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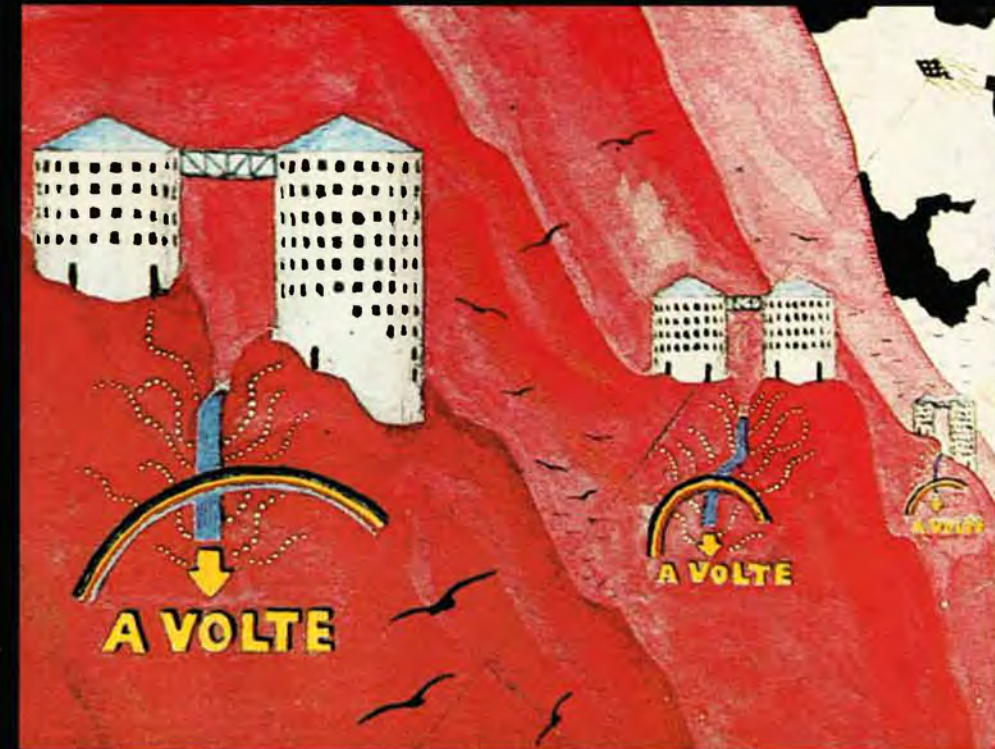
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TP provincial design 8, print

POST-MODERNISM



CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES
IN EUROPE AND AMERICA

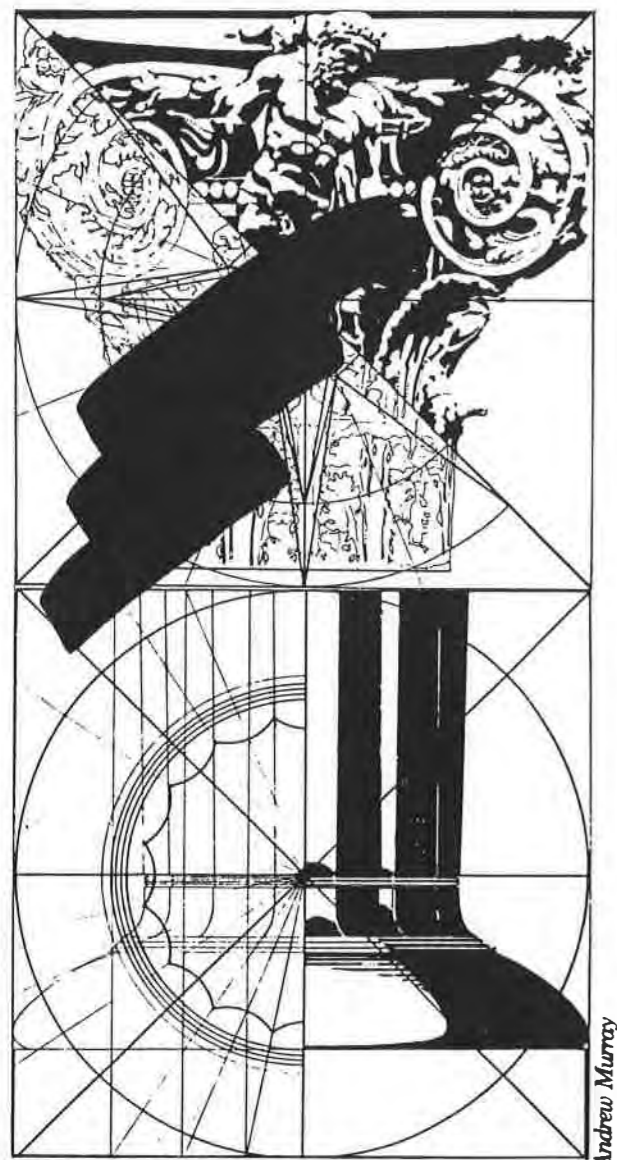
Journal
of the Natal
Provincial
Institute of
Architects

