The Architect

Established 1854

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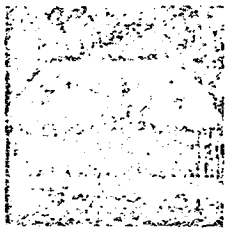

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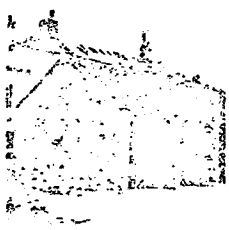

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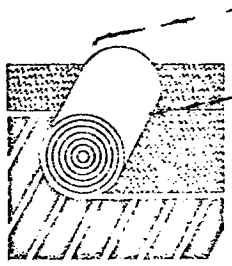

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New Directions:

In ***New Directions,*** The Architect is launching a major investigation of the role of the architect in the face of current and predictable pressures, needs and opportunities. Expanding on the title of the 1976 RIBA Conference ("Architecture: Opportunity: Achievement") we hope, over the months, gradually to build up a composite portrait of the kind of architect needed in an age of crisis. We hope that, as the series develops, it will become an open-ended and continuing discussion within the profession.

We begin with a challenge from **James Lewis RIBA,** senior research fellow at Bradford University and leader of its Disaster Research Unit.

Architecture is, by its nature, a multi-disciplinary pursuit. But the traditional concept of the architect as designer – leading and co-ordinating the construction skills and resources of the builder – as figurehead and as paragon of taste is still very much alive and persists both in the image the layman has and within some elements of the profession itself.

As, however, building methods and building systems became faster and more complex, and education more specialised, there was a realisation in the 1950s and onwards that building design, supervision and management called for expertise not contained within any one profession and multi-disciplinary design teams became normal practice.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the larger offices contained not only architects but also regional and urban planners; landscape architects; structural, electrical and mechanical service engineers; sanitation engineers; quantity surveyors; land surveyors; management consultants; systems analysts; financial advisers; photographers and communications experts; while contributors from the fine arts were on tap.

Invariably, however, the architect still led the team or headed the office and the end product was invariably pre-conceived as a building of some kind.

Multi-disciplinary

In evolving reorganised methods of practice to meet this new phenomenon, the profession again led; architectural teaching methods followed and adapted to the "multi-disciplinary" creed. Concepts such as the "internal-environment", "environmental control" and "environment systems" meant the contents of buildings were tackled with "comprehensive" understanding and, as students qualified, they reinforced the concept and execution of "multi-disciplinary" building design and production.

But what do architects mean by "environment" anyway? The term can mean the internal environment, contained and controlled by a building. It may mean space between buildings or the visual environment, or conservation; or a combination of any of these. It rarely goes any further when used within the architectural profession.

Rarely is the term used in a truly ecological context; even more so in terms of a building's impact upon "the environment"; and almost never in terms of the impact of environment on a building!

The word is used with more meaning by members of many professions, in their capacity of what architects call "laymen" or the "public".

In fact, the processes of designing and building are, to a large extent, repetitive. Variation (and therefore interest for the designer, builder and onlooker) comes from the location and siting as well as the material and function of the building. If the physical environment is considered in relation to the current political, social and economic environment, these variations would, over time, be considerably increased. Buildings are in any case, whether their context be so analysed or not, products of their *total* environment – one might even say by-products.

But instead of opening up, expanding and meeting these procedures and influences from an assessment of *total environment* the profession has closed in upon itself, put up its defences and become constrained, introverted and overburdened with its own problems; blinkered by its need to build at all costs to secure its own perpetuity, so that much of its work is divorced from social reality. It is, perhaps, an "uptight" profession.

The processes of education generally, and architectural education in particular, do little to change this situation. Education, for all its multi-disciplinary "creed", has still produced essentially separately trained "disciplines" with little reference to genuinely multi-disciplinary *working,* ie to the real needs and methods of group working or project based team formation.

Buildings themselves, those which are the products of the architectural profession, are a symptom of an up-tight and defensive profession; and an up-tight architecture can rarely be ecologically and environmentally sensitive. Aesthetic considerations appear to control the end-product rather than serving as a means to the ultimate end-product of sensitive, adaptable and delightful solutions. Beautiful materials and beautiful detail; but an up-tight architecture in relation to surroundings (to "environment") visually, socially, economically and ecologically, can and often does result in buildings that close themselves in, reject the onlooker, reflect the onlooker (sic), ignore their neighbours and stand as mastodons actually extinct but attempting to proclaim a bold future!

As if all these doubts and crises were not enough, following them has come the worst recession and financial crisis since the 1920s. Workload has declined, practices have shrunk or closed altogether and redundancies are high. Having struggled for twenty years to adapt to change, to adapt to new demands for faster and larger buildings for schools, universities, hospitals and housing, the architectural profession is defensive, shrinking, territorially sensitive and introverted.

