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'It is too easy to use our frustration with Parametricism to hark back to nostalgic and provincial Modernism'
Farshid Moussavi, p39

'The school doesn't solve major problems by applying political theories and utopian design concepts – it aims to meet the needs of the moment'
Jonathan Glancey, p40

'Sustainability emphasises the need to reintegrate an environment fragmented by modernity'
Peter Buchanan, p94

'Digitally driven design makes creative processes much more open to technocratic interference'
Pier Vittorio Aureli, p112

'He refuted Banham, calling him the "curator of refrigerators"'
Anthony Vidler, p102

'Never in the history of humanity has so much bad and meaningless geometry been produced by so few architects'
William JR Curtis, p116

CONTRIBUTORS

Isabel Allen is a former editor of *The Architects' Journal*. Now the design director of Hab Housing, which has just completed its first scheme, she writes on new housing typologies in Berlin

Pier Vittorio Aureli heads the City as a Project PhD programme at the Berlage Institute and teaches in the Architectural Association's diploma school. He co-founded the collective Dogma

Iwan Baan aims to 'challenge a long-standing tradition of depicting buildings as static' – never more so than in capturing the skateboarders using the new youth centre in Mérida, Spain.

Matthew Barac is our new Pedagogy correspondent. A senior lecturer at London South Bank University, his PhD from Cambridge University won the RIBA President's Award for Research

Peter Blundell Jones is professor of architecture at the University of Sheffield, making him the ideal local correspondent to revisit the city's redeveloped Park Hill housing scheme

Peter Buchanan is a former deputy editor of the AR. An internationally renowned critic and author, this month he explains the urgent case for the introduction of our new Revisit series

David Cohn moved to Madrid in 1986, after studying architecture at Columbia and Yale. The author of several books on Spanish architecture and an avid blogger (viewfrommadrid.blogspot.com), he writes here on Mérida's latest public spaces

Keith Collie trained at the Royal College of Art and began his career with British *Vogue*. Our cover is from his photographic essay on Park Hill, which was taken over a number of years from before reconstruction began

Peter Cook is known as a columnist to our readers, and around the world for Archigram, the Bartlett, and now his studio, Crab. He returns from Japan with an appraisal of a delightful school addition

William JR Curtis is a regular contributor to these pages. He is the author of the seminal texts *Modern Architecture Since 1900* and *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms* and this month writes two pieces: celebrating Corb and deconstructing Libeskind

Peter Davey has an OBE and a Finnish knighthood, but his greatest distinction is surviving as editor of *The Architectural Review* for a quarter of a century. Here he reflects on the AR's Townscape campaign

James Dunnett was born in Bulgaria, studied architecture in Cambridge, and now resides in Islington, north London. An expert on Erno Goldfinger (he used to work for him), he writes in these pages on socialist modernism

Mark Dytham co-founded Tokyo-based practice Klein Dytham. This year he missed judging the AR House Awards so he could meet and update the UK's Business Secretary Vince Cable on his visit to Japan to see the progress of the rebuilding effort. Mark cables his report from Sendai

Ed Glaeser is a professor of economics at Harvard. He has published scores of books on the economics of cities, most recently the highly regarded *Triumph of the City* in February. He shares his economist's perspective in our first Broader View

Jonathan Glancey has undertaken numerous travels through Afghanistan since the 1970s, and writes in this issue about a new school in Herat. A former AR Assistant Editor, he is the *Guardian*'s architecture critic. His latest book is *Nagaland: A Journey to India's Forgotten Frontier*

Mark Lamster – who visited the World Trade Center memorial for this issue – is a New York-based architectural historian, journalist and critic who is currently writing a biography of Philip Johnson

Andrew Mead gave up his job as reviews editor of *The Architects' Journal* to travel more widely, particularly in England and Italy. Here he takes a look at the unique urban setting of Sabbioneta

Jeremy Melvin reports from this year's Alvar Aalto conference; he coincidentally sits on the committee devoted to restoring Aalto's early masterpiece, the Viipuri Library, in the now-Russian city of Vyborg

Farshid Moussavi rose to fame as one half of Foreign Office Architects. She has just launched her own exciting new practice, Farshid Moussavi Architecture, and continues her role as professor in practice at Harvard. She joins the AR as a regular columnist. Welcome Farshid!

Declan O'Neil is this month's Exploring Eye correspondent: an Irish-born, London-based photographer and writer who 'uses the geographic distance to explore his relationship with the political and cultural landscape of his homeland'

Oriel Prizeman is a practising architect living and working in Cambridge, whose forthcoming book *Philanthropy and Light: Carnegie Libraries and the Advent of Transatlantic Standards for Public Space* will be published in April. She writes in this and the next issue on libraries

Deborah Saunt trained in the office of Tony Fretton. She is co-founder of the London-based practice DSDHA and a diploma unit master at London Metropolitan University. She recently took her students to study SoHo in New York, the subject of her book review

Anthony Vidler studied architecture at Cambridge (with Colin Rowe and Sandy Wilson). He is now Dean of the Irwin S Chanin School of Architecture, at New York's Cooper Union. A prolific author on architecture from the 18th century to the present, he is currently working on a history of architecture since 1945. He writes Part I of his trilogy on The Trouble with Theory in this month's essay section

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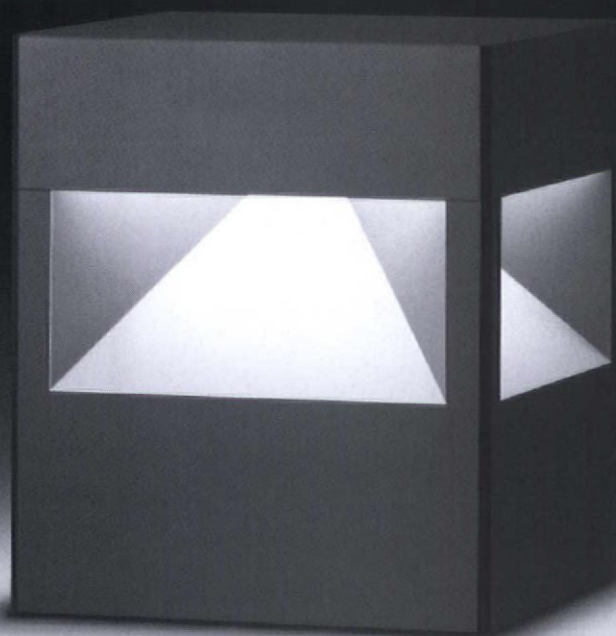
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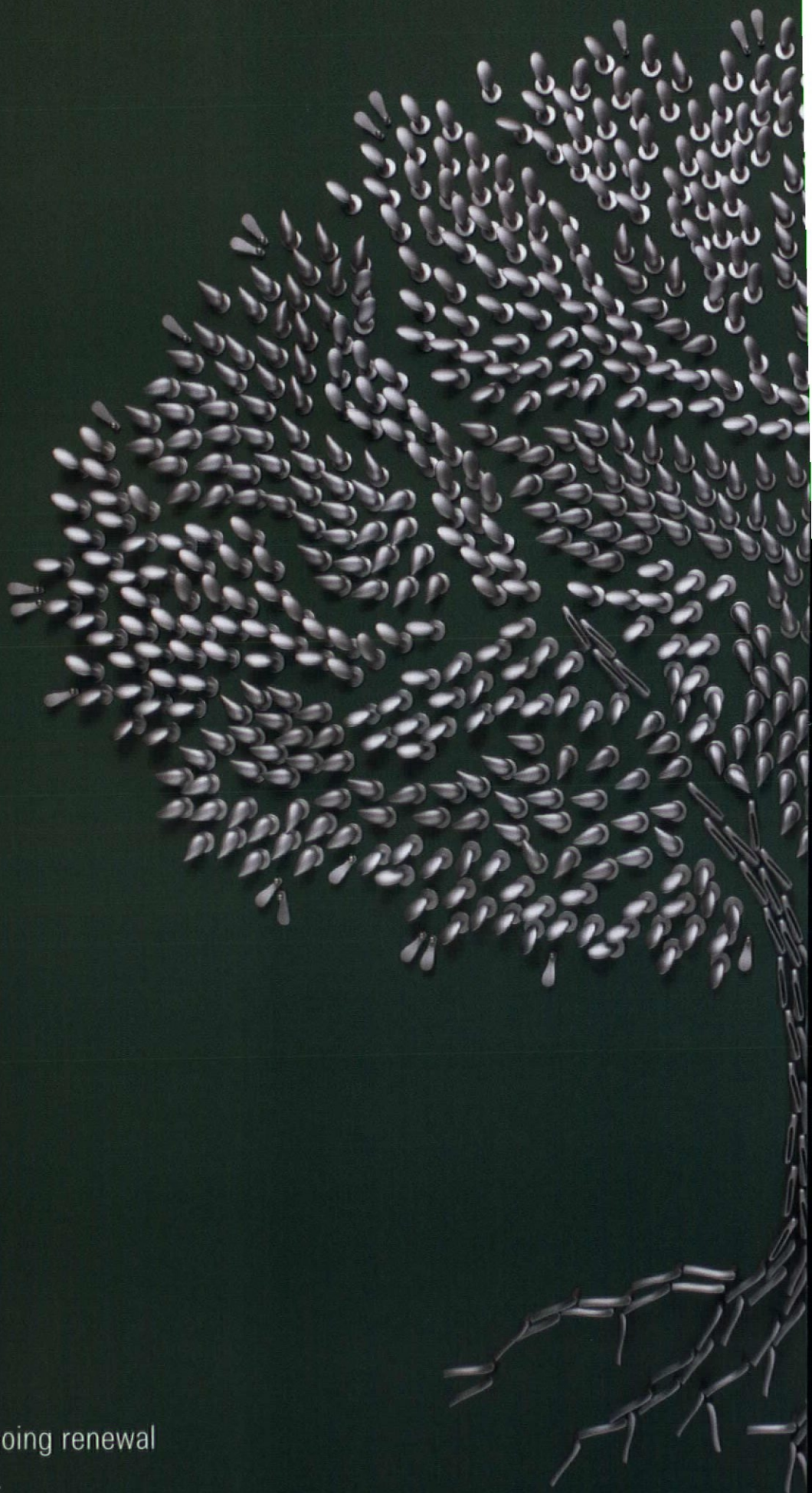
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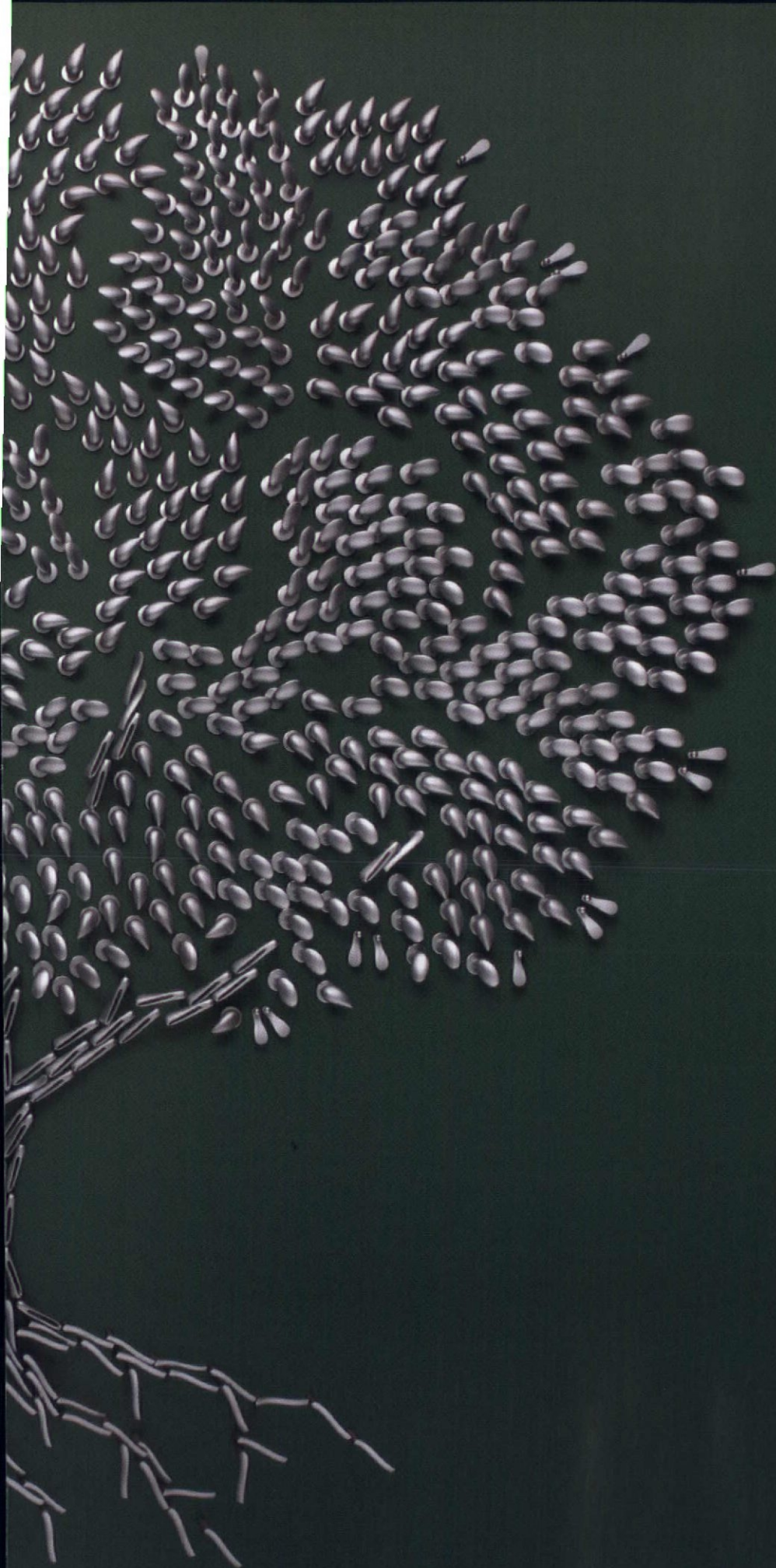
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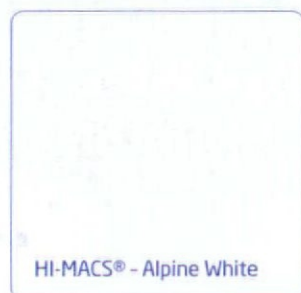
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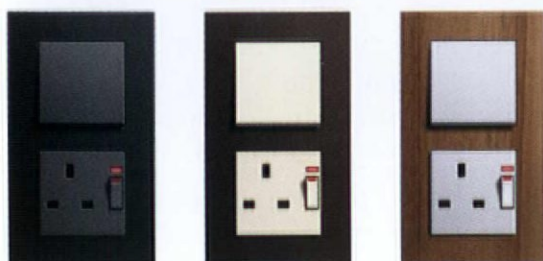
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Fig. from left to right: aluminium black/anthracite, aluminium brown/ cream white glossy, walnut-aluminium/colour aluminium

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Fig.: Gira Esprit, aluminium black with radio energy and weather display

Aluminium brown

Various brown tones are a trend and part of modern colour concepts for sophisticated interior design. Gira adopts this trend in the Gira Esprit switch range with cover frames of anodised aluminium in matt brown.
Fig.: Gira Esprit, aluminium brown/cream white glossy with surface-mounted home station video

Walnut-aluminium

Walnut is one of the most popular woods for manufacturing furniture. The combination with a cover frame made of anodised aluminium gives the new walnut-aluminium design variant an organic and modern appearance.
Fig.: Gira Esprit, walnut-aluminium with Gira push button sensor 3 Plus, 2-gang and Gira push button sensor 3 Comfort, 3-gang

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Editorial view

Reconnecting architecture with its core purpose, the relaunched AR offers critical thinking for critical times

This issue of the AR marks a new chapter in its long and distinguished history. It is not a cosmetic redesign, but a considered and comprehensive editorial relaunch, intended to offer critical thinking for critical times. Paradoxically, despite the immense advances of technology, humankind still finds itself confronting a series of potentially insurmountable crises. The prospect of ecological doomsday is well rehearsed, but heaped upon this are global economic meltdown, an alarming shortage of resources, the apparently unstoppable growth of cities and a wildly burgeoning population. By the end of this year there will be seven billion people on the planet. How can architects even begin to frame coherent responses to such issues?

Therein lies the problem. Now more than ever, the profession is in danger of becoming a supine and marginalised freemasonry, with architects reduced to the status of obliging set dressers to politicians, potentates and carpetbaggers. The *dolce vita* excess of the Noughties was a smirking triumph of style over content, a false featherbedding that has been abruptly stripped away. So what now?

In a media climate increasingly in thrall to the shallow and superficial, there is a clear need for a renewed and serious engagement with architecture and all the issues that affect and sustain it. From the napkin sketch to revisiting key historical moments, the new AR will provide intellectual sustenance and stimulus across the full scope of architectural production, aimed at reconnecting architects with their core purpose of transforming human life for the better.

Critiques of major new buildings are still at the heart of each issue, but new sections will enhance and expand the AR's agenda. *Theory* will intelligibly reconnect the disparate currents of architectural discourse with professional concerns, inaugurated by a salvo from leading academic Anthony Vidler (p102), who presents the first in a trilogy of articles analysing the quest for a unified theory of architecture. *Revisit* will look well beyond the catwalk moment of building completion to examine how notable projects have fared over the years. The fate of Park Hill in Sheffield (p83) is an especially instructive paradigm for today's planners, sociologists and architects.

Pedagogy (p114) is a unique new focus on how leading schools teach architecture, an issue of crucial importance to the profession's future. *Broader View* (p34) invites leading thinkers from other disciplines to share relevant insights. And from next month we will publish readers' letters, and invite your critical response to this and future issues. Polemics need to be tested by contradiction, so get in touch.

Over its 115-year history, the AR has been part of the remarkable trajectory of modern architecture. And as we move forwards, we are conscious of the responsibility that comes with being stewards of such an important architectural institution. We hope that you will delight in and draw inspiration from the AR's new phase, and take part in its evolution.

Catherine Slessor, Editor

Overview

Skyscraper shuffle

The design of high-rises is evolving rapidly, but who will pay for them? asks *Jeremy Melvin*

Studio Gang's Aqua Tower, Chicago

At the same time of year that the world's most powerful bankers gather at Jackson Hole, the architectural world gathers in Jyväskylä, a city in central Finland which is almost synonymous with Alvar Aalto and his architectural career. If Ben Bernanke's musings move markets, High-Rise Shuffle – as the fourth international Alvar Aalto Conference on Modern Architecture was called – set out to alter conceptions of tall buildings, a far-reaching aim that drew on Rem Koolhaas's much-cited comment: 'I want to kill the traditional idea of the skyscraper – it has run out of energy.' But although Modernism may be about creative destruction, more creativity than destruction was on display.

We heard about unfamiliar materials – super-tall timber structures and rammed earth; about typologies including Aalto and Jørn Utzon's 'humanising' high-rise designs; and a fascinating study of SOM guru Myron Goldsmith's search for a type that made architecture and structure co-terminal. Among the topics were height policies in Tallinn and Istanbul; a parametric programme for exploring high-rise options in Taipei; and theoretical speculations, ranging from choreography to gastronomy.

But the real message was the need for tall buildings to 'shuffle', or to engage with cultural, social and climatic contexts, as well as physical facts. Gravity may have been enough to energise Goldsmith and Mies van der Rohe, but it no longer cuts the mustard when skyscrapers are being built in so many different environments, and when these, along with economics, are driving new forms, types and hybrids.

Jeanne Gang, the only speaker who had completed a significant tall building – the highly rated Aqua Tower in Chicago – pinpointed the theme. Several consummate projects, notably a proposal to turn the former airstrip on Chicago's lakefront into a lagoon, showed an imaginative weaving of new structures and activities at ground level: the Aqua Tower drew that interaction upwards. Its undulating facade was resolved into serpentine balconies, creating the potential for a vertical *passeggiata*.

Ulla Hell of Plasma Studio showed an office tower proposal in China that appeared to grow, spread and drape like a weeping willow. The intensity of formal and functional interaction that has won the studio deserved plaudits for its ground-scraping Xi'an Horticultural Expo might expand upwards as well as outwards. Another young architect, Marwan Nasri Basmaji exhibited a speculative proposal for a burial tower for the three monotheistic religions in Jerusalem. Based on the dual realisation that land in Jerusalem is contested, and that enemies tend to be a little nicer to each other by gravesides, he suggested height as a solution to the practical problem of space and the political one of difference, with all sorts of ingenious systems of movement, people flow and theological nicety. If only.

There were some brave theoretical speculations. Panu Lehtovuori attempted to theorise the urban qualities of tall buildings with the help of GWF Hegel and Henri Lefebvre, before turning to practical examples of the genre in his adopted city of Tallinn. Having had the world's tallest building for much of the Middle Ages, its more recent high-rises have tended to be hybrids, new glass blocks sprouting from existing bases.

The relationship to context might not have been resolved but at least it became explicit. Irem Maro Kiris showed how Istanbul addresses the same issue: it has designated an L-shaped corridor where high-rises are allowed, although those built so far vary in quality. Another reading of context came from Trevor Patt, a PhD student who has devised a 'parametric engine' for exploring where and how high-rises might be feasible in Taipei, taking account of its existing fabric, land ownership and infrastructure. Parametrics, however, only establish a field of possibility: they have not provided a contemporary frame of certainty in the way Newtonian physics has offered an aesthetic as well as a physical structure for Goldsmith.

If anything was missing from the programme, it was a hard analysis of a real high-rise project: a blast from, say, Arup and Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners on the extraordinary synthesis between commercial priorities and structure in the 'Cheese Grater' Leadenhall Building would have been a reminder that money, its manifestations, uses and derivatives play a rather important part in the realisation of high-rises. But the real speculative intellectual potential of tall buildings lies in the way they distort and challenge conventional balances between possibility and responsibility, and this conference certainly opened up that territory.

Hope rises from Ground Zero

Mark Lamster

After 10 years of rhetoric, intrigue, exploitation, in-fighting, bean-counting, horse-trading, design development and construction, the essential contours of what is to mark the site once occupied by the World Trade Center are finally beginning to emerge. It has been an enervating journey, to say the least, and if you were expecting the result to be anything but compromised, you clearly have not been paying attention.

For all the ballyhooed talk of openness and public participation, the transformation of the six hectares of Ground Zero was orchestrated – predictably – behind closed

doors. This is New York, after all, and that's how things work here: this is not a city of monuments and memorials, but a commercial metropolis. Skyscrapers are built, and the first realisation of a visit to Ground Zero as it presently stands is that, above all else, it is a real estate development project.

Daniel Libeskind, the feel-good mascot of the early years of rebuilding, has been dispensed with, along with the architect's masterplan. Once known as the Freedom Tower and blessedly rechristened One World Trade Center, the centrepiece will still rise to a symbolic height of 1,776 feet (the year of American Independence), but is otherwise the work of Skidmore Owings & Merrill. It is an icy stalagmite in the manner that is the firm's signature, a building created by and for men who wear pinstriped suits – an apt symbol for the city's financial district.

That tower is just one of several that ring Ground Zero. Fumihiko Maki's decidedly banal Tower 5 is currently rising at the south-eastern edge, and the adjacent Tower 3, by Richard Rogers, is now poking up over street level, although it is not likely to grow much higher until the economy improves. Santiago

Calatrava's transportation shed, next door, remains behind schedule and woefully over-budget. Across the street, a partially completed museum pavilion by Snøhetta, a beached relic from the Decon era, will lead to cultural exhibits in the cavernous depths beneath the memorial plaza, their content still the subject of hot contention.

At the heart of the site is Michael Arad's memorial, dramatically different in final execution than in his competition-winning design entry of 2003. That original proposal sensibly wiped the site clear of Libeskind's intrusions, restored the memorial plaza to street level, and placed a pair of reflecting pools at the footprints of the destroyed towers. The memorial spaces were to be beneath these pools. 'Visitors are removed from the sights and sounds of the city and immersed in a cool darkness,' said Arad. The names of the dead would be inscribed on ledges facing veils of water cascading into square catchment basins.

Arad's underground chambers were fatally flawed from the outset – too claustrophobic; a logistical and security nightmare – but at least they offered a sense of the terrible sublime. As it is,

they have been jettisoned, and his reflective pools now sit amid a pleasant grid of oaks specified by landscape architect Peter Walker, who was brought in to reduce the severity of the proceedings. The names of the dead line the rim of the pools, stencil-cut into bronze panels so they can be backlit at night. The effect is impressive but somewhat gimmicky, lacking the authority of carved stone.

The enormity of Arad's black granite volumes, the whoosh of so much tumbling water, and the inherent gravity of the site confer significant and undeniable power. As works of art, they are a bit too literal for comfort – they do not possess the ineffable quality of, say, a Richard Serra sculpture – and their force will be undercut by the crowds who will gather along their waste-high ledges, an endless parade of mourners, gawkers and camera-wielding tourists gazing down, rather than up (as logic might suggest). The shifting human spectacle, ever visible across the basins, will make solitary reflection a challenge – quite a change from the promised removal from the 'sights and sounds of the city'.

'We don't need to set this space aside and make it a cemetery,' Arad told me on a

recent trip to the site. Just how well it mediates between its roles as a centre of mourning and as an outdoor cafeteria for office-workers, will be, if nothing else, interesting to watch. New Yorkers have a tradition of coming to terms with and then growing to appreciate their most controversial developments: the World Trade Center itself being a prime exemple.
☞ **Daniel Libeskind is deconstructed by William JR Curtis on page 116**

LONDON

The legacy of townscape

Peter Davey

Townscape was the AR's great mid 20th-century campaign: an attempt to alter perceptions of planners, politicians and traffic engineers, who had allowed ribbon development, sprawl and inner urban decay. A recent symposium, sponsored by the ATCH Research Centre of the University of Queensland, the Bartlett School of Architecture and the AR, was held at University College London to examine Townscape as a set of ideas. Was it more than a wilful reinterpretation of the Picturesque by Hubert de Cronin Hastings, the AR's eccentric proprietor? Has it had any impact on the real environment? Can it hold relevance today?

Mathew Aitchison of ATCH set the scene with a brisk overview of the Picturesque movement, from its origins in 18th-century English painting and theory (seen in the works of clergyman William Gilpin, author Uvedale Price and artist Thomas Gainsborough) to Hastings' attempt to revive Picturesque sensibility as a tool in town planning. Hastings collected a formidable group of contributors, among others the painter John Piper, Hugh Casson (later architectural director of the Festival of Britain),

The Ground Zero memorial by Michael Arad: the two plunging fountains articulate the voids in the footprint of the lost Twin Towers

CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

the Anglophile German scholar Nikolaus Pevsner, the formidable propagandist Ian Nairn and the brilliant illustrator Gordon Cullen. This team mounted the longest-lasting architectural campaign of the 20th century. Its aim was to free planning from the cold embrace of Beaux-Arts Moderne and to devise new ways of generating cities, partly based on informal compositional principles, which, as Ákos Moravánszky of the ETH Zürich would explain, were first championed in the late 19th century by Camillo Sitte and Hermann Maertens.

For all Sitte's insistence that a psychological basis for aesthetics could be found, Townscape's lack of a rigorous core theory was attacked by young architects like the Smithsons, soon to be joined by the AR's Reyner Banham. Colin Rowe described the AR's campaign as 'degenerate' and a 'kind of visual rubbish heap'.

As Barnabas Calder of the University of Strathclyde astutely pointed out, until the rise of *Architectural Design*, Townscape and Banham's New Brutalism were simultaneously championed in the AR's pages (H de C loved conflict and controversy). Calder argued that Brutalism had a lot more in common with Townscape than its protagonists would admit: for instance, Chamberlin, Powell & Bon's Barbican development in the City of London 'grew from Townscape', with no discernible influence of Brutalism.

In fact, although Townscape was a quintessentially English movement, its influence was wider than is often thought. Gillian Darley explained the links between Ian Nairn and Jane Jacobs, the great mid-century New York urban theorist. Erik Ghenoiu of the Pratt Institute suggested that Townscape's visual approach was to some degree related to the emergence of Postmodernism in the 1970s work of young American architects, such as Robert Venturi and Charles W Moore.

For all its past influence, the Picturesque movement is often seen today as no more than bedraggled clumps of cobbles and bollards lost in decaying 1960s housing estates. Now, when architecture is dominated by object buildings, and urbanism by traffic engineers, Townscape's humanism and respect for context deserve reappraisal.
☛ **Discover the AR's Townscape campaign at architectural-review. com/TownscapeArchive**

The Classical ideals of Le Corbusier

William JR Curtis

It is almost exactly a century ago that 24-year-old Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, the future Le Corbusier, saw the Acropolis in Athens for the first time. This was an essential step in his 'Voyage d'Orient', his legendary journey through the Balkans to the Bosporus and the ancient Mediterranean world in search of the fundamentals of architecture. Overwhelmed by the Parthenon, he revisited the site every day for three weeks, sketching and photographing, even comparing the temple to a machine. Refusing to trap the building in the dry categories of structural Rationalists, he rather saw it as the sculptural embodiment of an idea: a sublime expression transcending all simplified

notions of the Classical. Beyond the object was the space of the site and Jeanneret was struck by the way that the Parthenon was approached on the diagonal then entered from the far end, and by the dynamic interaction of the entasis of columns and the curves of stylobates with the distant horizon. The Athenian Acropolis was lodged in his memory as an architectural paragon to which he would aspire all his life. Little wonder that in *Vers une Architecture* (1923), he referred to it in terms of 'Architecture pure création de l'esprit'.

In 1929, the same year that the Villa Savoye was in construction, Le Corbusier, the pope of Modernism let it be known that 'the past is my only real master'. His architecture was radical in a double sense: both revolutionary and returning to roots. The Villa Savoye itself is about many things – a utopian vision of modern existence, a 'machine à habiter', a Purist language of form, a post-Cubist sense of space, a grammar for reinforced concrete – but it is also a distillation and abstraction of Classical Order and in some ways may be thought of as a machine age temple. There is the ceremonial approach by car, the entrance from the far end, the processional ramp guiding the *promenade architecturale* to the upper levels, and the engagement with the far horizon. In line with his concept of 'standards' the cylindrical pilotis holding up the Villa are instruments of urbanism

Le Corbusier's visit to the Acropolis in 1911 left a lasting impression on the architect

lifting up the superstructure of buildings and cities to permit the free flow of circulation, but they are also surely distillations of classical columns. As usual, Le Corbusier aspired to the type and the Platonic idea.

Some of Le Corbusier's early works explored the classical language and its resonances with the vernacular in a more overt way, guided in this endeavour by the likes of Schinkel and Palladio, but beneath the surface were the deeply embedded archetypes of the houses that he had sketched in Pompeii, the monastic cells he had admired in the Monastery at Ema, and the distilled memories of Greek and Roman ruins. It is these deeper 'mental structures' that persist and return in different forms throughout the architect's life, in the 'heroic period' of the 1920s, and the primitivism in rough concrete of the late works. On the hill top at Ronchamp, we rediscover some of the themes of Jeanneret's Acropolis but in a dynamic sculptural form: the processional route up the slope and around the building, the curved profiles of 'acoustic forms' responding to the distant horizons.

However, the apotheosis of the theme is surely the roof terrace in the Unité d'Habitation at Marseilles: the abstraction of an Antique ruin in 'béton brut' with its gymnasium, crèche and collage of sculptural stacks drawing in the surrounding rocky hills and celebrating the architect's Mediterranean myth. It is when you climb the steps of the open air theatre that the view suddenly expands to the infinity of the sea. The Unité embodied a collective ideal and the image of an ocean liner as a floating city but its roof terrace was the architect's homage to the Acropolis, experienced, drawn and internalised during the Voyage d'Orient 40 years earlier. With Le Corbusier all was metamorphosis: he was like a magician who stole things from the world and transformed them in his own creative universe.
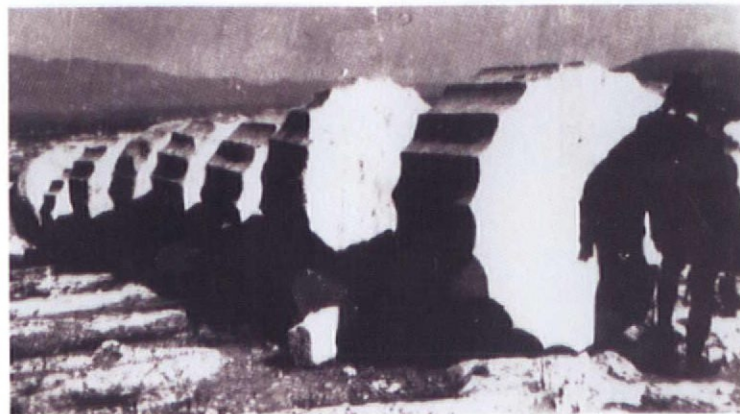
W is for Wall.

The town's image went from Old Blue Eyes to Bright Blue Skies in only a generation, and the W Hoboken Hotel and Residences is the perfect addition to its upscale business district.

On the riverfront, standing sentinel toward Manhattan, a violet dawn reflects off the Hudson. Inside the W, soft violet lighting is cast into ripples of woven metal on the massive interior walls. Stainless mesh, in tension, clads the lobby.

The incongruity is stunning. Gleaming steel fortress walls bathed in a floral hue. A texture of mechanical origin, with an order like the natural world.

Project: W Hoboken Hotel and Residences

Location: Hoboken, New Jersey, U.S.A.

Architect: Gwathmey Siegel & Associates Architects, LLC New York, NY

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Broader view

The only way is up

Harvard economist and author of *The Triumph of the City*, Edward Glaeser makes the economic and environmental case for building denser, higher cities

Great disciplines, including architecture and economics, develop powerful worldviews, and habits of language and thought. These conventions are convenient among our own kind, but can lead to unnecessary conflict when disciplines come together to discuss issues of mutual interest, such as land use policy within a city. What should architects know about how economists think?

Modern economics is rooted in the Scottish Enlightenment, in Glasgow and Edinburgh, during the time when James Craig was planning Edinburgh's New Town. During that era, about 50 years after Scotland was relatively forcibly incorporated into the United Kingdom, Scotland's thinkers focused on freedom.

Adam Smith, and his friends like David Hume, keenly understood that the interests of the sovereign and his people were not one and the same. Smith saw the benefits of individual initiative, and prescribed policies that cultivated choice. His intellectual heirs continue that focus on liberty, which is also embedded in the US constitution, and another legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment, brought by émigré John Witherspoon to his Princeton University students, such as James Madison.

This perspective may help to explain the different approach that economists and architects take towards building a new skyscraper on Manhattan's Madison Avenue. The architect may ask whether the building will be beautiful, on its own or in its neighbourhood; he may ask whether the structure's form is true to its function, or whether it will inspire or depress.

