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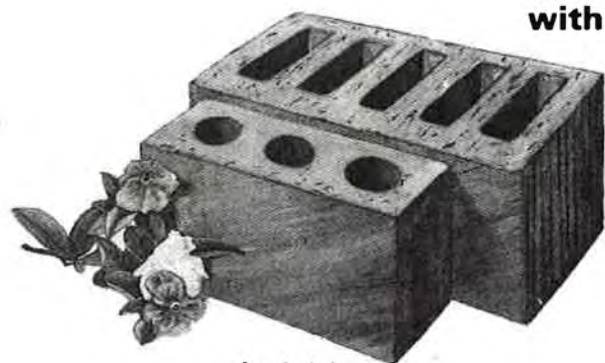
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**N P I A**

JOURNAL OF THE NATAL PROVINCIAL INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS  
TYDSKRIF VAN DIE NATALSE PROVINSIALE INSTITUUT VAN ARGITEKTE  
ISSUE 3/1989 • VOLUME 14 • ISSN 0379-9301 • UITGAWE 3/1989 • JAARGANG 14

INTERNATIONAL  
ISSUE



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INTERNATIONALISM  
PROFIT VS POLITICS  
CARGO CULTS  
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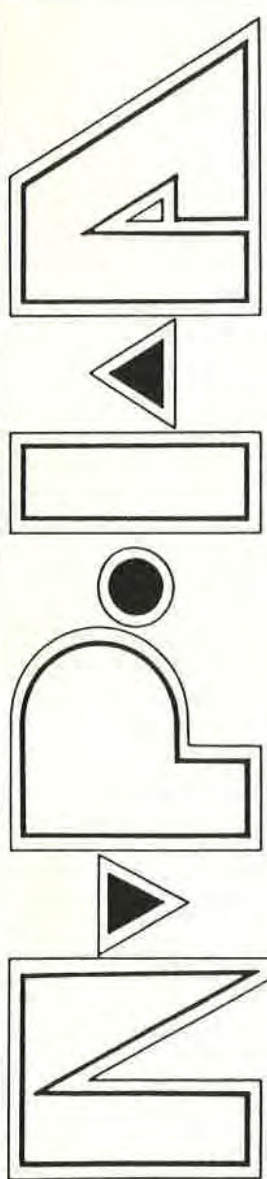
ALEX MURRAY 6 and 8

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THE ARCHITECTURE OF FRANK GEHRY, Walker Arts Centre, 1986 17, 19 and 20



PUBLISHED BY the Natal Provincial Institute of Architects PO Box 777 Durban 4000 Tel: (031) 3061028  
 UITGEVEE DEUR die Natalise Provinsiale Instituut van Argitekte Posbus 777 Durban 4000 Tel: (031) 3061028

**INSTITUTE NEWS****PROVINCIAL COMMITTEE 1989/91**

AT THE Annual General Meeting of members held at the Durban Country Club on Thursday, 12 October 1989, the following persons were elected to the Natal Provincial Committee for 1989/91:

Messrs Sydney Baillon, Maurice Dibb, Frank Emmett, John Frost, Patrick

Gibson, Rodney Harber, Brian Johnson, Peter McCaffery, Andrew Ogilvy, Ted Tollman and Walter Peters.

At a subsequent Committee Meeting, Brian Johnson was elected President and Frank Emmett Vice President. Durban City Architect, Mr Eugene van der Walt, was co-opted on the Committee.

**ISAA NATAL AWARDS OF MERIT 1989**

The NPIA has announced the following awards for the period January 1987 to December 1988:

Offices, 295 Pietermaritz Street, Pietermaritzburg

**Carter-Brown and Baillon**

Santorini (Phase One)

**Campbell, Bernstein & Irving**

Office Block for British Industrial Plastics Factory, Pinetown

**Johnson Murray Architects**

Architects Offices and Studios, 59 Musgrave Road, Durban

**Stauch Vorster**

In addition the following were honoured with:

**CONSERVATION AWARD 1989**

Quadrant House

**Hallen Theron & Partners****SPECIAL MENTION**

Conservation of the Mosque, Church Street, Pietermaritzburg

**Ismail Cassimjee**

The assessors were:

Gordon Small, Michael Green, Professors Errol Haarhoff and Danie Theron.

**PRACTICE NOTICES****CHANGES IN PARTNERSHIPS**

D.M. Thorne has rejoined the practice of Chick, Bartholomew & Poole as a partner.

D.J. Rushton has become a partner in Fridjhon, Fulford & Partners.

P.T. Hoal is now practising under the style of O'Donoghue & Hoal at 1000 Mutual Building, Gardiner Street, Durban.

G.J.H. Combrink is now practising under the style of CBL Architects.

The practice of Hughes Todd Inc is now styled Hughes Todd Bryan Architects.

D.G. van Zyl is now practising on his own account under the style of Douw van Zyl, at the School of Architecture, University of Natal.

C.C. Clark and D.C. Thomas have changed the style of their practice to Clark & Thomas Architects. The address remains unchanged.