Attacks from within the profession against the system for planning approvals, re-examination of the building process (long life, low energy, loose fit) and complaints about building regulations and the system of approval are symptomatic of a condition, but do not go very far either to provide a cure or to remove the cause.

Energy consumption

Some architects and students, it is true, have been quick to respond to demands for reduced energy consumption by buildings. Alongside is the fact that more architectural practices and more architects than ever before are working overseas – and not always from choice. It may be that, once again, the schools of architecture will seek to follow what they see as the needs of the profession but it is apparent that they are giving very little, if any, attention to the problems of design and construction in situations other than those which predominate in the United Kingdom.

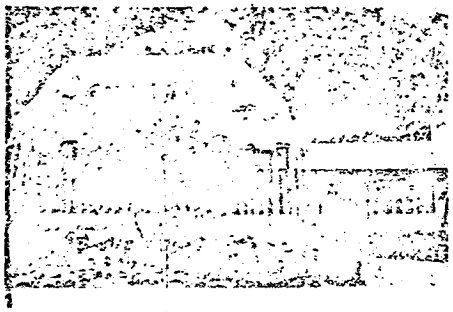
This is hardly surprising when the profession itself falls far short of expressing any recognition of major problems that society as a whole is having to face and will have to face in the future. Can we afford to continue containing the role of the profession in terms of buildings only? Or can "problem solving" involve us in non-building solutions and areas far removed from building construction? Can we afford to continue considering the role of the profession in national terms with a few (a lot?) of us overflowing from time to time into other countries? Should we not be thinking in broader concepts both conceptually and geographically?

The programme material for the 1976 RIBA Conference recognised the "grim" economic situation and the need for the profession to "identify the important changes in society which are creating a new context for the architect's unique skills", and to "increase its value to itself and society and thus retain its (society's) confidence".

But this concluded only in positing "the need to examine how architects can work with, and relate to, associated design skills, thus widening their own experience as well as increasing their value to themselves and others". A broad interpretation might have revealed an encouraging willingness to evolve relationships with society's needs, but these will not be answered by multi-

Are buildings the answer?

Problem areas which the architectural profession does not at present reach. 1: Traditional and modern materials used side by side in Western Samoa – but how readily available are either, which is the most successful, and what kind of assessment is being made of each? 2: The availability of privately-owned transport in Papua New Guinea indicates a capacity for improved building methods – but what guidance is there on the provision of building forms and methods which are resistant to heat, high wind, and seismic disturbances? 3: Again in Papua New Guinea, overcrowding in Port Moresby, the capital, is causing overspill to previously uninhabited islands, to which drinking water has to be carried by dinghy from the mainland. In the developed world, by contrast... ***(see p50).***



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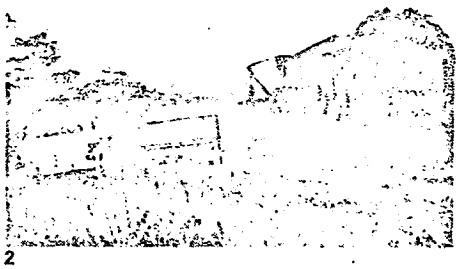

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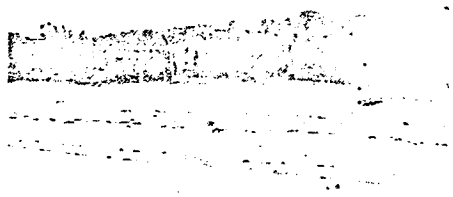

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disciplinary practice involving only "design" skills learnt ten to twenty years ago.

Those with an interest in new directions for the profession will find wider scope in an examination of world, as well as national, problems.

Problems of the kind which are facing society now and also, in many cases, in the future, will be beyond the capacity of any one profession or group of currently allied professions to deal with. The architect can no longer expect to be the leader but must be prepared to inject his "unique skills", as he can, alongside other equally "unique skills".

The problem areas relate, not only to the energy crisis, but to the population explosion and the relationship of developed countries to less developed countries. A nationalist view is not sufficient, either professionally, academically or politically. We must see ourselves in an international context, not only because of the United Kingdom's membership of the EEC, but even more because of our trade relationships with, and dependence on, our traditional producers of fuel and food – and their new job opportunities.

Desire for peace

The strains within these relationships make it very necessary to adopt, at home, an ecological responsibility and an environmental awareness that is new to architecture as it has been practised and taught in the United Kingdom so far.