None of these questions – or any like them – will occur naturally to the economist. Indeed, the economist will ask not whether the skyscraper should be built, but rather whether the government should allow the skyscraper to be built. Economists have no business judging the aesthetics of the proposed structure, any more than it is our business to ask whether people should buy long or short skirts, or read Proust instead of Joyce. For an economist, being pro-skyscraper does not mean believing that builders must erect higher structures or that people should live in elegant eyries. When an economist is pro-skyscraper, he or she thinks that public policy shouldn't excessively bar height.

Of course, economics does not automatically imply that developers should be free to choose the height they prefer for either financial or aesthetic reasons. When an action, such as building a skyscraper, imposes costs upon third parties (which economists call externalities), there is a case for public regulation or taxation. For example, many economists, including myself, believe that energy-users should pay a carbon tax roughly proportional to the environmental damage they cause. Our theorems and proofs only suggest that freedom achieves good outcomes when individuals pay for the full social costs of their actions, and a carbon tax is a way of making sure that drivers pay those costs.

Skyscrapers may also impose costs on third parties. Some views may be blocked. City streets may become congested. An older building, which brings delight to millions, may be destroyed by new development. One approach to these costs, which are not naturally paid by the building's developer, is to impose impact fees, as in some places in California. Typically, regulation has been used to achieve the same ends, because it is simpler and easier to enforce.

While many economists, including myself, agree that some building regulation is necessary and appropriate, at present, I believe that many cities regulate too much, by restricting land use or by preserving historic areas that aren't all that historic or all that beautiful. Economic theory suggests that the costs imposed by regulation should be roughly equivalent to the costs that builders impose on third parties. My work with Joseph Gyourko and Raven Saks on New York City found that regulations appear to increase costs in Manhattan by about 100 per cent, which is at least twice as high as a reasonable regulatory tax on that island, according to our estimates.

Economists specialise in understanding the larger implications of any given policy, and when it comes to land use regulations, blocking building in one area can have far-reaching consequences. Every building blocked in New York or London means that fewer families get to enjoy living in the city, and that the people who do have to pay more for their housing.

Moreover, the larger environmental costs of local regulation can be high and overwhelm any local benefits. While the activist may look at a successful campaign to stop new local development and see a triumph for Mother Nature, the economist may see a different picture because less building there means more building somewhere else.

The rate of building in the US follows roughly the national rate of household formation. Local activists can't significantly slow the rate of building nationally; they can only ensure that new construction will not be in their backyard. If we do not build in coastal California, then we will build in Las Vegas, Texas or Phoenix, and consequently do far more harm to the environment.

Coastal California is the US's most naturally low carbon area because of its moderate climate, whereas Houston is one of the most naturally high for the same reason. When local land use regulations move construction from Berkeley to Houston, they ensure that the US will use more carbon. Dense urban centres are less energy-intensive than far flung exurbs, because urbanites drive less and inhabit smaller housing units. When we restrict heights in the city centre, we

MATHURIN AUDOUIN

encourage more sprawl and that also leads to more energy use.

Behind the economists' frequent fondness for freedom lies a respect for the wide diversity of human tastes and scepticism about the perfect benevolence of the government. While great architects can change the way the world sees buildings, economists take tastes as given, and try to accommodate them.

Economists don't typically think that the government should be forcing people to embrace more beautiful building, in part because we don't trust the tastes of our elected policy-makers. Some kings and emperors have been patrons of genius, but others have not. Does the track record of public architecture in the US really suggest that our policy leaders are preternaturally gifted judges of great building? Even when respected architects get to make decisions, the results can often be distinguished buildings that are despised by locals, such as Kallman, McKinnell & Knowles' Boston City Hall. That outcome is hardly ideal.

Ultimately, architects and economists have complementary, not competing, sets of skills. The economist is meant to help create the policy conditions in which great architecture can thrive. The economic approach to policy-making should give architects the freedom to take risks and to produce spectacular buildings that are among humankind's great achievements.

My father was an architectural historian, who through my childhood was a curator at the Museum of Modern Art. I never inherited one-twentieth of his aesthetic gifts, but I continue to have a healthy admiration for them and for the genius of great architects. When economists like myself weigh in against restrictions such as excessive historic preservation or barriers to building upwards, we are ultimately championing the rights of future architects to build the structures that enrich our lives and shape our civilisation.

Axor Bouroullec
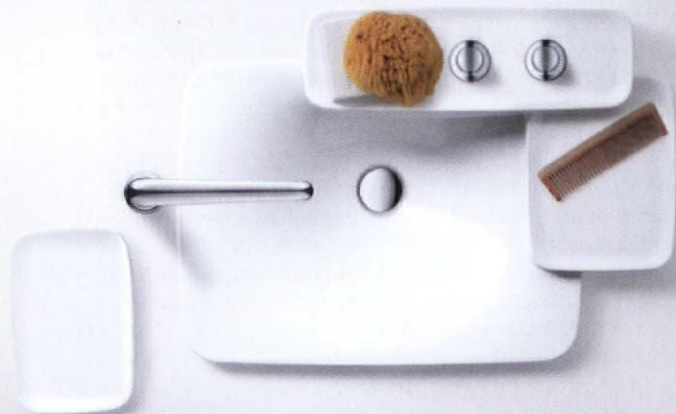
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View from...

The ancient tradition of posting multi-coloured messages of hope and good wishes is upheld at the Tanabata Festival in Sendai City, taking on an added poignancy coming so soon after the earthquake and tsunami

Sendai, Japan

In the region hardest hit by the Japanese earthquake and tsunami this spring, designers are bringing hope to shattered local communities, reports *Mark Dytham*

In August, we were in Sendai in north-eastern Japan for the city's very first Pecha Kucha Night (PKN), an event for young designers and artists to meet, originally scheduled for mid-March. As we got into a car outside Toyo Ito's Médiathèque (AR October 2001) Oshikiri-san, our energetic local PKN organiser and guide for the day, asked if we would mind if he kept the radio on. You hear this phrase over and over again as you get into cars in the coastal region totally devastated by the earthquake and tsunami last March. The radio has again become a lifeline, a dependable early warning system.

Sendai City was in full festival mode for Tanabata or 'Star Lovers' Day'. Hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over Japan had taken to the streets to attach colourful paper tags with messages of hope and good wishes for the future to the huge paper streamers that line the city's main street. The recent loss of so many loved ones in the region made this ancient tradition even more poignant.

It was stunning to see the city so abuzz, so lively. As we drove around, we were amazed at how little damage was apparent from the earthquake itself, a great testament to the building codes we work with here. One floor of

the Médiathèque was still closed due to a collapsed ceiling, but it was otherwise business as usual. In the lobby, we saw an exhibition called House for Everyone, a project that Ito initiated after the disaster. Colourful sketches from students were pinned up alongside drawings by illustrious architects from around the world.

We stopped at several buildings to see how the earthquake's sheer force had damaged columns at their base, rendering many uninhabitable. School buildings were among the hardest hit, and although few collapsed, more than 100 will have to be reinforced or rebuilt.

We took the expressway towards the coast. At the tollgate, Oshikiri-san showed his ID and a permit that allows the area's residents to use the toll road for free for the next year to help reconstruction. The toll road ran straight towards the sea, but a couple of kilometres from the coast turned to run parallel with it. Suddenly, on one side of the expressway there was nothing standing, while dense housing communities still dotted the countryside on the other. Located several kilometres inland, this road and its embankments had acted as this area's final line of defence from the tsunami.

The once bustling port town of Yuriage was reduced to a

sorry handful of uninhabited structures. On that day, five months on, grass was growing over building plots that could still just be made out. Boats, high and dry, still littered the devastated landscape.

But we were there to support the first new signs of life: the opening of an Architecture Café that will act as a hub for the local community in planning the rebuilding of their town. Yes, people do still want to live there, and no, they don't want to live behind the huge tsunami walls that the local government is contemplating. They want to live alongside the sea, in housing communities that stand like islands some 10m above the ground, each with a 20m to 30m high parking structure which can double up as a refuge when the tsunami returns.

The tsunami will return — the community know it. Local records show that such an event occurs every seven or eight generations. They still want to live with the sea, but want to be better prepared next time. Back in the car, with the local drum group still vigorously launching the Architecture Café, Oshikiri-san asked, 'Do you mind if we keep the radio on?'

☞ See the archive article on Sendai Médiathèque at architectural-review. com/SendaiMediatheque
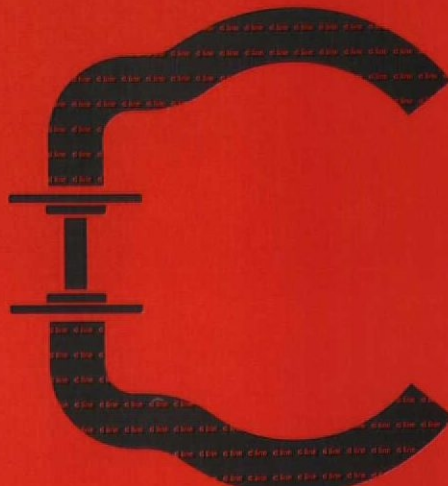
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Viewpoints

FARSHID MOUSSAVI

Parametric software is no substitute for parametric thinking

There is nothing new about parametric thinking in architecture. Great architecture has always been aware of its societal role, and has consequently been informed by multivalent parameters. Parametricism with a capital 'P', on the other hand, dispenses with the hindrances of external parameters and promotes the autonomy of architectural forms. It promises to be a style that invents novel ways of shaping matter to produce unexpected spaces – more than often with dazzling results. Something is wrong, however, as every form emerging out of Parametricism is inexplicably (yet predictably) smooth and undulating, made up of small, gradually changing units. How is Parametricism going to keep its promise?

When I joined the Architectural Association in the early 1990s, John and Julia Frazer's unit was the only one focusing on the processes of form generation (most others were investigating semiotic functions). Prefiguring Parametricism, their best students pursued a detached process of form-finding by writing new algorithms. Conversely Diploma 5, which I co-tutored, approached parametric *thinking* as a way to integrate formal experimentation with performative concerns – form derived from cultural, social and economic contexts. Students gathered information surrounding their project through fieldwork, before proposing a 'program' for generating form. The intention was to incorporate a discipline of analysis, avoiding form for its own sake. This necessitated establishing a correlation between a complex array of relevant external parameters through the architectural techniques of geometry and organisation.

As young tutors, we were accused of being interested in pseudo-scientific data, produced without any ideological stance. I remember inviting Peter Cook to one of our reviews – he was sufficiently offended by our lack of playfulness that minutes into the review he stormed out. Admittedly, Diploma 5 had its shortcomings – it was limited by Autocad and Microstation. The students spent so long gathering data that little time was left to run 'programs' again, in order to change how parameters were drawn together. The method was bottom-up, so students could only control the process and not the form resulting from it.

The world has moved on since our initial experiments with parametric design. It is faced with great problems defined by complex causes, all of which are linked. It is imperative that we cease perceiving architecture as only matter – a plastic art – and revisit parametric *thinking* after our distraction with Parametricism and its segue into formal extravagance. Architecture is a material practice, not a matter-practice. Once architecture is removed from the complexity of its surroundings, it freezes in time, while its environment continues to change. Architects must engage with the physical attributes that define these social and environmental parameters: climate and economics, wood and steel.

These 'potencies' must be considered as architectural material. Parametric software collates this material as parameters so that we can make formal decisions that are *sustainable*. With it we can design not only novel forms, but ones that, for instance, use less material in structural spans, render envelopes more energy-efficient, optimise seating alignments, fine-tune interior acoustics and make buildings responsive to their urban surroundings. Forms will be not be uniform (following Modernist ideals of efficiency) but optimised, differentiated, anisotropic.

Let 'sustainability' not be a safety-check on the architectural process, but a way to design. Today's software empowers us to think transversally across design information and to make decisions based on the feedback loops between formal and functional relationships. Parametric software must be rescued from the enclosure of Parametricism – however spectacular its effects – and put to work producing intelligent designs that embrace the full complexity of our environment. It is too easy to use our frustration with Parametricism, or even the shock of the economic recession, to hark back to nostalgic and provincial Modernism. The world is too complex, its problems too pressing. The built environment and the cultures it embraces require parametric thinking that places material over matter.

'If you really want to see, with your own eyes, a manifest symptom of a society gone wrong, just take a good long look at the Shard.'

Jonathan Jones assesses Renzo Piano's latest addition to London, in the Guardian, 19 August

'The design has been whittled away, until it has become not much more then a big version of a typical New York developer's skyscraper.'

Paul Goldberger, writing about the new developments at Ground Zero in The New Yorker, 12 September

'We thought we had followed John Ruskin's advice: "When we build, let us think that we build forever."'

Roy Hattersley, writing in The Times on 16 September about his involvement in commissioning Park Hill in Sheffield

DESERT FLOWER

In the charged landscape of war-torn
Afghanistan a school is blossoming

3

4

1. (Previous page) the first cohort at the Maria Grazia Cutuli School includes girls and boys, seen here congregating outside the perimeter wall as part of the school's opening ceremony in April this year
2. (Left) inside the perimeter wall, the school grounds are articulated by a series of 'green classroom' gardens that sit between single- and double-height buildings
3. At the opening ceremony, snipers patrol the site from the roof of the double-height library
4. The presence of a Boeing Chinook transporter is a vivid reminder of the continued presence of military action in this region of Afghanistan

REPORT

JONATHAN GLANCEY

A small, cobalt blue fortress set against a backdrop of the Hindu Kush mountains under a great dome of sky – deep blue in summer, pregnant with snow in winter – the Maria Grazia Cutuli School is a dignified, intelligent and quietly beautiful symbol of local defiance. Its two-storey library rises above blue-painted walls surrounding a cluster of blue-painted single-storey classrooms; it says here is a place of learning, as much for local girls as boys, in a district once dominated by the Taliban and a place that has seen invading armies come, fight bloodily, win, lose and go, not just over the past 30 years but as long as history has been written in this warring region of the globe.

One of the truly good works of the United Nations in recent years has been the construction of schools across Afghanistan, although in strictly architectural terms there has been little to write home about. Speed has been of the essence in an attempt to help shape a civic society,

a semblance of democracy, some degree of freedom and the rule of law. Here, though, some 12km from Herat – an ancient gateway to Persia, a staging post on the Silk Road from the Levant to China, and a city destroyed entirely by Genghis Khan in 1221, and rebuilt several times since – is a school with soul and identity very much of its own.

Borrowing from the idea of a regional village, with its clustered and organic – or happily shambolic – plan, the Maria Grazia Cutuli School is unmistakably its own place. Three shades of blue paint do much to bring it to the attention of passers-by. Here are the blues of the summer sky, of local tiles, of lapis lazuli, of gowns and burkas worn by local men and women, whether today or in portraits of time past. The primary school is tucked behind walls for defence, and not just against the uncertainties of conflict but also against what can be the unmitigated harshness of the local climate.

It is a special place, though, not just for its brilliant and brave use of colour and for its

empathetic plan, but because it owes its existence to a specific person and a specific event in Afghanistan's recent and troubled history. The school is named after Maria Grazia Cutuli, a Sicilian journalist who was killed by gunmen while on assignment here for the *Corriere della Sera* in November 2001. Cutuli, 39, was shot to death along with three other journalists on the road from Jalalabad to Kabul. An experienced foreign correspondent, she had previously reported from Rwanda, Israel and Sudan.

Her brother, Mario Catuli, is an architect and president of the Maria Grazia Cutuli Foundation. In collaboration with three firms of young Roman architects – 2A+P/A, IaN+, maO/emmeazero – he has created this Afghan school in memory of his sister and in honour especially of the uncountable number of women and children who have been caught up in decades of war and whose education, especially, has been demeaned and even denied by angry men with guns.

It seems only appropriate, then, that the new school should

blossom brightly in this heavily charged and demanding landscape. What seems remarkable is that it should have happened so very quickly. Workshops involving architects, educationalists, Afghan authorities and the Foundation, among other concerned parties, began in March 2010. Plans were presented in May and the first stone was laid in June last year. The buildings were completed in February 2011, and the trees and vegetable gardens were planted by the end of March. The school opened in April this year.

Construction is simple and straightforward. The eight linked classrooms and ancillary buildings – staff room, secretary's office, caretaker's house and lavatory block – are made of reinforced concrete and solid brickwork. Windows are framed in iron painted red. Roofs are concrete, interiors plastered and painted white. The buildings are sheltered by trees and overlook vegetable gardens – 'green classrooms' – tended by children and teachers. They have been positioned to catch light and shade at the appropriate times of

5. The isometric projection shows the arrangement of conjoined blocks of accommodation, with eight classrooms threaded around the central library
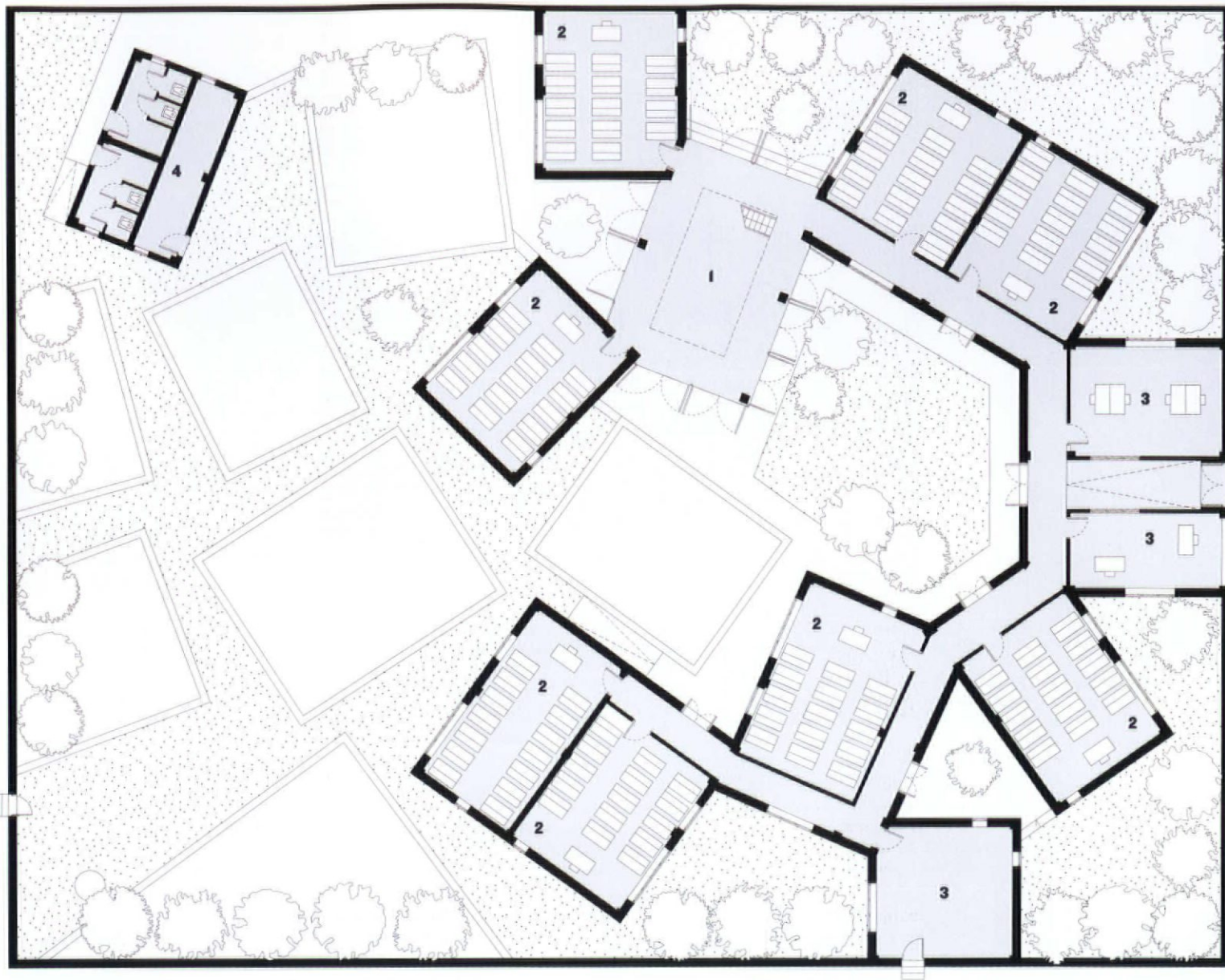6. The perimeter wall is broken in just three locations where it is articulated by bright red steel doors
7. (Right) distinguished only by colour, the school follows the pattern of settlement common in this part of Afghanistan
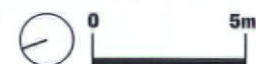
site and ground plan

0   5m

1   library
2   classrooms
3   administration
4   services

long section

8. Excited pupils explore
their new school on
the opening day, here
climbing the stair in
the central library
9. Classrooms are simple
but functional, with
each having direct
access to the surrounding
courtyard gardens

day and to catch breezes in the hotter months of the year. The surrounding wall – concrete and plain – flanks a site measuring 40 x 50m. Construction cost no more than €150,000 (£132,000).

The box-like buildings are capped with hints of cornices, and with their well-proportioned window openings imbue the school with an elementally classical character as if, although brand new, it might have stood here for generations. This sense of rootedness is all-important in Afghanistan; such initiatives, no matter how well intentioned, need to appear and to feel a part of the local culture and landscape rather than being regarded as an alien imposition.

A sign of peace, the school picks up from the surrounding architectural and planning tradition of small settlements huddled, hugger-mugger, behind walls, with a tower here and there rising from their midst. Planned along the lines of such local villages, the blue school visibly belongs to the area, although the clear geometry and crisp construction of its individual buildings suggest a new sense

of purpose and rigour. Seen as a whole, the compound fits into and stands out from the surrounding landscape, a balance that is hard to achieve as competently as it has been here, especially given the truncated timescale of the project. It is clear, from the plan of the school, the methods of construction employed and the unapologetically bold palette of blues, that decisions were made with acute and sensitive intuition.

Ancient Romans had the enviable knack of arriving at an unknown place and planning and building an entire city in next to no time; this took confidence and a sense that things should, could and needed to be done there and then. Just such conditions prevail in Afghanistan today: things – including new schools – need to happen at a finger-snapping pace to save further avoidable conflict. Such timescales lead all too often to overly involved decision-making, or lack of it. Here, on the fringe of Herat, the opposite has been true; the result is heartening.

As the architects themselves say, the school does not claim to solve major problems of the day

by applying political theories and utopian design concepts; its aim has been to meet the needs of a moment. And, what a moment: from the civilised comforts of Rome, architects and their photographers flew out to the opening of the Maria Grazia Cutuli School on board Lockheed C-130 Hercules military transport aircraft and Lynx helicopters, while the ceremony was conducted with armed soldiers patrolling from the compound's flat concrete roofs.

No one knows, of course, what the future holds for Afghanistan. Here is one of those junction boxes of the world where great and lesser powers push through on their way to what they suppose is power and glory, yet is more often than not hubris, and an immense loss of life. Here, though, in the long shadow of age-old conflict and the even longer shadows of the enveloping Hindu Kush mountains, is one small outpost demonstrating, vividly, what architects can bring to countries like this, at low cost, at remarkable speed and in what can appear to be the least propitious circumstances.
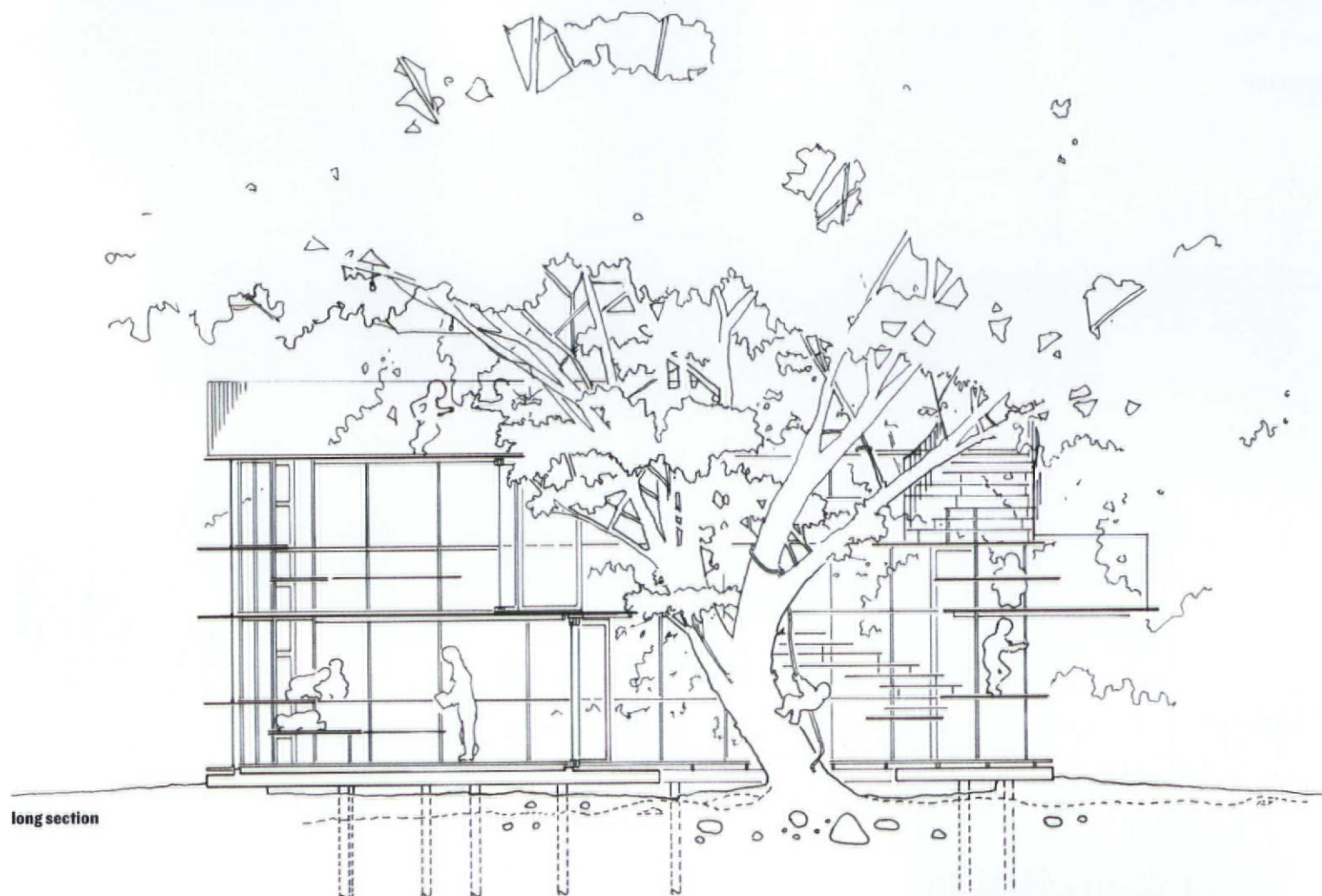
CADET BRANCH

Embracing an ancient Japanese zelkova, the Ring Around a Tree School is a stimulating enclave for learning and play

Ring Around a Tree School Tachikawa, Tokyo, Japan, Tezuka Architects

long section

PETER COOK

The Fuji Kindergarten (AR August 2007) in the Tokyo suburb of Tachikawa combines some charmed circumstances – which is not to deny its unquestioned quality as a building.

First – a pair of architects: Takaharu and Yui Tezuka, who are at that interesting stage in their development whereby a sufficiently identifiable set of responses (we might call them mannerisms) have settled to give their work a confidence and a staying power that contrasts with some of their contemporaries in Tokyo – who opt for the hard and the cool. Theirs is somehow an older, more direct, less gimmicky, more friendly architecture.

Second – an unusual and charismatic client: Sekiichi Kato, a thinker and doer in the educational world; an entrepreneur-visionary who clearly has a rapport with the Tezukas. A situation that seems to have been skilfully engineered in that very Japanese way of having a Director – a creative go-between: in this case Kashiwa Sato, himself a designer.

Third – a Tokyo site that was large enough to absorb a building that creates a calm and distinctive place – rather than the usual Tokyo insertion that is only viewable from about one-and-a-half positions.

And fourth – the fact that the pair of architects themselves are energetic parents of young children.

Completed in 2007, the long, oval building is very calm. Indeed, its atmosphere and the detailing of the parts, the extensive use of natural timber in relation to white ceiling/soffit and the modest height of the rooms that form the underside of the great hoop calmly remind you of Scandanavian architecture at its best, say during 1930-1970.

Now the Tezukas have returned to complete another building on the Fuji Kindergarten site, an annexe for foreign language tuition that is a smaller and slightly more mashed-up version of the original. Most strikingly, it wraps tightly around an ancient Japanese zelkova tree in the manner of an elaborate glazed climbing frame.

Mature trees in Tokyo are cherished; the zelkova is 50 years old and only just survived the impact of a typhoon, to much amazement. Now it shelters, sustains and gives a name to the Ring Around A Tree School. It's a neatly metaphorical Japanese tree of knowledge (but given the tender age of the pupils, obviously not *that* kind of knowledge).

The Fuji Kindergarten operates on Montessori principles, which emphasise the freedom of and learning by doing, rather than

1. (Previous page) Wrapped around an ancient zelkova tree, the new Ring Around a Tree School is an annexe for foreign language tuition
2. The site's architecture is unified by wooden, low and civilised interior spaces that reflect the democratic principles of Montessori education
3. The timber decks of the Ring Around a Tree School become an extraordinary and lively 'stage' for young children to clamber around fearlessly at break-time

static classroom-based teaching. Lessons are carried through in a series of rooms which offer a greater or lesser sense of control, largely through the various teachers. There is very little hierarchy of space. So the modernist-elemental formula of 'admin block' *vis-à-vis* 'classroom block' is rejected: it is all wooden, low, civilised (except for kiddie sound, of course), yet not self-effacing.

During break-time, the compact stacked decks of the Ring Around A Tree suddenly become an extraordinary and lively stage. The kids clamber around fearlessly, climbing up the tree and sliding down ropes. The Tezukas' earlier experience with their 'roof' house (AR October 2001) and the oval racetrack roof of the main kindergarten building show that children cheerfully embrace apparently perilous situations and relish risk. Although the Ring Around A Tree only has two storeys,

'Most strikingly, the annexe for foreign language tuition wraps around an ancient Japanese zelkova in the manner of an elaborate glazed climbing frame'

a series of intermediate decks form child-scale spaces of 1m high, for the challenge of compressed crawling and clambering.

Even though it's all highly playful – whimsical even – there is a maturity in the calmness of the detail. The balustrades are extremely ordinary, vertical steel at about 120mm centres, with straightforward, simple handrails. A curved ramp-cum-stair snakes up around the tree, directly up to the roof deck. Furniture is utterly minimal, with simple, built-in benches. What more do you need? At work is a knowing but subtle nonchalance. Childlike, rather than childish. The architecture directly relates to the strength of conviction of Kato – who by all accounts is an academic innovator.

Yet I remain haunted by my reactions to this architecture. Surely way back in those less cynical days when educationalists and their architects were truly passionate believers – in the Sweden of the 1940s or the Hertfordshire Schools of the 1950s and (perhaps) still lingering in the Hampshire Schools of the 1990s, when a clarity of purpose could lead to clear architecture that was not having to be rhetorically formal or cool or self-consciously 'grungy': it was simply about what kids did while learning. With the odd tree outside.