J.W. Nieuwoudt is now practising on his own account under the style of Hans Nieuwoudt Argitek at PO Box 1195, Margate.

M.F. Birss is now practising under the style of Michael Birss & Associates at 184 Loop Street, Pietermaritzburg.

G.E.H. Cornell is now practising on his own account under the style of Garnett Cornell Architects.

**CHANGES IN ADDRESS**

G.D.J. Wessels, PO Box 4, Kwambonambi 3915

K.E. Gow, 21 Nonoti Gardens, 15 Nonoti Avenue, Durban.

N.F. Robson to 3 Oriol Road, Pietermaritzburg.

F.W. Powers (Margoles Goodwin Dukes Inc) to 9th Floor, Liberty Life House, 269 Smith Street, Durban.

M.H. Kaplan to 52 Banfield Crescent, Puntans Hill, Durban.

D.N. Gillies to PO Box 37115, Overport.

J.E. Gourley to 9th Floor, Liberty Life House, 269 Smith Street, Durban.

G.A.M. de Haan to 9 Casa Merala, 138 Earl Haig Road, Durban.

I.D. Bell to c/o Paton Taylor Associates, PO Box 3478, Durban.

Seirlis, Wilkins & Smith to PO Box 1490, Pinetown.

J.R. van der Ham to 76A Old Main Road, Kloof.

W. Long to 1511 General Building, 47 Field Street, Durban.

C. du Toit to c/o Franklin, Garland & Gibson, 600 Standard House, 275 Smith Street, Durban.

J.A. Cameron to PO Box 2375, Durban.

Prof L.T. Croft to 209 Musgrave Heights, 132 Musgrave Road, Durban.

G.B. Cunningham to 6 Silverfern Place, Ferncliffe, Pietermaritzburg.

G.T. Downes to 2 Henwood Road, Durban.

J. Edgcumbe to PO Box 1685, Pietermaritzburg.

G.G. Macfarlane to 701 Crescent Gardens, 113 Loop Street, Pietermaritzburg.

R.J. Platt to Tyttenhanger House, St Albans, Herts, Z14 0PG, UK.

R.E. Pettit to Flat 2, 11 Alexandra Road, Pietermaritzburg.

**TRANSFERS**

G.B. Douglas from TPI to NPI — c/o Fridjhon, Fulford & Partners, 13th Floor, Federated Insurance House, Smith Street, Durban.

B.G. Smith from NPI to TPI.

J.J. Grobler from TPI to NPI — c/o Osmond Lange, PO Box 50115, Musgrave 4062.

L.D. Bryan from TPI to NPI — Hughes Todd Bryan Inc, PO Box 650, Pietermaritzburg.

C.D. de Jager from AnT to ordinary — PO Box 22414, Glenashley 4022.

W.M. Gow from NPI to CPI.

**CHANGES IN CLASS**

S. Price — retired to ordinary.

D.B. Jay — AnT to ordinary

R.J. Platt — ordinary to retired

K.P. Moull — ordinary to retired

R.E. Pettit — ordinary to retired

**NEW MEMBERS**

P.S. Sanders (ordinary) 258

Wakesleigh Road, Bellair, Durban.

W.H. Raats (ordinary) c/o Franklin

Garland & Gibson, PO Box 522,

Pietermaritzburg

K.B. Bingham (AnT) 67 St Andrew

Drive, Durban North.

T.L. Cockhead (Miss) (AnT) 515 Currie

Road, Durban.

Y.M. Dalrymple (Mrs) (AnT) PO Box 45,

Empangeni.

D.J. Esterhuizen (AnT) 31 Donray, 34

Masonic Road, Durban.

N.M. Fiser (AnT) 11 Struan Grove,

Morningside, Durban.

P.N. Lessing (AnT) 78 Jan Smuts

Avenue, Winston Park.

E.B. Orts-Hansen (AnT) PO Box 47342,

Greyville.

M.B. Bignaut (AnT) 293C Sydenham

Road, Berea.

M.S. Damant (AnT) 22 Santa Monica,

158 Innes Road, Morningside.

R.S. Reddy (AnT) 17 Winchester Drive,

Reservoir Hills, Durban.

M.L. Savage (AnT) 24 Gumtree Road,

Mount Edgecombe.

F.V. Coppola (AnT) 65 Stamford Hill

Road, Durban.

M. Malherbe-Savage (Mrs) (AnT) PO

Box 5198, Durban.

M.G. Todd (AnT) 14 Kerhede Place,

Durban North.

**DECEASED**

B.J. Clinch

W.I. Willies

**EDITORIAL****INTERNATIONALISM** A VIEW FROM DURBAN

WITH SOUTH AFRICA having been an exporter of human resources for so long, we are fortunate in that we have a ready-made world-wide network of South African architects. This issue taps into this potential in order to give us a brief view of four world cities: London, Paris, Los Angeles and Sydney, with commentary on the current trends in architecture.

