo Bofill and the Taller de Arquitectura (Architecture Studio) fantasize, elaborate and build. Their design technique, which begins with huge drawings of the architects'/ artists' imaginative outpourings, sees contribution by mathematicians, engineers, writers and sociologists: all important members of the Taller. As developers of their own projects (more often so in their earlier work than now), they **build**. Their buildings, imbued with jittery energy, are indeed fantastic, **screaming** for attention. The feeling given by looking at them is very much like that felt by looking at Edward Munch's painting, "**The Scream**". The buildings are rivetting; their colours are always intense; their settings glorious; their aura surreal.

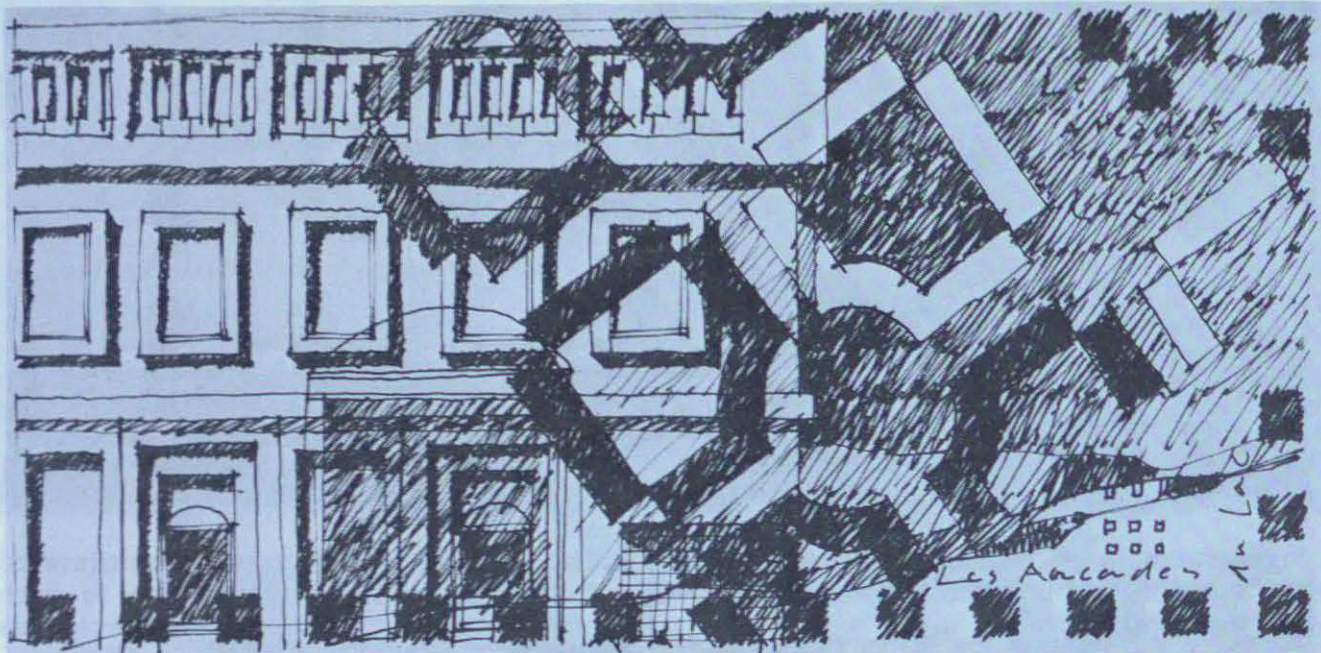
The early works of the office, particularly, unsettle us like a rambunctious child. In Calpe, Spain, on a bluff overlooking the Mediterranean, sit two works, the group called "La Manzanera". The first, **Xanadu** (1966) is described by Bofill:

"...A green rock composed of pure cubes and fragmented cubes, structurally arranged in space with a displaced symmetry."¹

The cluster of apartments, cantilevered from a core, seem to hang on to each other, fearing a fall down the precipitous slope. The building is a mountain village, and articulated by indigenous details, a Spanish village. The second building of La Manzanera, **La Muralla Roja**, (1972) is atop the bluff, its dramatic vertical expression **extending** the cliff, taking its stony physiognomy right up to the deep blue Mediterranean sky. The building is a brilliant red, its tones varying in each recess and projection of the fortress-like walls. Bofill says that these buildings, as architecture, are an addition to, an adaptation of the landscape.² The "new" landscape that these buildings contribute to is a fantastic one.

A landscape or cityscape is created within the protective enclosure of the building as well. The enclosure is surreal and unlike any enclosure we have experienced, yet, in the complexity of forms and their groupings, the spontaneity of organization of the village or barrio is referred to. Bofill thinks of these variations of forms as those which occur in nature.

If the human spirit and imagination are part of "nature", then indeed these buildings are wonderfully and ebulliently "organic". The order comes from within, from the "non-visible ... in that which underlies and regulates the varieties of



elements and structures."³

In their most recent work, the order which was before non-visible, has become ever-visible, expressed in the classical rhythms associated with the facades of grand French phalansteries of the 19th century.⁴ As contradictory as this order and regularity may seem to be to the Taller's early dogmas, the new work (in this case, **Les Arcades du Lac**, St. Quentin-en-Yvelines, France, 1974-80) is loyal to the firm's "Architecture of Fantasy". The dream is that of an ordered city - made up of block, street, network, square.⁵ It is a dream of ideal proportion, of grandeur, of sequential-space urbanity. The scheme consists of four super-blocks and four half super-blocks, forming "city" space set amidst the "taut" French lawns and man-formed lakes that Vincent Scully has spoken of. The main axis of the plan is terminated by a line of "aqueduct" buildings, hovering above and pushed into a huge rectangular lake. Executed in concrete and tile-brick, the buildings are weighty, the syncopated rhythms of the facades pounding heavily and forcefully. We are indelibly impressed by this vision of a city.

"Architecture no longer exists; only impersonal cities, without description and without style which nobody has ever dreamt of or desired. Against these clear and facile modern towns we launch out monuments which single out space, destroying it and inventing it."⁶

The Taller are creators of fantastic monuments in which we may live or die. In their "spontaneity" and order, their buildings are organic, borne of the human soul; realities borne of romantic vision. □

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WHO ARE YOU MR. CLAUDE NEON?

by Pieter Sijpkes.

Pieter Sijpkes is a professor of Architecture at McGill University's School of Architecture.

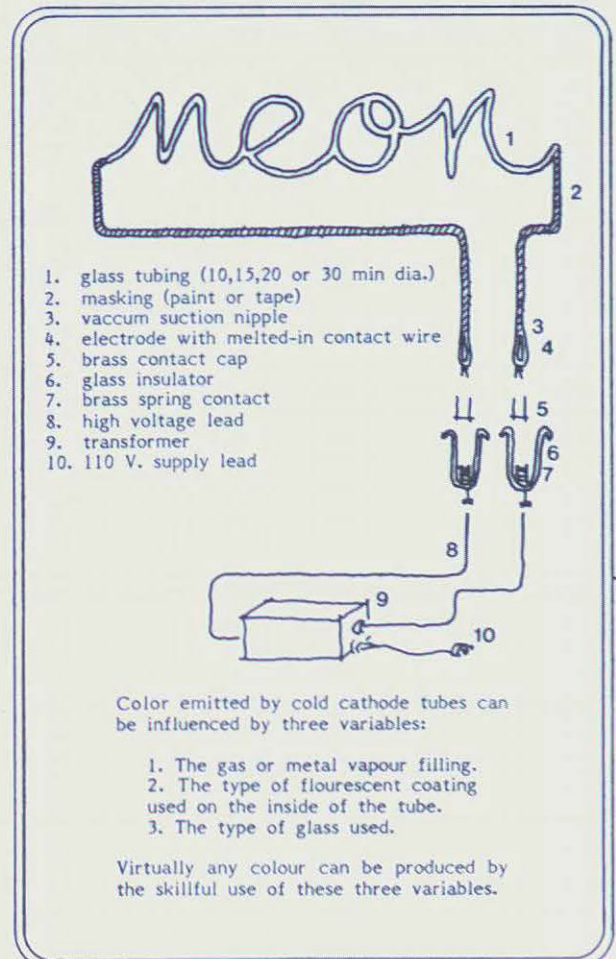
On August 12th, 1912, Mr. George Claude was awarded patent no. 458-697 in Paris: "...small caliber neon tubes for showing bright tension discharges, or for sources of light...".

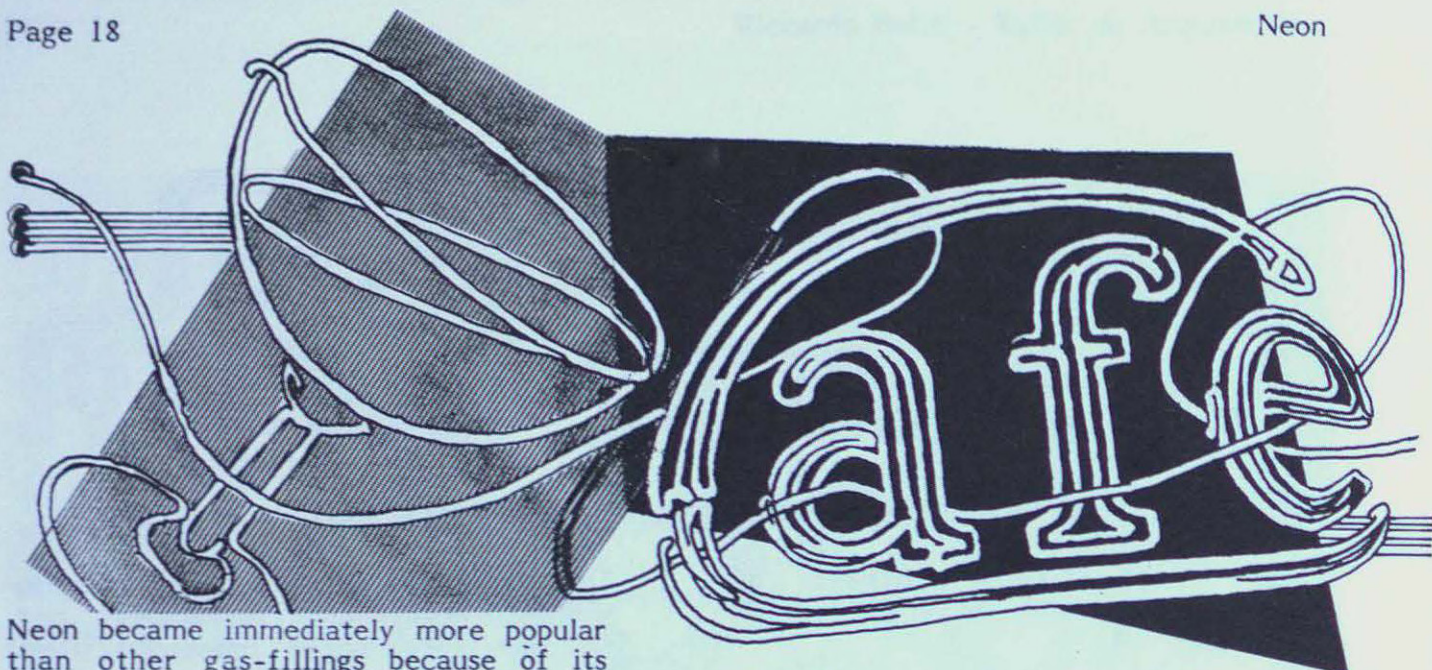
The neon tube was born. As early as 1858, a German scientist, Heinrich Geisler put an electric current through a glass tube which had been air-evacuated as well as was possible at the time. The glow that could be observed in the vacuum was the first cold-cathode discharge illumination. Prominent scientists such as Faraday and Hittorf soon experimented with low pressure gas fillings such as carbon dioxide and nitrogen. It was D.M. Moore who overcame the problem of the short life of these tubes by adding a regulating valve which stabilized the gas pressure in the tubes and the "Moore tube" quickly found wide application.