Ring Around a Tree School Tachikawa, Tokyo, Japan Tezuka Architects

4

1   Fuji Kindergarten
2   Ring Around a Tree School

5

site plan
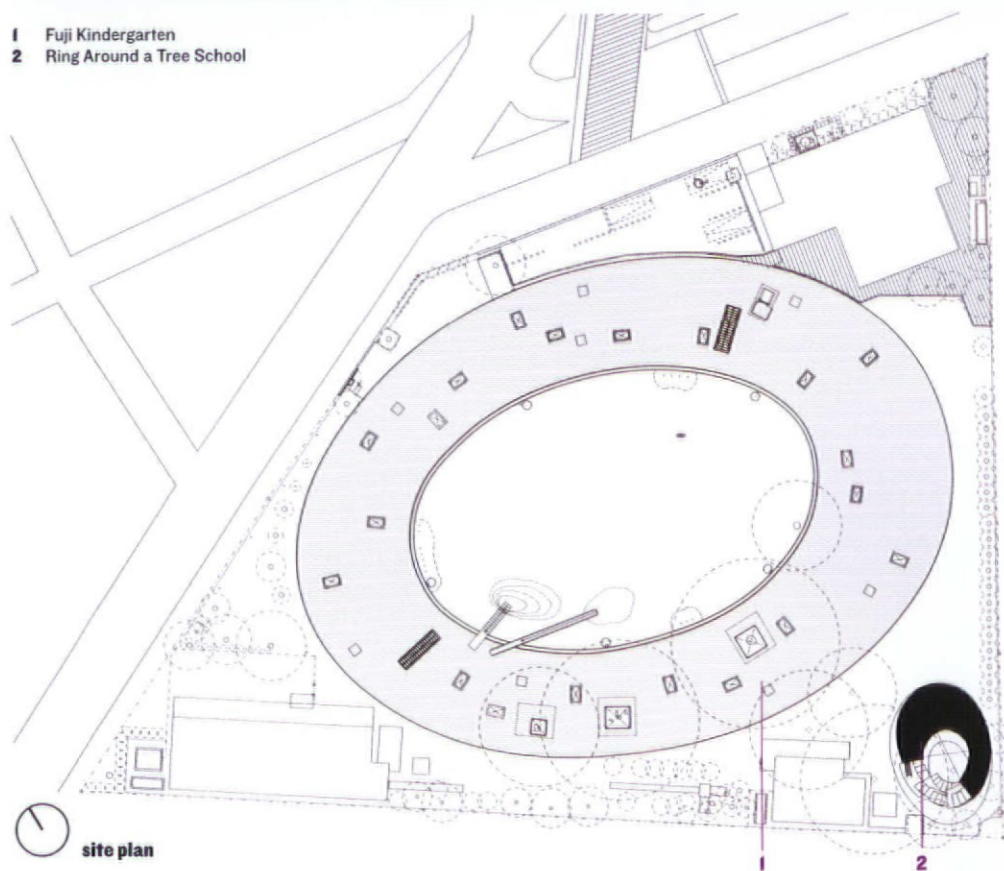
4. The original hoop of
the Fuji Kindergarten
with its inhabitable roof
5. The stacked decks
of the new annexe
have a cheerful yet civic
and sheltering presence
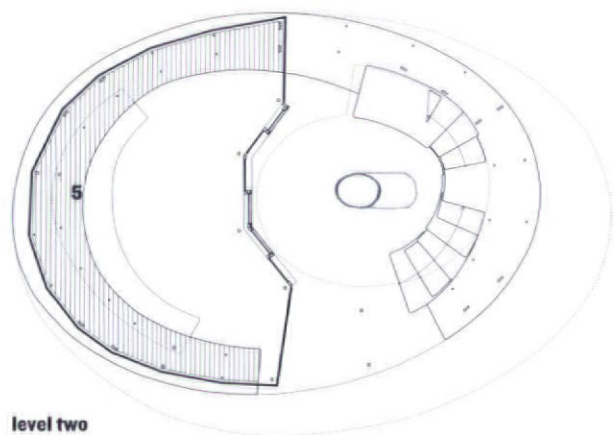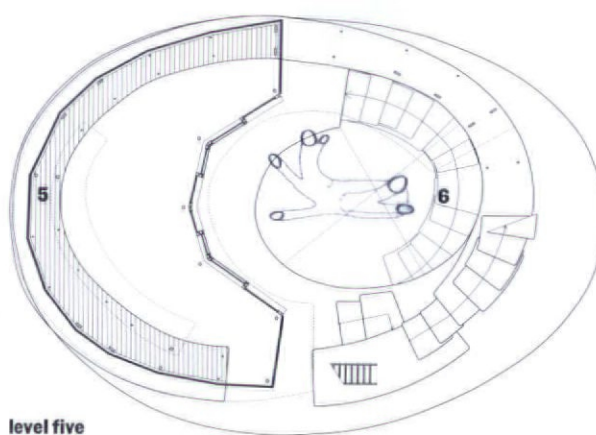
level two

level five
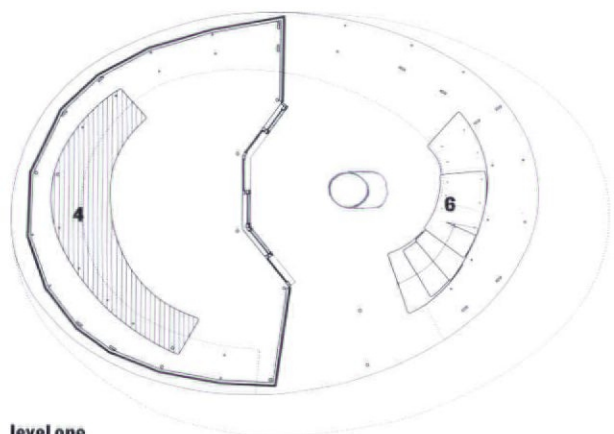
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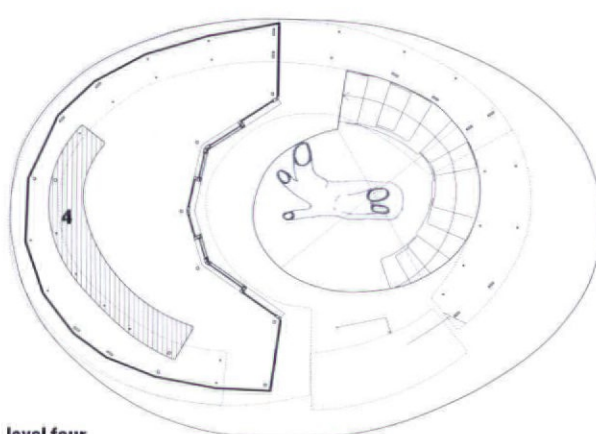
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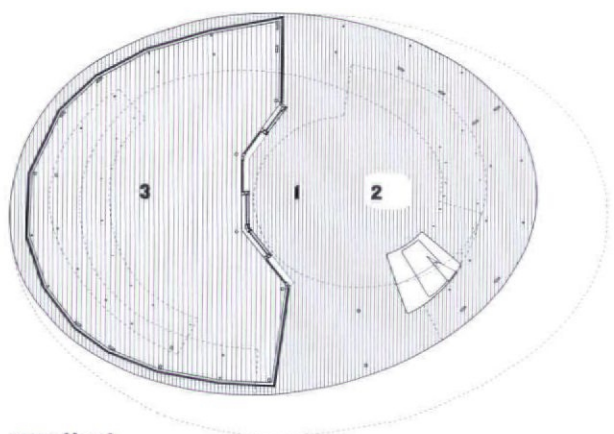
ground level
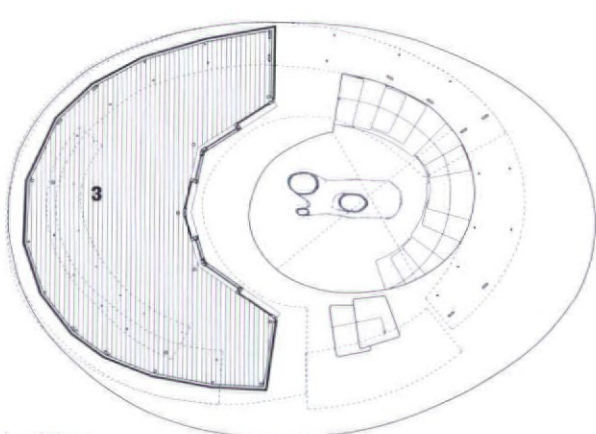
level three

1	open deck
2	zelkova tree
3	classroom
4	bench
5	intermediate deck
6	stair

0   5m

Cité de l'Océan
et du Surf
Biarritz, France
Steven Holl
Architects

OCEAN BOULEVARD

On the sybaritic French Atlantic coast, Steven Holl's new museum evokes the power and sensual allure of the ocean
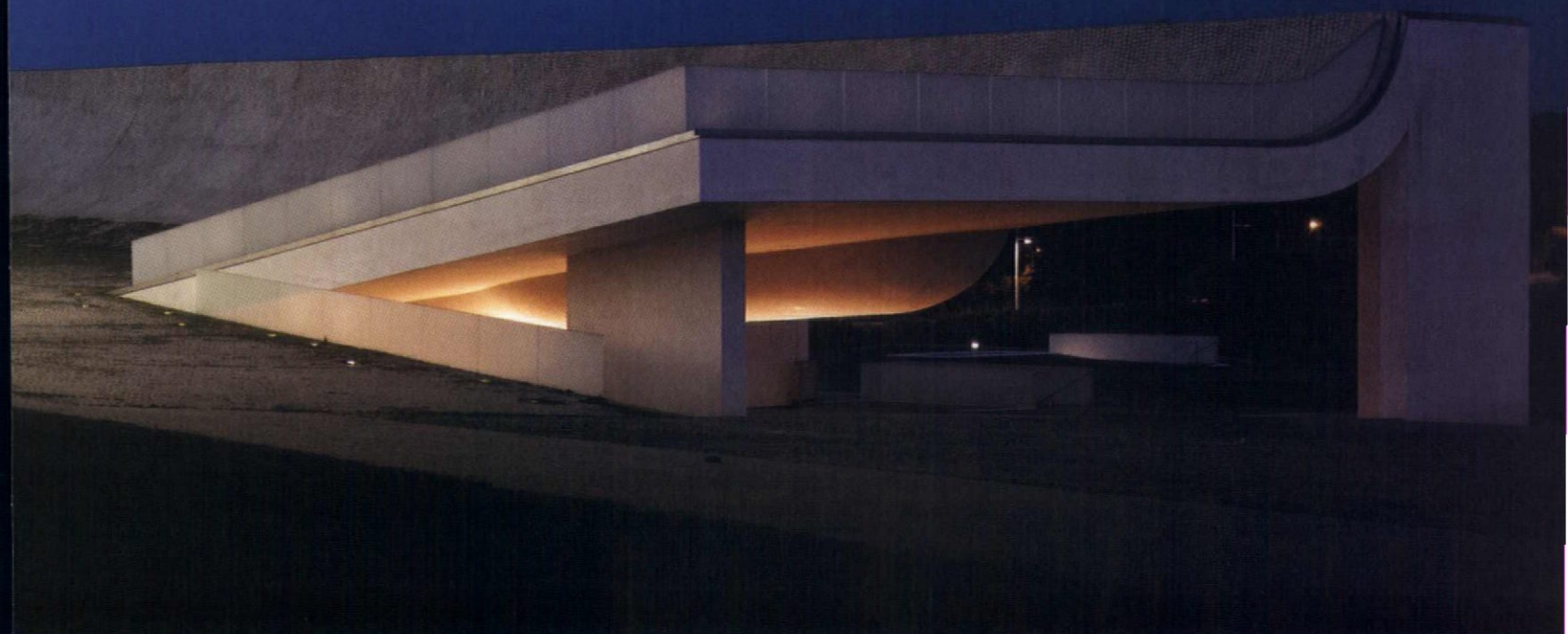
CATHERINE SLESSOR

Set on the Atlantic coast where France joins Spain, Biarritz exudes an air of faded, old world grandeur overlaid with contemporary surf culture. (Imagine *Point Break* meets the Belle Epoque.) In the 19th century, European royalty came to take the sun and sea air, widely thought to have restorative properties. A casino opened in 1901. Beachfront and ocean are still at the core of Biarritz's appeal, and the resort's major buildings – hotels, museums, casinos, even churches – form a rhythmic promenade along the sea edge. Adding to this repertoire is Steven Holl's Cité de l'Océan et du Surf, which opened at the end of June, six years after Holl won a competition for the commission. The site lies at the southern end of the town's main stretch of beaches, sandwiched between tracts of low-rise surburban housing and a golf course.

Topographically melding with the landscape, the Cité is a museum of oceanography, exploring themes of science, ecology and leisure that expand the remit of Biarritz's more conventional marine life centre. The choice of the soubriquet 'Cité', rather than 'Musée', anticipates how this as yet isolated fragment in picturesque beach suburbia has the potential to set up an engagement with the town, ostensibly forming a new locus of cultural and architectural gravity. But for now you get the strong sense that the action is still elsewhere.

'Under the sky/under the sea' is the conceptual essence of the project, exquisitely encapsulated in Holl's haiku-like watercolours of a concave gathering place fixed on the distant horizon ('under the sky'). Resembling a frozen wave, this warped structure also creates a convex ceiling enclosing a series of subterranean exhibition spaces ('under the sea'). Two thirds of the museum is, in fact, underground, a move that cultivates the necessary sense of mystique, while deferring to the modest scale of its surroundings. It also serves to reduce the building's energy consumption, with the ground acting as a natural source of insulation and cooling.

During the project's gestation, the exhibition content shifted from an emphasis on freewheeling surf culture to more serious aspects of marine ecology, but that energising sense of physical engagement with the sea is still palpable in the wave-like forms of the architecture. It's an abstract seascape embedded in the landscape – a mesmeric swell of concrete surging around two glass rocks. Below ground, a huge cave is washed by soft Atlantic light captured and reflected down into the depths by the swelling undercroft.
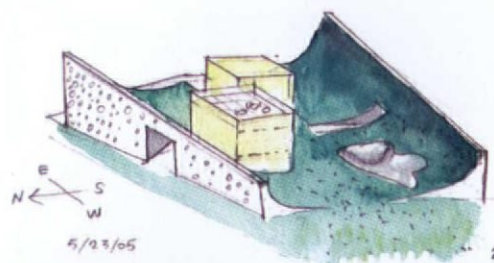
1. (Previous page) melding with the terrain, the new museum is conceived as a muscular concrete wave surging around a pair of glass rocks. At night the glazed pavilions become glacially glowing Japanese lanterns in the landscape
2. One of Holl's early exploratory watercolour sketches crystallising the essence of the project
3. Within the building the concave belvedere become a convex ceiling enclosing the entrance lobby and a series of subterranean exhibition spaces
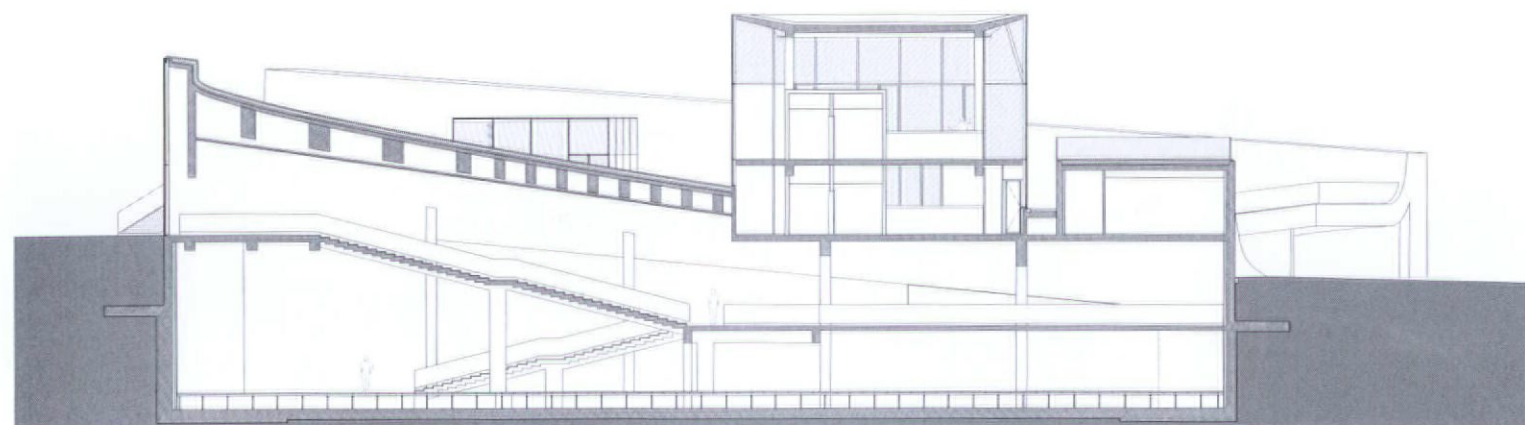
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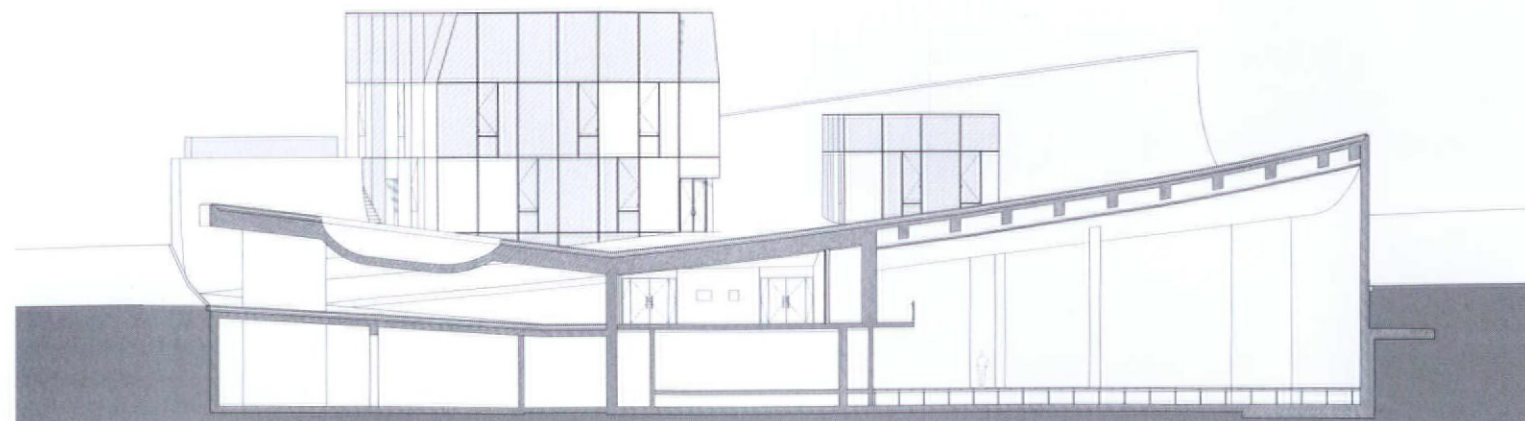
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**Cité de l'Océan
et du Surf
Biarritz, France
Steven Holl
Architects**
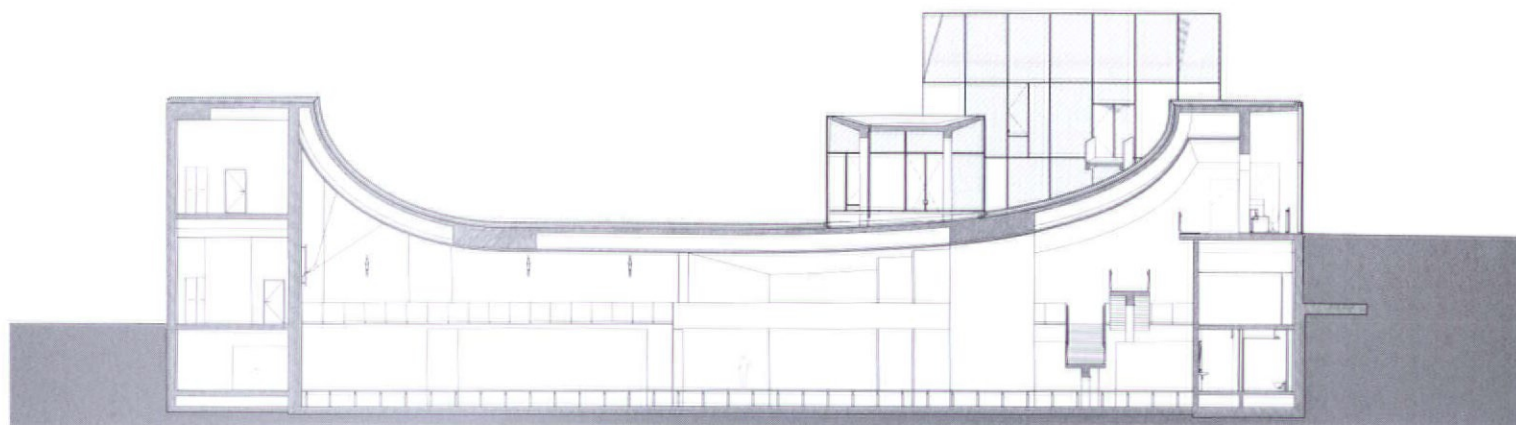
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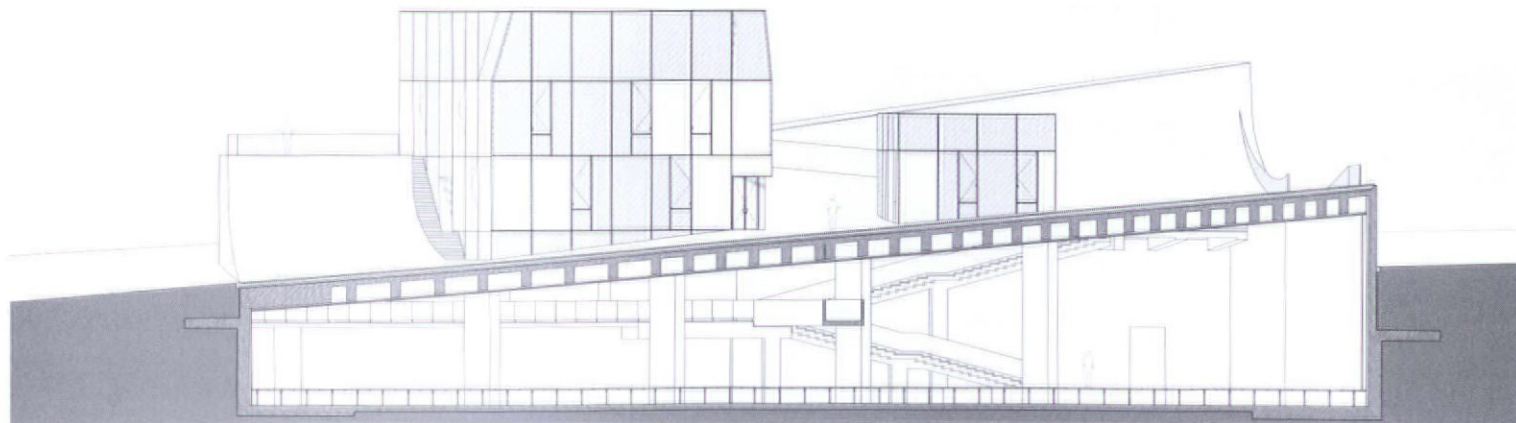
section DD

Cité de l'Océan et du Surf
Biarritz, France
Steven Holl Architects

site plan
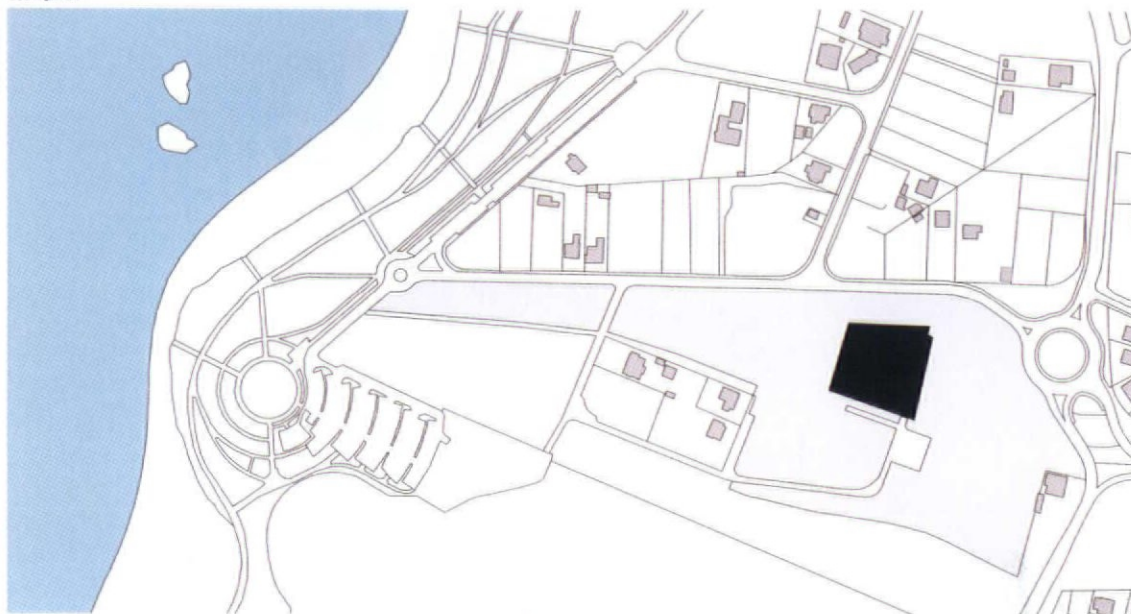
4 (Far left) skateboarders taking advantage of the smooth pool sunk into the cobble-lined belvedere. The curved form cups and encloses you like a wave. Holl is a keen surfer and knows the ocean's power
5. The glazed pavilion containing the café can be accessed directly from the belvedere. Panels of softly opalescent glass are held in a slim steel strapping
6. The surfers' pavilion fixed on the distant horizon. Translucent glass balustrades dematerialise the edge of the belvedere

'Instead of a building type', says Holl, 'it is a place of shifting perspectives; a phenomenal platform dedicated to a feeling of oceanic space and the immeasurable'. Tapering down to the ocean, a wedge of landscaping establishes the museum's presence in the terrain and defines a site for al fresco events and festivals.

An avid surfer, Holl understands the visceral thrill of communing with the ocean's rollicking power. Such experiences feed through into the muscular yet sensuous architecture, which cups and cradles visitors within the concrete wave. The curved platform also acts as a belvedere rising up to address the site and frame views to the distant western horizon where sea meets sky. This sense of compression and release is intended to suggest the experience of surfing. 'It's analogous to being on a rolling sea,' says Holl, 'when you dip down in a valley of water and are spatially enclosed... then the sea lifts you up and you can see in every direction.'

Protruding from and anchoring the warped concrete structure is a pair of glazed pavilions, one containing a restaurant and the other a kiosk for the use of surfers. These glass 'rocks' are an abstraction of the local seascape, evoking and visually connecting with two rocky outcrops that lie just offshore. Opalescent skins of glass are held in a strapping of slim steel T-sections, like anorexic half-timbering. At night these translucent pavilions are transformed into giant Japanese paper lanterns that glow with

a glacial incandescence, forming radiant beacons in the landscape. In both this and the conjunction of glass with concrete, lightness with weight, the Cité recalls Holl's extension to the Nelson Atkins Museum in Kansas City (AR October 2007). The new part was structured around a series of large glazed lanterns, their delicacy and irregularity counterpointing the stern stripped Classicism of the original museum. These could be read as new elements in a parkland site, while also channelling light into underground galleries.

The Cité extends Holl's concern for exploring the nuances of materials, teasing out unexpected visual and tactile effects from ordinary substances. Tiny Portuguese cobbles line the curved belvedere, giving it a rough, mosaic-like quality, while also tactfully confining the land surfing activities of skateboarders to the smooth, indented pool specially constructed for them. The concrete walls were cast using formwork made from flakeboard panels, so their surface has a subtly variegated finish that catches the light, like some kind of ancient stone, rather than flat, unresponsive concrete. In this there are echoes of the HEART Museum in Herning (AR October 2009), where fabric-lined

'Concrete walls were cast using flakeboard formwork, so their surface has a subtly variegated finish'

formwork gave the external walls the surprising texture of gently crumpled shirts.

So much for the container. The contents, however, are another matter; an unedifying mixture of municipal dreariness and Captain Nemo cheesiness that does little to bring an important subject to life in the minds of the paying public. The commodious exhibition spaces also seem curiously underpopulated, as if still awaiting the main event. The most exciting experience is architectural rather than museological, when visitors navigate the long staircase that runs from the entrance to the main exhibition floor two levels below. From here you can properly apprehend the dramatic heft and surge of the undercroft, and appreciate the changing spectacle of the softly filtered light as you slowly sink underground.

As it turns out, the exhibition tableaux were not Holl's responsibility, but for an architect used to operating in the more *simpatico* world of art curation, who constantly strives to attain an intelligible unity of art and architecture, the grating disjunction between building and contents must rank as a disappointment. You have to hope that the current dispiriting scenario cannot be the final extent of what must have originally seemed like a laudable piece of civic and pedagogic ambition. But at least if circumstances and cultural proclivities do change, Holl's Cité is more than capable of meeting higher expectations.

☞ See more of Steven Holl's work at architectural-review.com/StevenHoll

lower ground level

A

D

B

6

7

5   4   5

2

3

C

A

D

B

C

first floor

10

12

11

basement level

1

1

1

1

ground level

10

8

9

12

7
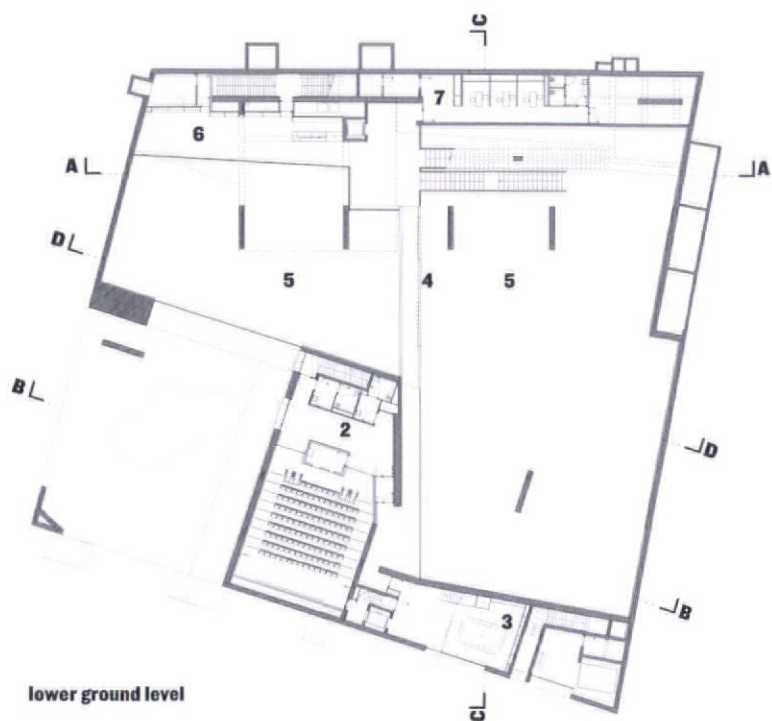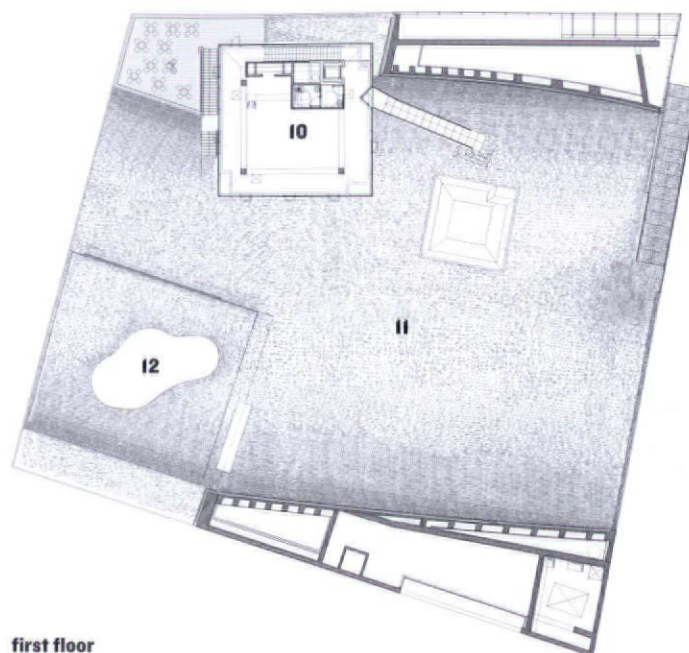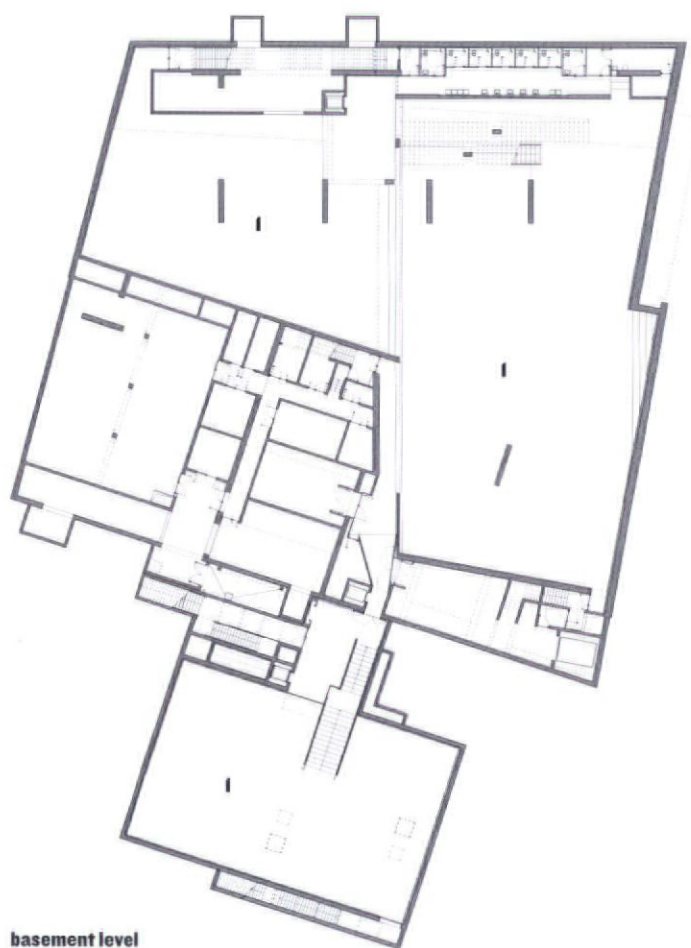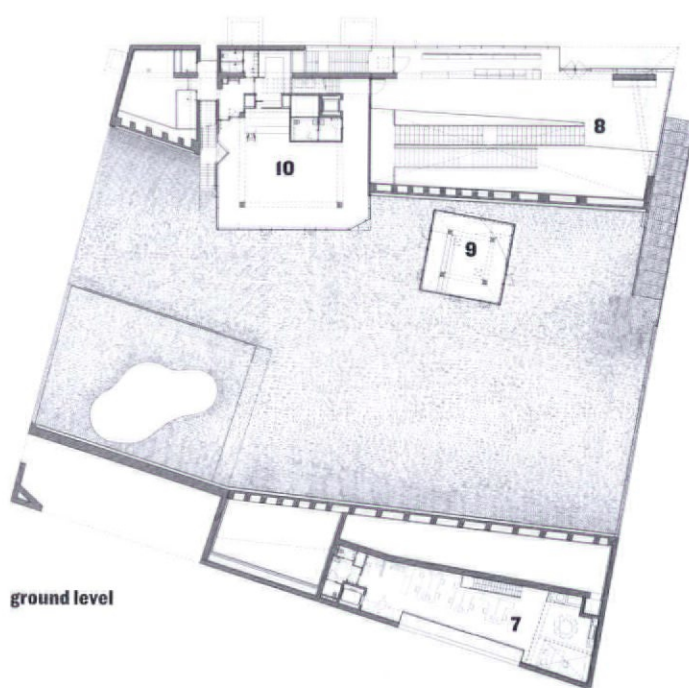
1	exhibition space
2	auditorium
3	meeting room
4	walkway
5	void over exhibition space
6	museum shop
7	offices
8	entrance hall
9	surfers' pavilion
10	café pavilion
11	belvedere
12	skate pool

Architect
Steven Holl Architects
Associate architect
Agence d'Architecture
Leibar & Seigneurin,
Bordeaux
Structural engineer
Betec & Vinci
Construction
Services engineer
Elithis
Exhibition engineer
CESMA
Photographs
Fernando Guerra
7 & 8 Roland Halbe

**Cité de l'Océan
et du Surf
Biarritz, France
Steven Holl
Architects**

0   5m

DOUBLE ENTENDRE

A curvaceous youth centre and a sober addition to Roman ruins explore the duality of Mérida's urban identity – both colourfully kinetic and quietly contemplative

**Perimeter
Building
Mérida, Spain
José María
Sánchez García**

**Youth Factory
Mérida, Spain
Selgas Cano**

1. Skateboarders at the
Youth Factory, a vibrant
suburban forum that
hosts a diversity of
activities, from rock
climbing to street theatre
2. In Mérida's historic
core, the Perimeter
Building forms a new
minimalist cordon
around the Roman
Temple of Diana
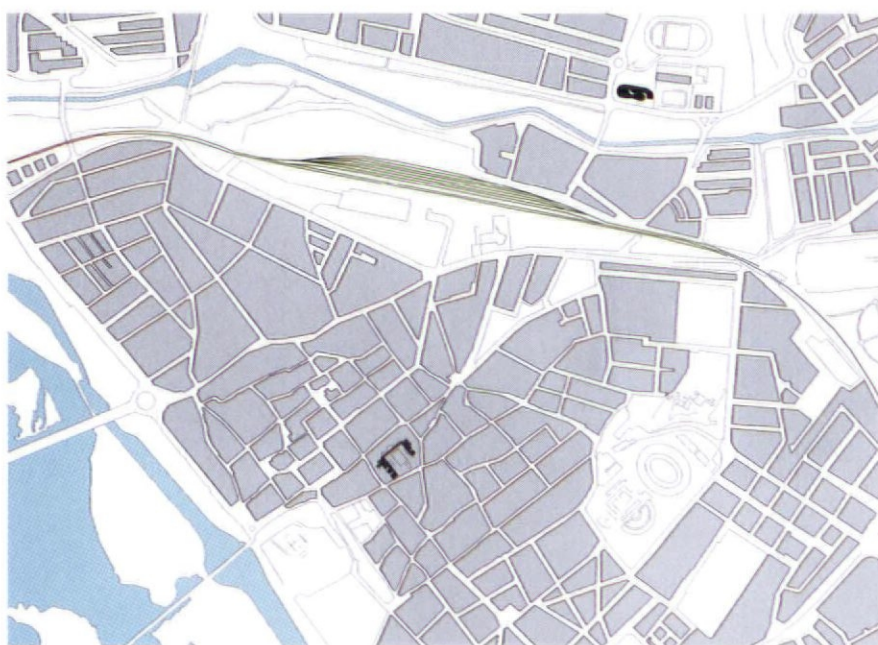
location plan: Youth Factory is to the north

The colourful, blob-shaped plastic 'cloud' of Selgas Cano's Youth Factory on the outskirts of Mérida, Spain, and the sober massing of José María Sánchez García's Perimeter Building around the ruins of the Roman Temple of Diana, in the city's centre, appear to come from two opposing worlds.