There are times when, living and working as an architect in Durban on the south-east coast of the continent of Africa, one gets the impression that we are an isolated outpost of colonial culture. We nevertheless continue trying to achieve identity and contribute in a meaningful way to the greater picture of history. The overseas trip which used to provide the "quick fix", now serves only to emphasise our physical and cultural isolation from the main body of western economic and social development.

The counter argument is that we must develop our own Southern African indigenous blend of culture and be less dependent on Eurocentric influences. The regionalist argument has many important positive aspects to it, but carries with it the danger of introverted parochial stultification. One of the lessons of the south-east Asian economic miracles like Singapore and South Korea is that progress is gained by feeding off and participating in the world market, and that a reverse transfer to the West of ideas and cultures occurs only when competing as equals.

With our position on the periphery of the main stream of architectural thought and development, there is a necessary time lag before we pick up on the latest trends. This gives us the benefit of detached objectivity without being drawn into the short-lived fads and "isms", like deconstructivism for example, that swept the schools of architecture in 1988 under various guises, such as the visually exciting, shattered forms of Co-op, Himmelblau or the sensuous paintings of Zaha Hadid.

History is a much more demanding critic and is the greatest enemy of fashion. It is only truly important buildings that survive as architectural milestones in the development of architecture. The search for aesthetic victory in the style wars of modernism and post-modernism has left our cities littered with shallow, hyped-up caricatures of both camps. Modern architecture has survived the attempts of architectural critics to compartmentalise it into the style of the time and has continued to be the mainstream of twentieth century architectural expression.

Internationally, modern architecture has continued to be transformed and enriched with vernacular regionalist influences. The current trend to explore the early beginnings of modernism, particularly constructivism and expressionism, is indicative of the tremendous wealth and depth of modern architecture, much of which was ignored by the early historians of the modern movement who concentrated on the works of Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and Aalto as if their buildings were the only works of value in the modern movement.

The best of South African architecture has always been able to compete at an international level. However, with our increasing international isolation, the danger of not riding the international mainstream into the uncharted courses of the future means we could find ourselves beached at the dead end of half-baked theories and concepts. This issue tries to keep our contacts and provide an ongoing stimulus in our search for great architecture.

**GUEST EDITOR: ANDREW MURRAY**

Andrew Murray is a graduate of the University of Natal and has been a partner in the firm Johnson Murray Architects since its inception in 1981. The firm has recently been awarded an ISAA Award of Merit for 1989 (an honour they also received in 1985). Johnson Murray won the 1986 NBS Affordable Homes Competition; the 1987 Dulux Colour Award, and were joint runners-up in the 1989 Durban Museum and Library Competition.





# PROFITS vs POLITICS



**B**OTH in London and Paris, this is the age of *grands projets*, though of two radically different natures. In Paris they are Mitterand's, born of autocratic dictat, funded by central government and imposed upon the city as architectural symbols of a *grand politique*. In London they are privately funded responses to external pressures, not part of any grand strategy, with a purpose which is principally the production of a *product*; in contrast the Parisian demand is for an actual architectural symbol.

The architectural function contained in these two programmes could thus hardly be more different. It is informative to contrast London's projects with those of Paris, but before doing so their context, and the general body of the work, of which size alone places them at the head, ought to be briefly reviewed.

## MAMMON — AND THE MONARCHY

London today is the hub of the biggest building boom in the UK since the sixties, and a wholly commercial one, unleavened by government expenditure of any significant kind.

In a rampantly free market where profit has become the sole criterion — and justification — of any enterprise, it is therefore logical that architecture is employed for no intrinsic value other than its ability to help generate profit:

### Reducing the latest avant garde postulate to just another high-street "theme" style

specifically by maximising net to gross floor ratios and packaging the product for greatest appeal, ie through the employment of safe, established conventional motifs.

This is the nature of much of the great tide of quasi-vernacular gabled garbage that has swept the country, eroding taste and discrimination even further by its ubiquity. But the corrosive effect of commercialism has bitten deeper: design now serves principally as a means of generating turnover through re-styling, and architecture — always a deadringer for the latest stylistic fad — is fast falling into the same trap, especially in that shadowy, ephemeral zone where architecture and design (weren't they once same thing?) meet — retailing.

Thus we have Rasshied Din Associates' (interior

designers) Next store in Oxford Street and Crighton's shopping mall in King's Road sporting a sort of revved-up designer-deconstructivism, reducing the latest avant-garde postulate to just another high-street "theme" style — a bit like Eisenman without the angst, one may say.

To blame Mammon alone for all this would be dealing even him an injustice. Other factors, some of a more indigenous nature, are involved, among the principal ones being a dire lack of design skills; no guts; the arrival of large commercial American practices and — the deepest rooted — a natural antipathy to the abstract, as exemplarily articulated by our future monarch.

Charles's opinions are, contrary to the opinions of the architectural establishment, in my view extremely pertinent. They have touched a very raw nerve and stirred up the dominant debate of the time but, depressingly, have been hijacked by reactionaries as a royal charter for the production of every kind of classical pastiche.