The soft golden yellow light emitted by nitrogen and the almost perfect "day light" emitted by carbon dioxide gas were put on display for Queen Victoria's Jubilee.

George Claude succeeded in 1895 to liquify air. As had been discovered by Ramsay and Raleigh, the air contains minute quantities of "rare" or inert gases such as Helium (after Helios), Neon (new), Argon (idle, inert) and Krypton.

The first use of liquifying air was to supply the demand for oxygen and nitrogen for various industrial uses. Claude introduced neon-gas into a Moore-tube to see if he could find a use for the by-product of his liquid air process. It took Claude and others until 1925 to solve a host of problems with luminous neon discharge tubes. The basic components of the system have hardly changed since 1925:





Neon became immediately more popular than other gas-fillings because of its intensely bright red-orange glow and because of its high light output per watt input. The term "neon tube" has in common usage become synonymous with Argon tube, Krypton tube and many other tube fillings. The proper name is "cold-cathode high voltage discharge lamp". People in the twenties and thirties fell in love with the new invention and "neon" signs sprang up around the globe. The Japanese particularly were (and are) amazingly skilled at the craft, but the orgy of light came to a real climax at the 1937 Exhibition des Arts et Metiers in Paris. Illumination was one of the main themes of the exhibition, and no expense was spared to develop indirect light fixtures and special underwater fixtures to light up spectacular fountains. However, the piece de resistance consisted of the illumination of the Eiffel Tower under the direction of the architect Andre Granet. The huge space envelopped by the four slanted legs and the first platform was turned into a gigantic luminous vault-like space by means of over six miles of tubing of various specially designed colors. The whole installation weighed 45 tons, and produced a lighting level of 200 lux on the ground, enough to read a newspaper.

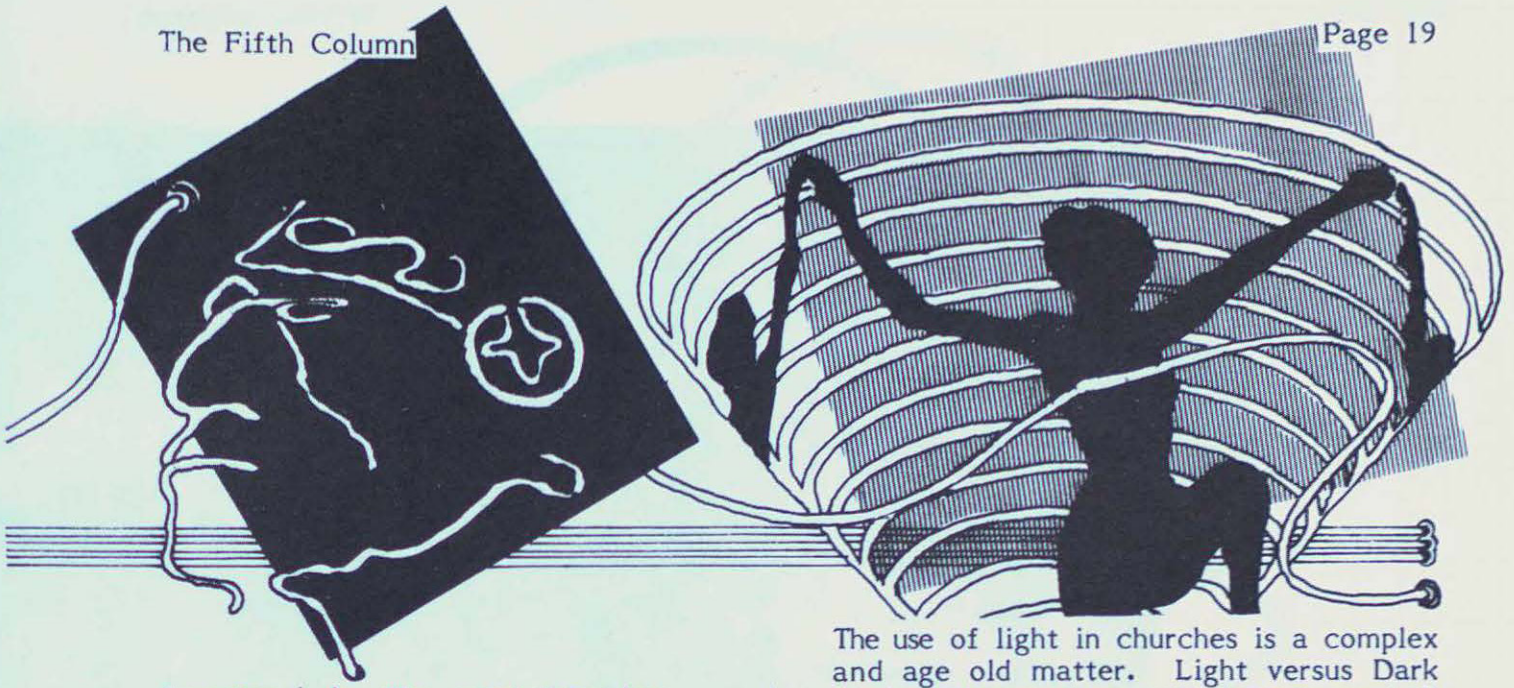
The lights went out rather abruptly in September 1939 when Hitler invaded Poland. "Neon's" first golden era had come to an end.

After the war, the serious business of rebuilding the world seemed more suitably served by standardized, mass produced hot cathode fluorescent tubes than by hand crafted high voltage cold cathode tubes. Architects had never shown much interest in the brash, powerful exuberant medium anyway. With the exception of Granet, the industrial designers such as Lowey and Teague, the field had largely been left to the sign makers in the land, a crafty, tough, unselfconscious bunch, not afraid of zoning authorities, beautification commissions, or anybody else who would interfere with their business.

Peter Blake's 1964 lament "God's Own Junk Yard" paints the scene very clearly: on the one hand the refined good guys wringing their hands at the defilement of the Great American outdoors, on the other hand the lobbying, bribing, philistines, who, under the banner "Freedom of Speech" erect gaudy billboards and neon-signs wherever there is room to stand.

The first author to paint a more favorable picture of the industry was Tom Wolfe, who, in 1965 wrote the Kandy Kolored Tangerine Flake Streamline Baby, a series of essays on the culture of low-culture: hot rod cars, Las Vegas, demolition derbies and the like.

"I call Las Vegas the Versailles of



America (...). The usual thing has happened of course, because it is prole (proletarian) it gets ignored, except on the most sensational level. Yet long after Las Vegas' influence as a gambling heaven has gone, Las Vegas' forms and symbols will be influencing American life. That fantastic skyline. Las Vegas' neon sculpture, its fantastic fifteen story high display signs, parabolas, boomerangs, rhomboids, trapezoids and all the rest of it are already the staple design of the American landscape outside the oldest parts of the oldest cities".

Tom Wolfe is rightfully credited by Venturi and Scott Brown as being part of "the intellectual and artistic underpinning" of the Yale Design studio in Las Vegas, which led in 1972 to the publication of "Learning from Las Vegas". This book together with "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture" essentially takes another look at Blake's, or rather God's own junkyard. Whether Venturi's populist rhetoric is more elitist than the modern movement establishment is an interesting question, raised, amongst others, by Gutkind in "After the Planners".

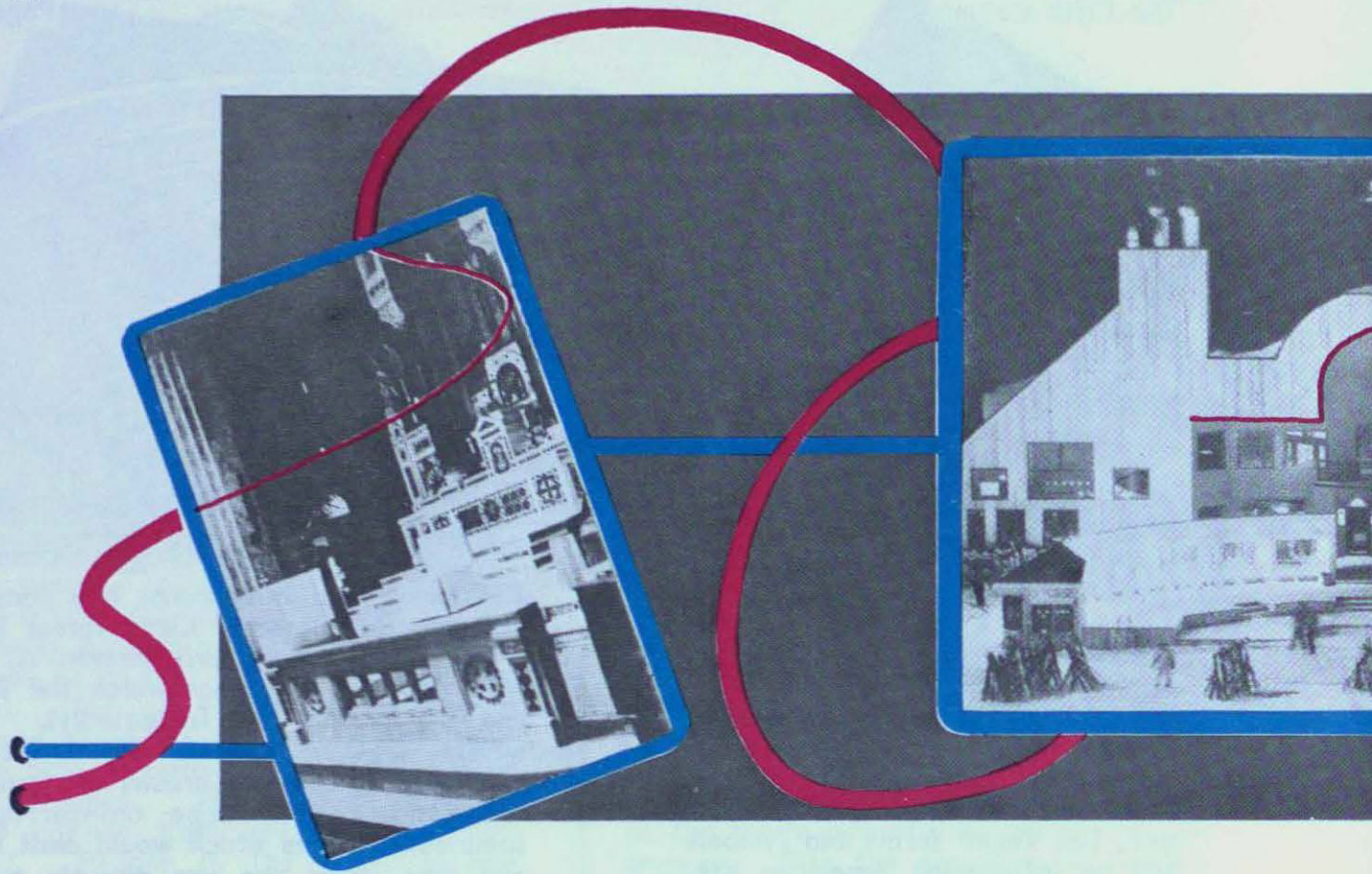
Venturi did apply his new-found insights in, of all places, a church, using cold cathode tubing as his main design element.