Both projects are magnets, but for entirely different audiences. Selgas Cano's Youth Factory attracts crowds of local teenagers: a skate park designed for rollerblading, skateboarding, cycling, wall climbing, dance, street theatre, electronic music, graffiti and so on. For its part, Sánchez García's Perimeter Building creates a dignified urban setting for this neglected monument amid the dense jumble of the old city. With its café, restaurant, specialities shop and cultural offerings in the small concession spaces on its upper deck, and the serene emptiness of its archaeological ground level, it is programmed to serve the tourists flocking to such sites as Mérida's Roman Theatre, centre of a summer arts festival, and Rafael Moneo's Museum of Roman Art (AR November 1985).

However, in addition to these differences in location, use and clientele, the gulf that separates the two works is also generational. José Selgas and Lucia Cano were both born in 1965 and graduated from Madrid's Technical School of Architecture in 1992, and their work exemplifies the exuberant formal inventiveness and optimism of recent Spanish architecture. Sánchez García was born 10 years later and finished his studies at the same school in 2002, and the tectonic integrity of his design is a deliberate reaction to what he has called 'the terrible pressure to be little geniuses' that he experienced in school.

'Society doesn't require so much spectacle,' he told the Spanish newspaper *El País* in a recent interview.

Mérida may appear to be an unlikely place for such an oedipal confrontation. With a population of only 57,000, it is the capital of the Extremadura in western Spain, a poor and isolated rural area. But like other remote regions in Spain, the city has benefited from the decentralisation of many state functions since the end of the Franco regime. Until the local elections of May 2011 that brought the Popular Party into office, the region has been continuously governed by the Socialist party.

Working with scarce economic resources, the Socialists have commissioned a number of works by noted Spanish architects for the city. Moneo's Roman Museum, built by the central government in Madrid, was followed by Santiago Calatrava's 1991 Lusitania Bridge over the Guadiana River, a 1995 administration building by Juan Navarro Baldeweg and a 2004 congress centre by Fuensanta Nieto and Enrique Sobejano. Sánchez García, who grew up in Extremadura, won the competition for the Temple of Diana in 2006; the commission allowed him to open his own office. Selgas Cano began designing the Youth Factory in the same year, after winning competitions to build congress centres in two other regional cities, Badajoz (2006) and Plasencia (currently incomplete).

The Temple

The ruins of the Temple of Diana constitute a remarkable piece of Mérida's Roman heritage. The temple survived for many centuries as part of the 16th-century Corvos Palace, which still occupies part of its plinth. The regional government began to clear the modern buildings that hemmed in the temple, while archaeologists discovered it formed part of
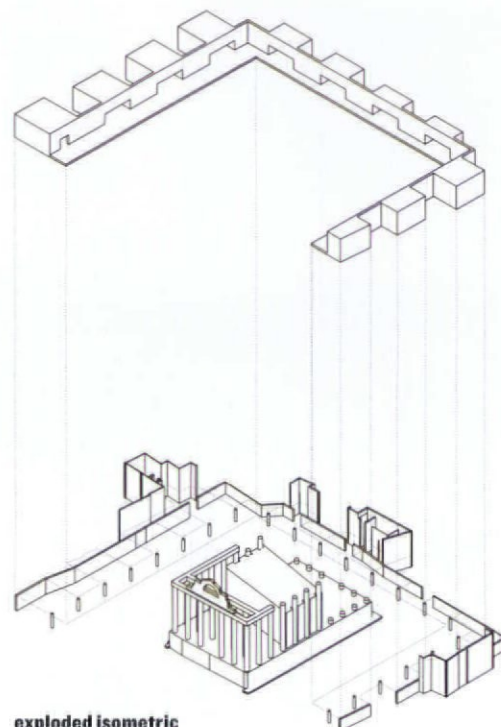
exploded isometric
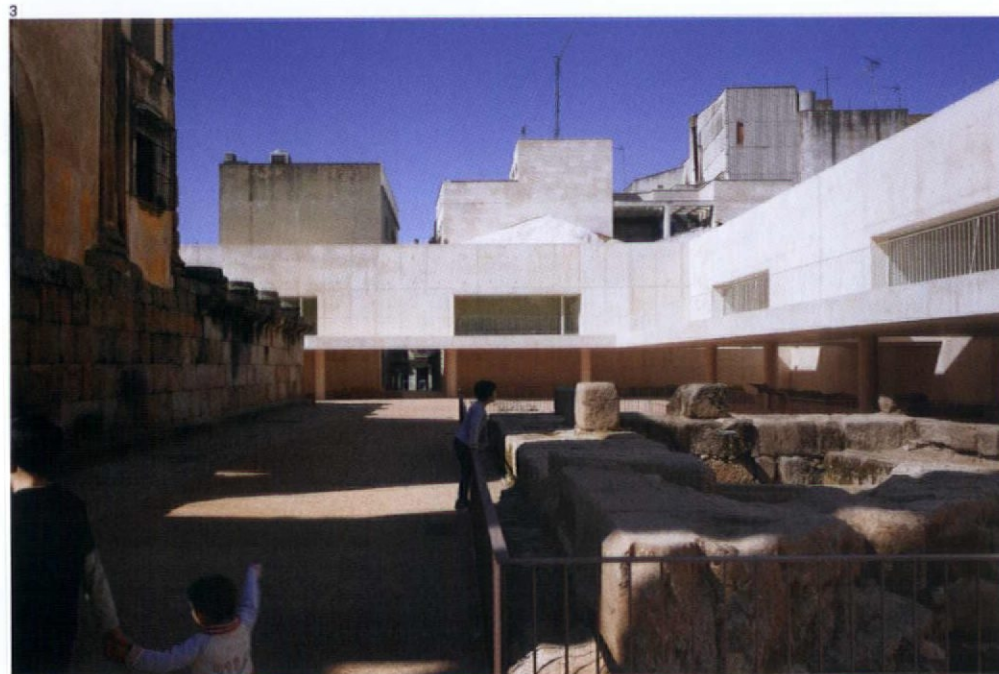
3. The structure creates a cantilevered platform for viewing the temple
4. Voids punched into the structure bring light down to ground level
5. The upper level will house shops, animating the viewing deck
6. The temple is screened from the surrounding jumble of buildings

5

6
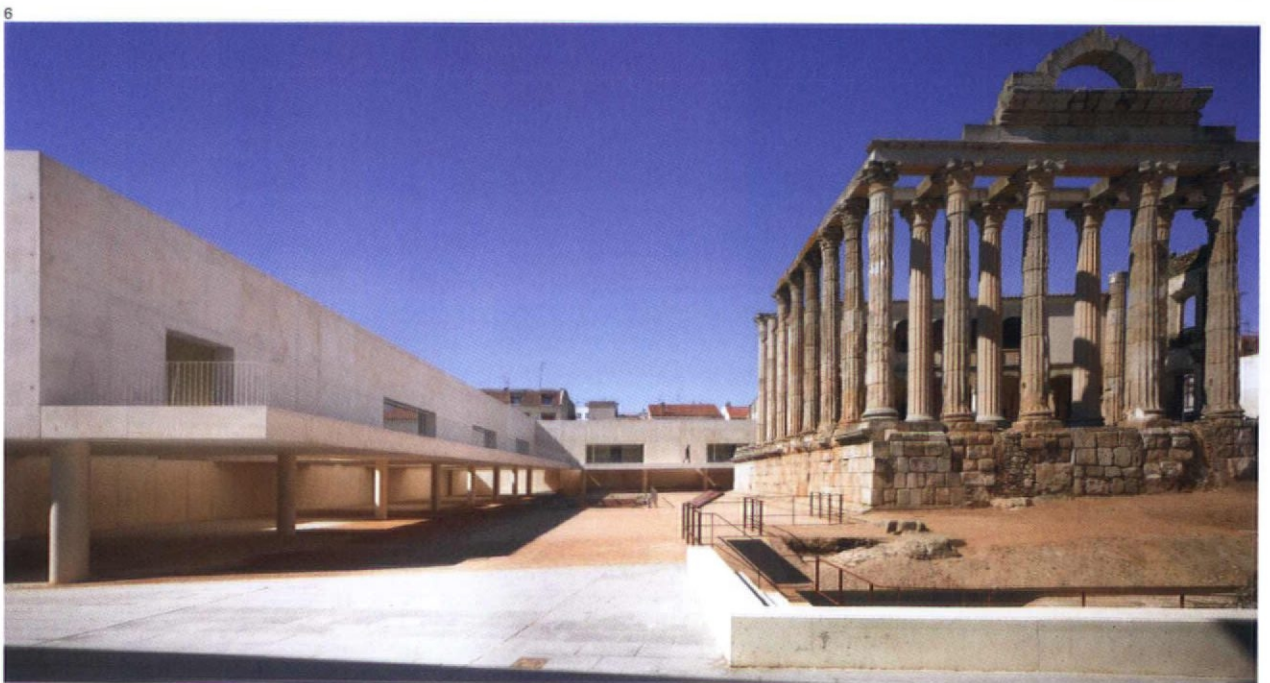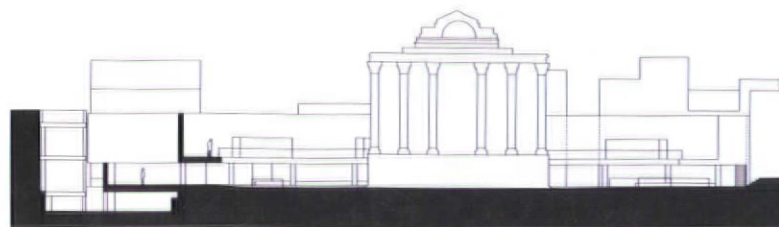
long section

cross section
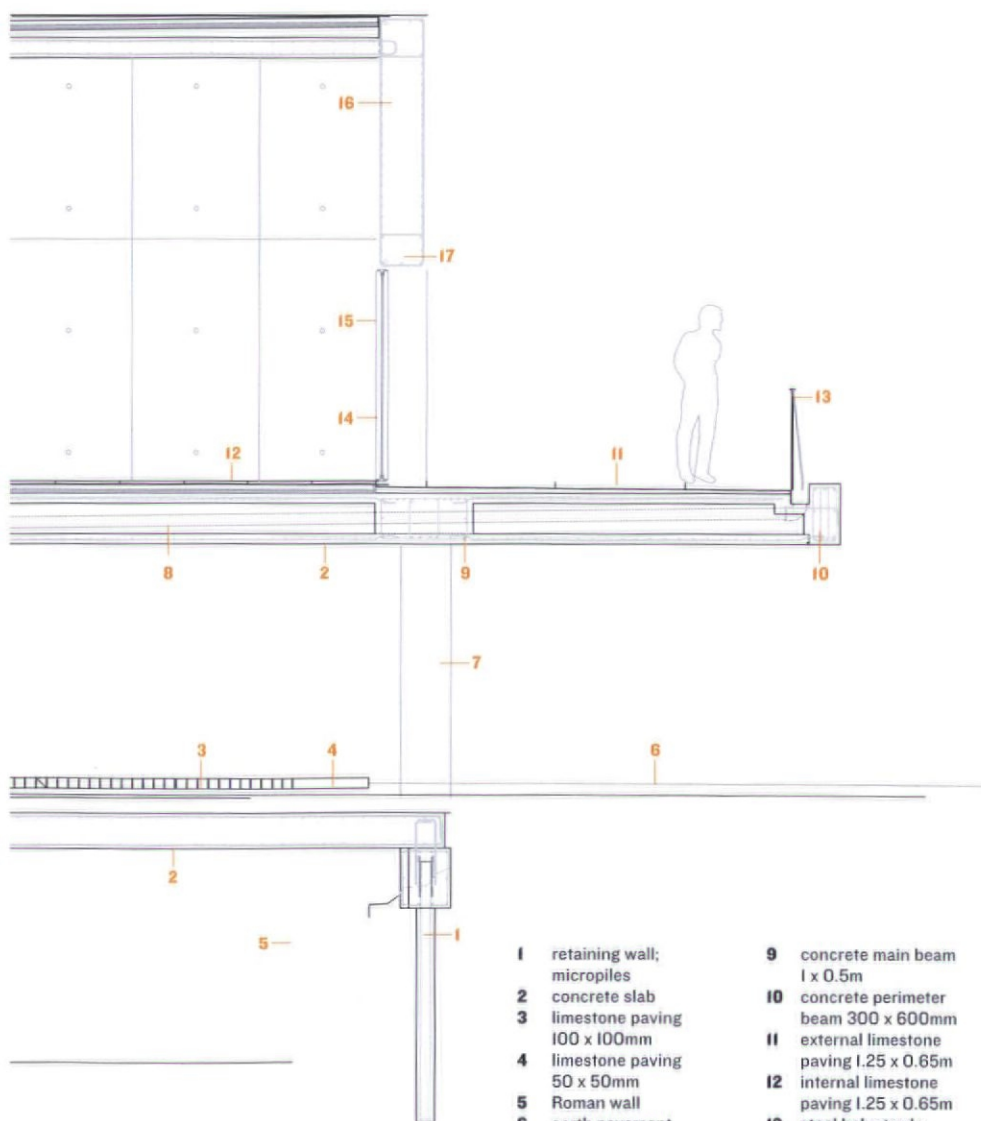
detailed section

I	retaining wall; micropiles	9	concrete main beam I x 0.5m
2	concrete slab	10	concrete perimeter beam 300 x 600mm
3	limestone paving 100 x 100mm	11	external limestone paving 1.25 x 0.65m
4	limestone paving 50 x 50mm	12	internal limestone paving 1.25 x 0.65m
5	Roman wall	13	steel balustrade
6	earth pavement	14	16mm laminated glass
7	500mm diameter concrete column	15	standard steel angle
8	concrete slab; lightened EPS blocks	16	concrete wall
		17	concrete lintel
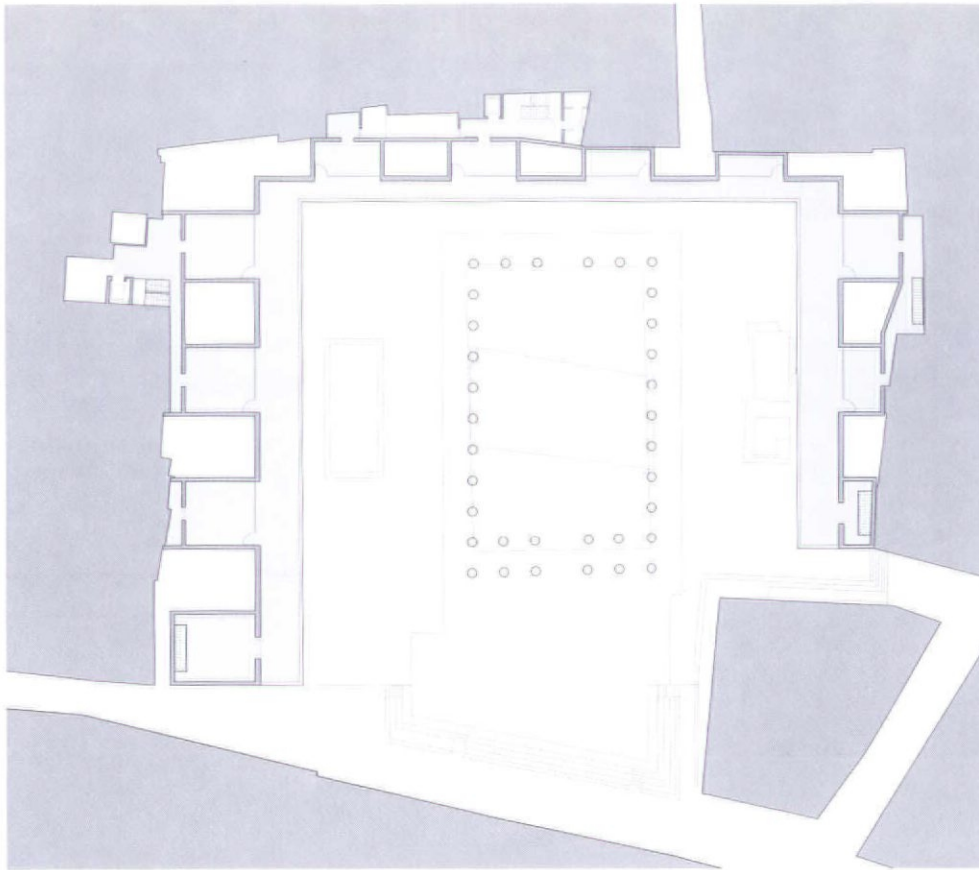
first floor plan
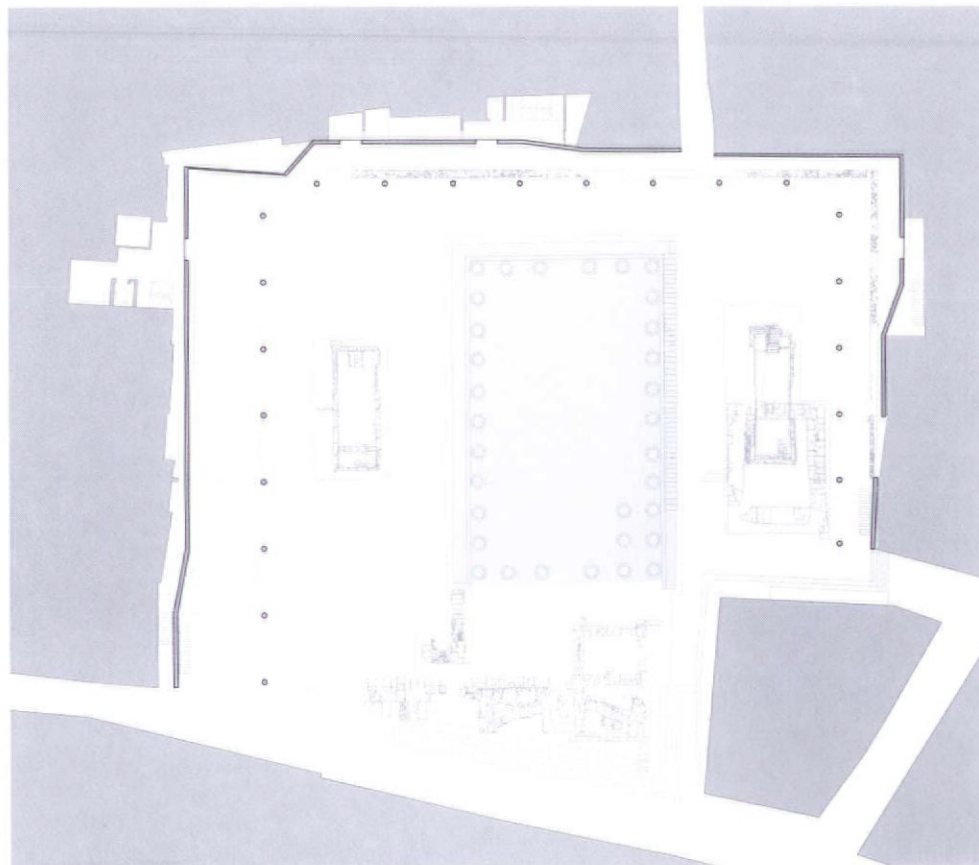
7. From the air, it's clearly apparent how the new building defines the rough limits of the original forum and how it folds around its three sides to absorb the irregularities of the site behind it, leaving the temple in serene isolation
8. The rhythm of solid and void meshes with Mérida's dense, historic townscape, framing and enclosing the temple site

**Perimeter
Building
Mérida, Spain
José María
Sánchez García**

ground floor plan

0   10m

the Roman Forum. Sánchez García's project to consolidate the forum site, and the party walls that enclosed it on three sides after the demolitions, was carried out concurrently with the archaeological investigations over five years. His design thus required, as he explains, 'a flexible syntax that could respond to changes that came up as work advanced'.

Sánchez García describes his solution as 'halfway between a plaza and a ruin.' He defined the rough limits of the original forum with an elevated, L-shaped structure, a cantilevered platform and wall, which folds around its three sides to absorb all the irregularities of the site behind it. The platform is situated roughly at the height of the temple plinth, giving visitors an intimate view into the ruins. The wall behind it serves to 'frame the temple and abstract it from the adjacent buildings,' says the architect. Its regular openings lead to spaces with 4.8m wide for commercial and cultural activities. These spaces alternate with voids behind the wall that bring natural light to the ground level. The thick perpendicular walls between them carry loads from the cantilevers of the platform, which reach up to 4m above the ground. Both platform and wall are made of finely crafted, poured concrete, using white cement and local aggregates that approach the granite tones of the temple plinth.

The platform is accessed on its extremes by metal stairs that can be hydraulically raised during off-hours, avoiding obtrusive ground enclosures. Sánchez García asked the client to leave the ground level free of programmed uses and open to the city. Within the forum's Roman walls the ground is paved in earth of crushed granite, as it was originally, with limestone cobblestones beyond it.

While the structural system, materials and horizontal openings of the Perimeter Building are unmistakably contemporary, its solid massing and large openings to the sky, modelled by the play of sun, shadow and light tinted by the reddish earth floor of the forum, is an evocation of the spatial experience of Classical ruins under the Mediterranean sun. You can't help thinking that the Colin Rowe of Collage City would have admired this project.

The Perimeter Building is similar in many respects to Sánchez García's prize-winning Center for the Technical Development of Recreational and Sports Activities in Guijo de Granadilla, also in Extremadura (AR December 2009). There his building takes the form of an elevated ring, 200m in diameter, creating a lookout over the landscape that is as tectonically vigorous and yet as contextually acute as his work in Mérida. Like José Selgas before him, Sánchez García won a scholarship to the Spanish Academy in Rome after he secured the Mérida commission, but his work was already steeped in a Piranesian monumentality.

The Circus

With its light materials and bright colours, the Youth Factory recalls a circus tent in its open park-like setting, an irresistible attraction. Since it opened last April, it has been overwhelmed with users. The project was developed by the regional government to channel the energies of marginalised urban teenagers, who programmed its activities through supervised collectives grouped around each interest. Due to the city's harsh summer climate, the architects designed a shaded area for the skate park with night lighting for evening use. The three multi-purpose spaces, each about 750m², open to different collectives on a rotating basis. The total budget for the 1550m² facility was €1.2 million (just over £1 million).

9. Wrapped in translucent polycarbonate, the Youth Factory is an enticing beacon in the edge of town landscape. Newly planted trees will eventually grow to provide shade
10. Detail of the rock climbing structure
11. The faceted climbing structure forms a colourful coda to the embracing canopy and activity pods
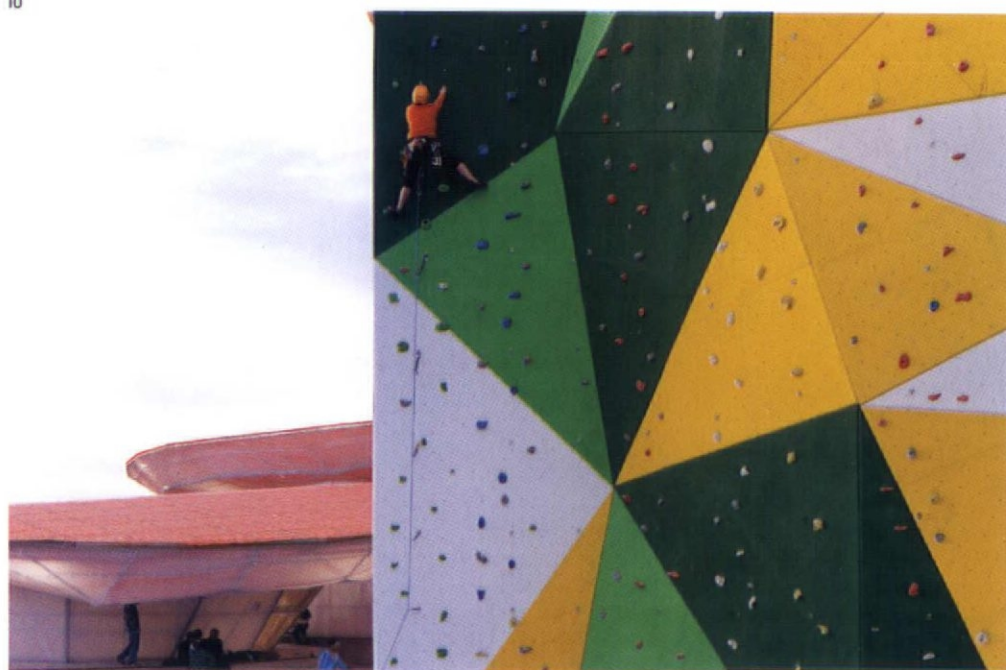
Youth Factory
Mérida, Spain
Selgas Cano

12. The thin skin of orange and white polycarbonate sheeting responds to the complexities of form and results in a lighter and more economical volume
13. The undulating canopy forms a shaded space for activities and socialising
14. Even at night, the building is animated, its polycarbonate skin suffused with light

Selgas Cano conceived the Youth Factory as a large, inviting canopy, open on all sides to all-comers. A metre thick and lit from inside, the roof forms a curving hairpin, rising to more than 12.5m to include the climbing wall. Its space frame structure is supported by the ovoid pods of the activity rooms, together with other pods for offices and services. The open ground level around the pods is a polished concrete surface for skating, with an outdoor amphitheatre in its centre and sitting areas for other activities on its edges. Though apparently open to its surroundings, its site is enclosed in a simple mesh fence with various gates. The architects planted 100 trees around the building for future shading.

The canopy and spaces of the Youth Factory are clad exclusively in translucent sheets of orange and white polycarbonate, a millimetre thick. 'It was the cheapest material we could find,' Selgas explains. 'It's virtually indestructible, and can be shaped any way you want. You just screw it in place and stretch.' The material also allowed for a considerably lighter structure. For thermal conditioning, the double layer of polycarbonate acts much like a conventional ventilated facade, according to the architects. They provided top and bottom ventilation, and extra insulation in the ceilings of the activity rooms.

Selgas and Cano have made plastics one of the main areas of investigation in their work. Their home outside Madrid features large windows glazed entirely in methacrylate; the Badajoz Congress Center has polycarbonate, polyester resin and methacrylate; and the Plasencia Auditorium and Conference Center is clad in ETFE. I asked the architects how they could justify using these petroleum-based materials in a practice that prides itself on its respect for the natural environment and its resources.

They replied: 'The lightest material is clearly the one that has the least amount of material in it, so consumes the least in its production. Glass requires 20 times more material than the polycarbonate we use, and much more energy for its recycling – plastic melts at 200°C and glass at 1,723°C. "Ecological" materials don't exist. What you actually have is the material best suited to each occasion.'

As with most construction projects in Mérida, the building process was prolonged by the discovery of archaeological remains on the site, from the Roman city of Augusta Emerita, a settlement established in the first century AD. Archaeologists found nothing worth documenting, but Selgas Cano raised the building on a 1.5m high berm to protect the site, evenly distributing structural loads over a ground slab without footings.

The Youth Factory and Perimeter Building are both operations of urban conditioning, in which enclosed spaces are secondary to shaded outdoor space. The urbanity of the Factory is more kinetic, dedicated to movement, activity and social interaction, and this is reflected in its fluid forms, where poles of attraction power the circular movement of its plan. The Perimeter Building, in contrast, aspires to be timeless. As a surgical operation on the urban fabric, it belongs to the tradition dating back to Baron Haussmann in Paris and Pope Sixtus V in Rome; Sánchez García himself compares it to the Baroque Plazas Mayor in Spain. But his work does not serve a Baroque operation of representation, creating a space where grand public ceremonies can be held. The plaza is 'abstracted' from the present of the city, as the architect observes, and is a space not so much for bringing people together as for contemplation, in which we observe the presence of others in the space as part of our solitary aesthetic reverie.
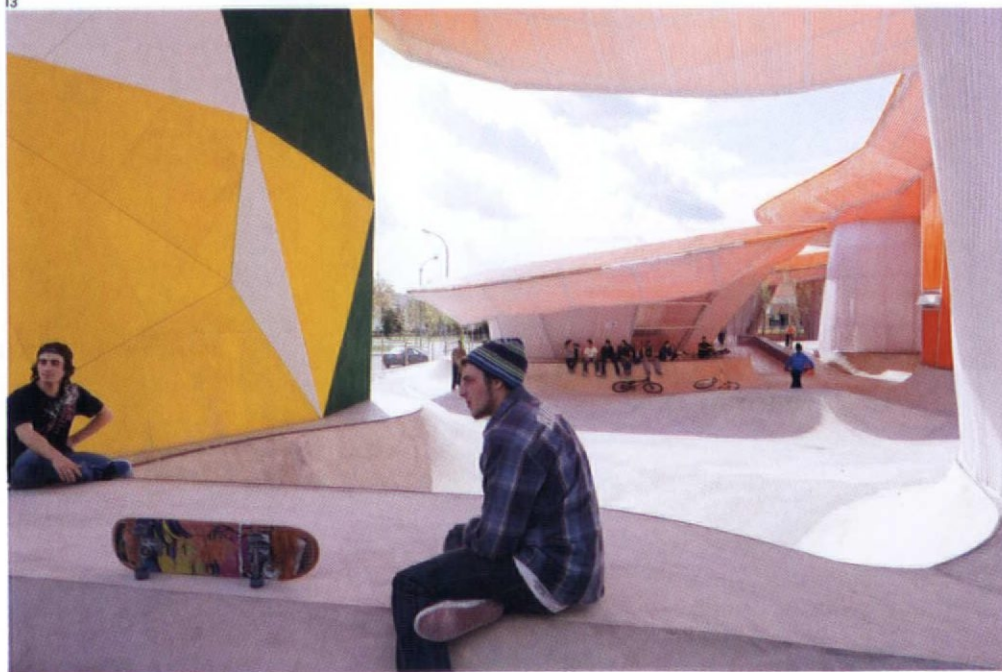
**Youth Factory
Mérida, Spain
Selgas Cano**
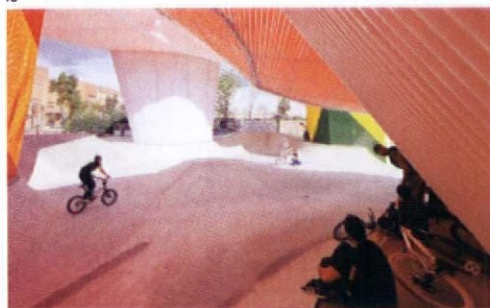
1   steel space frame
2   space frame joint
3   corrugated
     polycarbonate sheet
4   2mm galvanised
     steel sheet
5   steel L section
6   steel channel
7   support for space frame
8   140mm steel H section
9   100mm diameter
     CHS column
10 joint tie
11 pivoting window panel

15. The sculptured groundscape also attracts cyclists
16. One of the pods, which can be used as a classroom, rehearsal space or meeting room
17. The ground plane is a flexible armature for different functions
18. Computer suite: the building is serious as well as sporty

detailed section

**Perimeter Building
Architect**
José María
Sánchez García
Structural engineers
CDE Ingenieros, Gogaite
Services engineer
ARO
Photographs
Roland Halbe
7. Jesús Rueda Campos

**Youth Factory
Architect**
Selgas Cano
Structural engineers
BOMA, LANIK
Services engineer
Carlos Rubio
Photographs
Iwan Baan
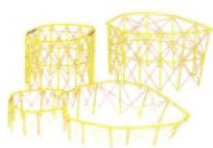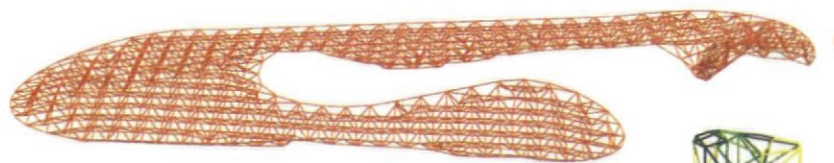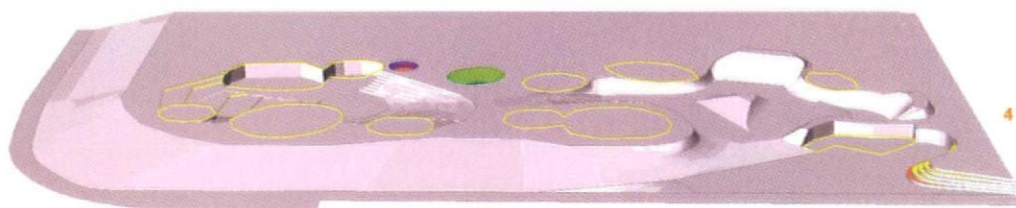
exploded projection

1 space frame
2 pod structure
3 ground floor
4 ground plan
5 berm structure

site plan

0 ——— 5m
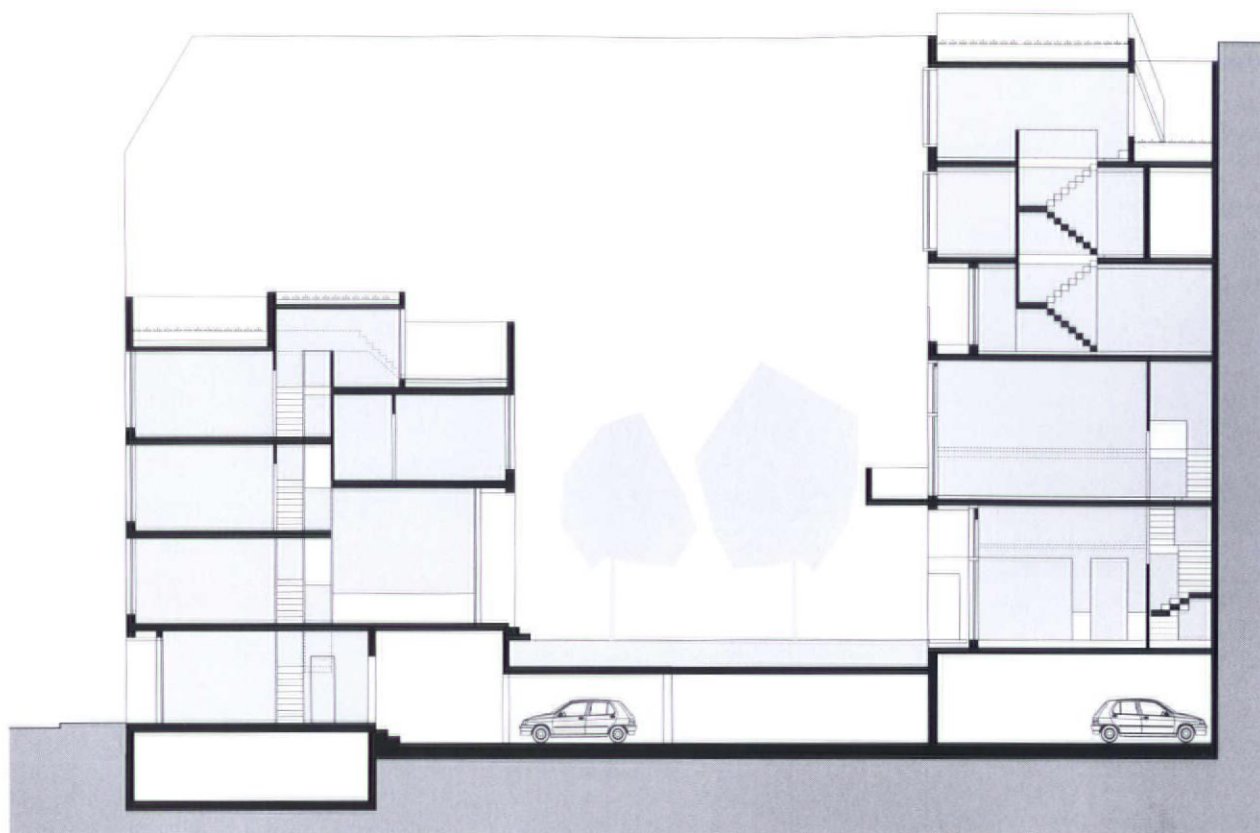
BERLINER FORMAT

The reinterpretation of three traditional housing types creates spatially rich dwellings for residents and a new urban model for Berlin

BIGyard project
Berlin, Germany
Zanderroth
Architekten

ISABEL ALLEN

To an outsider Zanderroth Architekten's BIGyard project in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin, is an exemplar of an increasingly ubiquitous building type: new-build housing that takes its cue from industrial buildings converted into residential use.