1-1983



Compiled and edited by Dr. Wally Peters for the Natal Provincial Institute of Architects. P.O. Box 777, Durban 4000, Telephone 67345
Design and production: Monica Göbel

Cover: 'Le Bateau Ivre', 1976, by Baldissari/Grossi/Minardi, AD 4/78.



Andrew Murray

Editorial: Comment

Post-Modern is a term invented by its apostle Charles Jencks. It is not the name of an architectural style – it lacks cohesion. Instead it denotes a period, as the prefix suggests, and it is used as an umbrella term for a number of contemporary attitudes in architecture. Common to these attitudes is their antithesis to the Modern or ascetic International Style, and their allusionism and historicism. For some time now the catch-phrase "Post-Modernism" has confused architectural discussion, the range within the work of the protagonists presenting practical and academic problems. *NPIA* is therefore pleased to accept the offer by two young practising architects, to contribute to an issue on Post-Modernism. Both are graduates of the University of Natal and have publications to their credit. The authors are well aware of the introductory nature of their contributions, and offer their elucidations of attitudes in America and Europe primarily to stimulate discussion within the profession. Comment is by Lance Smith, who as a post-graduate student studied under Louis Kahn at Pennsylvania, and later completed a degree in urban design at Columbia.

The contributions of Messrs Stafford and Murray highlight two variables which shape our response to architectural problems. In the first instance there are the varying attitudes of individual architects. These range from the "interventionist" at one end of the spectrum – those who see their work as a means of changing society to suit their view, and at the other end, those who accept and work within the cultural framework in which they find themselves. The second variable is the more obvious one of place. The combinations of these two variables are endless and are the strength of architecture.

If "Post Modernism" is taken to mean the adaptation of culturally unrelated historical elements to our buildings in order to impart "meaning" then it must be regarded as a stylistic aberration soon to disappear. J C Smuts once wrote "when I look at history I am a pessimist, but when I look at pre-history I am an optimist". While history may inform our response to architectural problems, the solution to them lies closer at hand. Within the confines of our own philosophy and those of the place in which we operate, the search for true meaning and relationship between architecture and contemporary society is full of unique opportunities. If, after all the "post modern" rhetoric has died down, architects come to realise the potential of their own backyards then Mr Jencks will have performed a valuable service.

Europe: Architecture of Intervention by Bruce Stafford of Ferreira da Silva and Stafford Architects



'All my life I have been waiting for the revival of architecture. I do not think it will happen, but if the right idea could be put out at the right time I think it would happen. How wonderful it would be. The world would be beautiful again!'

The modern movement is dead. The *Espit Nouveau* has become tainted with the failure of its goals. The heroic attempt to celebrate technology has had its Dunkirk in the Centre Pompidou. The disastrous British New Towns are a memorial to its planning ideals, epitomised by Le Corbusier's *Plan Voisin*.

This apparent failure can be related to the Modern Movement's negation of history and subsequent loss of place or *genius loci*. The modern axiom that architecture may be reduced to a translation of practical, social and economical conditions into form, lacks an important element – meaning in architecture.

