Alan Lipman

Architecture, heritage, history, memory

Peer reviewed

Abstract

> *... when the modern world finds that the eclecticism of the present is barren and fruitless, and that it needs and will have a style of architecture which ... can only be as part of a change as wide and as deep as that which destroyed Feudalism; when it has come to that conclusion, the style of architecture will have to be historic in the true sense; it will not be able to dispense with tradition; it cannot begin at least without doing something quite different from anything that has been done before; yet whatever the form of it may be, the spirit of it will be in sympathy with the needs and aspirations of its own time, not simulations of needs and aspirations passed away. Thus it will remember the history of the past, make history in the present, and teach history in the future.*

(William Morris, 1889 in Cole, ed.,1944, p. 492)

Keywords: Architecture, heritage, history, memory

Abstrak

… wanneer die moderne wêreld vind dat die eklektiese tans onvrugbaar en vrugteloos is, en dat dit 'n styl van argitektuur gaan nodig hê en benodig wat slegs deel is van 'n verandering so wyd en diep dat dit Feudalisme sal vernietig, dan kan die gevolgtrekking gevorm word dat die styl van argitektuur histories in die ware sin van die woord is, dit sal nie instaat wees om tradisie uit te oefen nie, dit kan nie begin ten minste sonder om iets te doen wat baie verskillend is van wat reeds gedoen is nie, maak nie saak wat die vorm daarvan mag wees nie, die gees van dit sal in die simpatie lê met die behoeftes en aspiraties van hulle eie tyd, nie simulasies van behoeftes en aspirasies wat reeds weg is nie. Dit sal dus die geskiedenis van die verlede onthou, geskiedenis maak in die huidige en geskiedenis onderrig in die toekoms.

Sleutelwoorde: Argitektuur, erfenis, geskiedenis, nagedagtenis

Emeritus Professor Alan Lipman retired from the University of Wales, Cardiff, in 1998. 45 10th Avenue, Parktown, 2193, South Africa. Email: <alipman@netactive.co.za>

1.   Introductory comment

In a world of dislocated images, of fleeting forms, of recycled architectural pasts, to remember is to resist. To resist is to eschew the packaged histories in current vogue. In the liberated South Africa this is unequivocally so. To insist on recall is to oppose the cosy forgetfulness of the imported, the imposed building styles which engulf us. To question this modish eclecticism is to seek our histories. And the associated questions press. Whose histories? Whose memories? Memories of what? Whose buildings?

Here, at the southern rim of Africa, most people are dislocated from their immediate pasts; some joyfully, others reluctantly, yet others refusing the realities of their displacements. All are preoccupied with matters of identity; with heritages, with histories – including architectural identities.

Post-modern pastiche, the predominant design mode of the day, is viewed as a practice for, among other goals, gratifying people's need for rootedness, for a sense of belonging. Such an approach, the argument runs, offers a way of repairing the damage resulting from modernist practices; a way, that is, for modernist architects who, purportedly, eschewed of affirming rather than denying the past. In brief, post-modernists advocate turning away from historical reference (Harvey, 1989), while design modernism is seen as part of the broader processes of modernisation; of social and physical dislocation, of severed roots (Berman, 1982; Frampton, 1985).

Once more the questions are immediate: who or what is being uprooted, how and in what ways? Much has been said in response, particularly by critical cultural theorists in western Europe and the USA (Hewison, 1987; Jameson, 1991; Samuel, 1994; Wright, 1985). This, to my knowledge, has not been the case in southern Africa. Here such issues have, seemingly, escaped critical focus. Hence the present paper – an exploratory foray into issues which must, surely, engage analytic attention.

Accordingly, in what follows, I examine two different, two contrasting approaches to architectural history in contemporary South African design.

Discussion will centre, first, on the present prevalence of historicism; especially on a selected instance of post-modernist revivals that call insistently on past building forms. This, the currently dominant

emphasis in local architecture, rests on the frequently asserted claim that architectural modernism was, and is, anti-historical (Rowe & Koetter, 1980: 11-31; Harris & Lipman, 1986).

We then turn to contemporary efforts to forge appropriate modern architectures in/for the new South Africa. We turn, in particular, to an attempt to recover the history of a singularly repugnant remnant of racial segregation and exploitation in southern Africa.

In this latter context, I must make my long-held stance explicit. For me, architecture – as practice and as product – does not simply reflect the societies in which it is produced. Buildings, I contend, are not merely images of what is, of how people live presently. On the contrary, I hold that, via its material presence as embodied human action, architecture can and does speak of what might be, of how we humans might live. Appropriate architectures must, then, help to shape, to educate people's desires.

This is far from being solely a matter of outward form, of style. In the nineteenth century, engineers and architects were called on to accommodate new social relationships in the new building types they designed: factories, railway stations, public libraries ... So, in the 1990s and early 2004s, South African designers are being summonsed to apply their knowledge and skills to the new spatial demands of their burgeoning democratic society.

While examining these two thrusts – in William Morris', words, "*simulations of needs and aspirations passed away*" as against those "*of its own time*" – I shall seek to highlight the ways in which concepts of cultural, of architectural heritage have been and are manipulated. I will focus especially on how these notions are used to bolster specific views of history at the expense of, indeed in order expressly to negate other, contending heritages.