The use of light in churches is a complex and age old matter. Light versus Dark symbolizing good vs. evil, heaven vs. hell is a powerful metaphor which the Bible and the Church use (repeatedly). The whole Gothic system of structural acrobatics is centered around the issue of how to create large uninterrupted luminous surfaces which would **emit** light and thus strike the eye **directly** rather than **reflect** light in the way we normally see objects. Cold cathode tubing, which can emit any colour in any shape in any intensity essentially fulfills the Gothic design specifications. (It is interesting to note that correctly **both** stained glass making and neon craft are enjoying a renewed interest).

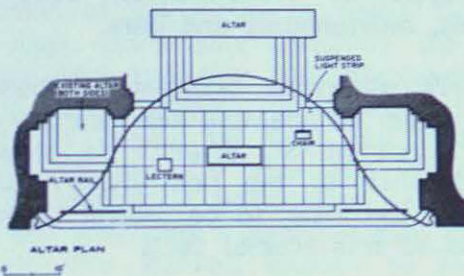
The real drawback of neon tube lighting is not the relatively high cost, nor the relatively high level of maintenance required, but the way people associate this type of illumination with gas stations, moviehouses and bars.

Venturi's otherwise brilliant solution to the problem of adapting the sanctuary of the Church of St. Francis de Salis in Philadelphia to the new liturgy which required the altar to be moved forward, overlooked this crucial fact.

His daylight-coloured delicately suspended cold-cathode tube, subtly separated the old altar from the new one. Within six months, however, enough parishioners had objected to the intrusion of "neon" into their church that the system was taken



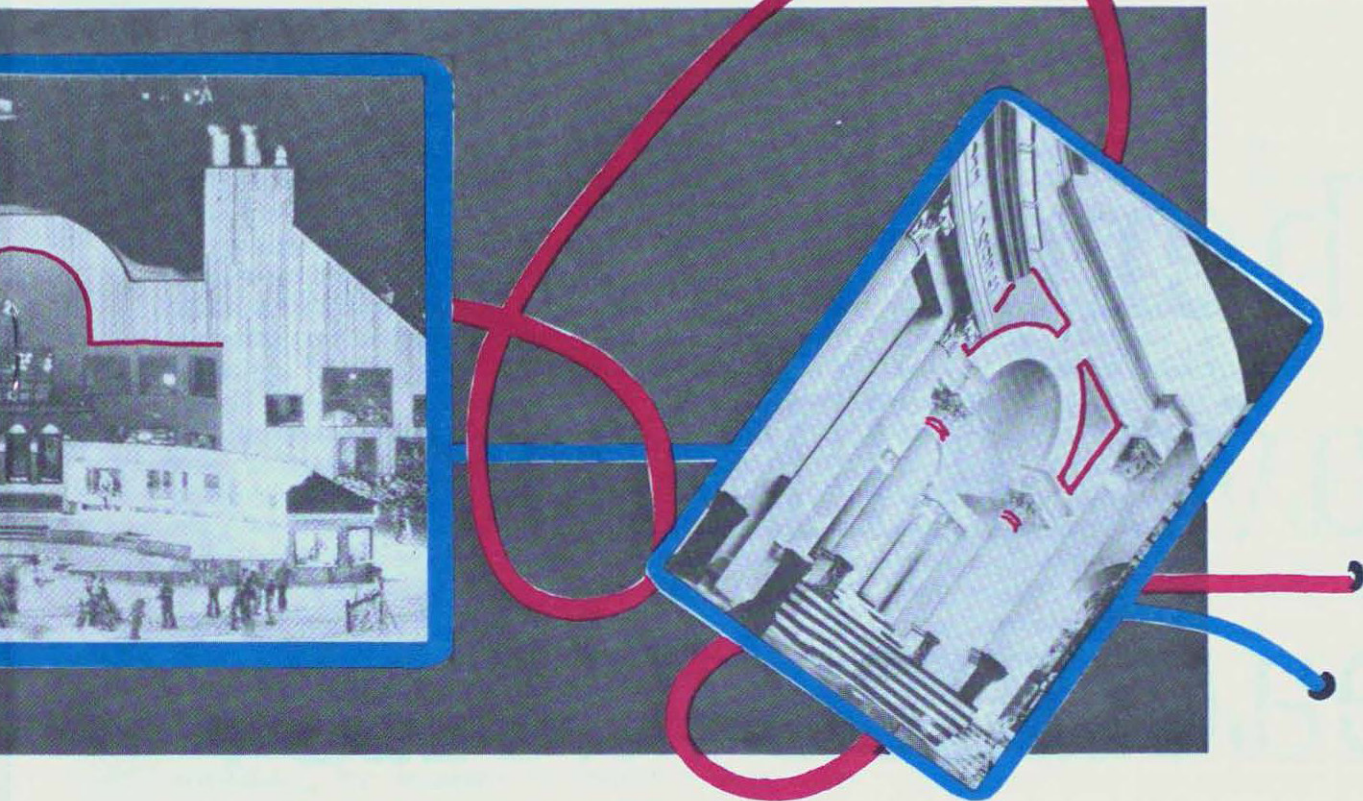
down, leaving the new white opaque plexiglass altar and the soft vinyl chair rather forlornly behind. A similar tube constructed in closely spaced incandescent bulbs or tubes, or even in sociologically untainted optic fibre would most likely not have a similar fate.



Churches have always been big "advertisers": high towers with brass bells weighing as much as eight tons certainly qualify as visual as well as audio advertising. It is not surprising then that

churches have used neon outdoors quite freely. The St. James Church on Ste. Catherine Street and the Salvation Army Citadel on Drummond Street both have gothic, artillery-shell-shaped neon signs, due to the combined influences of ecclesiastic imagery and Montreal by-laws. Several luminous crosses, amongst them St. Josephs Oratory, light up the sky. In California, many movie houses have been converted into churches, the only modification often consisting of removing the name of the cinema, and rearranging the movable type on the luminous marquee into the name of the church. In Mexico and Latin America, neon is used freely for the depiction of the Saints and the Virgin Mary.

I have elaborated on neon used by the Church because it illustrates succinctly the cultural variables which sometimes govern the creative use of the medium. In non-ecclesiastical buildings neon is still used sparsely by architects, with a few notable exceptions: Charles Moore's



Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans and Rose, Righter and Lancken's St. Sauveur ski center. In Moore's Piazza the lights delineate, give colour, illuminate, humour, and give a child-like sense of delight to a place that is exactly supposed to do just that. The neon used in the St. Sauveur ski center creates a delightful target for even the most inept skier to aim for, creates a festive mood, and helps create and sense of space and style in a building type which until recently outdid the fast food chains in dreariness.

Architects have to judge the new as well as the old. Steel, modern concrete, sheetglass, synthetics and of course electricity have all been brought into use and accepted in the last hundred years. At the same time brick, ceramics, stone and wood are still very much with us. The fact that the many opportunities which cold cathode tubing offers are finally being exploited by architects rather than being dismissed or villified is an encouraging sign. □

"Neon" is called cold-cathode lighting because the electrodes are not heated by a filament as is the case in standard fluorescent tubes.

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Where Have All the Teachers Gone?

For years, we students have sat behind wooden desks, notebooks open, pencils set, ready to note those words of wisdom offered us by our teachers. It is they who are the imparters of knowledge. It is they whom we entrust to prepare us for our future role in society. Yet, time and again, we encounter professors who have difficulty communicating facts, relating ideas, and demonstrating essential skills. Numerous reports by university officials on the problems of higher education mention the incompetency of professors. Is pedagogy a vanishing art? We would like to think otherwise, but let us be realistic. Required research and publication, supplementary office work, additional personal responsibilities, tenure and lack of training are the major factors contributing to the poor showing of our teachers in university classrooms.

by Ted Yudelson.

Surely countless exceptions abound; yet, there are many more examples of deficiency in the pedagogical realm. However, before I begin to investigate the various causes of what has been called "the decay of the teaching art"¹, it might be best to first define the objectives of a university and examine their relation to the professorial role. "Universities", claims R.P. Wolff, a member of the philosophy department at Columbia University, "have been founded for all manner of reasons: to preserve an old faith, to proselytize a new one, to train skilled workers, to raise the standards of the professions, to expand the frontiers of knowledge, and even to educate the young".² Professor Wolff's

description is most interesting as it implies that the education of the student body is, at best, only an afterthought. While such an appraisal may be overly sarcastic, the conflict of goals alluded to in Wolff's statement does exist and should not be taken lightly. Could it be that the universities are, in fact, mistaken in the priorities they have set? Has the administration failed to recognize the importance of the learning process and, in so doing, undermined the teaching-learning relationship? It would seem so. In order to illustrate this point, let us consider the following analogy which I do not believe to be farfetched: the university may be likened to a capitalist firm, the faculty to its workers, and the students to the consumers. The students buy the product put out by the firm - education. Assuming that such a comparison is valid, then the question emerges: Is the university to be concerned first and foremost with the satisfaction of its customers, the students, or should it work primarily to manufacture what some regard as a product more sophisticated, glamorous, exciting, and prestigious than education - knowledge? These lines of endeavor should not be mutually exclusive, nor should one be looked upon as the poor relation of the other. However, it appears that the ability to conduct basic research is of major importance to the powers that be. There is, consequently, not enough effort being invested in the domain of customer service. I firmly believe that the aim of every company should be to keep the customer satisfied. And, as notes Jacques Barzun, Dean of Faculties and Provost at Columbia University for twelve years, it is the duty of the university to "first of all...ensure the continuity of teaching: a nonteaching university is a contradiction in terms. Still, contradiction has never stopped corporate bodies from forgetting their purpose"³. Many and insidious are the ways in which this amnesia becomes institutionalized.