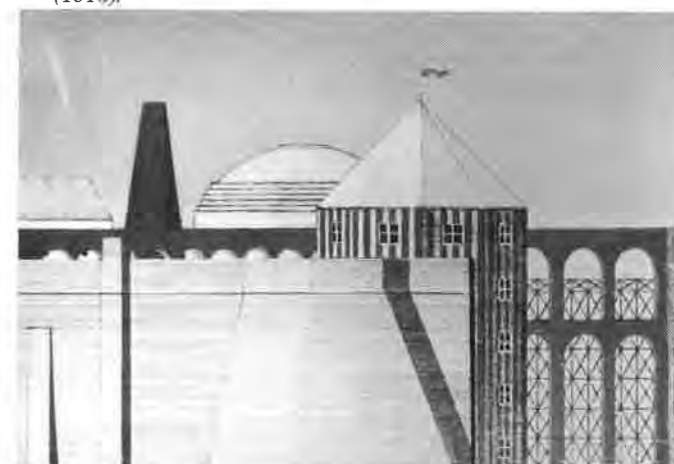
In the wake of the Modern Movement's *Blitzkrieg* through Europe, a counter revolution among the young began to question its hermetic ideals, heroic pluralism and perpetuation of the capitalist system. A renaissance of architectural thought generated a plethora of manifestos, exhibitions, books and articles that spread throughout Europe like the plague. The theories of Aldo Rossi, O.M. Ungers, Leon Krier and Manfredo Tafuri appear to be the most radical and vital, motivated by the common demand for meaning, historical-intelligence and politico-cultural content.



2. Aldo Rossi, *Floating Temple, Venice*

1. Laugier, *The Primitive Hut*

3. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Joys and Enigmas of a Strange Hour (1913)*



In his book: "Architecture and the City" Aldo Rossi postulates an architecture based on typological rationalism. The writings of Neo-Classical Abbé Laugier form the structure of his argument. Laugier proposed an architectural model derived from nature, a rusticated hut formed from the assembly of parts of trees. The trunks form the four corner columns, the branches form trusses and the leaves provide necessary cover, exemplifying the notion that architecture can be reduced to basic fundamentals or archetypes (Fig 1).

Rossi's rationalism protests against the liberal diversity of Post Modernism and advocates the return to simple typic forms which may be understood by everybody. *The Architect's task is to analyse the range of building types which have been developed through history and to abstract from them the essence of each type.* This process is initiated with absolutes or self evident truths of geometric form – the platonic cube, sphere, cone and cylinder.

These are added as independent pieces to form the simplest pure composition. Inflections or interaction between elements are carefully avoided thereby achieving a timeless essence devoid of any semiotic or iconographic connotations (Fig 2).

Rossi's technique is heavily influenced by the paintings of Surrealist Giorgio de Chirico – the last painter of the Italian city before it became invaded and polluted by industrial noise and machines. His work captures the hauntingly evocative Italian historical and vernacular architecture (Fig 3). As with Rossi the buildings have melancholic naivety drenched in time and memory. The formal language of functional mannerism is deliberately mixed with archetypal memories in such a way as to neutralise signification itself in a defiant gesture against bourgeois imperialism (Fig 4).



^ 4. Aldo Rossi, *Drawing with statue of S. Carlo*.

v 6. Leon Krier, *Michelangelo adaptation*.



A more radical marxist stance is taken by Manfredo Tafuri who argues that architecture is a powerful cultural medium capable of political expression. Successive works produced within the capitalist framework preserve and perpetuate that framework against the pressures of experience produced by the dynamic operation of economic and social realities. This has been done by the projection of beliefs and assumptions without which capitalist life could not continue.

Seen in one way this ideology is a deliberate mask for the exercise of power, and in another way it is a set of illusions by which the rulers and ruled alike hope to maintain their beliefs in the rightness of the world. By treating works of architecture in this manner Tafuri elevates them to a position in no way less important than all other products of intellectual thought. The result is to establish the right of architecture to be taken as an integral part of culture and to dispell any disparagement of it as mere technology or utility.

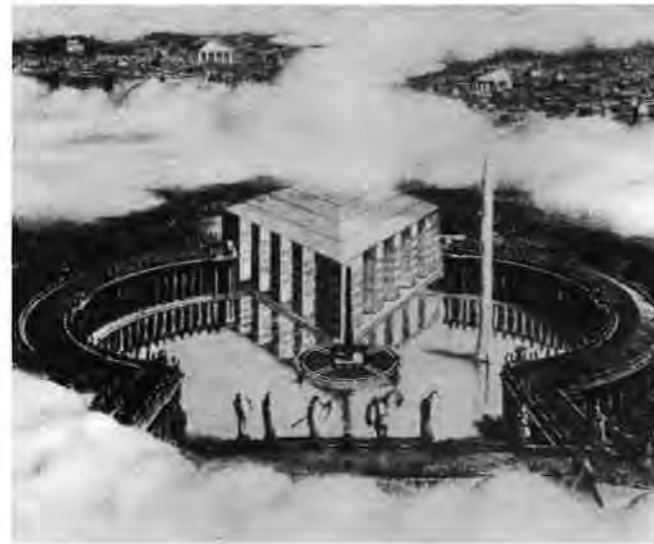
Tafuri sees the Post-Modern Movement in America as a prime example of the perpetuation of capitalist ideology. The architecture of inclusion, semiotics and iconography is a thinly veiled attempt to lift commercial imperialism onto a badly needed cultural pedestal.