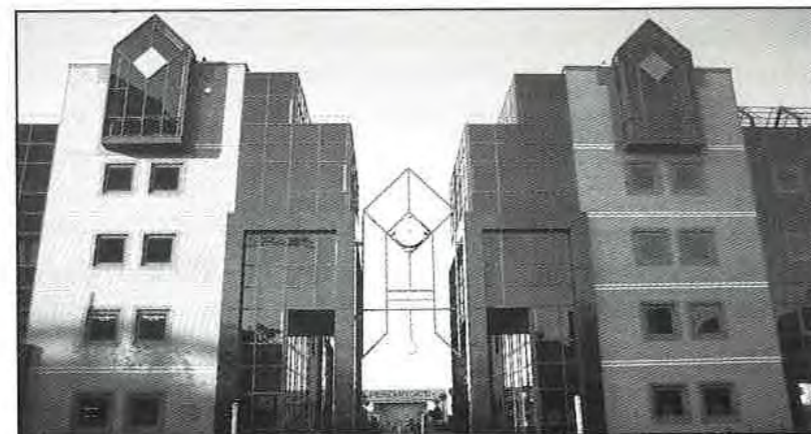
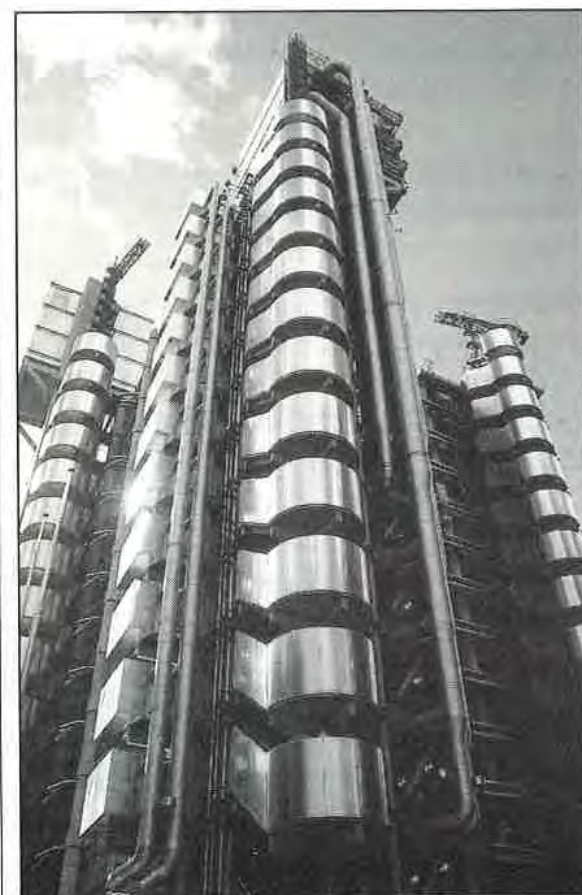
That, then, is a short description of the current scenario. The overall trend, or rather headlong drift, is that of overwhelming commercialism so, while the boom has allowed a lot of young talent to get in on the act, their work is often neutralised by the phenomenon of "stylism" and becomes of little consequence when viewed within the broad picture. It is the giant commissions which are set to stand as London's landmarks and become the most prominent symbols of their age. What will they say?

## LONDON'S NEW SYMBOLS

Let us first go to Broadgate. The most complete of these schemes, it provides a depressing preview of what is to come. Two practices are involved, of which Arup's work is the least offensive, at least attempting an urban response by abstract means and the inclusion of a much used central piazza.

SOM, on the other hand, obviously felt that a more literal response was required, and have risen to the occasion of their first London commission by offering Bishopsgate the rigid eight hundred foot frontage of a sub-Conan-the-Barbarian gothic-Edwardian pile whose scale and banal ornament crush all before it.

And this is just the starter. SOM have reserved the full display of their Baux-Arts skills for Canary Wharf in — or rather on — the Isle of Dogs in the docklands, where a series of boulevards, crescents and squares will, from what has been shown in the press, unveil further horrors of



1 The new printing works for the Financial Times, designed by Nicholas Grimshaw, has become a landmark building at the former East India Dock.

2 High street post-modern retail architecture, in this case Neo-Egyptian meets Stuttgart Staatsgalerie.

3 The Lloyds Building by Richard Rogers and Associates.

4 An example of medium rise speculative office developments in the London Docklands.



over-scaled Edwardianism and, no doubt, show all the local lads what real urbanism is about.

Crowning the lot will be Cesar Pelli's 850' stainless steel jacketed henchman of a tower, flanked (at my last view) by two gaudy neo-gothic monstrosities by Kohn Pederson Fox.

On the South Bank it appears London may be spared another American master stroke, Johnson and Burgee's execrable tourist's vision of a London landmark, only to be faced with a leading alternative which is an almost straight crib of St Marks in Venice. Such brazen historical plagiarism would beggar belief were it not for the precedent of the Grand Buildings competition in Trafalgar Square, where the winner was none less than: a replica of the existing elevation!