We have certainly all heard of universities that seek recognition by luring highly respected and/or well known

personalities to their staffs. Such people may be found among "ex-ambassadors, deposed heads of foreign states, international bankers with government experience, or artists of reknown"⁴. Faculties that include members of these and other elite groups ostensibly enhance the image of the institution. That is all well and good in these times of disappearing alumni donations and declining student enrollment, but we should examine how this practice affects the teaching-learning relationship. When the expertise that these specialists acquire from their years of practical experience is brought into the classroom, it is of indisputable value to the learning process. Hmmm. Sounds terrific so far. But wait. There is a small catch which the administration seems to have overlooked - the transmission of all this wonderful knowledge and experience to the students. Contrary to the general opinion of university officials, there is no guarantee that an authority in any area will be a competent teacher. Michael Coote, Director of the School of Architecture at Carleton University, remarked that "teaching (is) a professional occupation in its own right, which (these experts) engage in with no training at all and with no experience other than having been taught (themselves) (by people who had no training at all, etc. ... self-perpetuating incompetence?)"⁵. Indeed, such professorships pose a peculiar problem. In essence, "a great university, while it may sincerely want good teachers, will compromise and take the great inaudible expert whom, it would be cruelty to both sides, to put in front of a class"⁶. There is a remote chance, of course, that the expert may be a perfectly competent teacher. But, all facts considered, the chance is certainly remote.

The 'teaching expert versus expert teacher' dilemma is compounded by the hiring practices of the professional schools, which have no qualms about subjecting students to the vagaries of their academic staffs. In a variety of ways, the activities of their professors

"reach out beyond the university, and inevitably loyalties are divided. The professional faculties cannot commit themselves or their energies to the university unconditionally, as professors in the arts and sciences regularly do".⁷ As a result, good teaching practice is too often sacrificed in favor of the state-of-the-art knowledge available from working professionals who may be poorly equipped to interpret their experiences for us because they do not grasp the fundamentals of teaching.

All hope is not lost, however. While "many people believe that great lecturers, if not poor ones, are born, it is, in fact, not unrealistic to expect someone to change from a mediocre lecturer to a good one".⁸ This transformation can be accomplished via teaching clinics which all professors, ideally, should attend. McGill University, for instance, has a Centre for Teaching and Learning Services that offers a marvelous modular course on teaching and classroom instruction as well as information sessions on the use of visual aids.⁹ Moreover, it possesses a very specialized collection of books and articles on teaching and other related subjects. It is unfortunate that these impressive facilities are hardly being used to their full advantage. If all else fails, consultation with professors who have established reputations as first-rate teachers may also be beneficial in refining teaching skills.

Deficiency in such skills is not always the problem, however. The quality of education may also be adversely affected by the attitude of the staff. For example, there are those scholars who are granted permission to use university facilities for research purposes in exchange for their teaching services. Many such professors evidently have little desire to teach and merely go through the motions in order to fulfill their contractual obligations to the university. A similar outlook is encountered among professors who are forced to teach a course in which they do not have a vested interest. Undoubtedly, a lack of enthusiasm in the subject of instruction

itself is hardly conducive to good teaching.

Yet another problem which besets university teachers is the policy of 'Publish or Perish'. The university sets up a dipolar field in which professors navigate between the opposing demands of research and teaching. There are many who are of the opinion that research is "merely time and energy stolen from the students".¹⁰ On the other hand, the importance of research as a means of maintaining "an individual at the forefront of his field and, therefore, "making him a more interesting and vital teacher" cannot be denied. This conflict poses some difficulty for the educational system.

Whether research undertaken concomitantly with teaching enriches or limits the teaching-learning relationship, I cannot say for certain. It is my hope that a conscious effort is being made to achieve the former. In any case, it could be argued that there is little, if any, correlation between being a good teacher and being a good researcher.

Finally, there is the touchy subject of tenure. It appears that seniority, rather than competence, is the sole criterion for the procurement of a lifetime position. The university seems not to be concerned by the fact that a tenured professor with poor teaching skills constitutes a weak link in the learning process. Job security is fine, but I, like many students, believe the tenure system inadvertently creates an unassailable refuge in which academic mediocrity may hide, safe from peer review and external pressure. Several instances have been reported to me wherein a faculty member or university official has admitted the inability of a professor to teach, only to concede that "he has tenure; we're stuck with him",¹² a revelation that boggles the mind with its absurdity. It might be momentarily consoling to note that "we (students) cannot know all that goes into the choice of a man for a tenure post - his teaching if good is an asset; but there is his depth of mind to consider, his research,

his age, his specialty, his compatibility - all these taken in comparison with older men on the staff and younger men elsewhere, and in conjunction with budget allocations and the strategy of retirements and replacements. To make all this clear to a student committee would require a two-term seminar, and when it was over the impression left might be that older men lack the pure heart and candid mind"¹³

In conclusion, I can only reiterate the words of Jacques Barzun who, so eloquently and concisely described the frustration that permeates university campuses:

"...the student feels that he suffers from neglect. He is conscious of a greater maturity than his teachers credit him with or they would not subject him to cavalier treatment as they so often do - unpunctual, slipshod in marking papers, ill-prepared in lecture, careless about assignments - results, all of them, of academic rout previously described. To put it another way, the student sees and resents the fact that teaching is no longer the central concern of the university or of its members"¹⁴

If we students agree with Barzun's bleak assessment and feel the attitudes and practices cited by him are hopelessly entrenched within the system, then we can only look forward to the day when most of our higher education will emanate from the programmable innards of sophisticated teaching machines. Perhaps a collection of silicon chips could teach us more efficiently; but if we settle for this, we have tacitly admitted defeat. No computer console will ever be able to supplant the human element: spontaneity, immediacy, humour and warmth are qualities that only a dedicated teacher can provide. And there is no lack of dedication to teaching among the majority of men and women who lecture us daily. To a large degree, the crisis in education has developed

because their integrity has been compromised by a system that has grossly devalued the teaching aspect of their jobs. It is time to confront the realities of this age-old problem. Students along with the staff, administration, government officials and even the public must work together to reorder the faulty priorities of our academic institutions so that they may honestly reflect their function as educating bodies. Such initiative would be instrumental in restoring respect and prominence to the pedagogical aspect of professorships. In the final analysis, however, it is we, students, who, via our conscientious attendance of classes and punctual completion of assigned work, will have to demonstrate that all efforts professors make on our behalf will be worthwhile. □

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7. Wolff, p.13
8. Cecily Lawson-Smith, "The Lecture - A Vital Component of University Life", 1978, p.1
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HOODWINKS