How can an architect relate his training, experience and thinking to national and world problems? How should the buildings he produces reflect the social and economic environment in which they occur and how can he relate to these problems in other ways than by producing buildings?

The desire for peace can probably be said to be the most universal demand. Others, in varying degrees according to location, are for adequate standards of nutrition, housing and health. An exploration of the relationships of these four areas could be academic but, for the purposes of this article, deprivation of adequate nutrition, housing and health may be seen as leading to "unpeaceful" situations and conflict. Thus architects, by the design and provision of shelter and housing units, could be deeply, if indirectly, involved with the maintenance of peace. Indeed, we do not have to go outside the United Kingdom to discover demands such as these.

The second main group of world needs results from a rapidly increasing population, the energy crisis and the relationship between developed and less-developed nations. A rising world population exacerbates the demand for housing, nutrition and health, and relationships between developed and developing nations can reduce or exacerbate these demands, either by independent political means or through a medium such as the energy crisis.

If architects want to expand their role and their effectiveness, then clearly they cannot afford to ignore the developing countries. Housing is an obvious area for architectural expertise and it is one where the contribution from the profession has not been inconsiderable, both in the United Kingdom and overseas – including some less-developed countries.

Some specialist types of housing have also been subjected to detailed and valuable study by architects; Ian Davis' work in emergency housing for disaster areas is an outstanding example, and the works of Otto Koenigsburger, John Turner, and Pat Crooke are well known.

However, although they are architects, they are not producing architecture in the sense of designing buildings. What they, and others like them, are doing is to apply and extend their architectural (for want of another word) skills.

Other work for less-developed countries has been narrower in concept and less successful: its failure in direct relationship to the narrowness of the traditional concept of architecture. I have heard architects, after seeing press photographs of Bangladeshi refugees living in concrete sewer pipes awaiting a future drainage contract, say that more pipes than needed should be provided to enable these people to live more easily. Moreover, that "dual-purpose" concrete sewer pipes could be produced to facilitate their adaptation to dwellings! In its disregard for the real problems of housing and of refugees, does this not epitomise the narrow, blinkered "professional" view?

How far, again, have feasibility, design and construction programmes considered the impact of development on their immediate region? How far have hotel schemes taken into account the effect of tourism on a community already aware of its inadequate life style? How far, in any development, is its site researched in relation to extreme natural phenomena or, more important, its potential for increasing the migration of rural dwellers, and so causing housing problems or increased vulnerability to natural hazards?

Dependence

How far does any "development" attempt to use locally produced materials? How much is artificial dependence produced by imported materials, methods and skills? How many new problems are created by a new built development – no matter how well "designed"? Are we, as architects, content to prostitute ourselves to solve the building design problems of clients without considering the problems of livelihood of people? How do we *want* to relate to the socio-economic environment?

The energy crisis is long overdue and is with us for good; it should have been so a long time ago. It is not a passing phase. The repercussions of the expenditure of energy resources by and in buildings, is or should be, colossal.

More research is required into the energy consumption of the manufacture of building materials and, therefore, of the building process. Conservationists, often ecologically aware architects, though they may not always fully understand the connections, will enjoy additional strength from knowing the value of energy resource conservation accruing from the recycling of

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buildings. Buildings are recognised as a resource by Terrence Farrell and Nick Grimshaw (see, for example, the *RIBA Journal*, May 1976) – but how much by the profession at large?

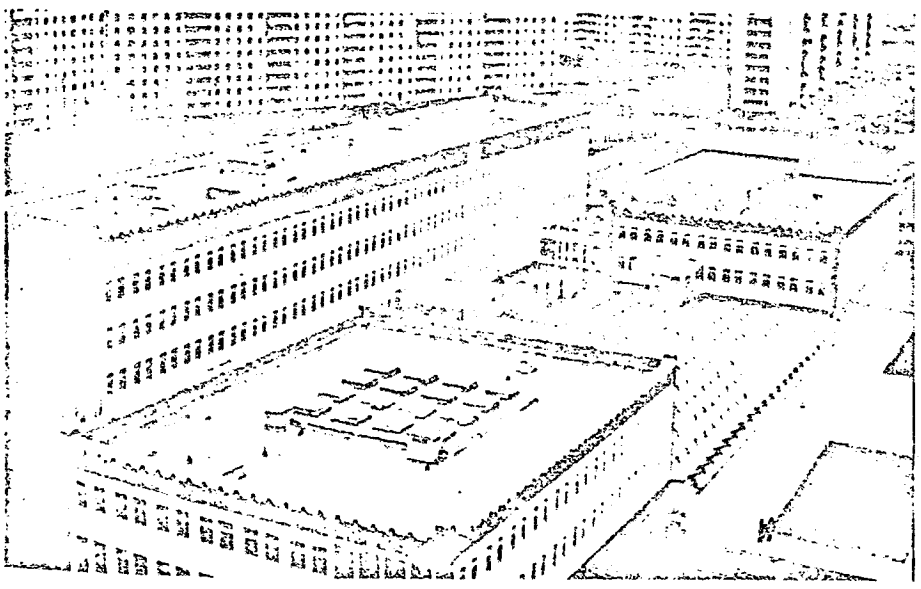
Energy consumption within buildings is not simply a matter for adequate insulation in order to keep fuel bills to a minimum. The total relationship of a building to the natural and physical environment must be considered and methods for a fine assessment of sun, rain and wind for heat and ventilation implemented. All such factors used to be positively considered, but this has now degenerated into lip service, where it exists at all, as first, technological solutions have overcome natural phenomena and second, other matters of cost, space, structure, architectural form and expression have, with unlimited resources, overcome these basic factors to such an extent that they have been forgotten, and the skills necessary to adapt to them lost.