Those are the three schemes which threaten most damage to the city of London. Two others of equal scale should, however, significantly help to redeem the situation. Led by Rogers and Foster respectively, they are the Royal Albert Dock development and the £6.5 billion, 52 ha, Kings Cross goods yard site redevelopment.

Both schemes cover great areas and Rogers and Foster have been appointed principally as master planners, so it is probably unrealistic to expect works of the same intensity as their previous schemes. However, given the abilities of these two men, it would be equally unrealistic to expect anything less than two developments of pivotal influence in the future shaping of London's built form.

**Mitterand's Paris — sharp, smooth, clean, angular, it is everything the dowdy, historicist pastiches being offered us in London are not.**

So, reasons for despair, reasons for hope. What of Mitterand's Paris? A recent encounter has been salutary. Firstly the Opera at La Bastille, already generally accepted as an architectural disappointment by Parisians (its stepped facade is contrived and already dated — oh! the eternal truths of post-modernism!) still impressed late at night by its cascade of black granite steps, the richness of its materials and its size.

It may be architecturally weak, but I was left wondering how Thatcher, at the recent bicentenary bash, could not have but been shamed when confronted by the scale and quality of this public edifice. For the record, the final cost came in at £225 million — double the annual UK Arts Council budget.

Pei's pyramid at the Louvre dazzles everyone, but is seriously compromised by its two quater-scale caricatures on either side, which do no more than dilute the boldness of the statement and clutter up the potentially grand space.

Situated at one end of a long axis it is balanced, and surely would be eclipsed were it not for the distance, by Otto Spreckelsen's masterpiece at La Defense. Spreckelsen's 360' high open cube is simply majestic, sitting atop a podium and fully exploiting its siting by its axial shift, which, contrary to all the talk about being determined by foundations and underground railway lines, must have been purposeful, creating a very necessary tension to such a serene, stable form. Sharp, smooth, clean, angular, it is everything that the dowdy, historicist pastiches being offered us in London are not, and captures the very essence of classicism, which they never will.

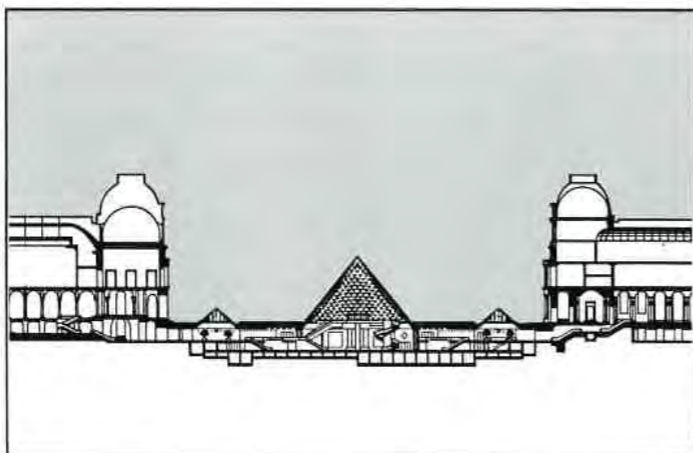
Lastly, I visited Parc la Villette, to see Adrian Fainsilber's conversion of the old abattoirs into the City of Science and Technology, and Bernard Tschumi's pavilions in his "Park for the



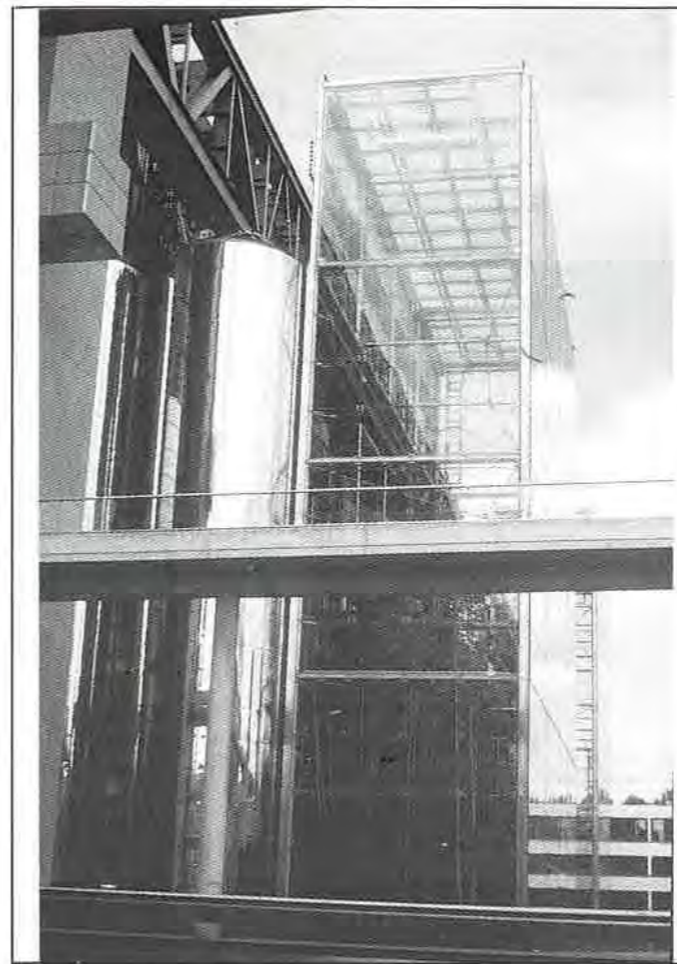
5 Otto Von Spreckelsen's "Arc de Triomphe", an office building on a monumental scale, Paris.