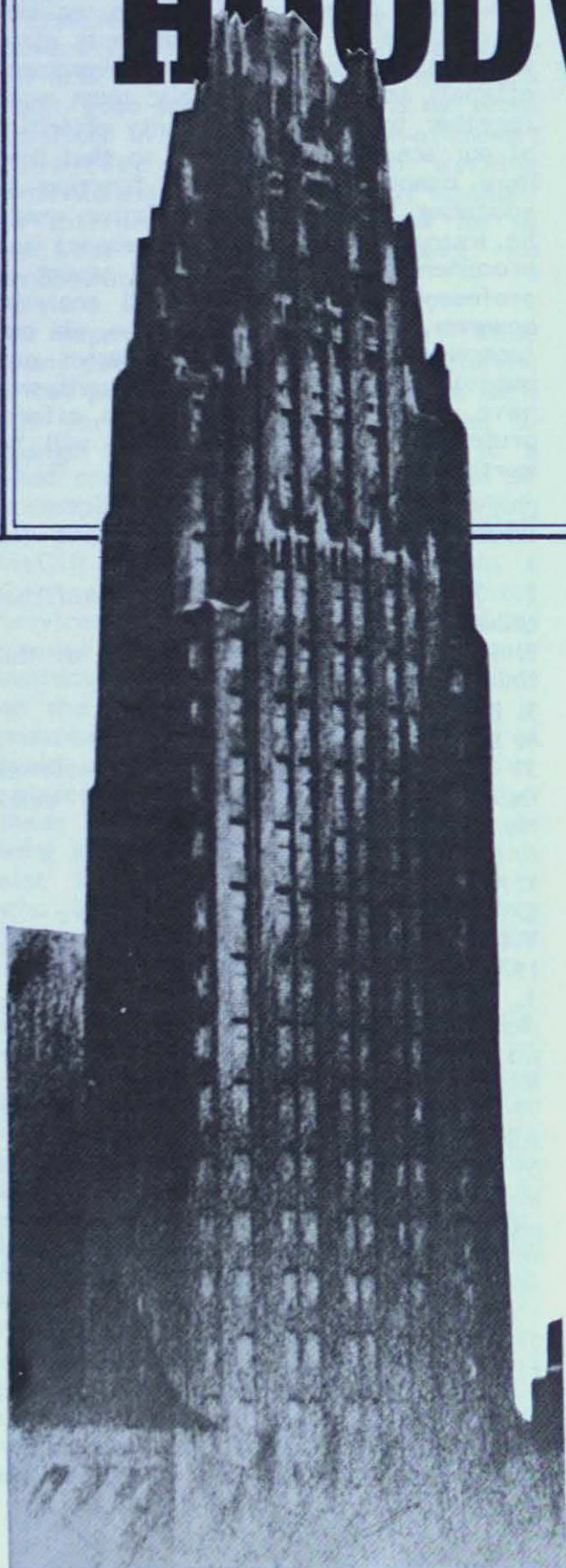
The Architecture of Raymond M. Hood

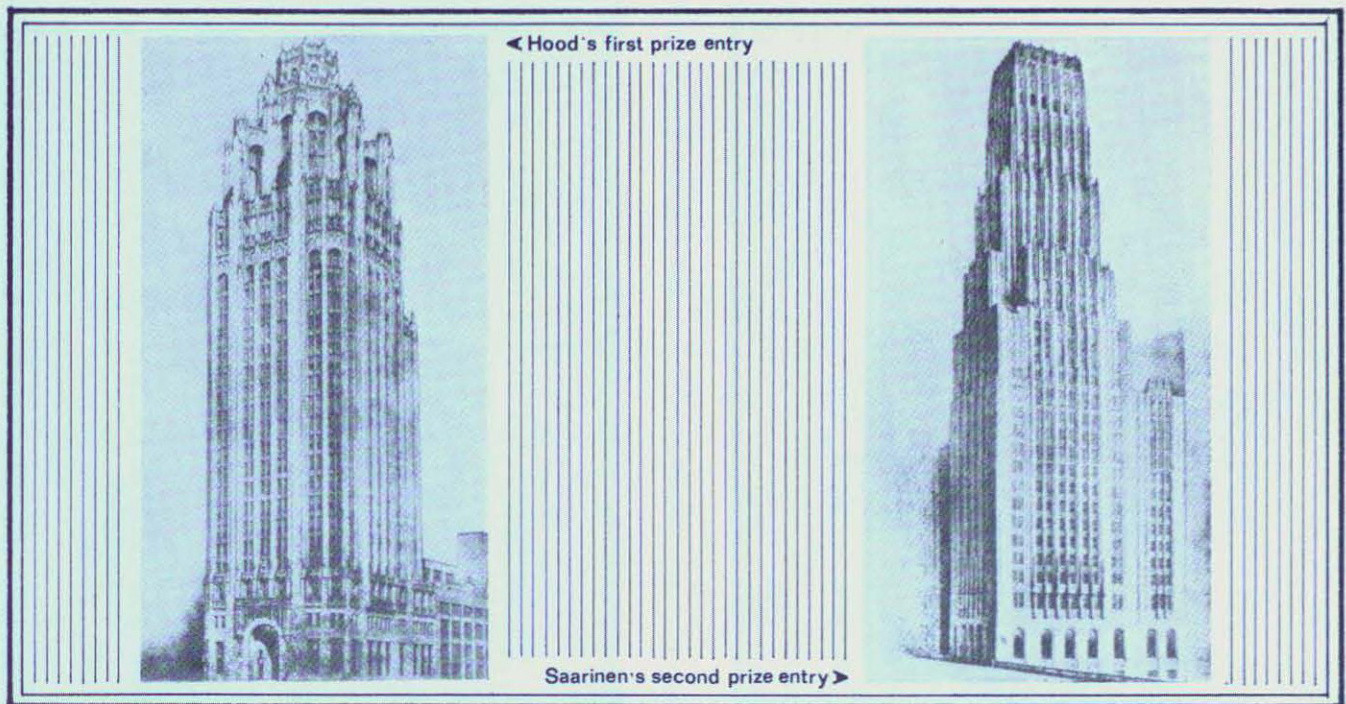
by Orest J. Humennyj.

Men of great stature reshaped the world in the twentieth century. Guided by a clarity of vision and purpose, swept along by breakthroughs in communication and technology, architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe profoundly altered the visual and habitable nature of our society. Through bold and determined strides these men of destiny carved their names into architectural history.

Notwithstanding the present re-evaluation of the Modern Movement, though valid and painfully overdue, the accomplishments and ideals of its masters will never be forgotten. Centuries from now Wright, as Borromini, will be remembered - architectural demigods. Their minds dauntlessly challenged established thought and stood at the vanguard of original and progressive ideas. Those less gifted, influenced by the Masters, copied, collated and coalesced. They jumped onto the bandwagon of trendiness; they did not 'see'; they did not evolve. Who then will remember Philip Johnson? Who remembers Raymond Hood?

"Masters of ideas are masters of





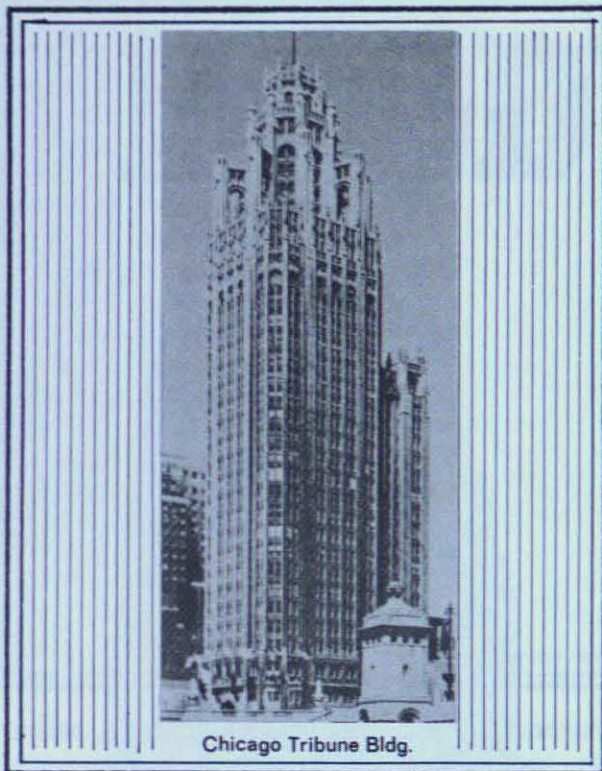
courage; the free will of adventure is in them. They stride where others creep. The pride of action is in them. They explore, they test, they seek realities to meet them face to face - knowing well that realities and illusions exist commingled within and without, but also knowing well that Ego is its own. Hence they walk erect and fearless in the open, with that certitude which vision brings - while slaves are slaves by choice. They seek shelter in the shadows of ideas".¹

Louis H. Sullivan

Though hardly a slave by choice, Raymond Hood, to whom Louis Sullivan was referring, was an originator without any original ideas. New York City's 'brilliant bad boy' from the mid-1920's to the mid-1930's, Hood was nonetheless incredibly gifted. His success reflected the persuasive power of his personality. Affable and engaging, Hood could argue with such sincerity as to test the convictions of the most hardened skeptics - yet without hesitation, with a craftiness that a politician would envy, he would readily abandon or alter his point of view. This ability to simultaneously

harbour two opposing views in his mind, an indication of a first-rate intelligence, was strengthened by his determination and resolve to become the "greatest architect in New York". Only the absence of the 'big break' separated Raymond Hood from his quest.

Opportunity knocked in 1922. John Mead Howells, one of ten architects invited to enter the Chicago Tribune's competition to "erect the most beautiful and distinctive office building in the world",² offered Raymond Hood the chance to submit. In an age when architectural revolution was sweeping Europe and the International Style was becoming manifest, Hood designed a controversial Gothic tower. Evolved from the bondage of the dying Woolworth ideal, Hood's entry nonetheless won the \$50,000 first prize. Incensed by the jury's choice, numerous architects of the day felt that Eliel Saarinen's second place scheme possessed such uncompromising qualities of beauty, soaring disposition and expressive understanding of the American skyscraper that it deserved top honours. Sullivan wrote: "...in that showing was brought into clearest light the deadline that lies between a Master of Ideas and one governed by ideas. There they came,

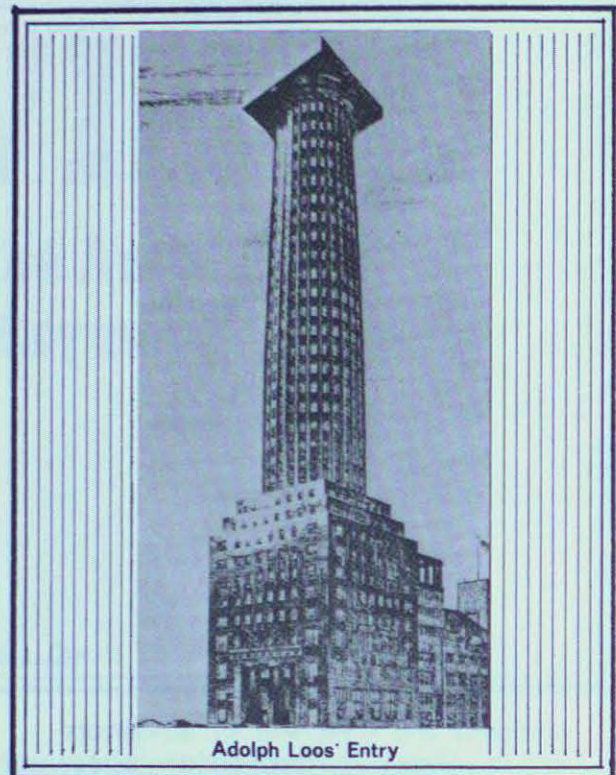


Chicago Tribune Bldg.

squarely face to face: the second prize and the first".³

The publicity generated by the Chicago Tribune Competition in an era of architectural unease was nothing short of phenomenal. Raymond Hood welcomed the resulting attention and controversy. Reminiscent of today's 'media architects' who orient themselves primarily towards publication, he understood and exploited the press. Through it, he eventually established his reputation as an architect in conflict, one who could not run with the pack.

The Competition's immediate impact on Hood, however, was as a resource pool of ideas. With an expedient lack of integrity he drew from it, both in spirit and in detail, during the course of his career. The tower massing of the American Radiator Building in New York is a synthesis of two unmistakable sources: Hood's own Tribune Tower and Saarinen's second place entry. A companion building, for the National Radiator Company in London, transcends the mere inspiration of the base part of Adolph Loos' entry - it is a virtual copy.

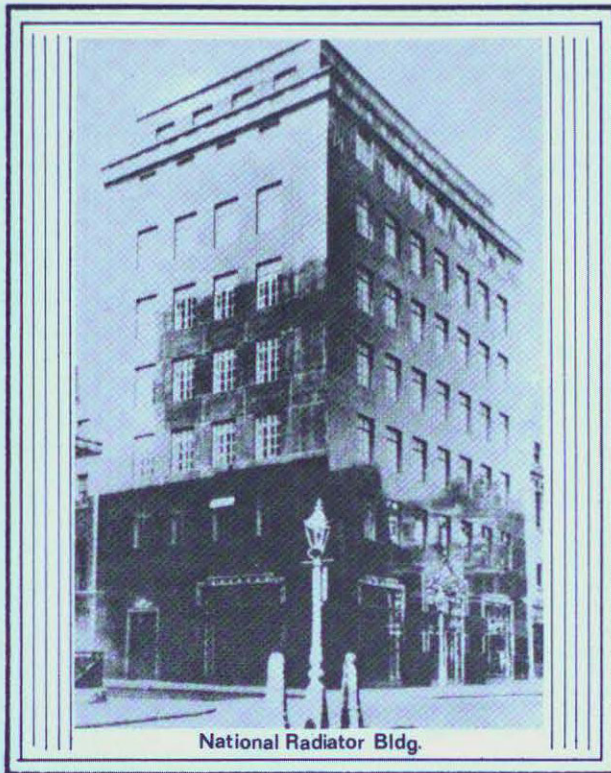


Adolph Loos' Entry

The origins of the McGraw-Hill Building in New York, with its horizontal emphasis and polychromatic differentiation, can be found in an entry by Knut Lonberg Holm.