Sharing this standpoint, Leon Krier calls for the return to the 'Art' of Architecture, where the division of labour and specialisation will be replaced by a return to craftsmanship – the very basis for any culture. As with Rossi, Krier's theories are influenced by writers such as Quatremere De Quincy and Quinlan Terry who propagated the re-instatement of the essential elements in architecture (the column, pediment and triangular roof truss) by a process of rationalisation within a contextual framework (Fig 5).



^ 5. Quinlan Terry, *The Rustic Hut*.

v 7. Leon Krier, *Bird's eye view of the new social centre in St Peter's Square*.



Krier sets out to mix history into the present to form a new urban synthesis. He proposes a model for action based on three principles: the actual physical form of the city should be built up from a basic urban block no bigger than that necessary to house about a dozen families; there should be an end to zoning and in its place *quartiers* – cities within the city – each containing all the functions normal to the urban life of the city as a whole; that the various buildings that constitute the city – civic commercial, industrial, residential, etc., should be understood as types and recognised as such. In a series of proposals for various European cities Krier applies these as well as typological and morphological principles in lucid seductive impressions using rich collages of primary Utopian Archetypes (Fig 6).

It can be argued that the theories of Rossi, Tafuri and Krier are radical in content and dangerous in reality. Their stance opens them to obvious criticism, for example Rossi's rationalism does not allow for human dimension, Tafuri is unclear on how he proposes to eliminate ideology from architecture and the practicality of returning to a pre-industrial age, as proposed by Krier, is somewhat questionable.

The value of their work does not lie in its literal interpretation but rather in the impact of alternative attitudes and processes by which the introduction of cultural and political intervention questions accepted architectural norms.

References:

1. Raymond Erith, *Royal Academy Catalogue*, 1976.
2. Aldo Rossi, *L'Architettura della Città*.

America: by Andrew Murray of Johnson Murray Architects



^ Robert Stern, *Residence at East Hampton*, 1980.

v Venturi and Ranch, *Tucker House*, 1974-75.

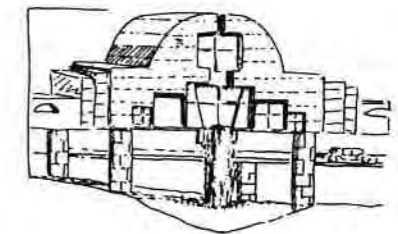


In America, in an age of silicone chip, bionic high – technology, it would seem strange that new buildings are appearing that have classical columns, broken pediments, heavy masonry walls and lots of colour. In order to get behind what apparently seems to be a style of pastiche and appliqué, one must examine the philosophies, ideas and buildings of the leading Post-Modern Architects. In order to put them in context one must start with modernism and trace the development through to the state of the art as it exists in America today.

With the arrival in the late thirties of the Bauhaus masters of the modern movement like Mies, Gropius, and Breuer, American architecture experienced a kind of cultural neo – colonialism resulting in what became known as the International style, a style that was hermetically purist and that held function as the primary determinant of form.

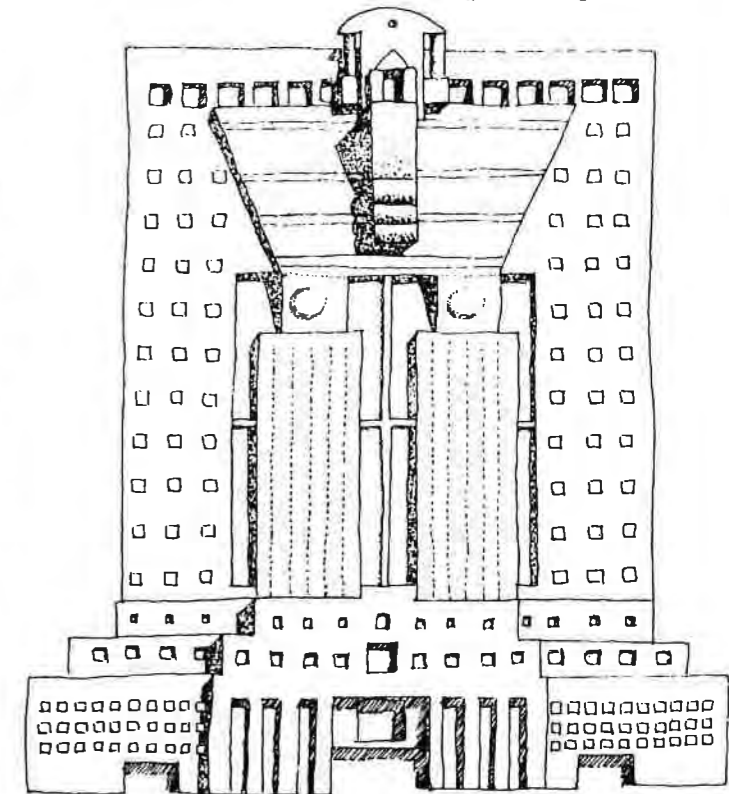
In the fifties two Architects began to produce work that created the first cracks in the monolithic facade of modernism, Eero Saarinen and Louis Kahn. Saarinen's TWA Building in 1956 broke all the rules of functionalism with its soaring "bird in flight" imagery. Kahn's expressive useage of building materials and revelation of the inner structure in an almost spiritual way, freed architecture from the restrictive bonds of minimalist purism.