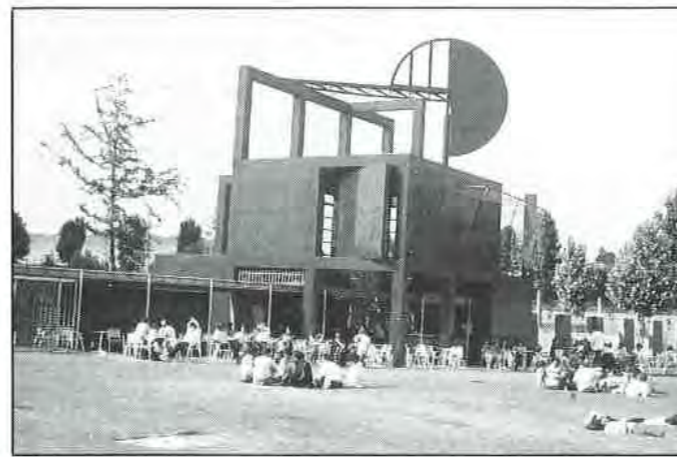
7 The recently completed Paris Opera House.



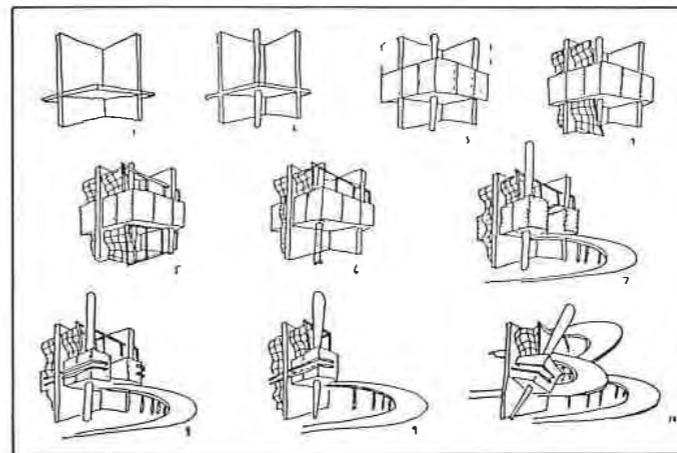
9 Cross section through I J Pei's Louvre extensions.



6 Parc de la Villette, Paris, the Museum of Science and Technology.



8 One of Bernard Tschumi's "Folies" at Parc de la Villette, Paris.



10 "Ideogram for a folly" at Parc de la Villette by Bernard Tschumi.

21st Century". Silber's conversion was the least formalist and most anglo-saxon in feel of all buildings visited. Its French extravagance, however, left a nagging sense of disbelief.

For example, internally the ratio of exhibits to actual structure is well in favour of the latter, and the three super-expensive, 80' high glass enclosures ("look, no hands" detailing by the English firm of Rice Francis Ritchie, also responsible for detailing Pei's pyramid) serve no purpose other than just being there — or maybe to press home the point that £450 million is what this little number cost.

**France's recent investments highlight the impoverishing paucity of vision in the UK.**

Refurbishments are always expensive. Tschumi's pavilions stand across the canal, on the other side of the park. Laid out on a 120 m<sup>2</sup> grid, each neo-constructivist confection is meant — from what I can gather from the dense theorising behind this installation — to promote its appropriation to more or less spontaneous, or at least non-rigidly defined, uses. That is a tall order but this is after all a park, a place for relaxation and amusement, so one can forgive Tschumi if his follies appear more like self-conscious formalisations than the ideal. They are ingenious and great fun — not least for the burden of deconstructive theory it is their duty to express.

What does a comparison with these monuments actually say of London's developments? That they are mediocre (at best), backward-looking, mean, certainly — but what stands out most of all is their deleterious effect on public confidence, not only in architecture, but in modern architecture.

Notwithstanding the long established gulf in cultural attitudes between the two countries, France's recent investments highlight the impoverishing paucity of vision in the UK. Paris is a city where the architectural content of the most prominent government-funded buildings is central and uncompromisingly contemporary.

London is one where architectural content is peripheral, apologetic, and cravenly obsequious to conventional taste. Again, the sheer size of London's developments has been allowed to tip the balance away from a true architecture — that is an architecture that is a true articulation of its age and culture — even further in that: a) scale alone guarantees impact, no matter what the architectural quality; and b) it duly follows that mediocrity on such scale must ultimately dilute and sour our society's general pool of architectural understanding and belief.