Yet despite his reputation as a facile stylist and the recurring superficiality of his vocabulary, Raymond Hood was a damned good architect. Disregarding the inherent publicity value, he produced far better buildings than even his clients expected. The intense sweeping emotion that characterized Hood's work failed to be tempered by a stringently pragmatic approach. He was consumed by a conscientious desire to design the most practical and efficient building possible. Practicality was indeed Hood's fundamental architectural philosophy. The final scheme selected was always the one to net the highest return on the investment. In 1929 he wrote: "...beauty is utility, developed in a manner to which the eye is accustomed by habit, insofar as this development does not detract from its quality of usefulness".⁴

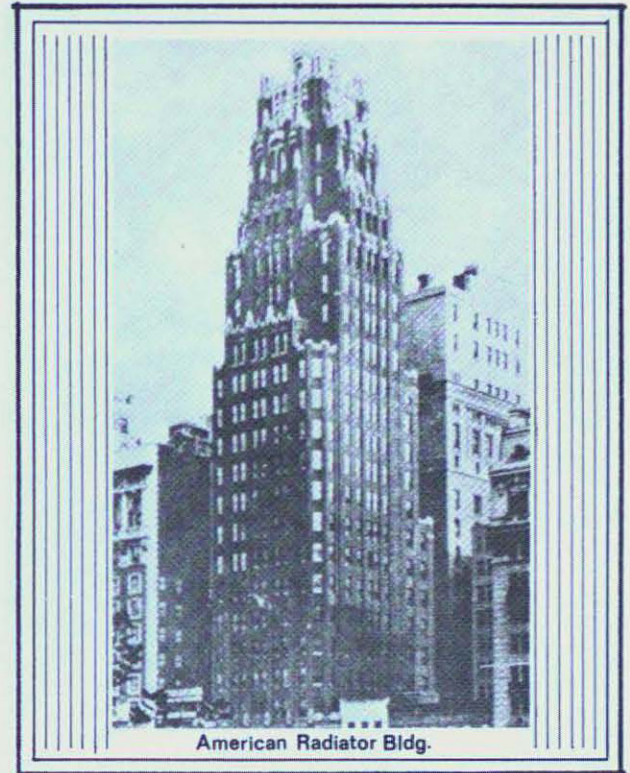
One of Raymond Hood's greatest attributes, and perhaps a hallmark of genius, was his ability to see the obvious.



National Radiator Bldg.

In a society where progress was equated with increased complexity, the development of clear simple solutions required admirable self-confidence. In New York, building out to the allowable limit of the zoning envelope often implied a blind wall; Hood's suggestion for the American Radiator Building was startling - by stepping back the tower he would perforate the blind wall with windows, increasing the quality of office space and thus generated revenue, while reducing the building's overall cost. Faced with the task of designing a crowning pinnacle for the Daily News Building, in order to conceal the jumble of mechanical equipment on the roof, Hood instead carried up the external walls an additional three stories. Also, realizing that offices overlooking a park were more highly prized than those with a view over the chaos of New York's roofscape, he planted ornate gardens on the roofs of Rockefeller Center, a sober commercial establishment. Such design innovations contributed to the legacy of Hood's success, for they constitute standard practice, even today.

The bigness and speed of America, with

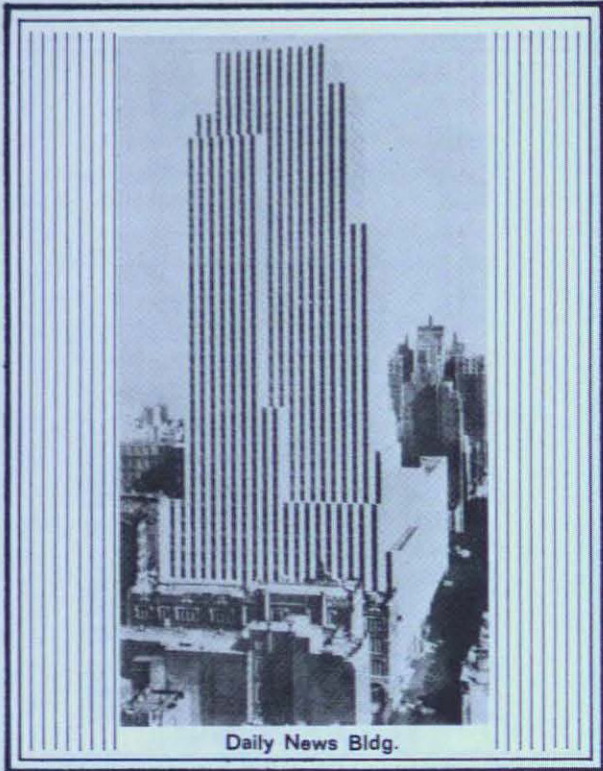


American Radiator Bldg.

commercialism as the guiding spirit of the age, exerted its influence on Raymond Hood as well. It gave his work a particular character, for he shared all its values and ambitions. He believed that the commercial success of urban life depended upon concentration. Hood saw congestion as a good thing, "its the best thing we have in New York. The glory of the skyscraper is that we have provided for it so well".⁵

Hood's first skyscraper in New York, the American Radiator Building of 1924, was an overt response to commercial ascendancy. As a direct and formidable symbol, he conceived a self-advertising building. The integrity of the tower's silhouette was maintained through the use of black brick, which prevented undue contrast between the windows and the walls. A glittering gold crown, which terminated the black mass, was constantly animated by either sunshine or floodlights. The resulting synthesis yielded a remarkable torch-like effect; sufficient recognition for a company which manufactured furnaces and heaters.

As the gospel of European Modernism



Daily News Bldg.

spread to America, Raymond Hood abandoned the Gothic idiom. Exuberant profiles surrendered to powerful clean-cut massing. He argued that worrying about detail on a modern office building was akin to "wondering what sort of lace shawl you should hang on an elephant"⁶. The clay model, fashioned from the crude form of the zoning envelope, emerged as his principal design tool.

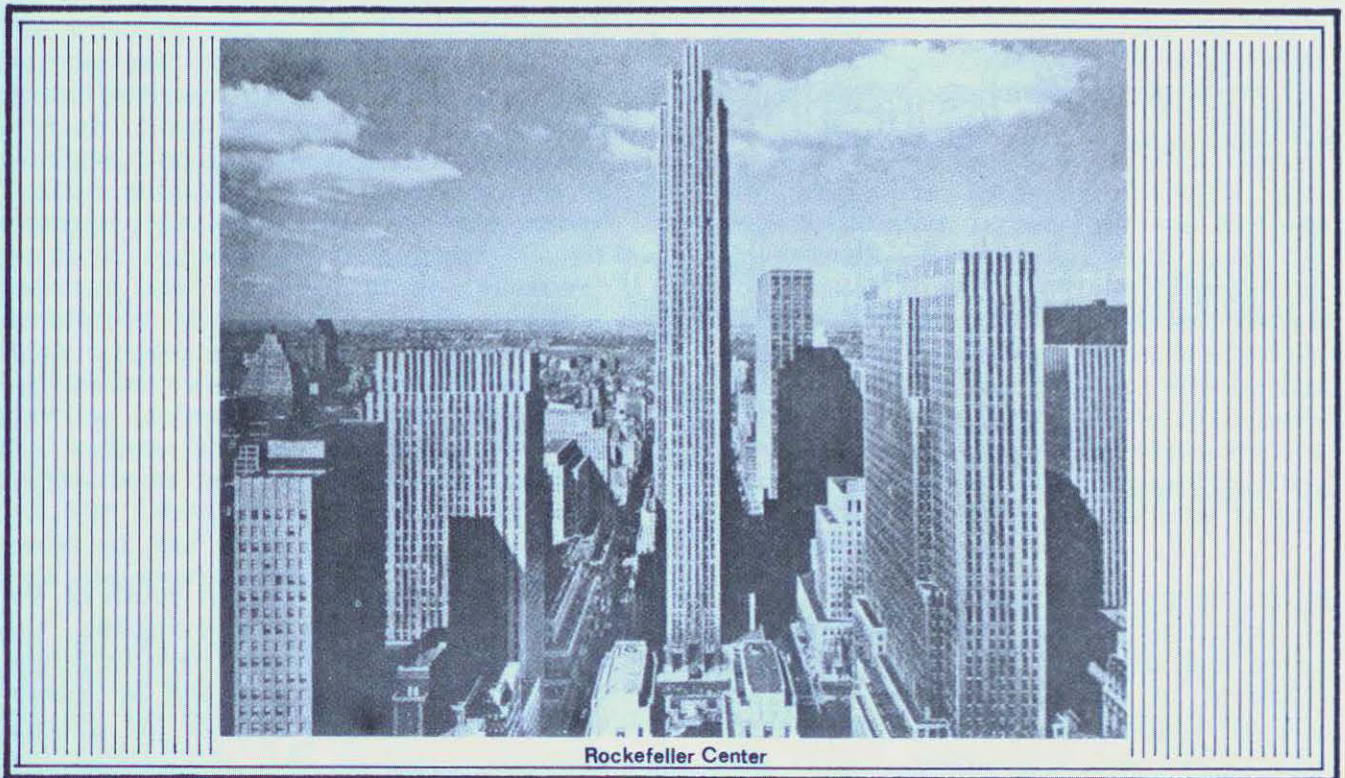
The Daily News Building of 1929, Hood's second New York skyscraper, "marked with more distinction than its outside rivals the end of traditional design in this field"⁷. Function and light defined the prevailing order. Conceived in clay and characterized by a strong clean-cut envelope, the emergence of the slab is apparent. Its external articulation, the finest accomplished example of vertical emphasis, accounted for the Daily News Building's celebrity. The upward thrust of the uninterrupted vertical piers of white vitreous brick, offset by dark recessed spandrels, was an afterthought, however, on the part of Raymond Hood - the refinement of a massing model. Fortunately for Hood, the ensuing fuss was sufficiently zealous to establish him



McGraw-Hill Bldg.

as the period's leading innovator in skyscraper design.

Hood's subsequent departure, the McGraw-Hill Building of 1931, coolly recognized the new European developments in a final 'dose of hedonism'. In direct contrast to the Daily News Building, he contrived the first skyscraper to emphasize the horizontal line. Spandrels formed continuous ribbons and columns, endeavouring to avoid any vertical accent, were recessed, resulting in an honest utilitarian expression of superposed factory floors. Windows, extending from desk height to ceiling and from column to column, reinforced the horizontal stress while inundating the interior space with sunlight. Although the New Yorker called it "a stunt and not a successful one"⁸, the real controversy sprang from Raymond Hood's fondness of whimsy and taste. He relied essentially on a questionable colour as a medium of external expression, covering the McGraw-Hill Building with blue-green glazed terra-cotta tiles. Hood's intent was to effect a tonal progression up the building, from dark to light, allowing it to blend off into the



Rockefeller Center

sky. Its reflective gold coloured window shades complemented the cool blue-green facades, intimating the bizarre image of a "fire raging inside an iceberg"⁹

Frank Lloyd Wright was not impressed. He referred to Raymond Hood as an "opportune New York Functioneer ...climber onto the latest bandwagon, regardless, determined to hold or drive"¹⁰

Hood's conclusive venture, before his premature death of rheumatoid arthritis in 1934, was as an associate in the design collaborative responsible for the most prestigious and successful architectural development in America's history - Rockefeller Center. Engaged as a consultant, primarily for his publicity value, he promptly established himself as the committee's most effective member and clearly dominated the design process. The specification of the building envelopes, epitomized by the distinctive RCA slab, undoubtedly bears Hood's imprint.