In England, the phenomenon is neatly illustrated by the trajectory of the residential developer Urban Splash, which cut its teeth and made its name converting Manchester's wealth of disused warehouses into contemporary living space. Making a virtue out of necessity, it developed a trademark aesthetic of open-plan spaces, generous floor-to-ceiling heights, industrial finishes and repetitive facades: qualities that quickly became de riguer on its subsequent new-build schemes.

While the warehouse-turned-apartment vibe is a leitmotif of post-industrial society, it is something of an anomaly in this particular part of town. Built as part of the masterplan for Berlin set out by James Hobrecht in 1862, Prenzlauer Berg has held on to much of its original incarnation as an organised composition of late 19th-century multi-storey tenement blocks.

Conceived as a working class district, it has historically attracted a bohemian crowd of writers, artists, designers and students – the 'pioneer' demographic that can be relied upon to inhabit, invigorate and eventually reinvent down-at-heel neighbourhoods. There is an inevitable next chapter to this cycle in which the area becomes so desirable that the bohemian crowd are priced out of the market and eventually move on to pastures new. Community building projects can be seen as a show of defiance; a proactive refusal to be priced out of – or into – a particular part of town.

The BIGyard project demonstrates the extent to which this resistance movement has now come of age. With 45 sizeable and spatially complex dwellings and 72 members of the partnership board, the project is an impressive display of both architectural and organisational dexterity.

Yet it is still very much a project with attitude. Its sheer chutzpah proclaims its liberation from the invisible forces that dampen the ambition of the vast majority of housing projects: the inherent conservatism of those providing project finance and customer mortgages and the vast army of forecasters – estate agents, marketeers – whose expertise lies in second guessing the prejudices and tastes of an imaginary customer. Real people constitute an infinitely more engaged and engaging client.

The end result of this collective consciousness is a judicious mix of prudent economy and outlandish self-indulgence. The essential massing and form are highly efficient. The site is divided into three strips – a central area of landscaped space sandwiched between two long narrow housing blocks. The development's external articulation is restrained; the street-facing facade suggests a straightforward gridded structure that belies the complexity of the buildings behind.

Communal facilities range from four guest apartments that residents can rent on a short-term basis for visitors to a 250m² roof terrace complete with summer kitchen and views across Berlin. But the real extravagance lies in the decision to opt for multi-storey dwellings. Homes are divided into three types. A terrace of 23 four-storey narrow townhouses addresses the street.

The 'hidden' block, stacked up against a 22m-high solid fire wall that marks the rear boundary of the site, consists of 10 three-storey 'garden houses' topped by 12 three-storey double-aspect penthouses. Volumetric gymnastics take precedence over the prevalent commercial imperative of maximising floorspace. Living spaces revel in a luxurious 4.2m floor-to-ceiling height. Split levels abound.

**BIGyard project
Berlin, Germany
Zanderroth
Architekten**
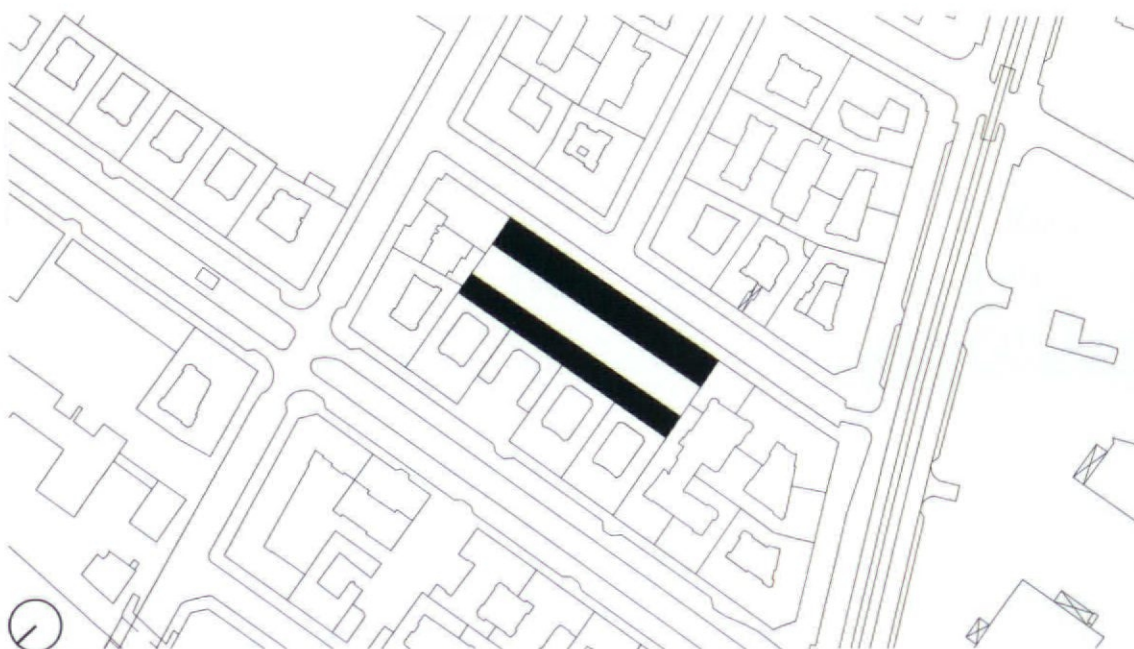
location plan

1. (Previous page, left) enabling the spatial complexity of the townhouses, the strongly sculptural staircase provides a dynamic motif to all the floor levels. There are 'two' ground levels: a lower one meeting the street, and this upper one, which gives on to the rear garden
2. (Previous page, right) cross section through site: on the left are the street-facing townhouses; on the right, the garden houses, with penthouses above
3. Concept sketch of the garden made by the landscape architect
4. 'An air of congenial chaos': while the dwellings provide opportunity for privacy, the shared green space is the social centre of the scheme

4

site plan

⊘ | 0   5m
   |—————|

5. (Right) view from the penthouse, across the roof terraces of the townhouses, to Prenzlauer Berg beyond

**BIGyard project
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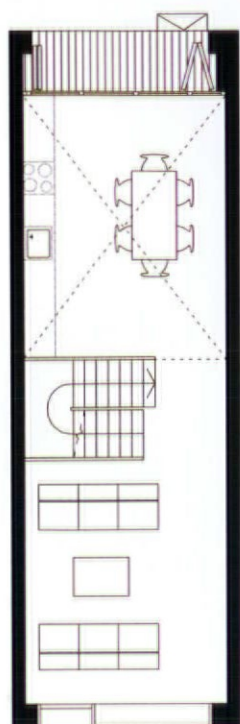
townhouse:
garden level
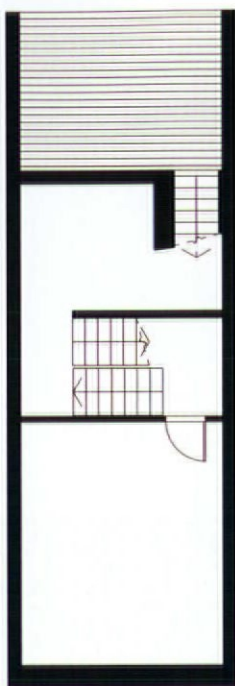
townhouse:
level two
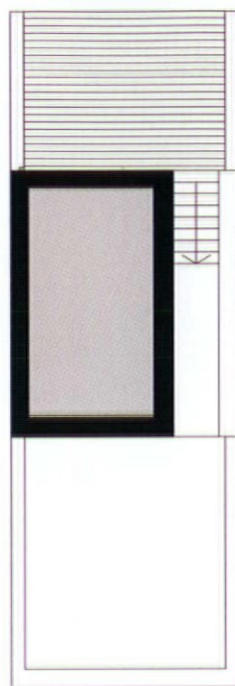
townhouse:
roof plan
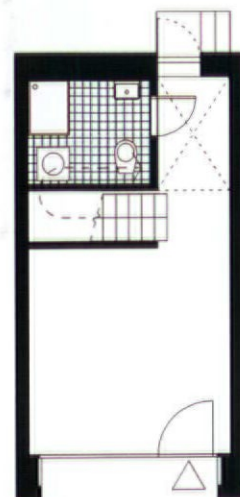
townhouse:
street level
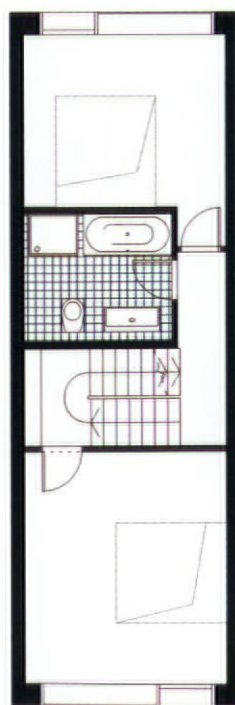
townhouse:
level one

townhouse:
level three

6. The townhouses
offer the scheme's only
street-facing presence, its
gridded structure belying
the complexity of the
composition behind
7. Away from the shared
strip of green, the
townhouse offers private
exterior space on its
grassy roof garden
8. (Opposite) the
garden-facing elevations
pick up the rhythm of the
counterparts to the street,
but have more generous
and sociable openings

0   5m

There is a clear thirst for theatricality, but also a recognition that our houses are no longer simply homes but, increasingly, the places in which we work, study, socialise and shop. A demand for dwellings that celebrate the rituals of domestic life – family tea-time, Sunday lunch – but that also allow for privacy, a change of scenery, a change of mood. For spaces that earn their keep.

The tension between private and professional, sociability and solitude, is at its most explicit in the design of the townhouses, which include a designated ground floor workspace complete with shop window into the street. But it is evident too in the patchwork of studios, patios, terraces, balconies and green roofs that pervades the scheme;

indoor and outdoor territory for contemplation and retreat.

But the project is more than a deft composition of disparate parts. BIGyard is billed by the architects as an 'urban village'; an analogy that speaks of community but also of self-containment and insularity. The image it presents to the city – the nostalgia for workspace-turned-living-space – signals a detachment from this residential neighbourhood; an affinity with those who have sought to appropriate different building types and to change the way in which we live.

For all its professionalism, this is a highly utopian project. Its belief in the value of a clearly-defined community is perhaps best expressed in the narrow landscaped courtyard that is not only concealed from

'There's a recognition that our houses are no longer simply homes but places in which we work, study, socialise, shop'

the outer world but which constitutes the project's heart. This compact space – 1,300m² in all – serves as front garden, back garden, play space and village green; a precious asset in a part of town that has an abundance of small children and a dearth of open space.

Its success lies in its easy ambiguity. Its myriad roles interweave and overlap. Crafted with a faux sang-froid, it suggests a landscape that has naturally

evolved. Tufts of grass give way to patches of sand, aping the natural pattern of seaside dunes; flowerbeds are ragged around the edges. An air of congenial chaos ingeniously pre-empts, and even invites, the inevitable ad hoc interventions and general wear and tear of the environment. An Archigram-esque playpod on wonky stilts wears an air of benevolent surprise – as though it has turned up to the wrong party but is happy to stay.

There is a dreamlike quality, simultaneously evocative of the meadow, the moonscape and the village green. A reminder that, at their best, community housing projects are not born simply of economic necessity or defiance, but of optimism too; a collective crusade to lift everyday existence on to a more poetic plane.
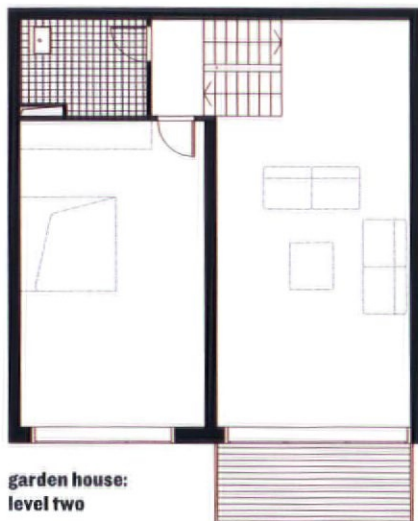
garden house:
level two
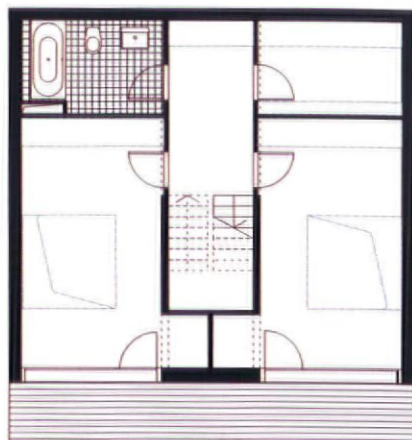
penthouse: top level

garden house:
level one
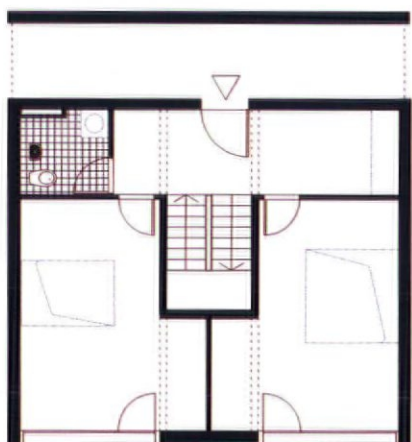
penthouse: entrance level
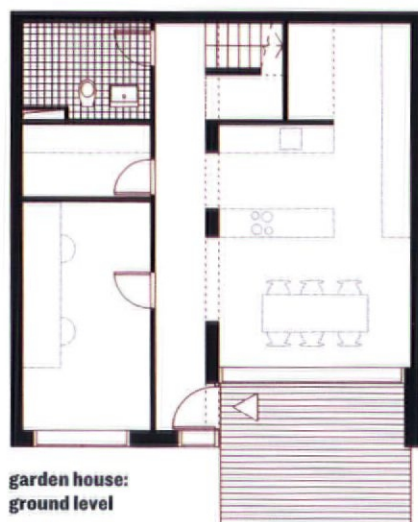
garden house:
ground level
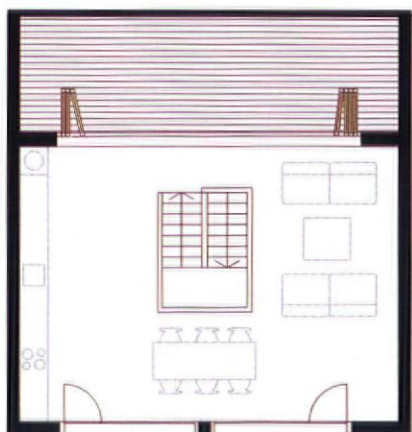
penthouse: lower level

0   5m

9. The garden house gets all its daylight from its garden-facing elevation. On the ground level, the relationship to the exterior is mediated by the terrace, which has an inset front door and a glazed folding wall which can open up the front space. In the photograph it is shown as a single large space, whereas the plan offers a partitioned option

10. The balconied space on the garden house's top level is also flexible, shown here as a bedroom, but as a living room in the drawing

11. The triplex penthouse is entered on its middle floor, with this image's living accommodation placed below (bedrooms are on the top floor). A glazed wall offers views over the townhouses to the city skyline

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REFRAMING PARK HILL

Inspired by Corb's Unité, Park Hill in Sheffield is Europe's largest listed building. Designed in the 1960s by two pioneering architects, it thronged with international visitors for the next decade. Yet as Modernist high-rises and equality fell out of fashion, the socialist ideal turned into a ghetto. Today, developer Urban Splash is animating its streets again with a bold programme

PETER BLUNDELL JONES

Sheffield grew up around producing steel, in the 18th century knives and tools, in the 19th century heavy industry, with a high population of low-paid but skilled manual workers. Social provision was important from early on, and before the 20th century, the city boasted the best collection of board schools outside London. In the era of slum clearance and provision of new houses following the Second World War, heavily bombed Sheffield was again at the forefront, and Park Hill marked the peak performance of Sheffield's City Architect's Office as run by J Lewis Womersley, regarded by Nikolaus Pevsner as an outfit of national importance.[1] Public service for local authorities was then viewed not purely as altruistic – building the Welfare State – but also as exciting and progressive. Park Hill was designed by two young architects almost fresh from university, Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith, but executed under the watchful eye of Womersley and built by the council's own labour force, allowing consistency and control of detail. The urbane Womersley smoothed the way politically and carried the Labour Council with him, even organising a visit abroad to progressive examples, which included Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation.[2]

The housing scheme was completed in 1960, with accompanying pubs, schools and other shared services. It proved popular with its residents, who loved their flats and soon formed an effective association. It was also much lauded in architectural circles, including star treatment in Reyner Banham's *The New Brutalism*.[3] Its size and hillside location made it the prime example of 'streets in the air' nationally, and for a decade or so it thronged with international visitors. Then came a gradual decline as the ideal of

equality was eroded, social housing became the ghetto of a suppressed underclass, and the more active, capable, and employed were encouraged to buy themselves out, leaving the disadvantaged in possession. The political changes enacted by Margaret Thatcher were accompanied by a growing prejudice against modern architecture, against concrete, against high-rise building in general. Oscar Newman and Alice Coleman had their say and buildings became causes of crime.[4] Lack of care and maintenance added to building failures due to unperfected techniques in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, so 50 years after slum clearance, new slums stood again.

At the same time, the reputation of 1960s architecture sank into a trough of despair, between being current and historic, and now much is being destroyed, especially in Sheffield, which has a short memory for its own triumphs.[5] The Kelvin, third sister of Park Hill, was mercilessly erased a decade ago, and its second sister up the hill, Hyde Park, was subjected to a PoMo facelift, which destroyed its integrity. There was a great temptation to destroy Park Hill too, and the site could easily have been suburbanised with a peppering of pseudo-traditional boxes. But it is nearly in the city centre and next to the railway station, an advantageous position with much impact on the city skyline. Furthermore, if as a nation we are to keep any housing reminding us of that era – and some is needed of every era – is not Park Hill the paramount example? After much pondering, English Heritage was bold enough to designate it the largest listed complex in Europe, but what was to be done? Recreating the ethos of social housing in a changed, even 'broken' society would be difficult, far beyond the means of the City Council. Handing it over

REYNER BANHAM

'When one looks out from some part of Park Hill and sees another of its limbs swinging across the view, the effect is like that of suddenly realising that the railway lines on the other side of some valley in Switzerland are the same that one's own train has just traversed a few moments before.

The chances are that the vantage point from which the other limb is viewed will be on one of Park Hill's much discussed street-decks, and that what one recognises on the other side of the site is not merely another street-deck, but another part of the same street-deck. For the ultimate unity of Park Hill depends on the inviolate continuity of horizontal communications; the street-decks make it possible to walk to any other point on the same floor level without ever having to go down to ground and come up again.

But these decks are more than glorified access balconies. Their width is sufficient to accommodate children's games and small wheeled vehicles. Functionally and socially they are streets without the menace of through vehicular traffic, and a lively argument is developing, and will continue, about the social function in particular.' This is an edited extract from 'Park Hill Housing, Sheffield' by Reyner Banham. Read the full version at architectural-review.com/ParkHillArchive

3

2

1. (Previous page) aerial photograph of Park Hill soon after construction, as seen from the south, with industrial parts of the city beyond. The railway station is just out of shot (bottom left). The blocks rise to the same horizontal level, but increase in height as the hill falls away 2. Site plan published in the Sheffield issue of *Architectural Design* in September 1961, showing relation of Park Hill (lower right of centre) to city centre (left). Town hall, cathedral and city hall are outlined in black (left),

but it is the Modernist buildings that are blacked in: the new high-rise market (centre), polytechnic (lower centre), Park Hill (right) and Hyde Park (far right). Equally crucial is the new ring road (streets bordered in black), counterpart of the pedestrian segregation of 'streets in the air'. Contours show topography along with two rivers: loop of Don at the top and buried Sheaf as a dotted line 3. Reyner Banham's critical essay 'Park Hill Housing, Sheffield', in *The Architectural Review*, published in December 1961
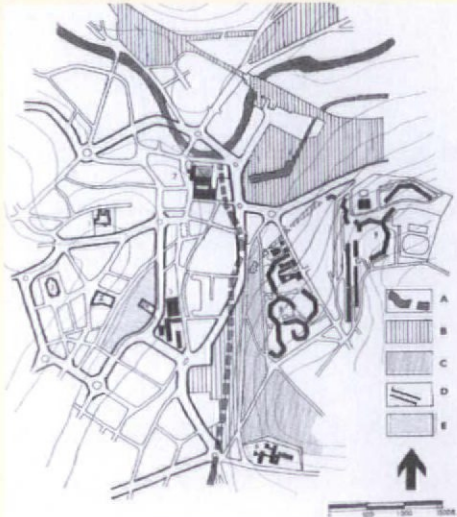
4. The size and hillside location of Park Hill made the complex a prime national example of 'streets in the air' when built in 1961
5. Lack of maintenance added to the building's erosion, documented in a photograph by Keith Collie in 2008
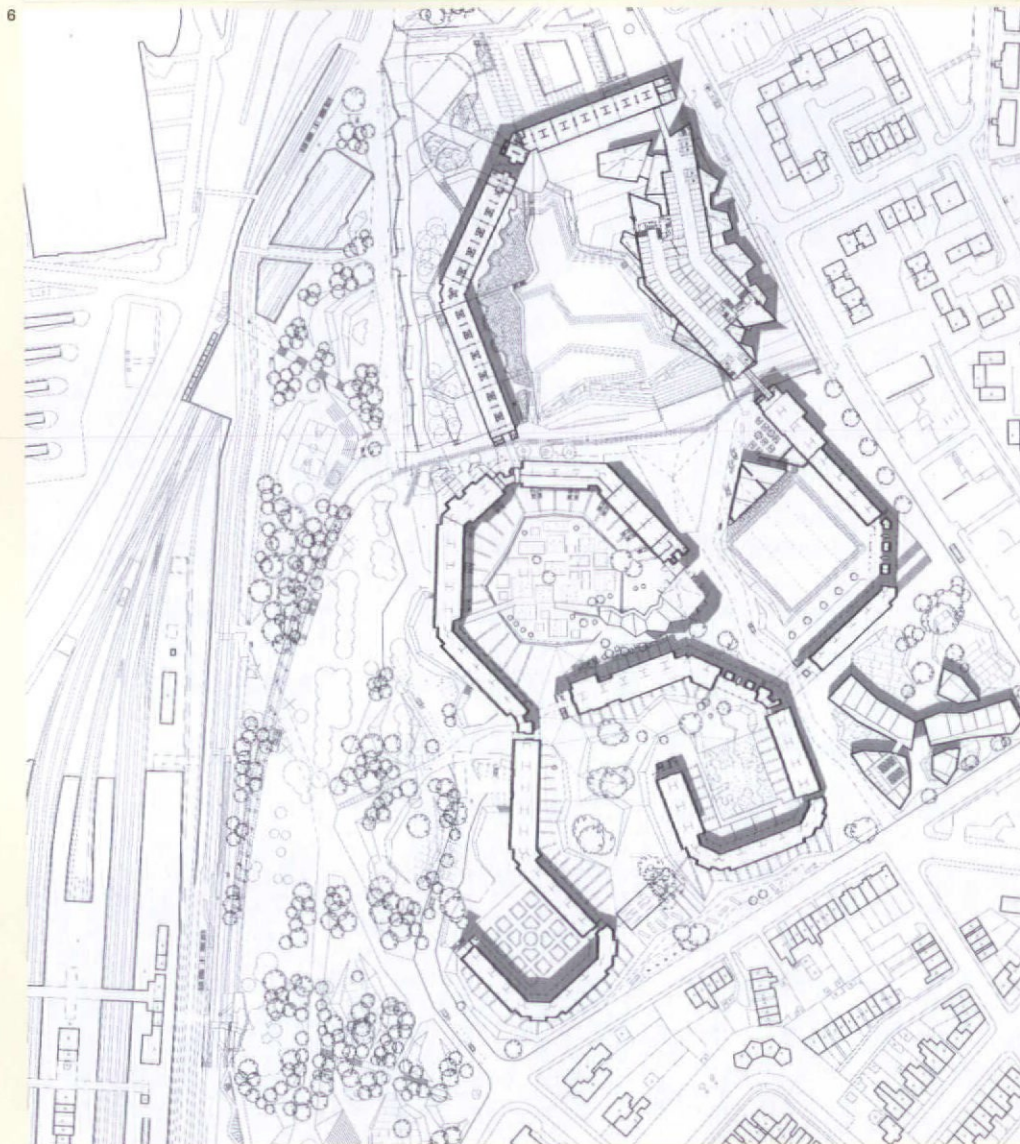
6

the new public entrance are top left. The right-hand edge shows new buildings projected for a later stage
7. Sketch by Christophe Egret showing his initial response to the site
8. Park Hill block stripped back to the naked frame for concrete patching before the infill is added

7
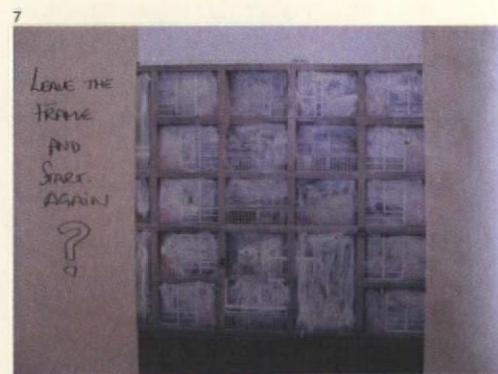
to the National Trust in order to recreate steelworkers' housing with actors dressed for the part would seem laughable, although that is what we do with country houses. No: clearly a radical reinterpretation was needed involving changes of content and form, if only to reinvigorate the deprived territory and sustain it in a capitalist world. A few years back, a draft mission statement from English Heritage declared defensively 'conservation is not about managing change', but in the case of Park Hill that's precisely what it is.

Enter Urban Splash, the Manchester-based property developer with a reputation for ambitious design-led conversions, several successful past projects in their portfolio, and an impressive survival through the recent economic crash. What they could do with a 19th-century industrial mill could perhaps

also be done with 1960s housing, but a bold programme of changes was needed to reverse degradation, correct original faults, supply new social and commercial content in place of old community elements, and inevitably to change the image. It appointed as architects Hawkins\Brown and Studio Egret West, and as landscape architects Grant Associates.

The Original Design
Striking in the original publications of Park Hill is the lack of context, as if the buildings stood freely on a virgin site, but this was typical for the time. New housing could follow its own formal rules without stylistic concessions. It operated within a system for mass production of parts and to produce volume with a small team. The logic was straightforward: a slab block up to 13 storeys

high and about 10m wide would permit a habitable room each side and centrally serviced bathrooms, while gallery access was preferred to a double-loaded corridor. By making maisonettes with internal staircases it was possible for one gallery to serve three floors, an arrangement pioneered at Ginzburg's Narkomfin Building in Moscow of 1928. Greatest design ingenuity went into planning interlocking flats of different sizes, making best use of the limited space. Although the design phase predated publication of Parker Morris,[6] it belongs to the period when those standards were being set, and they now seem generous, in relation to the products of mass house-builders.