A closer assessment of these factors will make it possible to overcome only those (eg extreme cold) which it is essential to do to provide comfortable living conditions and to exploit others which can be usefully adopted (eg ventilation). Such an assessment will commence with aspect, siting, and the form of the building, and only continue with its constructional method and detail when these major factors have been assessed and answered.

It will also be essential to take into account natural environments which occur regularly or more frequently in other countries than our own – extremes of temperature or rainfall, high wind and probably natural phenomena such as hurricanes and seismic tremors. As the necessity for buildings to regard sources of energy and other resources as the overriding constraint approaches, so the margin between construction, technology and natural environment will reduce. There will be a reduced "factor of safety"; so it will become necessary to adopt a closer understanding and a finer assessment of normal or extreme natural phenomena in order to design more closely to them.

What will then emerge, once this common understanding of political, economic, social and natural phenomena is generally accepted, will be a profession better able to apply itself in a world context. It will immediately be of greater use in a greater variety of situations and places. What is more, third world problems will not be a specialist area for a minority with peculiarly humanitarian motives; they will be assessed in all their variety in the same way as those of developed countries. Again, in teaching relevant methods in a truly multi-disciplinary atmosphere of fusion, we will automatically be imparting a methodology which students from developing countries will be able *immediately* to apply for themselves.

Multi-disciplinary thinking *and* multi-disciplinary working must therefore go further. Instead of being formed with the *answer* in view, and that answer usually as a building, "disciplines", whilst they continue to exist, must be placed together on a *problem* basis with no preconceived answer. Building production must therefore cease to be the only aim, the only self-perpetuating aim, of the architectural profession.



continued from p49)...too much knowledge becomes an environmentally dangerous thing, as in this Moscow residential district.

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Notice where planning permission to develop land has been refused) and s190 (Purchase Notice where listed building consent has been refused) of the 1971 Town and Country Planning Act.

The particular case I am using as an example is rendered especially difficult by the fact that some of the buildings in the terrace had not been listed so that s190 could not apply to them, but neither could s180, because planning permission had in fact been granted for their redevelopment, though it could not be implemented because the redevelopment incorporated the sites of the listed buildings.

It is beyond the scope of a general article such as this to go into the great legal complications arising from that particular issue, so that I shall consider just those buildings to which s190 does apply (ie those which were listed and where consent was refused), which is the same in effect as imagining that the whole terrace had been listed.

The procedure with a purchase notice is broadly that the local authority may agree to it, or they may contest it – in which case the Secretary of State will hold an inquiry under s 182 before either confirming or rejecting it. When the notice is agreed to or confirmed in this way, the local authority is deemed to have served a notice to treat, as in the case of compulsory purchase, and compensation, if not agreed upon, is assessed accordingly.

Under the 1971 Act as first enacted, this would have been quite a satisfactory procedure for the developer, for by s116 of the Act, on assessing the compensation, it was to be assumed that listed building consent would have been granted for the demolition of any building on the site, so that the compensation would reflect the development value of the cleared site.

However, this was changed by s6 of the Town and Country Amenities Act 1974, so that one is no longer to assume listed building consent for demolition except for certain limited purposes, such as rebuilding subject to a small increase in dimensions.

These limited purposes would be virtually valueless in many cases, such as the one in my example, and, of course, the whole of the value attaching to the office permission would be lost, so that the compensation payable could very well be much less than the price paid for the building.

This sort of situation, and variations on it, are not uncommon and probably more widespread than cases such as *Amalgamated Investment;* and here it is not only money but an enormous amount of time and effort that are wasted too. I can only repeat: if the community inflicts these sufferings arbitrarily on particular landowners, ought not the community also to pay for it?