In 1966 Robert Venturi, a desciple of Kahn's, published *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. This scholarly yet apparently heretical work from a modern day architect glorified the "messy vitality" of an architecture that was ambivalent and "doubly coded". *Learning from Las Vegas* followed in which Venturi and Scott Brown raised the ordinary, neon – bedazzled main street strip, to the level of an appropriate cultural manifestation, correct in scale to the passing automobile, and suitably coded to convey meaning



^ Michael Graves, *Fargo-Moorhead Cultural Centre*, 1977-1978.

v Michael Graves, *Portland Public Office Building*.



to Mr. Average American.

Complexity and Contradiction was immediately taken up by architects like Robert Stern and Charles Moore, both Post-Modern pathfinders, as their torch. "Signs", "codes", "ironic references" and "meaning" were some of the key words and references that suddenly began appearing in architectural dialogue. All are derived from the structural linguistics, the study of how language conveys meaning, a development that was applied to architectural appreciation. How and why do we relate to particular buildings? Semiotics as it was called, became the science of the seventies and suddenly buildings had to have meaning, had to relate at a human level, ideas that for 40 years had been expurgated from architectural theory.

Michael Graves, like Venturi, a 'Prix de Rome' scholarship winner, spent 2 years studying in Rome learning about architecture from the living examples of the Roman & Renaissance masters. In 1972 the publication of the "New York Five" brought Graves' work into the international spotlight. His early work returned to the roots of Modernism, De Stijl, Cubism, and early Corbusian forms. However these elements were used iconographically in a rich Baroque manner, further heightened by use of colour. Graves' recent work has shifted its frame of reference to the classical vocabulary and thus his buildings are built up in layers of historical allusions. Graves describes his work as "allegorical" with nods to the Italian Renaissance along with subtle references to his Modernist colleagues. In this respect Graves and the other Post-Modernists are like the new wave of filmmakers in the Steven Spielberg and George Lucas mould, who display their virtuosity by "tipping their hats" to the greats of recent film history. The meaning behind the metaphor is



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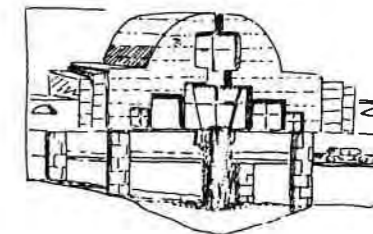