Also typical of the period was a generous provision of green space, the green lung promised by Le Corbusier as a recompense for
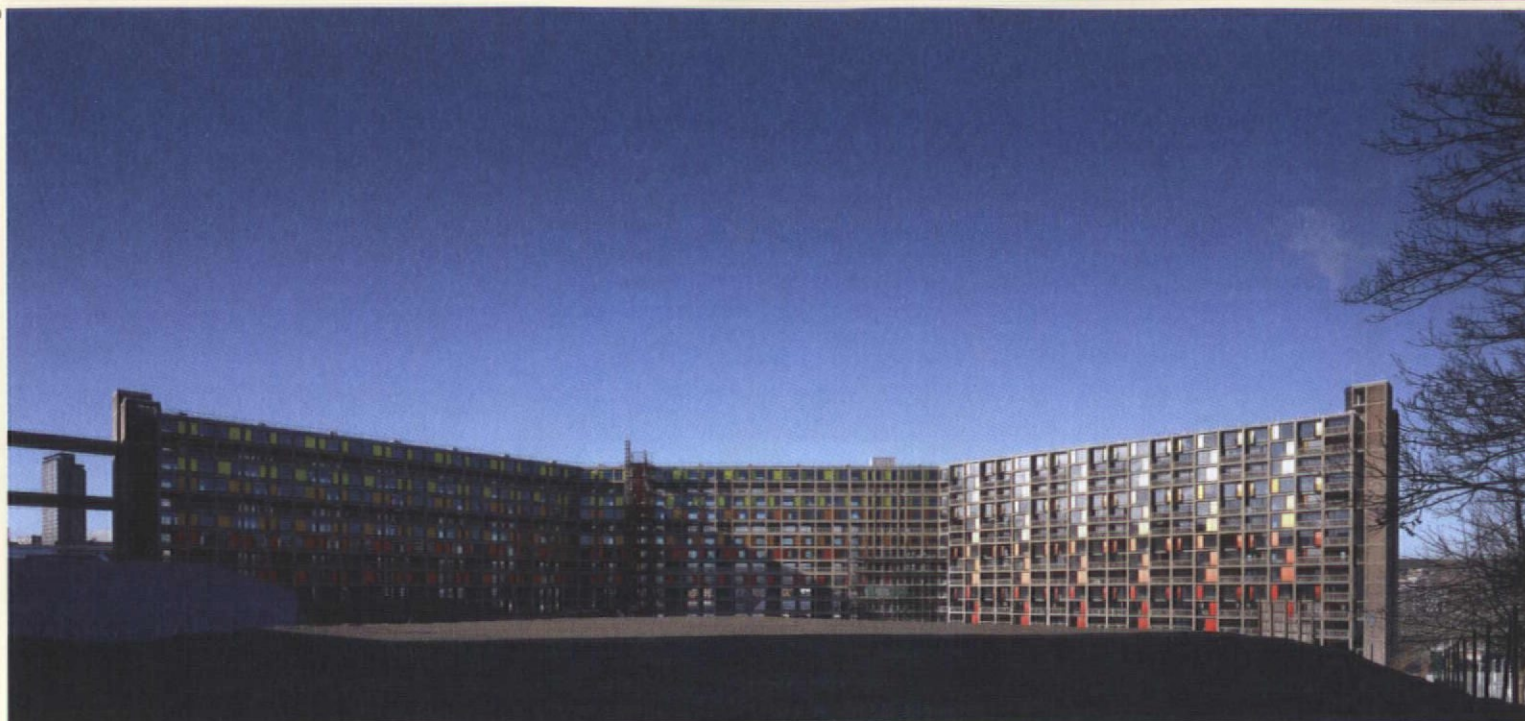
9. Park Hill makes a significant impact on the city skyline 10. Architect's sketch showing how the original frame might be interrupted and reinterpreted 11. Elevation of facade showing the complex's refenestration, with glazing increased from one third to two thirds
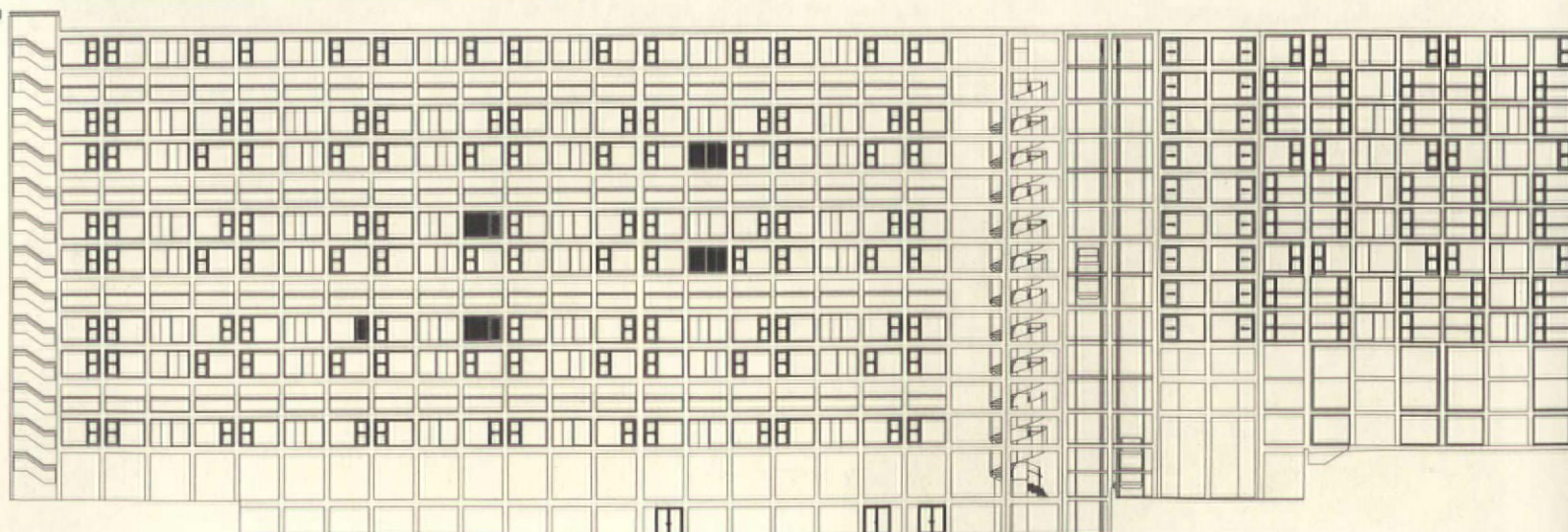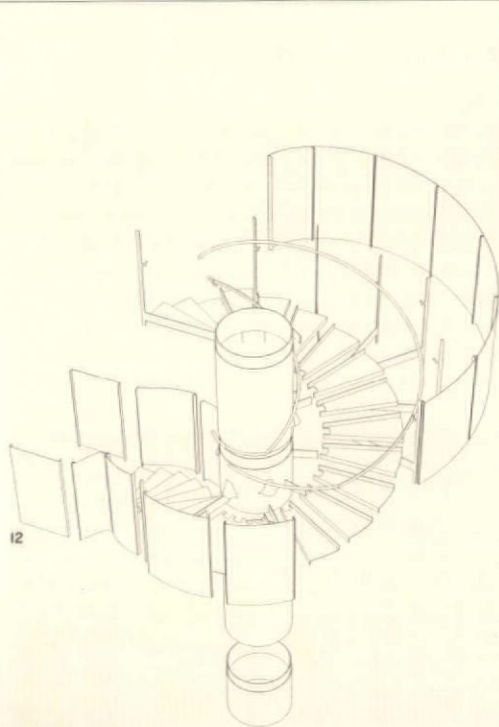
12 & 13. New spiral escape
stair clad in stainless steel
and playing with the frame
14. Instead of repeating
the brick infill, solid parts
have been clad in coloured
anodised aluminium
panels to give the concrete
building a new image
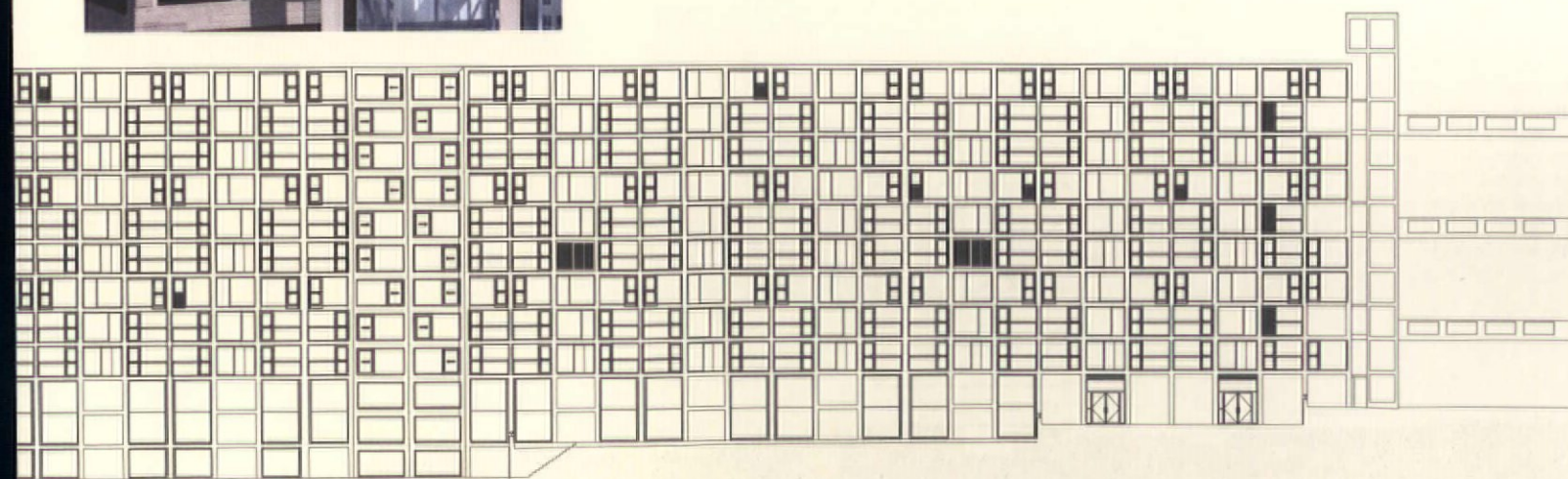
the density of the Unité d'Habitation. In Sheffield's case, there was the excuse of a former deer park, but the re-transformation was arguably un-urban, for by the early 19th century the former park had been subsumed under a dense street pattern, which covered the whole Sheaf Valley. Streets between back-to-backs led down past pubs, schools and chapels to a major artery on the line of the buried river. It was a typically Modernist move to obliterate all this, although Womersley and his architects did intend to substitute a new kind of urban continuity by separating pedestrians from traffic and carrying them across to the city on a system of decks and footbridges, an extension of the streets in the air that was never completed.

Park Hill's isolation was increased by greening the space between South Street and the railway. It was too steep: the architects chose instead the gentler slope between South Street and Duke Street, and it is telling that the first publications include drawings of ground conditions and contours, for changes of level were at first a problem but finally the making of the scheme.[7] Because of the hill, the streets in the air could meet the ground at one end, and due to the irregularities of site in plan and section, Walter Gropius's parallel lines of the Zeilenbau development – the automatic Modernist solution – was precluded. The key to the layout became instead the development of connecting knuckles between the slab blocks angled on plan at multiples of 22.5°, allowing the blocks to snake about on the site to take best advantage of terrain and light. The departures from right angle in plan, highly unorthodox for the time, also made good sense in the flats, allowing more aspect than with corners at 90°. The changing, turning blocks lent Park Hill

a picturesque appeal that contributed to its international popularity, reading as far less numbingly repetitive than more supposedly 'rational' housing schemes of its size.

Although its streets in the air have been much criticised, they have a degree of inevitability. Walk-up flats paired around staircases work only up to three storeys, four if the top one is a maisonette, so higher developments require horizontal access to share expensive lifts. Side galleries with air and views are preferable to double-loaded corridors, also permitting double aspect even if one side is compromised. The trick of one gallery to every three floors brought the triple advantage of economy, unimpeded aspect on intermediate floors, and social concentration; bringing more people together for chance meetings and self-policing. The logic still holds if one accepts the inevitability of flats for high densities in urban situations, as exist in cities worldwide. It may be that without open space, sufficient density might have been achieved in courtyard housing, but so close to the centre of England's sixth largest city, an urban typology was and remains appropriate.

The Reinterpretation

The Brutalist identity of Park Hill depended on frame and infill, which produced the rhythm of the structure, the layering of the facade, the contrasting textures of in situ concrete, precast concrete and brick panels in two colours. The original elevations were not so much composed as allowed to develop in response to the changing sizes and types of flat, enlivened by the layering of galleries and balconies.[8] Refurbishment architects Hawkins\Brown and Studio Egret West agreed with English Heritage about the primacy of the concrete frame

PARK HILL TODAY

PROJECT PERSPECTIVES

The AR has gathered three supplementary views on the project: Jan Fitzgerald from Sheffield City Council explains how Park Hill's turbulent past has informed its reinvention; Mark Latham at Urban Splash describes the challenges and opportunities of taking on Europe's largest listed building; and – perhaps most importantly – a resident who has lived there for more than half a century shares her reminiscences and thoughts on the new scheme. All these interviews can be found online at architectural-review.com/ParkHillInterviews

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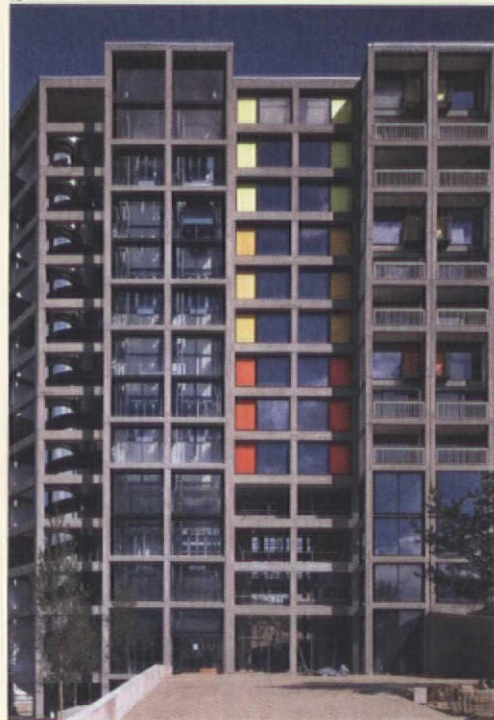
15. Section through the block at nine storeys, showing two groups of maisonettes, each fed by a middle level gallery and the bottom three storeys given over to communal and commercial uses

16. The block is glazed to attract residents and customers from either direction and allow glimpses through

17. A generous paved walkway typifies the free circulation of the streets in the air
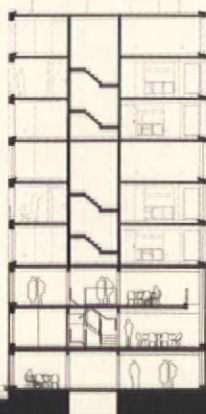
15

– 'the grid' as they call it – and although it had spalled in places, a successful technique was developed to excavate faults, clean reinforcement and patch it up. Also highly important to maintain character were the badly eroded precast balustrades, which were replaced in a modified and lightened form. More controversial was the treatment of the infill, since windows needed replacing and the solid parts insulating. Rather than repeating the original fenestration, the architects decided to enlarge the glazing – two thirds instead of one third – and to ventilate via side panels to keep the main windows simple. Instead of repeating the brick infill they clad solid parts in brightly coloured anodised aluminium panels, the most radical change of image, but swallowed by English Heritage after some debate over colour. It was essential to declare the refurbishment to the world, as well as making the flats trendy and attractive.

Within the block, rooms could be reassigned in new combinations, and a relative generosity of space could be attained by reducing the assigned number of inhabitants. In the first completed flats, high-quality finishes and minimalist detailing combine with well-planned built-in furniture and previously spartan bathrooms have become luxurious. In a reminder of Brutalist origins, selected structural walls and beams are left stripped and naked, with scars of previous services. The big new windows welcome breathtaking top-floor views across the city and the restored balconies exploit the generosity of the layered facade with a changeable relation to the outside world. On the entry side timber extensions invade the formerly bleak streets in the air, adding storage within and recessed porches without. New corner windows are a nice touch,

inviting personal display as well as allowing supervision. It would be a good place to live.

Getting to the ground now occurs through paired glazed lifts facing the view, much more inviting. A bold spiral stair with shiny balustrade articulates the connection and plays within the frame. Arriving at ground level, you might in future step out next to a newsagent and take your paper to a corner café, or visit a hairdresser further along before strolling off to the nearby tram-stop. Such close-hand sociable and commercial activities are the essence of civilised city life, and in a determined bid to attract them, Urban Splash has designated the bottom three storeys at the north-east as shops, cafés, and other businesses, with decked terraces for sitting out at ground level. Fully glazed both sides, they should attract customers from either direction and allow glimpses through.

Park Hill's original social provision was generous, with a nursery, a primary school, a chapel, a small shopping centre, three pubs and five children's playgrounds. But much proved unsustainable and fell away, for it was too self-contained, reserved for the residents rather than for the rest of the city. Further to break this isolation, Urban Splash and its architects have cut a four-storey gateway at the north-west corner closest to city and tram-stop, adding a generous paved walkway to welcome people through. The previously neglected surrounding landscape has been imaginatively redeveloped by Grant Associates with large trees, a new planting scheme and good-quality paving. Further round to the south-west an amphitheatre has been formed in the slope of the hill to enliven the climb from the railway station. Whether it will actually be used for performances is currently less important than
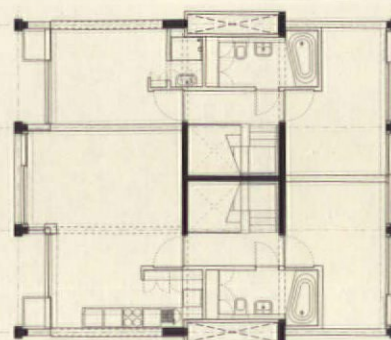
upper plan
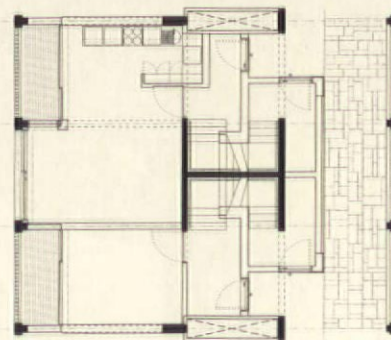
deck plan
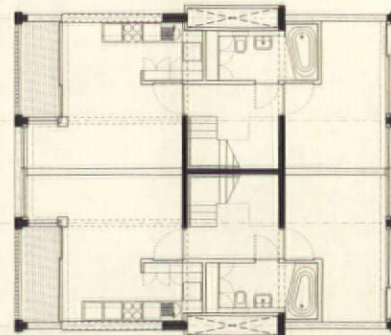
lower plan

18. The new ground work and landscaping creates a tranquil atmosphere for the residents of the new development
19. The refurbished arrangement of maisonettes makes advantageous use of shifting party walls
20. Big new windows offer views across the cityscape and restored balconies give free access to the outside world
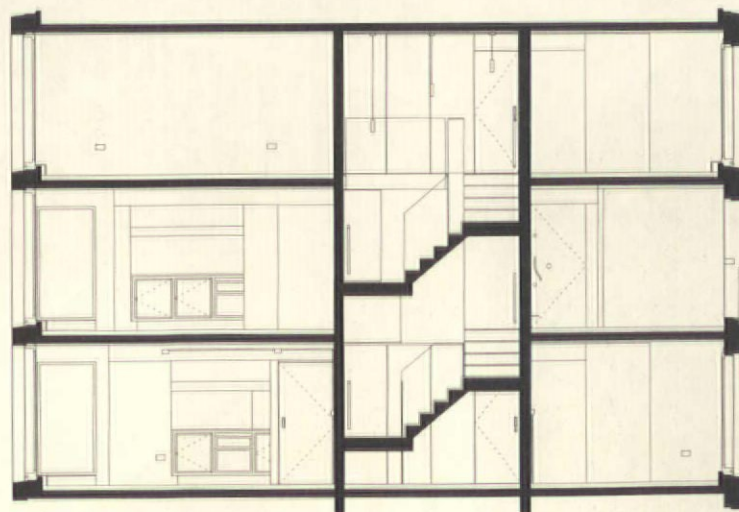
section

the change of image as an essential catalyst to bring commerce and new public life.

Not all the original tenants have left, and some await transfer to the refurbished blocks. The City Council intends for about one third of refurbished flats to remain as social housing, let through an agency called Great Places, and priority will be given to former residents. This means that two thirds is being privatised (and gentrified), whereas communal services will be straightforwardly commercial. This was the best deal the City could get, with others taking the main risk, and if it succeeds it should allow a mixed community to grow and change in place of a social housing ghetto, but little will remain of the altruistic if also paternalistic aspirations of the Welfare State.

From a building conservation point of view too, much has changed, and we may yet regret the lost authenticity, but Park Hill is better preserved in an altered state than not at all, and for the sake of its inhabitants' memories as well as for its architecture. Another wanton reduction to a tabula rasa has been avoided, kinder to the planet in terms of embodied energy and lower running costs. A more thoughtful and interesting architecture has arisen than standard new-build, and it is happily less constrained by the existing than inspired by the challenges of reinterpretation. Every place has its qualities: there are always layers, memories, a potential palimpsest, but there is also always need for change, which makes pure conservation a rarely realisable ideal. Reinterpretation is the middle way, and it need not imply compromise. The debates surrounding what to do with Park Hill revealed a heartening will to understand and to work with the given, whether or not the right predictions have been made about what it will become.
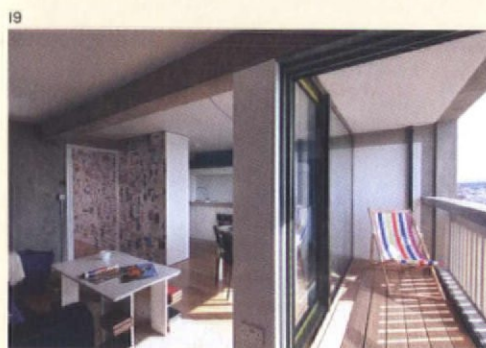
1 In Nikolaus Pevsner, *Yorkshire West Riding (Buildings of England)*, Penguin, London, 1967, pp446–449, the author praises Womersley for recognising the potential of the city and rates 1950s Sheffield as second only to London for architectural development. Pevsner calls Park Hill 'sensational'. A good visual record of the city's achievement is the Sheffield issue of *Architectural Design*, September 1961.
2 See Andrew Saint, *Park Hill: What Next?*, Architectural Association, London, 1996, for the best general essay on Park Hill. Saint acknowledges as his primary source the PhD thesis of Christopher W Bacon, University of Sheffield, 1982.
3 Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism*, Architectural Press, London, 1964.
4 Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space*, Macmillan, New York, 1972; Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial*, Shipman, London, 1985.
5 Several school buildings by Womersley's office have gone, including Tapton, and its market building is set for demolition, as is Yorke Rosenberg and Mardall's Cole Brothers, now John Lewis. Avanti Architects has completed a wonderful restoration of Gollins, Melvin, Ward & Partners' University Library, but the firm's other university buildings have been handled less sympathetically.
6 Parker Morris Committee, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, HMSO, London, 1961.
7 See Jack Lynn et al, 'Park Hill Redevelopment Sheffield', *RIBA Journal*, December, 1962, pp447–469.
8 As confessed by Jack Lynn, ibid, p454.

THE URGENT CASE FOR REVISITS

Too little has been learnt from the architectural experiments of the last century. To overcome this historical myopia, a new series of revisits assesses the outcome of past social and technical innovations, to seek more informed answers to today's pressing challenges

PETER BUCHANAN
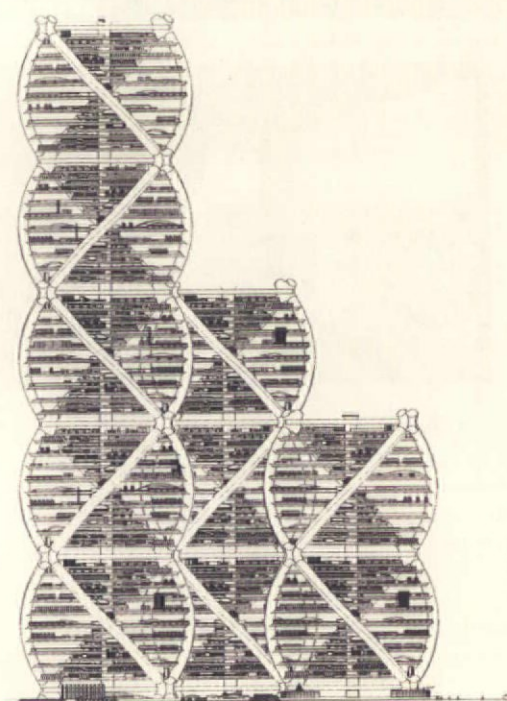
Solving today's problems will require a balance between experimentation and plausibility. Understanding the past's radical architecture can guide predictions of future experiments. For example, the Metabolists negotiated a route between vision and buildability. Completed work placed services around perimeters – but would Kisho Kurokawa's unbuilt Helix City Plan (1961) have been an ideal solution or a step too far?

Most architects, surely, have wondered about the fate of certain buildings, published with fanfare and now seemingly forgotten. Did that radical idea for providing flexibility really work? Did that network of open spaces come to life as envisaged? Did those stuck-on pediments ensure popularity? Did those flimsy cladding panels last, corrode or succumb to vandalism? Having no answers to such questions deprives us of immensely useful feedback. We have learnt too little from how realised buildings, their generative concepts and technical innovations have performed over time. Recognising this, the AR introduces a regular series of building revisits, starting with this issue.

A building revisit is a retrospective reappraisal of the structure. Two kinds are particularly germane: the reinterpretation of the original work; and the analysis of how it has actually performed over time. Both sorts, done well, help us learn and build on lessons from the past – the latter sort of revisit is particularly useful in relation to the numerous, more experimental buildings of the last half century or so. And if, as many assume, we are nearing a pivotal moment in history when many assumptions must be rethought, then both sorts of revisit are urgently relevant in highlighting what to take forwards into future approaches to designing and assessing architecture.

Re-reading designs in the present day

The first sort of revisit re-reads a well-known work, reinterpreting it, providing new insights into its generative concepts and composition – or speculating on the former, which may be unrecorded or never consciously articulated. Such revisits deepen our understanding of a design, and often too of the potentials of architecture generally, while assessing its relevance to its own and our times. Thus an architectural work, or a way

of thinking, is kept alive and contemporary, remade as a fertile resource for today, one that enlightens and expands architecture's potentials.

Such studies tend to be undertaken by academics and are published sporadically in journals or books. They typically ignore the building in use, maybe discussing functional concepts but not their success or failure. The AR has and will continue to publish such essays. (They seldom arise from commissions but from *eureka* moments or pondering and lecturing about a design.) Key essays include now famous examples like Colin Rowe's 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa' (AR March 1947) and Richard Padovan's 'The Pavilion and the Court' (AR December 1981).

The other sort of revisit is seemingly more prosaic. Yet it is even more useful in expanding the knowledge base that guides practitioners and the development of architecture. This kind of research is rare in academe, a gross dereliction of an essential service to architecture that it is arguably best placed to provide. These revisits focus on the building in use and all aspects of its performance over time, from which an immense amount can be gleaned. It is this sort that the AR is introducing as a regular series.

Although most architecture departs little from the conventions of its time, there has always been some innovation, in the forms and styles studied in history, to accommodate new functional programmes and to exploit new materials and techniques. The Victorian period, for instance, was immensely innovative in exploiting new materials and devising new building types. But the AR revisits will be confined to modern architecture, particularly those shaped by innovative social concepts.

Most modern and contemporary buildings also simply rework standard solutions. Yet, even if only as a

minority strand within it, architecture since the beginning of the last century or so has been a hotbed of innovation and experimentation, as encouraged by Modernism's utopian ideals and rhetoric. These advocated shedding the shackles of historic convention and starting designs *de novo*, bringing new approaches to form and the organisation of socio-functional relationships, and adopting the latest materials and techniques as almost a moral imperative.

The transformation of society

New building types (such as open-plan offices, shopping centres and airports) were developed and older ones reinvented (including the house and collective housing), in accordance with new concepts of serving or transforming society. Attempts to generate, with varying degrees of success, some sense of conviviality and community have ranged from glass-roofed 'streets' lined with communal and commercial facilities linking the blocks of a large complex (corporate, educational or healthcare) or 'streets in the sky' in housing blocks as surrogates for the traditional residential streets.

New mechanical and electronic equipment now service buildings (escalators, air-conditioning and fluorescent lighting), and the proliferating equipment inside – with, say, underfloor cabling and devices removing the increased heat loads. New structural techniques and methods of analysing and calculating structures and internal environmental conditions have been developed, along with thousands of new materials, whose long-term corrosive and toxic effects are virtually unstudied. New approaches to construction and its management have also influenced design.

Accelerating change necessitates flexibility, with approaches ranging from Mies van der Rohe's gridded 'universal space' to Louis Kahn's 'served and servant' spaces, and their combination in the tartan grids of served and servant zones developed by Arup Associates. Other approaches range from the Metabolists placing equipment and services around the perimeter for easy repair or replacement, to Herman Hertzberger's devices – which don't dictate a single use but provoke creative interaction and the discovery of potential uses.

Further impetus for change came from Postmodernism's critiques of Modernism, particularly of its obliviousness to context and culture, but also for its arid aloofness from the user. The concern with semiology might have waned quickly, but that with phenomenology continues, even if primarily in academe. Now the quest for sustainability and the impact of the computer on design, component manufacture and assembly processes are further drivers of innovation.

Sustainability, among many other things, emphasises the efficient use of all resources, not only energy, exploiting ambient conditions, the elimination of high-embodied energy materials and those toxic to manufacture or when in place, and again the need to reintegrate an environment fragmented by modernity. The computer (on which much sustainable design is dependent) facilitates the conception and construction of virtually any form, raising new questions about the aptness of forms. Such concerns are changing architecture, and how we assess that of our own times.

These pressures for change have resulted in both incremental improvements and radically innovative, even highly experimental, designs that have accumulated into an immense resource to research. Yet there has been amazingly little systematic research into the successes and failures (and the reasons behind these) of innovative buildings, and even

less of such feedback has been published to become general architectural lore. Instead, we are vaguely aware that buildings have failed or been demolished, but are uncertain as to exactly why, which may be a lack of management rather than a design failure. Architectural firms once responsible for landmark buildings have admitted, when asked how these are faring, that they do not know. And many such buildings, despite their intrinsic interest, have been forgotten.

Even architects presenting themselves as studiously rational and technocratic, pursuing a semi-scientific approach, do not conduct post-occupancy and follow-up studies, nor monitor such things as energy consumption and environmental performance. Yet a useful way of thinking about innovative and experimental architecture, one consistent with the supposed spirit of Modernism, is as quasi-scientific hypotheses to be tested and proved in terms of the building's performance. In dialectical terms, this is the antithesis stage from which a higher level of synthesis will derive as architecture progressively moves on.

Such steady improvement depends on even the most problematic aspects of the past being studied and learnt from rather than dismissed.

What aspects should be revisited?

So what might form the basis of a typical revisit? Schemes will be selected that are illuminating to study, because success and failure, and the reasons for these, can be established. (Though failure is frequently more instructive than success, the concern is not with finding fault but to distil useful, positive guidance for designers.) Revisits will ideally include feedback from owners and users, and those who manage and maintain the building. Performance, not aesthetics, is the primary concern, with emphasis on the programmatic, with the design's

novel social concepts and arrangements, what these were intended to achieve and whether these have proved successful.

Sustainability brings with it a whole slew of new criteria as design becomes concerned not only with the qualities and performance of the building itself but also the long-term and global impacts of constructing it – from extracting the materials and manufacturing the components through to the recycling of these or their return to earth. There are too many new concerns and criteria to list here. Although most green buildings seem very recent to be contenders for revisits, the improvement of approaches to green design is so urgent that some will probably be the subject of reconsideration.

Constraints on time and research resources, as well as space available in the AR, mean that no revisit could possibly answer all these questions. Instead each revisit will concentrate on the most apposite and illuminating points. Besides expanding architectural knowledge, collectively the revisits together should contribute to a stock-take of the triumphs and failures of the architecture of the recent past – a necessary part of any reformulation of architecture as part of the sustainable culture of the future.

Although this series is impelled by recognition of how vitally urgent revisits are, the AR is all too aware of the limited resources for research of the magazine and its authors. Yet there must surely be many studies that have and are being conducted, which offer vital information to inform a potential revisit, or are sufficient to be reworked for publication. The AR would be grateful if those who know of any such comprehensive and rigorously conducted studies would get in touch.

☞ **This is an edited version of a longer article. Read the full version at architectural-review.com/ RevisitEssay**

ON THE TRAIL OF ORANGEFEST

The 12 July celebrations in Belfast have been branded as a retail-friendly attraction by the local government, but the move belies the cultural provocation of a sectarian ritual
Essay and photographs by Declan O'Neill

At midnight on 11 July, hundreds of bonfires are lit throughout Northern Ireland. With hints of Guy Fawkes or Walpurgis Night, these burn-sites are where Loyalists and Protestants gather annually to celebrate and commemorate the victory on 12 July 1690 of the Protestant King William of Orange over the Catholic forces of King James II at the Battle of the Boyne.

The traditional 'boney', as the bonfires are called, are a place where some communities assemble to temporarily renounce modern society and to recharge the tribal batteries. For them, these short-lived structures are a distinctive expression of cultural identity.

For others not of this persuasion, the bonfires are sectarian rituals which are designed to reignite a triumphalist and culturally provocative identity; they are vehicles which are intended to induce anxiety and conflict. Since the bonfires are often dressed with the flags of the Republic of Ireland and the Vatican alongside political effigies and racial slogans such as 'Kill All Taigs' or 'KAT' – taigs being slang for Catholics – the 'boney' starts to look more than a little tainted.

Attempts by local government and tourist agencies at re-imaging and re-branding the fires and other 12 July celebrations as 'Orangefest', Europe's largest outdoor festival, have been problematic. There are genuine concerns that public funds are being used to promote loyalism as a legitimate cultural expression and Orangefest as a family and retail-friendly tourist attraction similar to the Notting Hill Carnival.

Last year, there were 86 bonfires in Belfast alone and the council calculates the clean-up bill at around £5,000 per bonfire. The 11th night bonfires are held

Left: a teenager in a makeshift shelter keeps watch for thieves and saboteurs at an Antrim bonfire
Right: council estate green areas are common locations for fires and afford locals the opportunity to donate materials and labour
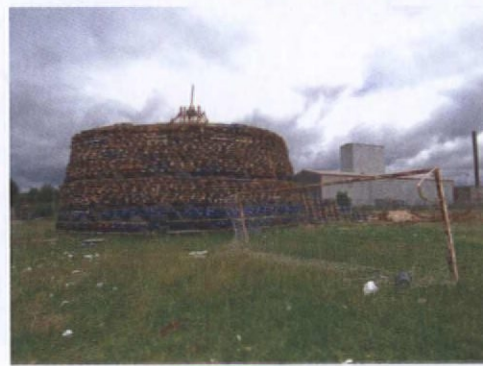
While redevelopment has gathered pace in Belfast, the urban landscape is still pockmarked with areas of waste ground that become burn-sites every July. Bonfires can also occur at less desirable locations such as road junctions, car parks and playgrounds. Constructed from pallets, railway sleepers and tyres, the structures can be scaled and sculpted. Many bonfires are 'dressed' with sectarian slogans and the flags of the Irish Republic before being set alight
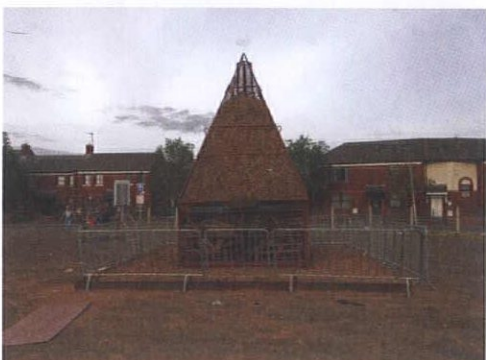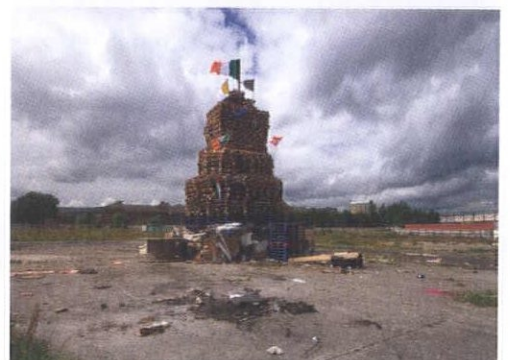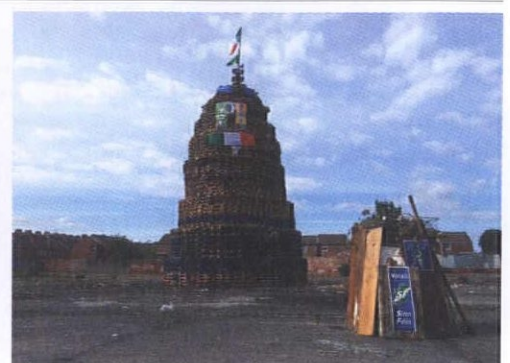
Belfast has initiated a bonfire pilot scheme (pictured left) that seeks to replace the traditional towering conflagrations with a 'safer' and more environmentally friendly 'beacon' – however many are sabotaged before 12 July

on local green spaces, playing fields, parks, waste ground, car parks and even in suburban side streets and at traffic junctions. The bonfires cause enormous environmental damage and are often constructed with dioxin-producing vehicle tyres and furniture, whose fumes engulf entire neighbourhoods that appear either immune to their effects or powerless to change.

Since 2005, Belfast City and other local councils have provided loyalist groups with up to £1,200 each to host community celebrations like street parties at established sites as part of a Bonfire Management Scheme.

'The bonfires cause environmental damage and are constructed with dioxin-producing vehicle tyres and furniture, whose fumes engulf entire neighbourhoods'

In a bid to encourage a more responsible approach by bonfire organisers, the 'boney' has been replaced with an eco-friendly, carbon-neutral beacon. The beacons are steel pyramids, filled with woodchips on a sand base.

The scheme aims to reduce anti-social behaviour and to cut the cost for the Fire Service and Housing Executive, as well as alleviating pollution by only using clean burn materials on the bonfires. Twenty-four community beacons were supplied in various locations throughout Northern Ireland in 2011.

For some locals, the idea of the authorities replacing the bonfires

with beacons misses the point and 'takes away the fun', according to a local participant. Rival Protestant districts compete to build the biggest and teams of teenagers usually construct the fires, some starting as early as April, gathering wood and materials in the build-up to the school summer holidays.

In neighbourhoods such as Sydenham in east Belfast, the bulk of the work is carried out by older men, often with the help of heavy plant hire vehicles such as cherry pickers and forklifts. 'Dump Wood Here' signs spring up near burn sites and local businesses; residents and fly

tippers comply with pallets, tyres and domestic detritus.

Hundreds of unregulated bonfires are constructed like this and in the early summer months the *terrain vague* erupts with these pyre-like sculptures. They have been likened to giant beehives and many mimic the stupas and pagodas of Burma and Thailand, and draw crowds of locals and photographers.

With a discernible nod to psychogeography, the structures have given me the excuse to visit neighbourhoods once thought to be off-limits, and I am not alone in my curiosity. At most sites, eager kids pose for the camera and scale the constructions using makeshift steps. At others such as Sandy Row in west Belfast, surly teenagers demand £5 for a photograph and throw rocks when payment is not forthcoming.

In my six years of documenting the bonfires, their number and scale have diminished, displaced through redevelopment projects and a growing indifference from youngsters more interested in gaming, perhaps, and other distractions of the modern age. In Belfast's Sydenham, however, the descendants of the Titanic's shipbuilders continue to put their engineering skills to some use in building one of the province's largest bonfires.