Caleb Hornbostel, an old friend, while reminiscing with Raymond Hood, reminded him that he once left the provincial

office "to become the greatest architect in New York".

"The greatest architect in New York?", Hood repeated, focusing on the RCA Building, fiery in a sunset. "By God, I am!"¹¹ □

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John Ostell - Making it Big

by Stefan Wisniowski.

British North America in 1831 was a land of opportunity, and it was then that a young and energetic John Ostell came to Montreal to seek his fortune. The 18 year old Englishman, trained in surveying, architecture and engineering, sensed the potential that the growing city held and adopted it as his home. Here he was to serve as inspector of roads, land surveyor, perhaps the first lumber miller in Lower Canada (in 1848) and in 1860 the owner of a door, sash and blind factory. He was also a director of the Montreal & New York and the Champlain and St. Lawrence Railroads, the Montreal Gas Company and the Royal Insurance Company. Perhaps most importantly, he became instrumental in introducing Architecture into this city, which was at that time generally composed of rough stone houses and in which the British influence was only beginning to manifest itself, some 70 years after the Conquest.

For several decades, few Englishmen had settled in Montreal. However, by the time that Ostell arrived there were more English than French-speaking people in Montreal. Settlers were pouring into the hinterland beyond Montreal, and the city was their only link to Europe and to civilization: passing raw goods from the West to London and to Europe, and funnelling manufactured goods into the West.

This environment presented many opportunities to the newly arrived Ostell.

Schools were needed for the youth of the burgeoning English population, the overloaded judiciary needed new facilities, more and larger churches and seminaries were needed to accommodate the growing population, and by 1835 the harbour had developed to the point that it was declared an official Port of Entry into British North America, requiring a Customs House for inspection of the incoming cargo. The self-assured John Ostell took advantage of these opportunities to become the dominant Montreal architect of the mid-19th century, starting with his first major commission: the Customs House.

Finished in 1838, Ostell's small Customs House not only became a symbol of the British presence in Montreal, but also a monument to the growing importance of the merchant class in Montreal life. It fronted on the former **Vieux Marche**, which was subsequently opened to face onto the harbour to create one of the most striking locations in Montreal. Ostell had left England at a time when the concern for Antiquity was at a high level and was anxious to demonstrate his familiarity with the classical language of Architecture. Much of Ostell's style is captured in this elegant little building, with its numerous references to the original Renaissance sources passed down through British tradition by architects such as Inigo Jones, Sir William Chambers, Robert Adam, and James Gandon.

The Customs House was Georgian in its massing and composition, graced with a central pediment carrying the arms of the British Empire, console-surmounted windows, and a *piano nobile* with applied Tuscan pilasters - all resting on a strongly rusticated base. A one-storey portico supported on paired Tuscan columns and engaged antae (pilasters) completed the elegant facade greeting ships arriving at the port. All of these high-relief elements characterized the elevation facing the open **Place Royal** and the harbour beyond, as Ostell, who had always been concerned with the profile and the formal image that his buildings projected, had designed this facade to be read and appreciated from a distance.

The city elevation, facing St. Paul Street, was experienced from much closer range, and its surface treatment and detailing were subtler, even while the giant order pilasters made it visually more dramatic to compensate for the fore-shortened view.

The building was enlarged to its present

size in 1864, when Ostell moved the front facade 26 feet closer to the waterfront and infilled the extension behind it.

In 1837, Ostell married Eleonore Gauvin and began to integrate himself into French Canadian society, perhaps forming the connections which helped him win the commission to complete the twin towers of the French Catholic Notre Dame Cathedral, delayed due to a lack of funds when the church was built in 1824 by the Irish American architect James O'Donnell. Ostell respected the original plans, except that he replaced the planned pitched roofs with castle-like crenelations to cap the towers.

At that time the Sulpician Order wished to enlarge the facilities of their Seminary next to Notre Dame. Ostell was asked to propose a new Seminary to replace the ancient edifice of the early 1700's, though only half of his reconstruction was completed when in 1854 it was decided to build a new Seminary on the site of the **Fort de la Montagne**, above the present-day Sherbrooke Street, fortunately leaving much of the original Seminary



intact, with its traditional construction in striking contrast to the Ostell wing.

Inaugurated in 1857, Ostell's **Grande Seminaire** is a simple yet pleasing composition. Its overall horizontality, emphasized by a string course at each level, is neatly offset by the vertical expression of the rusticated quoins and by the proportions of the projecting central bay.

Ostell proceeded to execute many works in the Bishop's employ, among them several churches, a home for the aged, and a Bishop's Palace which combined Grecian porticoes with a Gothic chapel and a dome taken from St. Peter's in Rome. The Palace was an example of Ostell's adaptivity in working with a demanding and stubborn client, Bishop Bourget.

Meanwhile, the rapidly expanding English community lacked a centre of higher education in their colony, and one of Montreal's leading citizens, James McGill, therefore willed his land and a sum of money for a college. After much delay over the disputed will, four architects entered a competition for the college buildings. The schemes of George Brown, John Wells, H.B. Parry, and John Ostell each had certain merits and weaknesses, and after resubmissions, Ostell was retained to again revise his plans, incorporating the best features of each scheme into a final design.

This design consisted of a porticoed central block with wings and pavillions to either side, with a one-storey Grecian portico over the main entrance to his central block. The design was later ammended, though, by the addition of a third storey and a two-storey portico which would in Ostell's words: "produce that varied line to the horizon (which I conceive of importance in architectural composition)". (McGill University Archives, A.447/52).

The facade treatment of the Central block, now known as the Arts Building, recalls Ostell's earlier Customs House with its engaged pilasters flanking a central bay surmounted by a pediment, all resting on a rusticated lower storey. The profile again follows the familiar Georgian lines, except for the wooden lantern probably borrowed from George Brown's scheme to provide Ostell's "varied line to the horizon."



McGill College
c. 1865

The East block, now known as Dawson Hall, recalls the central bay of the Customs House's St. Paul Street facade, with its double-storey engaged Tuscan pilasters, framing three bays of windows piercing a smooth, unrusticated wall surface, and with its original horseshoe-shaped staircase - which has since been replaced on both the Customs House and Dawson Hall.

Financial difficulties of the fledgling university proved very frustrating for the conscientious Ostell, whose two-storey portico was never to be constructed. In 1860 a graceful, **one-storey** wooden portico was built by J.W. Hopkins, and was later replaced during extensive renovations in 1925 by the squat and ungainly stone portico that McGill University has now grown accustomed to. Note the second-floor central window, situated above the present portico: its detailing echos that of the entrance way directly below, suggesting its intended function as a doorway onto Ostell's portico, and along with the antae on the second floor remains to remind us of his original double-storey design.

John Ostell's last major commission also experienced the misfortune of having an ungainly addition imposed upon it. Working with his nephew and partner, Maurice Perrault, Ostell won a competition for a new Court House in 1849. This was an important project, and the Quebec Bar Association insisted on a majestic portico, modelled on that of the earlier Bank of Montreal building built in 1842 by John Wells on **Place d'Armes**. Though Ostell's Ionic portico does not rival Wells' Corinthian masterpiece, the Court House was successful as an elegant composition. The greystone facade featured high-relief classical elements such as the giant-ordered portico which, capped by a triangular pediment, met the face of the building to rest on Tuscan antae, a familiar device of Ostell's. Although the overall composition of the building was especially pleasing, with the horizontality of its massing accented by its vertical constituent elements: windows,

columns, and projecting wings, resting on a strong and satisfying rusticated base, the excitement that it produces largely arises from its detailing.

The windows in the central block of the **piano nobile** are capped with pediments in the Italian Renaissance style. The strongly projecting frames of these windows, with the balustrade-like elements applied on the facade above



*Court House
detail*

them, and with the astoundingly sculpted keystone on the rusticated East facade base, form a rich vocabulary which generates patterns of light and dark on the facades, creating an undulating wall-surface effect, and which is almost Mannerist in its exaggerated denial of structure.

Unfortunately, the plan did not work as well as the elevations did, perhaps due to the constant interventions of the Bar Association. The judicial departments were short of space and the Court House had severe functional problems. It depended upon the still primitive science of building ventilation and warming, and its interior was said to be dismal and

Court House



humid. In fact the death of a well-known lawyer, J.A. Perkins, in 1875 was blamed on the building, whose drains allegedly released a pernicious gas of fatal character, perhaps caused by impurities in the cast iron pipes.

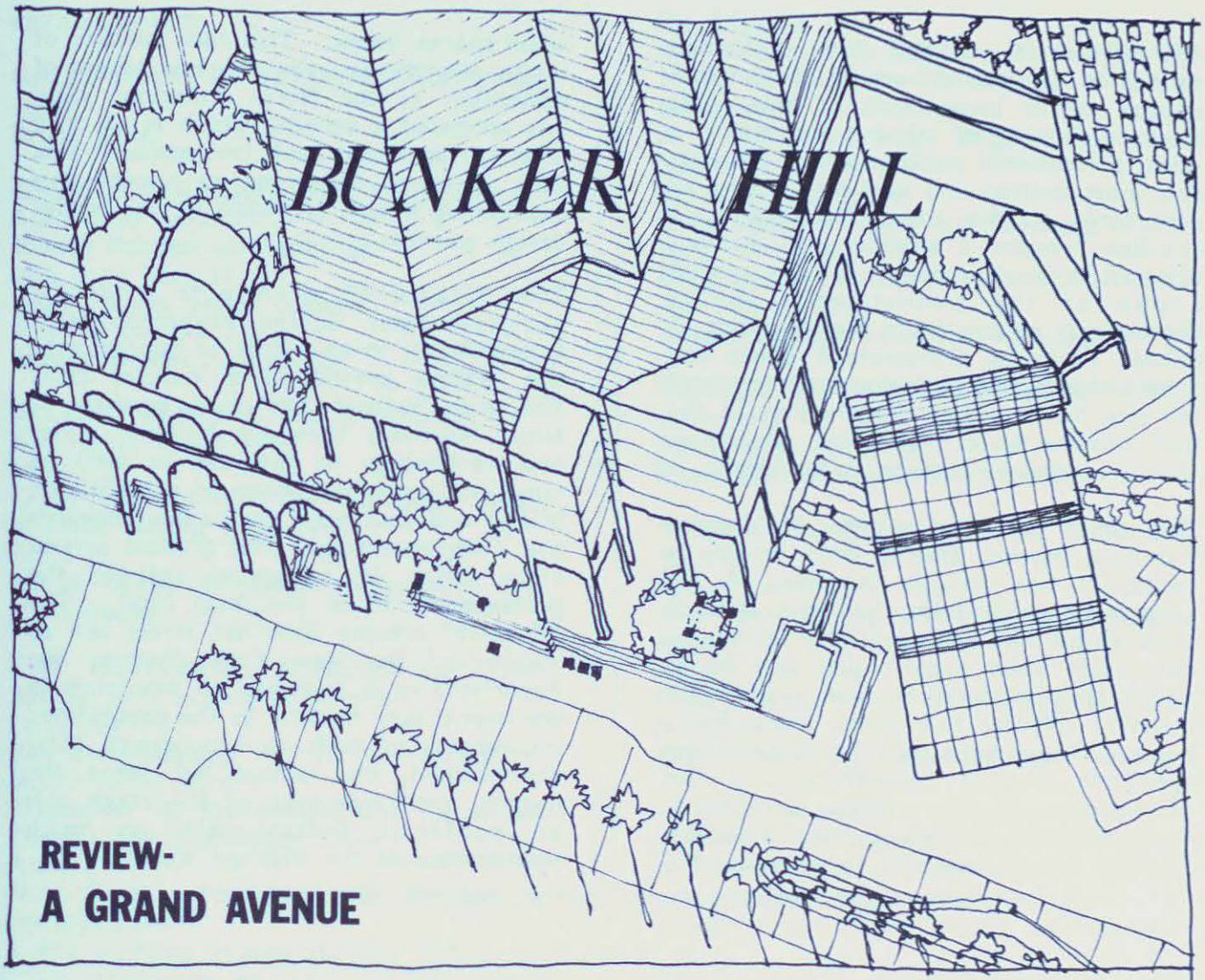
With the need for expansion critical, the Bar Association in 1890 demanded the addition of a further storey to the Court House. Maurice Perrault, by then practicing without his 87 year old uncle, designed the unfortunate additions visible today: a fourth storey, a fifth on the central block, and a mammoth wooden dome. The grace of Ostell's original design is now virtually impossible to picture when confronted with these heavy-handed additions. Poor Perrault suffered the ironic misfortune of destroying the beauty of a design which he had helped to originally create.