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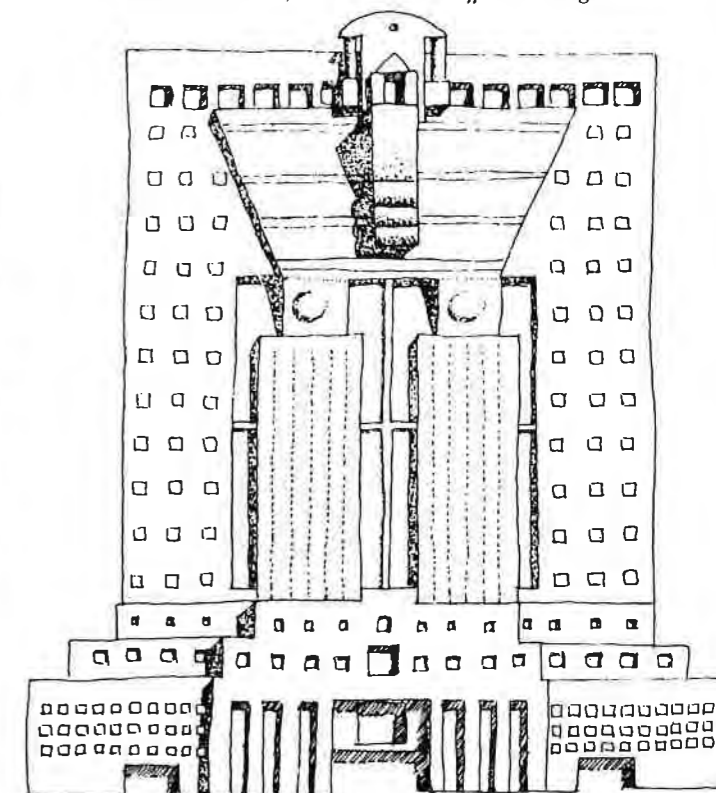
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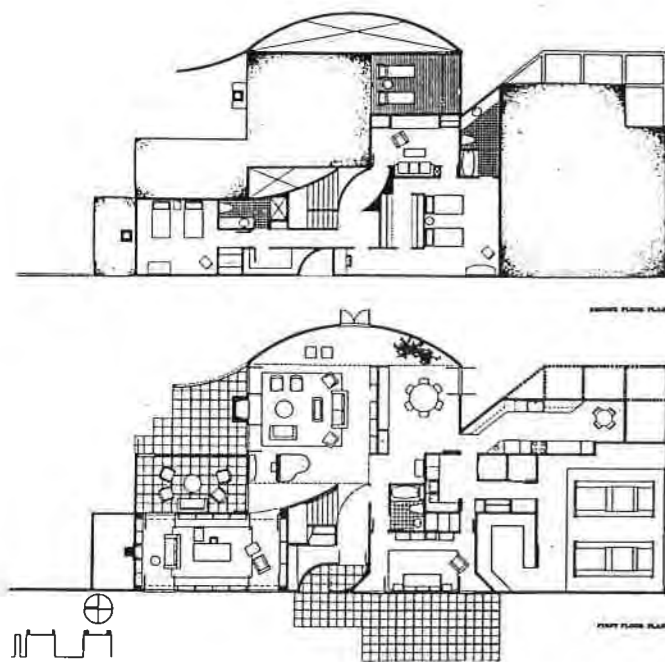
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▲ ▼ Robert Stern, *Lang House, Connecticut* 1974.



not always obvious, however each apparent whimsy is carefully thought out, the results being inventive and rigorously informed.

Robert Stern has pursued the stylistic aspect of Post-Modernism to perhaps the greatest degree. He defines three attitudes that are beginning to form the paradigms of a style: "Contextualism", or the belief that buildings should refer and defer to their surroundings; "Allusionism", a kind of romantic use of historical icons and forms for semantic reasons; and "Ornamentalism", the satisfaction of man's desire for elaboration in order to give human scale to the building/object. Stern's domestic work exemplifies these stylistic elements. His use of the Shingle Style, with large bay windows, pitched roofs, verandahs and decorated fireplaces, evoke the American ideal of the cosy, homely house and yet are planned in a manner appropriate to today's lifestyle. Stern's choice of the classical language of architecture for his public buildings is an attempt to import a quality that is both rational as well as humanistic. For example classical columns with their easily recognisable human proportions of foot, body and head, create a sense of scale. Post-Modern-Classicism differs from Graeco-Roman classicism in that it is used in a representational way, in a hybrid manner in response to contemporary society which is pluralistic and dynamic, unlike the ordered balance of man and his environment that was Platonic Classical Society.

Charles Moore is the kind of intellectual who chooses emotional values over academic ones. His search is for universal pleasures inherent in architecture: "the way we feel about buildings, how light animates them and the breezes flow through them, and how they engage our bodies and give us a sense of where we are and cause our



▲ ▼ Charles Moore, *Piazza d'Italia, 1978/1979*



spirits to soar". Moore, rightly, gets beyond the semantic treatment of the facade and puts it into the total experience of the building.