As the night before the 12 July approaches, security is stepped up, with attempts made by competitors either to torch their rivals' efforts early or to steal their timber reserves. Makeshift shelters built of carpet and pallets house sofas, chairs and a rotating watch of children and teenagers on guard duty. This loyalist clubhouse-cum-domestic parlour will eventually end up on the fire when the time comes. As for the beacons, the majority have been torched early in acts of sabotage. Only the bonfires seem destined to remain.

Above: a young family walk home after a long night of 'cultural expression'

TROUBLES IN THEORY
PART I: THE STATE OF THE ART 1945–2000

Becoming a subject of interest to those beyond the profession in the late 1960s, architecture – and its theory – in turn opened up to outside influences. An anti-institutional ideology, with strong French philosophical connections – Foucault, Barthes, Derrida – served to undermine architecture's own disciplinary focus. Key figures – Summerson, Banham, Eisenman – sought to regain the lost territory, but a unified theory of architecture remains elusive. The first of three essays outlines the background to architectural theory's current condition

ANTHONY VIDLER

Author's note
In this and the following essays I have adopted the position of Eric de Maré, who, in 1949, published three articles towards a new 'canon' in *The Architectural Review*, attempting to account for the range of theoretical interventions in postwar Scandinavia, Europe, Russia and the US. And, like de Maré, I will be unable to come to a definitive conclusion…

'The Case for a Theory of Modern Architecture'
John Summerson, *RIBA Journal*, June 1957

'We lack a satisfactory theory of architecture.'
Christian Norberg-Schulz, 1965

'A comprehensive unified theory of and for architecture is important… No one has attempted a unified theory since Le Corbusier, and perhaps since the book *The International Style*, or perhaps since the work of Christian Norberg-Schulz (Intentions in Architecture).'
Patrik Schumacher, *The Autopoiesis of Architecture*, 2011

Architectural theory has taken many forms since Vitruvius attempted to bring together in 10 scrolls 'all the principles of the discipline', with the conviction that 'an architect should know writing [*litteras*]' both to 'secure a more lasting remembrance through his treatises', and as a balance to the knowledge of mere manual skill. The rediscovery of Vitruvius in the 15th century led to several centuries of similar treatises, followed by a 19th century full of style handbooks and teaching manuals; followed in the 20th century by a flurry of polemical manifestos, and more measured statements of purpose and strategy after the Second World War.

The generation that graduated from architecture schools in the decade following the Second World War was a generation in search of new principles for architecture itself. In the shadow of the modern masters, critical of the social and urban effects of International Style Modernism, yet reluctant to abandon a commitment to modern architecture, they looked in different ways for continuity through more or less radical revision.

In this search they were supported by the surprising catholicity of *The Architectural Review*'s editorial board. Despite the individual sensibilities of Hubert de Cronin Hastings, Gordon Cullen, Eric de Maré and Nikolaus Pevsner, the journal hosted debates over questions as diverse as those posed by Colin Rowe's Palladianising of Le Corbusier ('The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa', March 1947) and the Modern Movement in general ('Mannerism and Modern Architecture', May 1950); de Maré's attempt to revitalise the 'canon' in his three-part survey of Scandinavian, British, American and Russian ideas in 1949; Banham's 'New Brutalism' (1955); and Cullen's 'Outrage' over the 'Townscape' environment.

Indeed, the AR seemed open to all comers, at the same time as proposing a fairly consistent editorial position against what Pevsner called the 'new historicism' and for de Cronin's campaign for a comprehensive adoption of Townscape. On its signature blue, brown and sometimes yellow paper inserts, contrary visions of what might be a principled postwar architecture were posed and refuted, often by the editors themselves. The AR was not alone in this debate: in Italy, the gauntlet was taken up by Ernesto Rogers in the significantly renamed *Casabella-Continuità* after 1953, as he indignantly refuted Banham's claim that Italy's Neo-Liberty style represented a retreat from Modernism, calling him the 'curator of refrigerators'. In France, André Bloc, editor of *L'Architectured'Aujourd'hui* until 1964, continued to support the second generation of

Hubert de Cronin Hastings (aka H de C and Ivor de Wolfe) berates the growing tide of unsympathetic urban environments in a Townscape article, December 1949, while Reyner Banham heralds the arrival of a stark new style: New Brutalism, December 1955

I. de Wolfe

TOWNSCAPE

In 1794 Sir Uvedale Price published his Essay on the Picturesque. This, it is argued here, was a key-moment in art-history since Price actually succeeded, despite the handicap of eighteenth-century art-jargon, in isolating what had not been isolated before—a way of looking at the world that might be called perennially English. So regarded the Picturesque Movement' has a significance far transcending its local position in landscape-gardening history, for acknowledgment in our own day of the existence of a perennially English visual philosophy could revolutionize our national contribution to architecture and town-planning by making possible our own regional development of the International style, at a result of our own self-knowledge—technics given in marriage to psychology. This is Mr. de Wolfe's case. His method or lack of it is demonstrated in miniature in the section which follows the article.

A Plea for an English Visual Philosophy founded on the true rock of Sir Uvedale Price

Reyner Banham

THE NEW BRUTALISM

'L'Architecture, c'est, avec des matières brutes, établir des rapports émouvants.' Le Corbusier Vers une Architecture.

Introduce an observer into any field of forces, influences or communications and that field becomes distorted. It is common opinion that Das Kapital has played old harry with capitalism, so that Marxists can hardly recognize it when they see it, and the wide-spread diffusion of Freud's ideas has wrought such havoc with clinical psychology that any intelligent patient can make a nervous wreck of his analyst. What has been the influence of contemporary architectural historians on the history of contemporary architecture?

They have created the idea of a Modern Movement—this was known even before Basil Taylor took up arms against false historicism—and beyond that they have offered a rough classification of the 'isms' which are the thumb-print of Modernity into two main types: One, like Cubism, is a label, a recognition tag, applied by critics and historians to a body of work which appears to have certain consistent principles running through it, whatever the relationship of the artists; the other, like Futurism, is a banner, a slogan, a policy consciously adopted by a group of artists, whatever the apparent similarity or dissimilarity of their products. And it is entirely characteristic of the New Brutalism—our first native art-movement since the New Art-History arrived here—that it should confound these categories and belong to both at once.

Is Art-History to blame for this? Not in any obvious way, but in practically every other way. One cannot begin to study the New Brutalism without realizing how deeply the New Art-History has bitten into progressive English architectural thought, into teaching methods, into the common language of communication between architects and between architectural critics. What is interesting about R. Furneaux Jordan's parthian

Modernists – Jean Prouvé, Georges Candilis et al.

By the 1960s, however, a second postwar generation was concerned to advance this critique, with a sense that what Banham had called 'une architecture autre' was to be found in a reframing of the discourse through technology and social science. *Architectural Design* (AD) under the editorship of Monica Pidgeon with Theo Crosby, and Kenneth Frampton, supported the Smithsons and their allies in Team X, but also, such widely disparate positions as those of Cedric Price, Archigram, as well as of John Turner, with his reports from Lima spearheading investigations into the potential reconstruction of the barrios, or the world ecological consciousness of John McHale, who edited a special issue in 1967 on '2001', reviewing the state of world resources and anticipating his seminal books *The Future of the Future* and *The Ecological Context*.

As Beatriz Colomina and her colleagues have made clear in *Clip, Stamp, Fold*, a book and exhibition devoted to the little magazines of the 1960s and '70s, by the late '60s 'theory' had been co-opted by a proliferation of these 'little magazines' representing an increasingly radicalised generation intent on countering the conformist axioms of the profession. Even AD was transformed into a hip broadsheet, with its signature section 'Cosmorama', started in 1969 when Peter Murray joined Robin Middleton as art editor and began the wild ride to be the architectural equivalent of the *Whole Earth Catalog*. Here the move to environmental, ecological and social issues was clear. 'Casabella', on the other hand, under the editorship of Alessandro Mendini, was supportive of the groups Superstudio and Archizoom in their utopian/dystopian take on the present; Archigram published its own 'journal' (from 1961), as did Jean Aubert and Hubert Tonka of the Utopie Group (from 1967) in France. In total opposition, yet fascinated by the potentials of architecture to inflect society, Guy Debord and his friends published the *Internationale Situationniste* from 1958.

Redressing the balance

These counter-architectural movements were balanced during the 1960s and '70s by a series of appeals to renew the language of architecture itself after the perceived barrenness of the hegemonic International Style: Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction* was only the first of such attempts, followed by Charles Jencks's *The Language of Postmodern Architecture* in 1977, and somewhat redundantly capped by Paolo Portoghesi's announcement of 'no more inhibitions' in his installation of the Strada Novissima for the Venice Biennale of 1980. The journal *Oppositions* published by the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York between 1973 and '84, under the joint editorship of Peter Eisenman, Mario Gandelsonas and Kenneth Frampton, tried to redress the balance, with an emphasis on critical theory, as did *Arquitecturas Bis* in Barcelona.

All these movements have been excellently catalogued in anthologies that convey the changing nature of theory during those years. Ulrich Conrads, with a hint of nostalgia, assembled the *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture*, demonstrating that
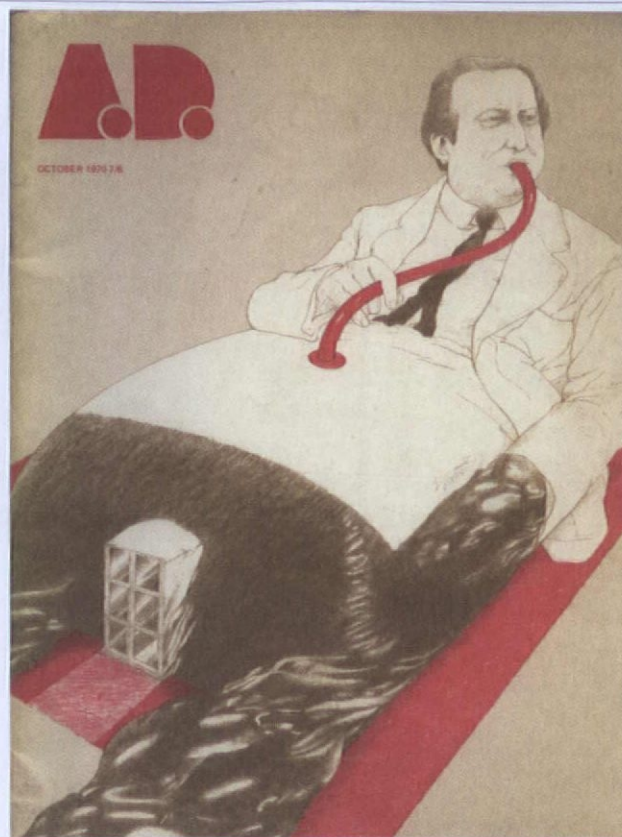
the most important theoretical interventions between 1900 and 1968 took the form, not of 'treatises' as before, but of manifestos following the model of Marx. Taking up the challenge, Joan Ockman's anthology of statements in *Architecture Culture 1943–1968* reveals the shift to statements of principle as opposed to manifestos.

But around 1968 – and not necessarily as a result of the revolutions of that year – things theoretical seemed to change. Architecture, rather than a subject discussed by architects and architectural theorists, became a subject of interest from outside – from philosophy, epistemology, linguistics and most importantly politics. With the Marxist critique of institutions, from Louis Althusser to Henri Lefebvre, architecture – already under attack from the right and the left for its apparent failure to address the social problems of the postwar period – became an object of inquiry as an ideology, similar to those identified in Marxist theory: law, religion, the state. Architecture was now understood in Althusser's terms as an 'ideological state apparatus', and thereby an instrument of state power. It was a moment fuelled not only by the role of architecture in representing or constructing the State, or in aestheticising Capital (the foundation of all 'Theories' of architecture), but equally by the politics of resistance that emerged in the opposition to the Algerian and Vietnam wars, to the neo-liberal capitalist governments of the postwar period, and to the consumer culture of the 1950s and '60s that threatened to de-politicise the class and ethnic struggles of post-colonialism.

This argument was advanced on the left by the

'Architecture, rather than a subject discussed by architects and architectural theorists, became a subject of interest from outside – from philosophy, epistemology, linguistics and most importantly politics'

institutional critiques of Michel Foucault, and reinforced by the textual critiques of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. In a move towards what today might be called media theory, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio analysed the relations of architecture to representation, traditional cultures, technology and social mobility. The most effective of these interventions within architecture itself was perhaps that of Foucault, whose investigation of disciplinary discourse was centred on institutions that had developed significant architectural typologies since the 18th century – asylums, hospitals, prisons – and whose writings from 1965 to 1974 inspired both critics and architects to rethink the idea of typology on an architectural and an urban level.

These texts were taken by architectural theorists not, as before, as supplements to the design process itself – anthropologists and sociologists acting as 'humanising' influences on the theories of Team X, for instance – but rather as invitations to rewrite the theory of the discipline as a whole. So, to give some examples out of many, Foucault's history and epistemology of institutional discourse – asylums, hospitals, prisons – launched a critique in architecture directed at the nature of power and its sources, hidden and overt. Barthes's essays on semiology introduced architects to the structural analysis of buildings and cityscapes as communication devices. Derrida's deconstruction of philosophical and literary texts led theorists to question the commonplaces of their practice. Gilles Deleuze's studies of Gottfried Leibniz and the Baroque precipitated interest in the topologies of folding and Jacques Lacan's rereading of Sigmund Freud brought a new understanding of the relations between visual gaze and desire. In each case, the intent of the transmigration of theories from outside to inside was to unpack the verities of the profession and disclose the ideological agendas behind apparently innocent practices.

Thus from 1965 onwards, we saw a gradual and increasing influence of such critical texts from outside architecture, continuing until now, with, of course, several moments of delay due to translation lag. With the political and social movements of the 1960s, some of these texts were implicitly normative, in other words developing thought about the proper role of architecture in mass society. Some were politically engaged – Situationism, and the rereading of Karl Marx (Althusser, Étienne Balibar), Antonio Gramsci. Some were ecologically engaged (John McHale, Buckminster Fuller) – whether for or against architecture. But most of these questioned the discipline itself, as a part of the general critique of disciplines as themselves ideologically tied to and supportive of the established political power of the bourgeois liberal state.

It was perhaps as a direct response to these external theoretical movements, that a number of architectural theorists tried once more to regain the sense of a discipline. The pressures for a rigorous and unified theory intensified, beginning with John Summerson's appeal for the 'programme' as a fundamental source of unity for modern architecture (he drew his inspiration from László Moholy-Nagy's sense of a biologically-grounded formal aesthetic); followed by Reyner Banham's

'Stocktaking' of February 1960, which called for a new technological basis derived from cybernetics and computer science; and Peter Eisenman's first forays into formalism in 1963, publishing his call for a 'formal basis of modern architecture' in AD. In *Theories and History of Architecture* (1968), Manfredo Tafuri attempted to discriminate between the rigorous construction of architectural history and 'operative' and instrumental criticism, noted a distinct shift towards the framing of a comprehensive theory of the discipline:

'It is symptomatic, in fact, that there is a demand from many quarters for the establishment of a rigorous theorization of architectural problems. This need is felt by a considerable number of English-speaking critics — particularly by [Peter] Collins — by historians like Christian Norberg-Schulz, by specialists of planning methods like Alexander and Asimov, by theorists involved in planning like Aldo Rossi and Giorgio Grassi.'

For Tafuri, the possible reasons for the desire for a systematic theory of the discipline stemmed from the perceived loss of public meaning in modern architecture and its failure in linguistic communication; from the need to control the underlying meanings of the radical transformations in the physical and human geographical environment; and finally from the need to control the form of the city, its territory and sectors. In short, he summed up, the need to find ways that can substitute for the lost linguistic unity, an objective logical and analytical method for the control of planning, urban design and architecture. In the late 1950s and early '60s, these attempts took on forms that paradoxically seemed to reflect the divisions that classical theory from Vitruvius onwards had sought to overcome: between use, structure and form.

Thus, writing in the *RIBA Journal* in 1957, Summerson opined that a 'theory' of architecture would be 'a statement of related ideas resting on a philosophical conception of the nature of architecture', one that he found in a group of Mediterranean beliefs about reason and antiquity, stated by Alberti, reformulated in the age of Descartes, rewritten in Claude Perrault's critique of Vitruvius, then again by Laugier, Durand, Viollet-le-Duc, Pugin, Berlage, Horta, Perret and Le Corbusier:

'Perrault said antiquity is the thing and look how rational; Lodoli seems to have said up with primitive antiquity, only source of the rational; Durand said down with Laugier, rationalization means economics; Pugin said down with antiquity, up with the Gothic, and look how rational; Viollet-le-Duc said up with Gothic, prototype of the rational. Eventually a voice is heard saying down with all the styles and if it's rationalism you want, up with grain elevators and look, how beautiful!'

In this argument, Summerson traced the idea of the Classical, the rational and the organic, to its modern conception, following a trajectory which moved 'from the antique (a world of form) to the programme (a local fragment of social pattern).' Hence Summerson's celebrated conclusion that 'the source of unity in modern architecture is in the social sphere, in other words, the architect's programme — the one new principle involved in modern architecture.' In his terms, a programme 'is the description of the spatial dimensions, spatial relationships, and other physical conditions required for the convenient performance of specific functions,' all involving a 'process in time, a rhythmically repetitive pattern that sanctions different relationships than those sanctified by the static, Classical tradition'. The problem he identified, as with a naive Functionalism, was the need for a way to translate such programmatic ideas into appropriate form – a problem to which Summerson offers no direct answer. Dismissing Banham's 1955 appeal to topology in his essay on the New Brutalism, as 'an attractive red herring (I think it's a herring)', Summerson was not a little dismayed at the 'unfamiliar and complex forms [that] are cropping up' in practice around him through the extension of the engineer's role.

Yet, as Summerson recognised, this tradition had come to a close in the modern period, to be superseded by a new scientific paradigm, that of 'the biological' as advanced by Moholy-Nagy. As he stated, 'architecture will be brought to its fullest realization only when the deepest knowledge of human life as a total phenomenon in the biological whole is available'. For Moholy-Nagy, noted Summerson, the biological was psychophysical – a demanding theory of design matching a broad idea of function that called for 'the most far-reaching implications of cybernetics to be realized... if the artist's functions were at last to be explicable in mechanistic terms'. In this context, the problem for architecture was to discover the apt language for the expression of the new biological facts, based on the discovery of the structure of DNA.

His conclusion was, however, pessimistic; he concluded that any theory that posits programme as the only principle leads either to 'intellectual contrivances', or to the unknown: for his fear was that 'the missing language will remain missing' and our discomfort in the face of this loss would soon be simply a 'scar left in the mind by the violent swing which has taken place'.

A new and compelling slogan

Reyner Banham, writing three years later, was more optimistic. While he sided with Summerson in deploring the style-mongering of the 1950s – 'it has been a period when an enterprising manufacturer could have put out a do-it-yourself pundit kit in which the aspiring theorist had only to fill in the blank in the phrase The New (...)-ism and set up in business' – he found that 'most of the blanket theories that have been launched have proven fallible, and partly because most labels have concentrated on the purely formal side of what has been built and projected, and failed to take into account the fact that nearly all the new trends rely heavily on engineers or technicians of genius (or nearly so).' He proposed that what was needed was 'a new and equally compelling slogan', and suggested some of his own: 'Anticipatory Design', 'Une Architecture Autre', 'All-in Package Design Service', and, perhaps even 'A More Crumbly Aesthetic'.

The most radical departure from the Vitruvian triad, however, was that proposed by a young PhD student at Cambridge, Peter D Eisenman, who in 1963 propounded his faith in 'the formal basis of modern architecture'

'Despite attempts to produce a unified theory, the proliferation of theories "from the outside" has engendered a new kind of resistance, one that poses as a "post-theory" position, with the argument that the counter-disciplinary emphasis of critical theories left designers with little to go on'

in a short article in AD. Attempting to go beyond the technological and social, the programmatic and the functional weighting of Vitruvius's categories, Eisenman argued that 'the situation is more complicated than Summerson allows for, and if seeing a work of architecture in terms of its programme is the only alternative to seeing it in terms of history, it must be admitted that criticism is not very far advanced.'

In his formal Dantonism, Eisenman then went on to refuse all outside reference for meaning in architecture, exorcising symbolic, iconographic and perceptual influences or interpretation. Instead he looked at the 'primary configurations' of buildings considered as structures of logical discourse – their internal spatial and volumetric considerations deriving the formal 'linguistics' of his understanding of architectural systems from Le Corbusier's 'Four Compositions', and making their implications explicit. If for Summerson form was considered only in relation to proportional systems, or for Banham it was no more than a dead (academic) language, Eisenman saw all formal systems as communicative, based on the properties of form itself: this was the only criterion through which architecture could be thought a discipline.

Once more it was in reaction against this overt fragmentation of the Vitruvian triad, that Christian Norberg-Schulz tried to bind the body back together again, in a long-drawn-out assemblage of observations on almost every aspect of architectural thought: historical, semiological, programmatic, technological, and, above all, phenomenological. 'Experience' was the key; balance, the method. Yet despite his attempt to introduce the newly popular Martin Heidegger into the equation – his phenomenological credo was set out in *Existence, Space, and Architecture* (1971), the result was what historian Ignazi de Solà-Morales termed 'weak' theory – one that gave no indication of the desired result save as a bundle of untested principles without explicit formal outcomes.

The present condition of theory, however, is more complex. For, despite attempts to produce a unified theory, the proliferation of theories 'from the outside' has engendered a new kind of resistance, one that poses as a 'post-theory' position, with the argument that the counter-disciplinary emphasis of critical theories left designers with little to go on; words like 'post-critical' and 'pragmatic' are used to describe a new attitude towards design that seems on the surface to reject traditional theorising altogether. The second essay in this series will assess these 'post-theory' positions, and look at the non-traditional places where theory now resides and flourishes – in the experimental practices, somewhere between, art, architecture and science, that take on in a different mode, the urgent tasks of inventing a theoretical practice for an uncertain ecological future.

REVIEWS

On the path to the Socialist Bloc

JAMES DUNNETT

Roman Bezjak: Socialist Modernism – Archaeology of an Era
Edited by Inka Schube, texts by Till Briegleb, Christian Raabe, Inka Schube, Hatje Cantz, £35

This is perhaps how revolutions start, at least in taste: a 'look' becomes less abhorrent, begins to have an appeal long before scholarship has caught up. The orgy of destruction is in full swing when, against all the odds, someone begins to think that there may be something worth looking at there after all, but no one has had a chance to find out how it got there.

This is a book about a 'look' rather than architecture – a collection of photographs of buildings and urban scenes in the former Soviet Bloc, dating from about 1955 to 1990. The start date is significant: just after the radical change of policy in construction initiated by Nikita Khrushchev in a speech in 1954, which ushered out Stalinist populism and neo-traditionalism in favour of mass production and an acceptance of some of the ideology of the Modern Movement.

The photographs – each one occupying a full page and taken since 2005 by Roman Bezjak, who was born in Slovenia (then Yugoslavia) in 1962 but raised in West Germany – reflect the current German fashion in photography for panoramic semi-urban landscapes with a lot of sky, still, and with few and small evidences of humanity. As with the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher, the sky is preferably flat and grey without any shadows, the focus is sharp with all verticals parallel, and the presentation is apparently factual and value-free. This approach often proves to be well suited to its subject: as we know from innumerable sketches and texts by

Le Corbusier, the object of building taller in widely spaced blocks was to open up the view of the sky, to create a vista of space and stillness in which human beings would perforce appear relatively small.

A striking example is the first photograph in the book showing Victory Square, St Petersburg, with the over life-size bronze figures of the Second World War memorial grouped around an obelisk in a vast plaza framed by two residential tower blocks all under a flat sky – but no actual people or vehicles. The photograph of Augustus Square, Leipzig, is similar, but with Lowry-like stick-figures scurrying across the plaza and an air of better maintenance. It may be that the East excelled at this kind of composition, where land values were not an issue.

Below: Victory Square in St Petersburg – the opening photograph of Socialist Modernism – contains larger than life-size bronze figures in its Second World War memorial but the vast plaza is bereft of real people

But the photographer is not an architect and all buildings are presented in a similar way, whether exhibiting the banality of prefabricated repetitive housing blocks in Kołobrzeg, Poland, the sculptural kitsch of the 'Manhattan' apartment block in Wrocław, or the Neo-Constructivist heroics of the Georgian Ministry of Highway Construction, Tbilisi. No attempt is made to attribute any of them to designers or to give them dates, or to group them by locality, so that a scene in Yalta is preceded by one in Prague and followed by others in Berlin and Minsk. But Russian place-names alone are also given in Cyrillic. Buildings of the period that I believe actually to have architectural quality or interest, such as the Comecon Building or

the angled blocks on the Kalinin Prospect in Moscow, both designed by Mikhail Posokhin and others in about 1964, are not shown.

The text by Till Briegleb, in particular, often contains perceptive observations, but the English translation is in places an impediment. Christian Raabe begins with an interesting 1966 quote from East German writer Hermann Henselmann: 'As we are designing our [socialist] cities, we should keep in mind that not only will vehicular traffic increase in the future, but that more people will be moving through the streets with increasing freedom, and these people will be highly educated, curious and having a great zest for life. They require an environment that is not only well ordered, but also filled with poetry.'

Bezjak is reportedly sympathetic to the former socialism of 'the East' but there is a pervasive feeling of melancholy, and beneath it the palette of architectural styles does not appear to be very different from what was prevalent in the West. Perhaps this book should have been called *Modernism in the Socialist Bloc.*

Cracking the code of the ideal city

ANDREW MEAD

Sabbioneta: Cryptic City
James Madge, Bibliotheque McLean, £25

Anyone who reads the introduction to this book is likely to be hooked. Architect and teacher James Madge recalls his first visit to Sabbioneta, near Mantua in the plain of Lombardy, on a day of dense fog in January 1988. In such conditions it was impossible to form an impression of the city as a whole: 'Instead, each incident of its architecture appeared in succession as an isolated and memorably insistent presence.' As Madge wound

his way through the streets, the overall atmosphere seemed 'distinctly uncanny if not bordering on the insane'. It sounds like a sequence from an Andrei Tarkovsky film. Don't you want to read more?

Sabbioneta was built in the second half of the 16th century and is frequently seen as a Renaissance 'ideal city'. Though Vincenzo Scamozzi designed its theatre, the architects of its other major buildings remain unknown, and there's a general assumption that the city's instigator, Vespasiano Gonzaga (1531–1591), had a decisive impact on its form and detail.

The AR made Sabbioneta the centrepiece of a special issue on 'Italian Townscape' in June 1962. Writing under the pseudonym of Ivor de Wolfe, the magazine's proprietor Hubert de Cronin Hastings saw it as a model of the 'picturesque townscape' that he and AR colleagues such as Gordon Cullen were promoting at the time. He argued that much of its effect stemmed from it not being an ideal city in the sense of absolute symmetry and an exact grid. 'No quick picture – no grasp of the masterplan or underlying rationale. On the contrary: surprise, anticipation, mystery, frustration, shock, delight.'

In an essay on Sabbioneta in *L'Arte* in 1969 (misdated as 1959 in Madge's book), Kurt Forster, like de Wolfe, picks up on the numerous T-junctions that disrupt the grid plan and create a labyrinth. He sees this as a Mannerist trait (the system is 'at once spelled out and broken') but reminds us that the labyrinth is a Gonzaga emblem, which Vespasiano might be deliberately reflecting in his city.

It is this question of Vespasiano's intentions that preoccupies Madge, who was intrigued by Sabbioneta from that first visit in 1988 until his death in 2006. In a book that becomes increasingly speculative as it proceeds, the author aims to
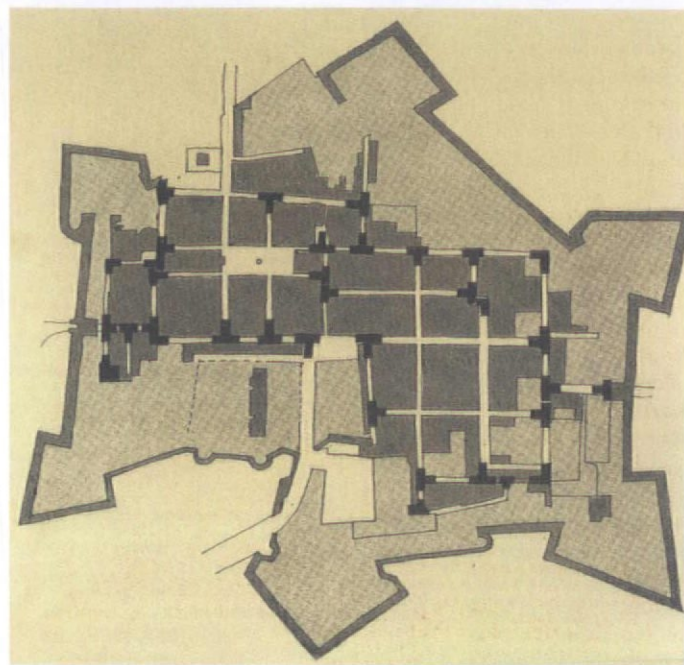
Above: a plan from the AR's issue on 'Italian Townscape' in June 1962, which made Sabbioneta its centrepiece. The urban T-traps – which 'disrupt the grid plan and create a labyrinth' – are marked in black. For the full version of the article, visit architectural-review.com/ SabbionetaArchive

'illuminate a state of mind' and to supply 'a more intimate and personal reading of Vespasiano and his city' than has emerged up to now.

So as well as examining the form and fabric of Sabbioneta, still largely intact after four centuries, Madge draws on disparate sources: contemporary treatises, letters and diaries; the handful of poems that Vespasiano wrote; the iconography of the decorations in his Ducal palace. In recreating the intellectual world that Vespasiano inhabited, especially its focus on architecture, he also tries to determine how Vespasiano adapted prevalent ideas to his own ends in realising Sabbioneta.

Madge quotes a contemporary diarist who noted that 150 cartloads of timber scaffolding were removed on the city's completion in 1590. The same diarist had earlier observed the arrival of nine mules from Rome with marble for Vespasiano's funeral monument. By contrast to such seemingly solid facts, Madge admits that he is often piecing fragments together and making inferences,

but his approach is systematic and judicious. It is encapsulated in the close attention to built form that he shows in tracing two distinctive motifs (oversized brackets and blind crenellation) from their appearance in Sabbioneta to earlier Gonzaga properties in the region, a deliberate atavism on Vespasiano's part.

But Madge may lose some readers with the psychoanalytic interpretations that appear towards the end of the book. 'It is only a game to raise new walls, to give life to material things while I am so much diminished in spirit,' wrote Vespasiano in a letter, and there is ample evidence that his life was troubled – not least in his relations with women. With this as his cue, Madge alights on a 1983 text by the French psychoanalyst André Green, 'The Dead Mother', which goes on to inform his pages on Vespasiano's poetry and decorative schemes.

Where this approach really becomes contentious is when Madge later refers to Sabbioneta's two main urban spaces, each with 'a trio of representational structures, an arrangement for which there is no suggestion in any of the architectural treatises'. Following Green's line, Madge sees this as the reintegration of 'the father/mother/child triangle, now without the fear of violation'. It is a far cry from Ivor de Wolfe.

To be fair, Madge makes no great claims for his conclusions, suggesting that he has simply added 'a few more possible explanations' to an already long list in the literature

on Sabbioneta (he provides a full bibliography). Despite this self-deprecation and the recurrence of such words as 'perhaps', he nonetheless establishes how saturated with meaning Sabbioneta was for its creator, even if it may always be 'cryptic' for the rest of us.

Rather curiously, the AR called Sabbioneta 'cosy'. That's not a word you would find in current guidebooks. Cadogan Guides describes it as 'a museum city of unfulfilled expectations with the air of a De Chirico painting'; Lonely Planet settles simply for 'surreal'. While Tarkovsky never filmed there, it was the perfect setting for Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem*, based on an intricate story by Borges. This little city affects people in a palpable but imprecise way. For Madge, it was the source of a fecund and illuminating obsession.

Bohemian rhapsody in New York City

DEBORAH SAUNT

Illegal Living: 80 Wooster Street and the Evolution of SoHo, Roslyn Bernstein and Shael Shapiro, Jonas Mekas Foundation, £25 Distributed by Idea Books

Speculating on the rise and fall of cities is an endlessly fascinating pastime. And it is not only architects and urban designers who like to dredge the deeper currents to understand what lies beneath the city's perpetual tumult. Everyone loves the story of the High Line in New York, for example, which has single-handedly re-awakened a slumbering neighbourhood with a 'park in the sky' along a defunct elevated railway line. But, in reality, is this re-shaping of the city really so simple?

Just as Rem Koolhaas demonstrated in *Delirious New York* of 1978, a city can provide an accidental manifesto and here, in *Illegal Living*, SoHo proves to be an accelerated template for many post-industrial cities where you witness the alchemy of mixing artists and derelict factories and turning them into gentrified backdrops for aspirational living. This study by Roslyn Bernstein and Shael Shapiro ably exposes the momentum generated when gifted individuals, innovators,

risk-takers and promoters negotiating city governance (with a splash of branding with the invention of the soubriquet SoHo = South of Houston) are combined as the ingredients of successful grass roots urban renewal. It is a complex matrix of influences and, despite appearances, not a quick fix.

Around the world, post-industrial cities mimic SoHo's demographic shape-shifting by inverting expectations by going from bust to boom. This rebirth is achieved both with the sometimes fortuitous turning tides of global economics and more specifically by recycling robust 19th-century buildings, coalescing creative communities who wish to inhabit them, and then, crucially, adapting planning mechanisms and urban infrastructures to harness new value.

This regeneration overview runs beneath this highly researched biography of a modest building at 80 Wooster Street. Its various physical iterations and the narratives of its inhabitants illustrate both the persistent preoccupations of city dwellers over the past 200 years (rubbish, taxes, noisy neighbours) and the physical morphology of Western cities. The original building goes from genteel home to grossly overcrowded lodging house, set in an underworld of prostitution on a down-at-heel side street, and it is then reincarnated as a fire-proofed warehouse for the specialist goods trade in a rapidly expanding city bursting with new immigrants. A magnificent architectural presence bedecked with giant frieze and cornice, medallions in terracotta, Roman brickwork and cast iron columns and storefront, it eventually faces decline as heavy uses evacuate the centre of the metropolis and relocate on the edge.

Then, in 1967, arrives George Maciunas: comic visionary, architect and artist, creator of the Fluxus movement, collector (ranging from his 'anthologies of animal droppings' *Excreta Fluxorum* to his *One Year*, comprising all the containers for all the items he consumed in 1972), and ringmaster to SoHo's re-invention.