John Ostell was Montreal's most prominent architect at a time that Architecture was being introduced into the increasingly sophisticated city. His work can be traced back to British roots, following in the Palladian traditions of architects greater than he, such as Sir Charles Barry, whose Traveller's Club had just been completed when Ostell left London. But it was the boundless energy of John Ostell and other "pioneers" like him who helped to develop Canada in its early days, and who have contributed so

greatly to our architectural heritage. From the time that he had arrived in 1831 to his death in 1892, Ostell had seen the architectural transition of Montreal from its indigenous French found-stone construction to a Victorian city of commercial and public buildings of various classical styles. British architectural fashion was by then in the hands of the Gothic Revivalists, though the battle of the styles was to be short-lived, as the new technology of iron frame construction was already springing up in the search for a truly appropriate style for the new age. □

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by Peter Scriver.

An exhibition organized by the Architectural Undergraduate Society at McGill University's School of Architecture from February 23 to March 6, 1981.

The programme for the Bunker Hill redevelopment is as topical as the design schemes it has spawned. Depending on one's perspective, the project may be viewed as either the epitome of architectural adventures, or the ultimate of urban planning disasters. It is my conviction that the attempt to design at such a scale is pure folly. Neither an individual nor a consortium of specialists can hope to simultaneously predetermine the infinite complexity of relationships which define the natural composite of

urban structures and spaces. Such complexity is the function of time and requires infinitely more design thought, allotted element by element, in full conscience of the evolving urban context.

The 11-1/2 acres of vacant real estate which comprise the immense Bunker Hill site are completely devoid of their former 'fin-de-siecle' context; a nameless, imageless urban desert where neighbouring corporate towers offer only a sporadic definition of the frontier. To design content for Bunker Hill then, is not to add sympathetically to Los Angeles (a contextual non-entity), but rather, it is the brazen attempt to design a complete urban entity in itself.

All but one of the five schemes submitted in last summer's competition appear quite incognizant of this fact. Erickson Associates' winning proposal is a sleek, professional package which presents the most unified and elegant massing of structures on the site. But, the built sky-line remains a shallow and abstract dimension with respect to the spatial scope of the pedestrian. As is depressingly reiterated in the proposals of S.O.M., Fujikawa, Conterato & Lohan and Albert Martin, the ridiculous immensity of the site has provoked consumption at the most obvious scale, **monolithia**; pedestrian space remains in essence an accident.

The widely published scheme of Maguire Partners, Myers, Moore, Pelli, et al, is certainly not totally innocent of the aforementioned folly, yet the distinct organization and individual orientations of the design team suggest that the design was at least initiated with an appropriate intent. While the tower men, Pelli, Kennard, Leggorreta and Myers, pay their respects and/or irreverence to the tombstones of the urban graveyard, Moore, Halprin, Gehry and Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer set themselves to animate the

urban spaces below. This rare balance of design priority between the two orders of dimension in the North American city, has produced a scheme which is at once unique, functional and fantastically **fun**. But, it would be wrong to accept this outstanding design approach as the proper design solution.

The "Maguire" architects evidently pursued their design responsibilities independently in an effort to approximate the random growth of a 'natural city'. The true 'natural city' is a product of time, however; time for building styles and technology to progress as well as time for the urban space to establish its image and thus curb the random towards the complementary. The gradual arrival at a unity of image establishes the **permanence** of the 'real city'. The "Maguire" scheme does not strike one as 'real city' (ie. New York, Boston, San Francisco) as it launches all too much in one momentary thrust. In the predestined incongruity of such an exuberant, total environment, one cannot but sense the nagging disillusionment of the stage set; an eclectic fantasy with as much **permanence** as the average World's Fair.

Making Plans.

ALCAN LECTURES, H. Noel Fieldhouse Auditorium (6:00 PM, Leacock 132, McGill University).

April 7

Michael Graves: On His Work

ATELIER LUKACS, 1430 Sherbrooke W.

April 7

Peter Aitkens: recent paintings

April 24

Lili Richard: abstract

May 12

Toby Graser: recent works

CONTINENTAL GALLERIES, 1450 Drummond

March to May

Traditional Canadian Art

April 28 to May 9

Terry Tomalty: one man show

DOMINION GALLERY, 1438 Sherbrooke

April

Jules Herve: paintings

Hans Schlee: sculpture

Late April

Eric Goldberg: selected works

GALERIE A, 680 Sherbrooke W.

March 11 to April 2

Atmospheres - couleurs sur papier et sur soie de Veronique Da Costa: tableaux et

environnements

GALERIE ART ET STYLE, 896 Sherbrooke
April
Bruno Cote

GALERIE COLBERT, 1396a Sherbrooke W.
April 2 to April 12
Denise Poirier: oil paintings
May 6 to May 17
Luiti Tiengo: water colours
May 20 to May 31
Sydney Berne: recent oils

McCORD MUSEUM, 690 Sherbrooke W.
Wed.-Sun., 11AM-5PM
March 25
Great Expectations: The European Vision in Nova Scotia, 1749-1848.
April 22
1860s Dress: costumes, accessories and photographs

THE MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, 3400 avenue du Musee
Until April 12
Pierre Alechinsky: A Print Retrospective
March 17 to June 14
Problems in Contemporary Furniture Design: The Cantilever Chair
April 11
New German Cinema - Win Wenders: a retrospective
1 PM - "Alice in den Stadten" ("Alice in

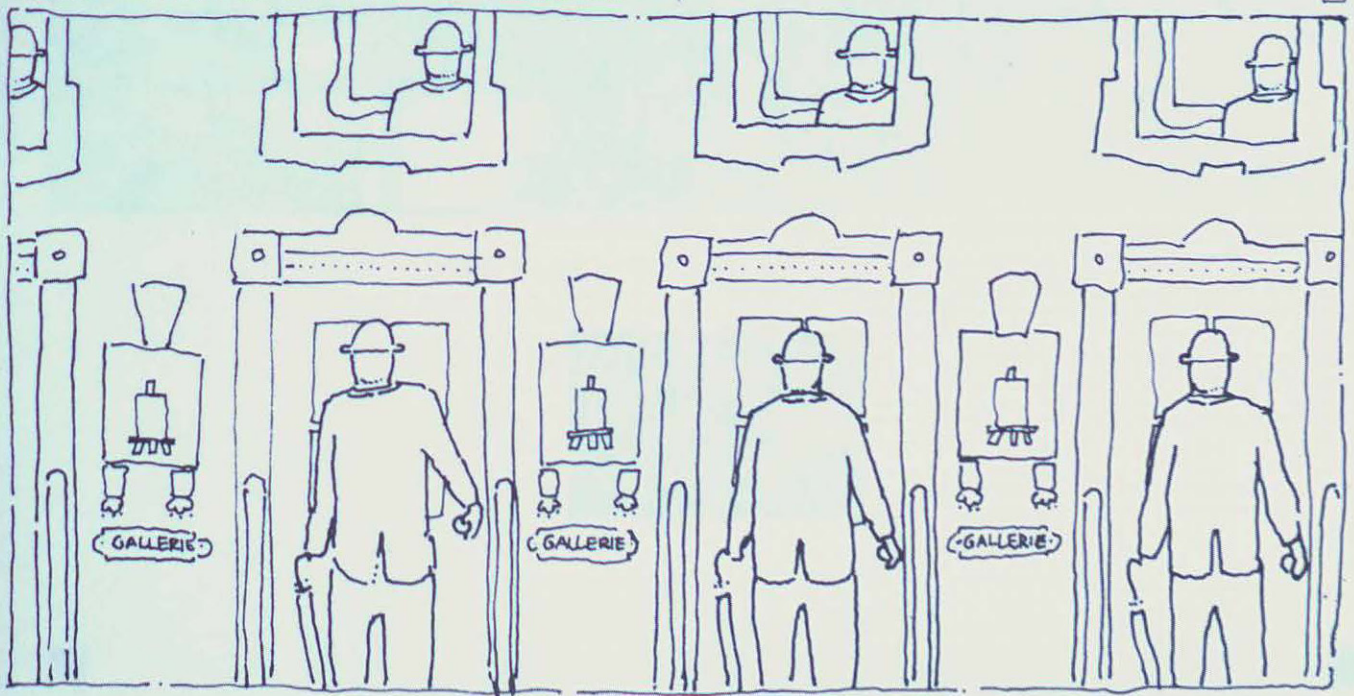
the Cities")
A 1974 film with English subtitles (B&W).
3 PM - "Falsche Bewegung" ("Wrong Movement")
A 1975 film with English subtitles (colour).
April 17 to May 31
Contemporary Prints and Drawings
April 17 to May 31
Greg Curnoe: a full retrospective
April 24 to June 2
Roman Opalka: exhibition of works

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, McGill University
April 10 to April 20
Final Year Thesis Presentations

YAJIMA GALLERY, 307 Ste. Catherine, Suite 515
March 24 to April 11
Sam Tata: works: 1937-1980, photographic exhibit
April 15 to May 2
Greg Curnoe: recent works, paintings and drawings
E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits

In order to place a notice concerning a current or an upcoming event of interest to Montreal's architectural or artistic community, contact: Helen Malkin at 392-8319 or Barbara Dolman at 392-5277.

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