In recent years the American born architect Charles Jencks has become the most prolific documentor of the Post-Modern phenomenon. Jencks, with his mania for categorising developments at an early stage, has brought architectural journalism up to the level of the "New Journalism", and architects are finding themselves increasingly self-conscious of current and future directions of philosophy, especially with no rigid dogma to influence design. The dangers are there. The risk of failure is high, a "Radical Eclecticism" could easily degenerate into a new kind of superficial play with forms, the striving for meaning becoming lost as the sign itself becomes the content. However this as yet unnamed era that we are moving into is exciting and challenging and behind all the present-day "puns", "metaphors", "ironic references" and "serious jokes" is a developing body of architectural thought that contains the signposts for present day architects to leave their mark on history.

Illustration Acknowledgements:

Europe: *Architectural Design*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 4, 8, 9.

America:

Architectural Design, Vol. 47, No. 4, 5/6-1980.

University/Institute Liaison Committee:

The following events have been planned for the first quarter of 1983:

Tuesday, 1 March, 5.15 p.m. in SH.2, University of Natal: *What can we learn from Hindu temples?* by Paul Mikula, co-author of the book 'Traditional Hindu Temples in South Africa'.

Monday, 7 March, 5.15 p.m. in SH.2, University of Natal: *Helmut Jahn on 362 Smith Street*.

Tuesday, 15 March, 5.15 p.m. on the Western Campus, University of Natal: *Tennis*, Students and Staff vs the Profession. Members wishing to make the Institute teams should contact Keith Alcock, tel. 330023.

News:

ISAA Congress 1983: Southern Africa Architecture: Roots, Development, Future.

To be held in Cape Town immediately after Easter from 5-8 April, the Congress gives a unique opportunity of combining a holiday in the mother city, during what is usually the best time of the year, with participation in the wide ranging Congress debates and concurrent Cape Town Festival events.

Foreign speakers who have accepted invitations include RIBA Gold Medallist, Sir Philip Dowson; Amos Rapoport of "House Form and Culture" fame; Joseph Rykwert, an historian based in London; and Julian Beinart of the USA, a former head of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at UCT.

If booked and paid 60 days in advance, the Durban-Cape Town return airfare amounts to R218, a savings of R92 over the normal fare, an offer members are urged to avail themselves of. Block bookings have been made at various Cape Town hotels.

Enquiries or requests for further information should be addressed to: The Secretary, Congress Steering Committee, P.O. Box 3952, Cape Town, 8000.

Public Relations

Requests from a daily newspaper for ideas on architectural coverage have been interpreted by the Provincial Committee as an opportunity for corporate advertising and for communication with the public. A primary goal would be an increased public awareness of the built environment, particular emphasis falling on the architect's role therein. Coverage is to be thematic and channelled through the Secretariat.

As a first theme, buildings about 25 years of age that have had a significant impact on the built environment and significant influence on the profession has been suggested and members are asked to submit to Mrs Grobler (tel. 67345) names and addresses of buildings that they have built in Natal during the period circa 1958 or such by others that they consider worthy of inclusion, final selection being at the hands of an especially appointed sub-committee.

Such press coverage could not only help the public identify and appreciate good buildings that have stood the test of some time, but also promote the need to preserve buildings of quality, an early public education making preservation battles a case of action rather than reaction.

Nominations and/or ideas for further themes should be made by Friday, 31 March.

Visits to Buildings

As a result of the good response by members to the visit of "101 Victoria Embankment", it is intended to arrange similar visits to other buildings during 1983. Members are asked to submit suggestions of buildings to the Secretariat that visits can be programmed.

Changes:

Changes in Partnerships

Mr J.B. Weston resigned from the partnership of Williams, Weston, Joubert, Owens, Van Niekerk and Partners Inc. w.e.f. 30th September 1982. As from 1st October 1982 he will practise on his own account under the style of "J.B. Weston, Architect" at 301 Juniper House, Overport Drive, Durban.

Mr R.F. Williams resigned from the partnership of Williams, Weston, Joubert, Owens, Van Niekerk and Partners Inc. w.e.f. 30th September 1982. As from 1st October 1982 he will practise on his own account at 27 Ashcombe Park, 150 Prospect Hall Road, Durban North.

Notification has also been received that as from the 1st October 1982 the company of Williams, Weston, Joubert, Owens, Van Niekerk and Partners Inc. will change its name to Joubert, Owens, Van Niekerk and Partners, Durban Inc. at 303 Juniper House, 92 Overport Drive, Durban and the office will be managed by Messrs David Gillies and Brian Robb.

Mr B.R. Servant and Mr M. McKinlay have advised that as from 1st November 1982 the name of their partnership had changed from The Victor Fouché Partnership to The Brian Servant Partnership and the address has changed to 332 Loop Street, Pietermaritzburg.