**There is every reason to believe that London's best is still to come**

This essay has concentrated on London's worst, but there is every reason to believe that London's best is still to come. Buildings such as Lloyds, the new FT printing works by Grimshaw, and Hopkins's new stand at Lords have, by the prominence of their clients and the extremity and quality of their vision, had a powerful effect on public attitudes.

Theirs has been a holding exercise; hopefully the next generation of work, such as the recently completed Sainsbury supermarket by Grimshaw, Farrell's rising "gateway" over Charing Cross, Stirling at Mansion House and Hopkins's planned terminal at Waterloo, will start to swing the pendulum back.



# CARGO CULTS

**HANS HALLEN** WRITES FROM SYDNEY

**W**HILE IT IS a little flippant and inaccurate to suggest that post-modernism is modernism that comes in the post, it is true that provincial places move this way as the fashions of the great metropolitan centres reach them. Post-modernism, a fashion with its driving ideals trivialised, has come to town, as has the more pervasive ideal of "regionalism". Regionalism, often the local handmaiden of nationalism and other "isms", appears to have a functional environmental basis that, at first, is appealing. The worm at the core of this apple is that there is a strong selective basis for designing the "regional", for the style comes before function; and what is "regional" comes in advance of tackling the problem at hand.

There are two concepts at work in the creative processes. These are both antithetical and synthetic. Irony, the quality that best describes mannerism (or as this age calls it post-modernism) is when modernity, which means building the best way you can, takes on board the external symbols of historic forms. The architecture of mannerism is the architecture of satiety — of a rich and sumptuous meal consumed after the rigours of the forced march, or before one! It is about a knowing wink and nod, of having been there before, combined with skilful use of form and structure.

**We have no need for fashions.  
We need developed skills, for it is  
in the hands of strong architects  
we get enduring and enriching images.**

But in the last analysis modernity is not a style. It is the rigour of the avant-garde — of travelling light using form and structure; it is lean, spare and appropriate. It is daring and offers very little room for old symbols, for it makes its own!



11 A detail of the New Overseas Passenger Terminal, Circular Quay, Sydney, by Lawrence Neild and Partners.

## ARCHITECTURE FOR DURBAN'S TOMORROW

When Barrie Biermann built his house at Glenwood 25 years ago the interplay between these two forces made the result. Ten years earlier Fritz Kass, functional modernist, stuck garlands on to Rosemod Court at 333 Musgrave Road. The Brenthurst Library has history stalking my elbow but the function shapes the form.

We have no need for fashions. We need developed skills, for it is in the hands of strong architects we get enduring and enriching images. There are architects whose buildings enrich Durban's architecture; they are personal and reflect their training and they, unlike worshippers of cargo cults, of which much of post-modernism is an example, bring not fashion but style rooted in skill. Issy Benjamin's buildings, Hirsts's Howard College and his excellent Reserve Bank building come to mind as does the Marine Terminal by Janusz Warunkiewicz of MS Zakrzewski & Partners. For good measure it is salutary to take a drive out to see Kristappa Reddy's Newlands Temple!

The world building boom has to an extent run out of architectural ideas. The issues sketched out earlier are being played out in many countries. Contrast the major works in Paris, Spreckelsen's new "Arc de Triomphe" office building, Pei's pyramid of glass and Jean Nouvel's recent work, with SOM's return to the idioms of London County Hall in the Canary Wharf project. Contextualism, a dreaded phrase, is at its most sensible architectural urbanity and civility. This meant no loss in architectural power in the hands of Corb, Wright, Aalto and Mies, but in lesser hands it is a fruitcake of references and impoverished built form.

The Canberra Parliament House concept was welcomed for its powerful image. On completion its internal and external spaces and finishes show a surprising timidity and banality — all in the name of contextual, regional and cultural arguments! In Sydney,



12 The National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour, by Philip Cox and Partners.



13 The new Capita office block in central Sydney by Harry Seidler.



14 The new National Exhibition Centre at Darling Harbour, Sydney, by Philip Cox and Partners.



15 Rosemod Court, Musgrave Road, by Fritz Kass, stucco garland on functional modernist brickwork.



16 Haven Court, Esplanade, Durban, by Benjamin & Crofton.

home of two powerful images of contemporary modernity, the Opera House and the Bridge, there are few new buildings to equal these, and none of the new office buildings has the panache and excitement of Norman Foster's Hongkong and Shanghai Bank or Pei's new China Bank building.

Harry Seidler remains true to his convictions, and his new Capita Building and Grosvenor House building are, for their power of form, integrity of detailing as well as inventiveness, well ahead of most of the competition. That competition includes Kohn Pedersen Fox's (New York architects) schmaltzy 1920's office building for Chifley Square. Every nuance, reference, motif and cultural bauble has been included in a huge step backwards. Had the Harbour Bridge been built today it would look like London's Tower Bridge!