Here, Maciunas personifies the dynamic combination required to shape change at an urban level in tough conditions with great practical and professional skills, a working knowledge of Codes and Plumbing, and the ability to orchestrate serious fun. As the narrative picks up pace

and canters through a list of soon-to-be artists and celebrities (Robert De Niro, Willem Dafoe, Trisha Brown and Philip Glass), and established stars (Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenburg, John Lennon and Yoko Ono), a storyline emerges akin to the casting of Groucho Marx in the Theatre of the Absurd. Forced to wear disguises to hide from the Attorney General's inspectors and disgruntled contractors, Maciunas sets up the first of many planned Fluxhouses in the building (complete with bolt-holes and escape hatches), which is designated as non-residential, but that he insists will one day be live-work, as an 'artistic nucleus' in the community.

Lacking the ability to raise funds commercially without a Certificate of Occupancy, he draws together like-minded artists and scrapes enough money together to buy the building. Over the course of the next decade, building support and legitimacy for what is essentially illegal loft living, he paves the way for the radical amendment of planning codes, which eventually in the 1980s allowed registered artists to live in SoHo, thus recognising the need for spaces for the marginal in the centre of the city.

As Jane Jacobs said in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 'If a city area has only new buildings, the enterprises that can exist there are automatically limited to those that can support the high costs of new construction... Chain store, chain restaurants, and banks go into new construction... Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings [but] *new ideas must use old buildings*.'

By generating a new model of urban occupation based on adjusting planning at a policy level and the careful adaption of existing fabric, SoHo is a helpful test-case from which to learn. How a new settlement seeks first rubbish collections, then schools and basic social infrastructure, balancing the logistics of sanitation and defence against disaster, echoes the needs of squatters around the world. Simultaneously, these new homeowners demand controls as to who is allowed to occupy and use the future city. As if defending their stronghold, in effect they help to write an urban constitution with physical constraints and tight social control, which means that only registered artists can live here, and non-artists need not apply.
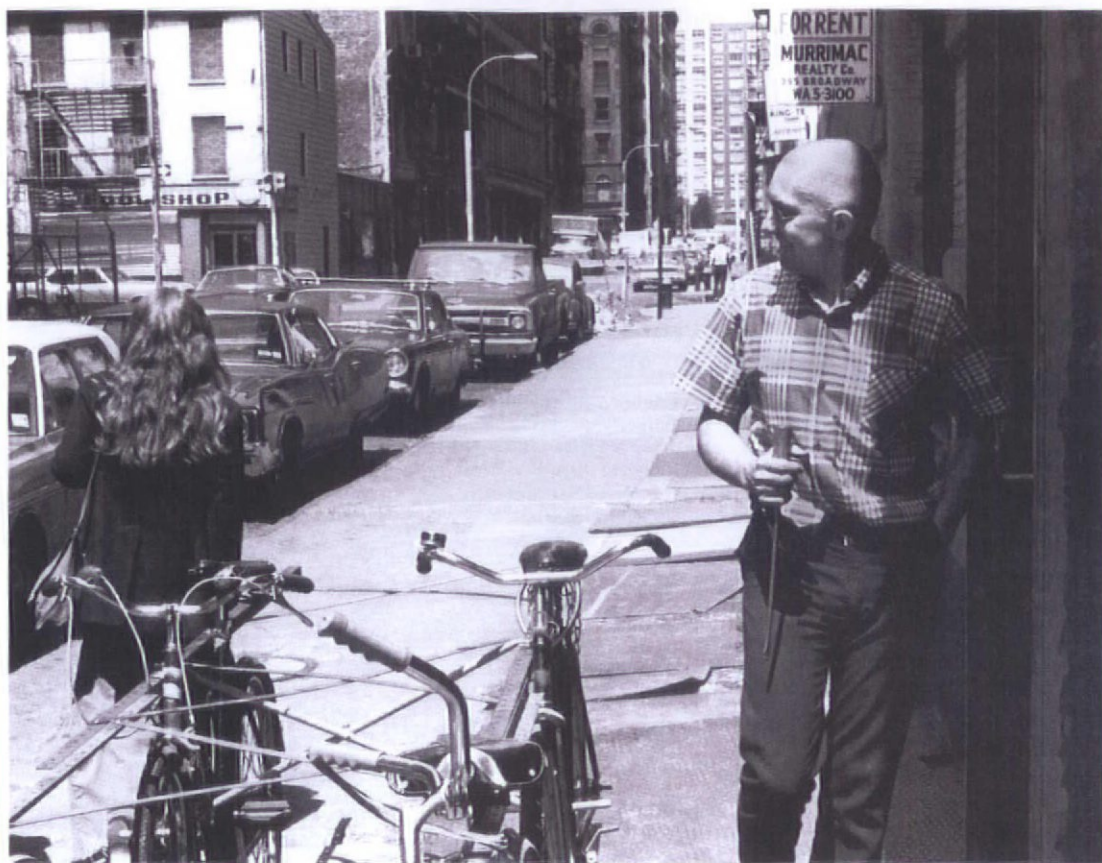
Above: the transformation of SoHo in New York is told through the narratives of inhabitants who occupied a magnificent building on Wooster Street in the book Illegal Living

Despite requesting certificates to prove an artist's status in order to occupy a space in SoHo and to achieve the artists' own ambitions for a counter culture, in reality the City could not enforce this requirement. Over time, the residents' complexion altered as older artists cashed in and a new wealth entered the frame, leaving studios to be remodelled as large living spaces only. Galleries became boutiques and the aim for a cultural district gave way to destination shopping and tourism, and the art world found areas to colonise elsewhere.

The attitudes in SoHo have shifted too. Not surprisingly, the marginal occupants from the 1960s and '70s have aged and perhaps have acquired the characteristics of suburban plot-dwellers, now complaining about traffic jams, alcohol licences, and despairing at the creation of SoHo as 'party central', exhibiting growing intolerance to 'The New' despite their radical origins. It is 'No' to new 'non-artist' residential developments and definitely 'No' to a McDonald's fast food outlet. They bemoan the loss of real artists, but fail to lobby the City to enforce the law for fear perhaps of losing out on the re-sale of their now highly

priced lofts. Ultimately they prove, in the same way that developers in Soho, London, have found, that the longer residents stay in one place, the more they tend to want peace and quiet, and as little change as possible. It is with a delicious irony that genuinely mixed-use cities are notoriously hard to police and maintain in harmony once they have become someone's legal home.

SoHo offers many lessons from its rapid change in fortune. Speculating with my students at London Metropolitan University on the future of London's Soho and trying to avoid romanticised versions of a bohemian demi-monde, we have found ourselves using SoHo, New York City, as a valuable foil. Both have surprising similarities evolving in well-defined enclaves, from residential to manufacturing. As decline has set in, both have survived the threat of traffic infrastructure crashing through their historic fabric in the 1960s and '70s (in London's Soho, the motorway planned with A+P Smithson's support; in SoHo, NYC, the eight-lane expressway across Broome Street). Both have achieved heritage status – in SoHo's case, the preservation of the stunning cast-iron buildings

that mix utility, decorum and prefabrication. Over time, ground-up determination to avoid big-block site assemblage and the loss of small plots has defended the area from overdevelopment, and both boast conservative amenity groups intent on negotiating the conundrum of feeling at home in the city while defending un-urban qualities such as peace and quiet at night within a 24-hour city economy.

However, it is at the scale of policy combined with maverick architect-led action that SoHo offers a critical perspective. By demanding that marginal uses of an area be preserved, distinguished areas of the city can be defended and specific (if not 'original') characteristics encouraged. By renegotiating planning policy, new urban morphologies evolve that are unexpected and delightful. The cast-iron lofts of SoHo's Heritage District are precursors to the bold initiative of the community-led, architect-designed High Line in the former Meatpacking District, where design success is underscored by a radical readjustment of zoning law.

The once-condemned elevated railway that cuts a swathe through a part of Manhattan where residential development had previously been restricted was kept and restored, thereby severely limiting any potential redevelopment envisaged for the sites along its route. In exchange for this preservation, the planning department allowed owners to transfer their established development rights to neighbouring plots and this action enabled the area to accrue value and kick-started regeneration. New amenities flourished and the rejuvenated city emerged, as if to emphasise that the importance of gifted architects and quietly radical planning legislation should never be undervalued.

As a coda, it might be the financial crisis of 2007–08 that could auger a new chapter in SoHo's history. After years of laissez-faire borrowing, *The New York Times* reported in November 2010 that the banks were now scrutinising the legal agreements relating to the occupancy of lofts in SoHo, and finding the need for a certified artist to be in residence to comply with local laws. They are questioning the very legality of the newest wave of occupants to SoHo who are, of course, now engaged in their own form of illegal living.

Above: comic visionary, architect and inventor of the Fluxus movement, George Maciunas is credited with the artistic revival of SoHo in New York City during the early 1960s

Reading the digital revolution

PIER VITTORIO AURELI

The Alphabet and the Algorithm
Mario Carpo, The MIT Press, £15.95

You don't have to be a follower of the parametric church to read, appreciate and learn from *The Alphabet and the Algorithm,* the latest book by Mario Carpo. Although written in support of the digital turn in architecture (a trend that is today already in decline), Carpo's book is nothing less than an epistemological enquiry into the very concept of design, and more precisely architectural design.

Instead of providing another messianic manifesto on the digital revolution, he looks back to the very origin of architectural design to prove his thesis. For Carpo, the period that goes from the 15th century to the last decade of the 20th century – a period in which architects authored their buildings by providing notations in scale to be executed as identical as possible to the architect's original conceptions – is a historical interlude. Before and after architecture *was* and *will be* a work open for constant change and revision and thus produced out of the paradigm of formal identicality between the built work or the designed object and the architect's scheme.

In order to advance this thesis, Carpo proposes a penetrating analysis of Leon Battista Alberti's invention of architectural design, since it is exactly such method that, as Carpo argues, is going to be seriously challenged by the increasing use of computers within the production of architecture. For the author, the Albertian architect is an early manifestation of the episteme of mass production in which multiples are exact copies of the original, the prototype. Long before mass production would be an industrial phenomenon, Alberti attempted to mass-produce the architectural project by claiming that a building had to be executed as a mechanical imprint of the notations that were provided by the architect himself.

In this way, architecture became an allographic art, that is an art whose buildings are instances of the artist's authorship without being directly crafted by him/her.

Alberti was so adamant about the distance between design and building that he recommended architects not to even enter the building site. From that moment on, builders were no longer autonomous fabricators who possessed both the idea and the craft, but simply executors of other people's designs. Even though such procedure would become extremely influential in defining the role of the architect, Alberti's implementation of this method was not without problems as apparently the builders of his first design, the Tempio Malatestiano, were reluctant to cooperate.

Alberti's invention of design was indeed a refinement of Brunelleschi's attempt to overcome the workers' resistance towards his leadership on the building site of one of the major architectural works of the early Renaissance: the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore. It is known that Brunelleschi did not disclose his plan to complete the dome to the workers in order to deprive them of their professional autonomy. However, Filippo Brunelleschi's authorial strategy was not tenable since such strict control would force the author to be always present on the building site. It was for this reason that Alberti proposed that the architect would provide builders with notations to be executed faithfully in the architect's absence. Alberti thus founded his method on the paradigm of *identicality*, which as Carpo suggests made the architect's design the definitive notational source of the building.

For Alberti, indexical correspondence between design and building was so crucial that in his book on the art of building, *De Re Aedificatoria*, he did not include images because they would have been susceptible to alteration while being copied. Instead, he scripted all his design explanations by literally digitalising architectural form: that is replacing drawings with the digits that would stand for architectural measures of parts.

It is an irony, Carpo suggests, that Alberti perfected such authorial method just a few years before the invention of printing. With printing, identical reproduction of architectural images made the paradigm of identicality a norm among architects. What the diffusion of architectural treatises established was a process of mass-production of ideas and architectural forms.

This process became even more radical with the advent of industrial production in which a further expanded division of labour and mechanical reproduction – not a simple reproduction of ideas and forms, but of the building elements themselves – made the distance between design and craft larger and larger.

This mode of production has been fundamentally challenged by the digital turn in architecture that occurred in the 1990s. The advent of CAD/CAM-aided design – Carpo argues – is overcoming the Albertian paradigm of identicality to replace it with the one of *sameness*. While mechanised reproduction of objects was based on the strict indexical relationship between the original and the copy, with processes of digital reproduction this relationship is no longer necessary and not even possible. Digital means of production are susceptible to being constantly re-adjusted, and self-customised.

Moreover, whereas with mechanical reproduction it was not feasible to change the form of the object or the component while it was being manufactured, with digital modes of production each mass-manufactured item can be different. For example, the architect and theorist Bernard Cache has theorised the authorial approach to digital design as 'objectile' (which is also the name of his practice and workshop in Paris). In Cache's terms, objectile stands for a generic object whose algorithmically produced form

can be differentiated and made singular for each object produced.

For Carpo, such production processes serve to reintroduce a pre-Albertian way of making architecture and design objects in which production is no longer driven by identicality, but by sameness, that is the resemblance between differentiated objects. Such a mode of production implies a form of authorship that is much more open to adaptability and interpretation, the author argues, and the end of identicality in design means that the latter is no longer a hierarchically organised form of labour, but a more open and horizontal way to produce architecture.

It is precisely at this point that I would level a criticism towards Carpo's thesis: that the 'open-ended' nature of the digitally driven design is ultimately a much more strict form of control. It makes creative processes much more open (indeed) towards any form of technocratic interference. If the Albertian invention of design contributed towards the division of labour within architecture, digital design appears to make this division even more complicated and difficult to re-compose.

Yet in spite of this criticism, *The Alphabet and the Algorithm* is a brilliant and well-crafted provocation that may be of interest not only for those who have embraced digital design, but also for those who remain sceptical towards the practice.

Below: a reconstruction of a drawing device following Leon Battista Alberti's 'scripting' method. Communicating space through notation rather than representation protected the architect's control and prevented drawings from being reproduced with errors
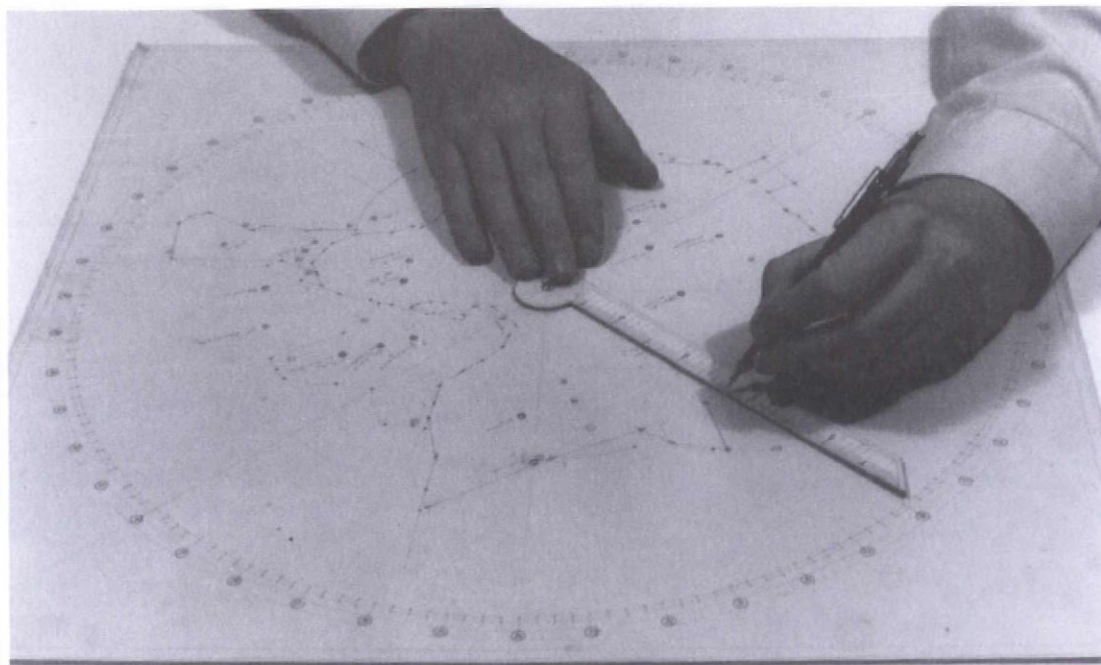
The secret life of libraries

ORIEL PRIZEMAN

Wisdom Builds Her House: The Architecture and History of Libraries, Architekturmuseum, Munich, until 16 October

Curator Winfried Nerdinger claims that more libraries have been built in the last 20 years than ever before and that contrary to expectations of the 1960s, navigation of digital versus physical literature has not halted this progress. Just now, such a positive message rings more brightly close to Munich's Glockenspiel than it might do amid the death knell of public libraries audible in Britain. Nevertheless, globally, a slideshow demonstrates that the idea of the library, as a physical embodiment of knowledge, is very much alive.

Four rooms narrate the purpose of libraries from dry to sweet. An impressive variety of texts from the library of Werner Oechslin is followed by plans and photographs interspersed with CAD/CAM models of libraries. Anecdotal vitrines hint at the wider role of libraries in culture. The rational progression through configurations for the type leads to responses from Le Corbusier to Toyo Ito: how might the sum of all knowledge be contained in buildings?

A wall of Erik Desmazières' cartoons depicting Jorge Luis Borges' impossible 'The Library of Babel' screens a final room in which a reel of real library activity runs. Collated from the archive of Ingo Tornow, excerpts from films depict encounters of murder, seduction, farce and fulfilment in libraries, including Wim Wenders' 1987 flight through Hans Scharoun's State Library in *Wings of Desire* where, against a collage of sound, smiles into the camera are calmly passed by for a long view across the horizon of the reading room below.

The story is a huge one and not completed here but the modest exhibition provides a stimulating framework from which to become more curious about our ambition to own, contain and wander around knowledge. By including the film montage, it mitigates the potential seriousness of the subject and gently acknowledges our fascination with rule-bending in such environments.

Oriel Prizeman focuses on libraries in next month's new Typology quarterly

PEDAGOGY

Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology, Ahmedabad, India
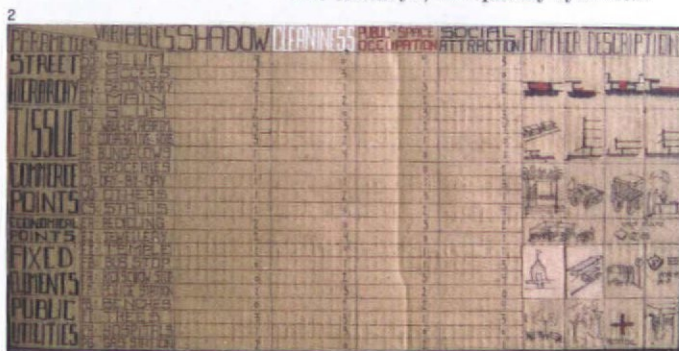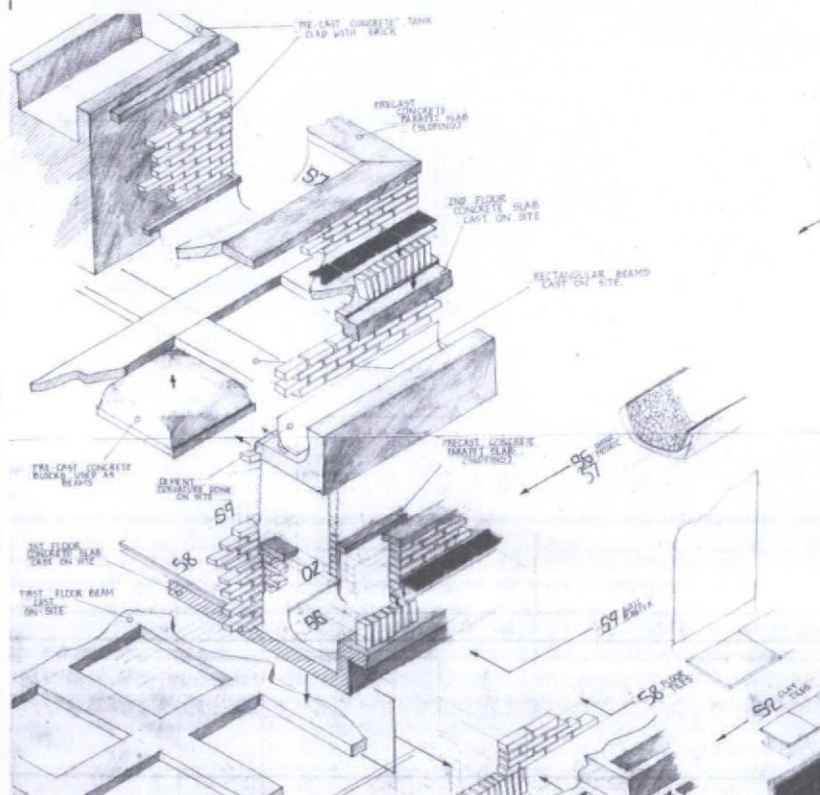
MATTHEW BARAC

As a fresh-faced first year at the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT), alumnus Prachi Acharya, now 27, was sent off by her studio tutor to spend the morning at Ahmedabad's bustling railway station. The purpose of the outing was not to study the building but to carry out, she recalls, 'a conscious documentation of the habits and space-use patterns of people'. Sketching luggage porters, chatting to strangers, watching the world go by in its ordinary detail, Acharya and her classmates were embarking upon a journey of

architectural discovery that would come to define their outlook on life, guided by a pedagogy that has distinguished the school since its establishment almost 50 years ago.

With its insistence on the centrality of everyday life to design, this educational approach is reinvigorated by each new generation of faculty at the CEPT. Vishwanath Kashikar, who began teaching soon after completing his postgraduate diploma and now holds an assistant professorship, explains: 'We believe in recognising existing contextual realities by experiencing them first-hand.' The implications of this ostensibly banal philosophy are far-reaching. 'It is easy to fall back upon nostalgia for a localised past. We want our graduates to understand the layered dimensions of truth that encompass both the global and the local, and to design in a manner attuned to today's complex reality.'

1. In the Building Construction and Detail drawing class, students Chandani Patel and Sejal Vasani create an elaborate exploded axonometric drawing of a wall detail
2 & 3. In Vishwanath Kashikar's fourth-year studio, students are encouraged to use first-hand experience to understand India's housing problems. Students work in groups to document habits and space-use patterns of the city's inhabitants

This down-to-earth engagement with the architectural site, rooted in the experience of actually being there, has an instructive provenance. Founded in 1962, CEPT was the brainchild of eminent Indian architect Balkrishna Doshi, whose teachings and buildings invoke a fusion of modernity and spirituality while celebrating ordinariness. The name of his practice, Vastu Shilpa Consultants, echoes the Hindu *shastras* associated with ancient place-making customs, yet his formative years were spent at the heart of the Modern Movement in the Paris office of Le Corbusier. Doshi schooled his students to embrace cultural traditions and at the same time to adopt an unsentimental, scientific approach to construction. His university buildings at CEPT, all concrete frame and exposed brickwork, offer an object lesson in the social impact of this approach. For Acharya, the quietly symbolic

campus architecture has the capacity to 'make one feel at "home" away from home... the design does indeed facilitate student interaction'.

Today's cohort of students continues to benefit from Doshi's pedagogical commitment to combining up-to-the-minute concerns with timeless values. Each year, undergraduates conduct a measured survey of a vernacular or historical site, engaging with their surroundings through the medium of drawing. This leads to positive outcomes for both school and students. CEPT's considerable architectural archive of hand-inked drawings documenting settlements across India demonstrates the sketching competence that has been nurtured through studio and fieldwork exercises. Over the years, it has provided a measure of students' environmental awareness and their ability to anchor proposals within the real world. For Kashikar,

'the proliferation of data means that teaching must increasingly focus on making sense of today's visual overload, instead of imparting information [but this] has pushed us towards emphasising the value of first-hand experience through making and sketching, rather than simply seeing'.

Design projects in Kashikar's fourth-year studio, which he runs with visiting tutor Surya Kakani, address the challenge of urban housing. Students investigate case-study sites – slums, bungalows, tenements, multi-storey blocks – generating a spatial vocabulary of occupation, which informs studio seminars and helps to bring design proposals to life. Hemal Tilvawala's project for mid-rise housing at Bimanagar, drawing on his studies of how people gather and move through public space, looks to reinvent the maligned motif of 'streets in the sky'.

Kashikar explains: 'Hemal is trying to transplant the heavily inhabited Indian urban street into an otherwise dead multi-storey housing corridor.'

The street is a perennial theme. Supervised by Kashikar on her final-year project, Acharya surveyed entrance thresholds in four local housing types, including a tightly knit, traditional low-income urban quarter. Illustrated by 39 hand-drawings, her micro-studies – documenting a shady spot that affords certain forms of encounter, or the way informal traders appropriate an articulated doorstep – provide evidence with which she builds a case for improvements to housing in Ahmedabad. For Kashikar, the implicit give and take between seeing and making is irreducible: 'We want our students to appreciate that the right design processes can lead to a better understanding of one's context, which makes it possible to create better design solutions.'
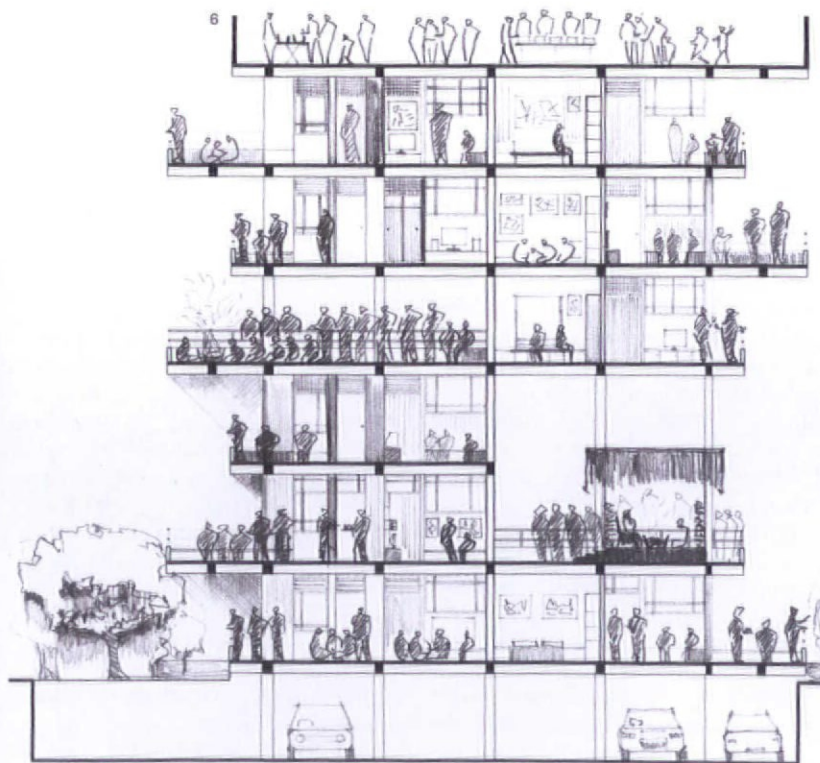
REPUTATIONS

Daniel Libeskind

WILLIAM JR CURTIS

It is a curious experience to go back to Berlin after an absence of some 15 years. Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum was under construction when I was last there in 1995 but I did snatch a glimpse of the building with its zigzag plan and diagonal gashes of light. The themes of Walter Benjamin's One-Way Street, and of the central void left by the Holocaust, were clear enough in the drawings and models but not yet perceptible in the construction.

Only days ago, I went back and experienced the finished building for the first time. It is now an established landmark in the city. The reaction was mixed. The leaning exterior is more subdued than many imagined and makes a dynamic foil to the old museum building of which it is an annexe. The theme of the street, with its three diagonal crossing points, one to annihilation, one to the diaspora and one to the future, is clearly spelt out. The void at the centre of the building, the dark tower chamber at the end of the Holocaust Street, and the tilting grid of stele in the Garden of Exile are strong spatial experiences, as is the central stair ending in a blank wall. But the route through the upstairs galleries is a muddle and the matter is not improved by the confused presentation, which is not worthy of its tragic subject matter.

Not everyone approves of Libeskind's 'theatrical' rendition of a troubled past but the Jewish Museum in Berlin stands as a work full of promise, designed by an architect who was in his forties when he conceived the idea. This was not a matter of 'Deconstructivist' mannerisms that were so fashionable at the time, but of a narrative translated into abstract form, light and space through the medium of architecture. There was another Libeskind project of the early 1990s

which revealed the potential of the relatively young architect, namely in the understated Garden of Love and Fire at Almere in the Netherlands.

Formed from a series of parallel metallic stele on a gritty base in the middle of an open green space, this haunting scheme no doubt owed a great deal to Richard Serra's sculptures using steel blades and cuts; but it showed how Libeskind was capable of using abstraction to touch upon subliminal emotions, to stir memories and even to encourage meditation. Although small, the project possessed a restrained monumentality. These two works of the 1990s continued investigations launched a decade earlier in the sketches of the 'Choral Works', which explored a sort of visual equivalence to music in scores of a kind. The Berlin and Almere schemes call to mind Wittgenstein's observation: 'Remember the impression one gets from good architecture, that it expresses a thought. It makes one want to respond with a gesture.'

So what went wrong? Fast forward to this year's Run Run Shaw Creative Media Centre for the City University of Hong Kong, a pile-up of Libeskindian clichés without sense, form or meaning – a reduction to caricature of all that the Jewish Museum set out to achieve. Or take the project for Gazprom City in St Petersburg of 2006, a 300m tall 'tower' that resembles a high heel shoe. Or the 'Tangent' facade for Hyundai Development Corporation Headquarters in Seoul of 2005, with its leering round mask, like a cartoon on a poster, but rendered in a visual language devaluing El Lissitzky: a colossal billboard shouting a trite and noisy corporate message across the mess of an East Asian city. Talk about an uneven trajectory. This was virtually a betrayal of all that Libeskind had stood for.

Maybe the trouble started with the famous 'Freedom Tower' fiasco in New York, the skyscraper which from a certain angle mimicked the

> 'He lost his architectural soul, like so many other architects of his generation once trumpeted as the critical avant-garde'

upraised arm of the Statue of Liberty and announced its all-American credentials by being 1,776ft tall (the date of American Independence – 1776 and all that!). Suddenly, the Danny who had been all about cutting through the tangled suppressions of difficult European war memories seemed to let his architecture serve the dubious Neo-Con redefinition of 9/11 as an attack upon the 'freedoms' of the US, if not the 'Western World' in general.

As it turns out, these 'freedoms' included the 'right' to invade countries illegally, to set up prison camps and to muzzle the freedom of the press and the free expression of public opinion with the Patriot Act. Not Libeskind's fault, of course, but he took a risk in playing along with a narrative embedded in half-truths and in a refusal to look critically at international political reality. You can wear 'I love New York' buttons and appear on TV chat shows but it turns out that NY does not love architecture. In the end, everything is reduced to the level of the real estate developer's calculations. A skyscraper is just a skyscraper, after all, a banal stack of offices whatever cartoons, national myths, or twists and turns one may apply to it.

So Libeskind hit the big time and became a 'success story' and an international brand in the global star system. But perhaps he lost his architectural soul in the process, like so many other architects of his generation once trumpeted as being part of the supposedly 'critical avant-garde'. One thinks of Coop Himmelb(l)au, the Rolling Stones of Vienna with their Blue Angel creeping over a rooftop, then the monstrosity of its recent skyscraper for Shenzhen; of Peter Eisenman's theorising snatched from Derrida, then the catastrophic reality of the City of Culture in Galicia; of Zaha Hadid with her neo-Lissitzky paintings of the Hong Kong Peak project, then the jumble of computer-generated formalism

JONATHAN FARR

being dumped all around the world, promoted by specious comparisons with gladioli or seashores. Oh the delights of Parametricism and computers, which make the bad easy and the good as hard as ever. We hear ad nauseam about 'complexity' but most of it is simple-minded. Never in the history of humanity has so much meaningless geometry been produced by so few architects.

Then a flashback to a warm afternoon in New York in 1988... a visit to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) to see the 'Deconstructivist' show. I join Joseph Giovannini, former critic of the *LA Times*, who was miles ahead of Mark Wigley and Aaron Betsky in sensing new directions. Of course, Philip Johnson was pulling the strings behind the scenes and MoMA was serving as the willing fashion boutique promoting new hemlines. What fun to pull the rug out from under Postmodern Classicism when you had been one of the proponents and just when the corporate US was settling into a banquet of pink keystones. What fun as well to dress the whole thing up in radical chic theorising and to compromise academia in the process: 'Deconstructivism' = Neo-Constructivist formalism + a dose of 'Decon' philosophy... geddit?

Of course, the best of the lot was Frank Gehry, who hardly opened a theory book in his life. A nice bit of packaging then for a new generation and in the middle of the show Libeskind's 'City Edge' project for Berlin, all about cuts, fracturing and difficult historical memories in a divided city, a divided Europe, a divided world. So the wall came down in 1989 and the capitalism of the 'free world' went on the rampage with social fractures and urban fragmentation of its own, and on a large scale all over the place. And the 'radicals' all became conservatives putting their flamboyant gestures and fractured shards in the service of the unfettered forces of the market. 'Freedom' or slavery?

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Review of applications will begin on October 1, 2011 and will continue until the position is filled.

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For more information about the Department, the College of AAP, and Cornell University,
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CAVE. CANEM.

The abandoned mines in the mountains of Campania, sketched by Beniamino Servino, a Naples-trained architect who lives in their shadow, in the town of Caserta. The Latin caption, *cave canem* ('beware of the dog'), plays on the Italian word for the abandoned pits (*cave*) and the desolate landscape that remains behind. This is one of a number of sketches on the subject by the delicately aphoristic artist, who takes pride in his position in the architectural world: *quelli che stanno al margine hanno semplicemente un'orbita più grande* ('those who stand at the margins simply have a wider orbit').
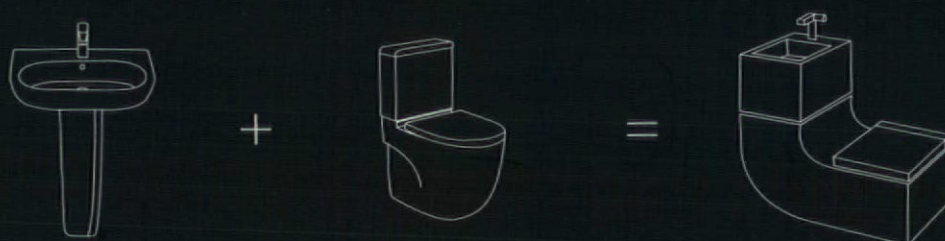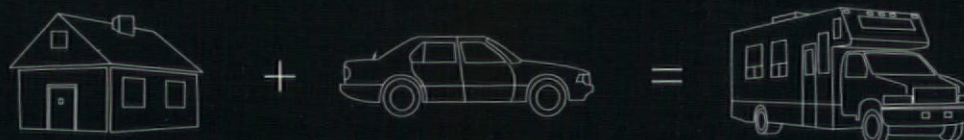
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