As from 1st September 1982 Mr M.H. Kendall became a director in Paton Taylor Associates Inc.

Mr M.F. Mullins has changed the style of his practice to "Mullins Associates" with effect from 1st July 1982. Mr G. Mullins is consultant to the practice.

Mr G.M. Khan has opened a practice under the style of "G.M. Khan Architect".

Mr J.A.K. Hope and Mr C.C. Clark have formed an association to be known as "Hope Clark Associates" at Suite 503 Charter House, Brand Road, Durban.

Mr R.S. Granville is in charge of the Ladysmith office of Myles, Porter, Pugh and Seirlis.

Messrs Monty Isaacs & Fandam have entered into partnership with Mr W. Steele and have opened a Durban office under the style of Monty Isaacs Fandam & Steele. The address given is P.O. Box 480, Westville.

S.N. Tomkin, Hanson and Partners have advised that as from 21st August 1982 Mr S.N. Tomkin retired as a partner of the firm but will remain as a consultant to the practice.

Mr R.C. Geraghty has advised that as from 1st August 1982 he has entered into an Association with Mr I. Little and Mr P. McCaffery. The style and name of his practice "Geraghty" will not change.

Mr J.M. Edgar has advised that he is no longer a partner in Building Design Group Lesotho and is now in practice on his own account under the style of John Edgar Architect P.O. Box 2186, Maseru, Lesotho.

Mr L. O'Shea has advised that the partnership F.H. Moerdyk, O'Shea, Serfontein, Viljoen and Partners has changed its name to Stucke, Harrison O'Shea and Partners. The address remains unchanged.

Changes in addresses

H.V. Mariner to 157 Pietermaritzburg Street, Pietermaritzburg.
A.J. Watson to 13 Bishop Road, Stamford Hill, Durban.
G.G. MacFarlane to P.O. Box 20192, Windhoek, S.W.A.
L.R. Pieterse to 16 Kildare, 81 Botanic Gardens Road, Durban.
M.A. Friedrichs (Horne Glasston and Partners) to 542 Ridge Road, Durban.
J.L.H. Smith to 741 Musgrave Road, Durban.
B.T. Kearney to 5 Kinmont Crescent, Carrington Heights.
R. Geraghty to 601 Prudential Equity Building, 331 Smith Street, Durban.
J. Edgar to P.O. Box 2186, Maseru.

Changes in Membership

J.A.K. Hope - TPI to NPI address P.O. Box 3033, Durban 4000
A.C. Dold - TPI to NPI (Retired) P.O. Box 127, Southbroom
J.J.M. Van Zyl - CPI to NPI address 204 Burton Hall, Burton Avenue, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg.
C. du Toit - CPI to NPI address 197 Woodhouse Road, Pietermaritzburg.
P.C. van B. Gertenbach from TPI to NPI address c/o Campbell Bernstein & Irving, P.O. Box 37002, Overport, 4067.
A.P. de B.L. Ivo - NPI to TPI.
P.C. van B. Gertenbach - TPI to NPI, c/o Campbell, Bernstein and Irving, P.O. Box 37002, Overport.

Changes in Class

D.N. Callinicos - ordinary to retired
S.B. Neal from Ant to Ordinary

New Members

I.A. Little (ordinary), 16 Ryde Avenue, Durban.
P.G. McCaffery (ordinary), 6 Paulynn Place, 13 South Ridge Road, Durban.
P.R. Moss (ordinary), P.O. Box 3540, Durban.
M.A.R. Wesson (ordinary-restricted), P.O. Box 4082, Durban.
S.B. Neal (ordinary), 2 Trevelyan, 33 Pinewood Gardens, Umbilo, Durban.
D.M.B. de Gersigny (ordinary), P.O. Box 217, Estcourt.
D.J. Harris (ordinary), c/o Benmor Architects and Town Planners, P.O. Box 256, Hatzor, Haglith 10300, Israel.
M.A. Pellegrini (Ant), 12 Kent Gardens, Durban North.
D.W. Cross (ordinary), P.O. Box 94, Maseru 100, Lesotho.
P.G.S. Peck (Ordinary), Room 111, Bank of Transkei Building, Sutherland Street, Umlata.
A.R. Murray (ordinary), 48 Cromwell Road, Glenwood, Durban.
P.R. Moss (ordinary), P.O. Box 3540, Durban.

Resignations

W.M.M. Sutherland.

Deceased

Mr W. Lyon on 23.10.82.