Philip Cox's football stadium and his new Exhibition Centre at Darling Harbour, done with Arup's secret weapon, Peter Thompson, are distinguished modern buildings of great integrity, and hopefully are pace-setters for the future.

But overseas consultants are being flown in in droves: Kurokawa, SOM, Tange, and many more come to mind!

**Had the Harbour Bridge  
been built today,  
it would look like  
London's Tower Bridge.**

Whilst the careful rationalism of Glenn Murcutt, the modernism of Seidler, the creative power of Cox, and the explorations of modern formalism by Denton Corker Marshall flourish, and if younger architects such as Tzannes and others are given their head, then all will be well.

But it looks to me as if Australian architecture in its most manifest and large-scale expression will be what the talents and inclination of the overseas architects of its most prestigious buildings dictate.

So much for regionalism. If this happens it will be an expression of Cargo Cults!



# LA TODAY

(FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD)

DAVID PAKSHONG WRITES FROM CALIFORNIA

**T**HERE IS nothing to match flying over Los Angeles by night. A sort of luminous, geometric, incandescent immensity, stretching as far as the eye can see, bursting out from the cracks in the clouds. Only Hieronymus Bosch's hell can match this inferno effect. The muted fluorescence of all the diagonals: Wiltshire, Lincoln, Sunset, Santa Monica. Already, flying over San Fernando Valley, you come upon the horizontal infinite in every direction. But, once you are beyond the mountain, a city 10 times larger hits you. You will never have encountered anything that stretches as far as this before. Even the sea cannot match it, since it is not divided up geometrically. The irregular, scattered flickering of European cities does not produce the same parallel lines, the same vanishing points, the same aerial perspectives. They are medieval cities. This one condenses by night the entire future geometry of the networks of human relations, gleaming in their abstraction, luminous in their extension, astral in their reproduction to infinity. Mulholland Drive by night is an extra-terrestrial's vantage-point on earth, or conversely, an earth-dweller's vantage-point on the Galactic metropolis.

At 6 a.m. a man is already telephoning from a public phonebox in Beverly Terrace. The neon signs of the night are going out as the daytime ones become visible. The light everywhere reveals and illuminates the absence of architecture. This is what gives the city its beauty, this city that is so intimate and warm, whatever anyone says of it: the fact is it is in love with its limitless horizontality, as New York may be with its verticality.

Jean Baudrillard: America, 1988



To comprehend the architecture of Los Angeles, it is important to understand the physical and cultural landscape by which it is shaped and whose images it reflects.

Instead of the concentric patterns of growth common to the classical and industrial cities of the 19th century, the developmental processes resulted in a horizontal, low density, suburban/urban sprawl based on automobile transportation. Los Angeles is the world's first great automatic city by virtue of the fact that there are no alternatives for its inhabitants. Reyner Banham acknowledges that "the freeway system in its totality is now a single comprehensible place, a coherent state of mind, a complete way of life, the fourth ecology of the Angeleno."

A network of local government evolved to sustain this growth, which is dominated by one hundred distinct cities and communities spread over the 5 000 square mile area of the country, with Los Angeles as the major city, in excess of 500 square miles. Carey McWilliams' description of "a collection of suburbs in search of a city" remains appropriate. Yet despite being the contemporary expression of a communications-bound, anti-architectural, post-modern society — Los Angeles has a notable architectural tradition.

Frank Gehry started by mirroring a regional expression of the International Style, demonstrated in his Malibu house for Ron Davis (1974). The cubistic layering, distorted perspectives and disjunctive relationships are spatial devices employed to respond to the specific conditions of Los Angeles. He speaks little on philosophy and accepts the rootlessness of objects — to be endlessly arranged and re-arranged, shifted and shaped.

The normality of the unconventional made acceptable by Gehry re-established Los Angeles as a laboratory for speculative experimentation. Fringe investigations thrive in the shadow of the mainstream, permitting a critical discourse. Outsiders such as Co-op, Himmelblau, Arata Isozaki, Kisho Kurokawa, and Richard Meier, guarantee an international focus.

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If, as Baudrillard says, "America is the original version of modernity. We (the Europeans) are the dubbed, the subtitled version" then the aspirations and sensibilities of those born into this culture are in fact different from those who conceived the utopian vision of it. The resultant architecture cannot be the same. The search is for authenticity and an engagement with the world.

The concern in the years following the "High Modern Movement" shifted to colour, mass and packaging as seen in Streamline Modern and Art Deco. The 50's and 60's witnessed the worldwide decline of the Modernist tradition but by the 70's a number of American architects began responding to the problems of Modernism in heterogeneous ways. Led by Venturi's populist theories, Charles Moore advocated the use of historic allusion.

These schools and profession reflect a subjective, open-ended spirit, fueled by an obsession with communication and the challenge of an ambiguous, unpredictable city.



17 California Aerospace Museum, by Frank O. Gehry.



18 Strip Architecture LA.



19 Loyola Law School, by Frank O. Gehry.



20 Norton House, by Frank O. Gehry.