2.   A word on modernism

There are at least two modern architectures. The first appears in scholarly books as works of inspiration, the outstanding buildings of modernism which few see, let alone live or work in. These are the avant garde buildings of the early twentieth century – mainly in Europe – when for the first time architects grappled with the issues surrounding mass populations, industrial production and technological innovation. This is an architecture of change; a time of

revolution, of crumbling empires, of social hope ... of futures. This is the architecture of the founders of the Modern Movement; the dreams, made concrete, of a cultural elite. These are the buildings through which designers tried, strained to express humane social, even socialist ideals.

What happened? In the 'socialist' East – rejection, expulsion, exile; social content ripped from form, deformed. In the 'free' West – incorporation: an architecture of defeat, of aesthetic form ripped from social content. This, of course, is the second modern architecture, the one which is all too familiar, the one in which many live and work. This is the planned, segregated township, the suburbia of physical, of individual, of social isolation. Neighbourhood without communality. This is urban growth, speculative development; banks, office parks, finance houses ... shopping malls. This is the new factory: a fine-tooled envelope around a stripped, cheap interior; packaged exploitation in a landscaped industrial park.

This is Speculator-modern, the architecture of the 'free', the monetarist market: inflated opulence for the few and pinched spaces, shoddy materials, botched work for the rest. It's a rotten architecture. But then, for most, it's been a pretty rotten society. And the post-modernist response? – well ... architecture is about making architecture popular.

3.   Foibles of historicism

Post-modern discourse tends to be repetitive. For some three decades one has been told that modernism is dead; buried, primarily, beneath its weighty inaccessibility to 'ordinary people,' its widespread unpopularity, its pre-occupation with emancipatory naïvete, "*The modern movement is dead*" (Jencks, 1977). Another approach, a venerable, supposedly populist, living tradition is, though, at hand – 'The New Classicism':

> *What is real architecture? It is architecture that ordinary people recognise as being architecture, where buildings are not only beautifully finished and nobly proportioned but articulated, ornamented and expressed. In other words it is classicism. It is an architecture of rules and erudition. But unlike all the forms of Modernism and its descendants it is instinctively recognised and understood by ordinary people, having evolved as part of the common language of civilisation over 3,000 years* (Aslet, 1988: 5).

Let us examine this stylistic claim in a specific instance, Bank City in central Johannesburg. To occupy seven city blocks when completed, this head office for a national banking house – with its associated speculative accommodation – will, reputedly, be the largest single development of its type in Africa.

Citing Aslet in a report to their clients, the architects confirm his call on universality, on classicism as a purportedly inherent human constant. Transposed to southern Africa, this biological given offers, apparently, an apposite, a civilised (civilising?) idiom. Following the 'rules and erudition' of classical design, the facades comprise three principal elements. Arcaded colonnades at ground level form a base with the similarly treated, rusticated mezzanines above them. The six-storey upper surfaces of symmetrically disposed solids and voids (walls and windows) are 'articulated' by vertical openings to the atria of each block and by horizontal, colonnaded loggias. This formula, the foot-body-head maxim of formal neo-classical architecture, is crowned by a cornice and then by a recessed seventh storey and curved, vaulted roof. And, in another nod to neo-classical canon, the outer corners of each block are marked by a domed tower-like form.

Historical continuity is further emphasised in the architects' report where they acknowledge two specific sources, one local and the other from abroad – both almost a century old. The latter they describe as "*some of the truly elegant office buildings built in Vienna, Paris and New York before the First World War.*" When asked to elaborate in conversation, the chief architect referred to the Post Office Savings Bank in Vienna designed by the renowned Otto Wagner, built in 1903-6.

The local influence is depicted in similarly broad terms. It embraces buildings from the year 1905, when the Bank's present, nearby, head office was erected and includes more recent neo-classical work. "*What we have done*", the architects state, "*is to take a step back and look at the model of a more graceful Johannesburg.*" But, they stress, classical images and models are not confined to this period: they are

> *universal and constant elements ... as valid today as they have always been. ... this timeless and enduring expression will present a sound and lasting image ... as fresh and undated in 50 years as it will be in the 1990s.*

This view of how architecture should be made is bound by rules and precepts. It calls on a range of pre-determined, abstract criteria for realising 'real architecture'; it calls, for instance, on tenets of proportionality, symmetry, axiality. When observed, the code leads, in appearance, to neo-classical buildings. It results in architecture that is held to embody such classic ideals as equilibrium, wholeness, synthesis, order. It constitutes an aesthetic language which is, we are told, "*intelligible to the public ... it bears an understandable resemblance to the best of Johannesburg or South Africa's architecture.*" Intelligible to which, to whose public? Which best South African architecture?

I am sceptical, if not incredulous. I query this doctrinal, this reductive view of architecture – especially of so diverse an endeavour as classical design.

Claims for a specifically universal, timeless design practice can scarcely be sustained, even as rhetoric. Unless, that is, the categories 'real architecture' and 'civilisation' are deemed to exclude vernacular building world-wide, thereby banishing prehistoric, and much of Mycenean, Islamic, Gothic, Moghul, Arts and Crafts architecture, as well as that of numerous other historical periods and societies. And calls on the suspect socio-biology of an instinctively recognised classicism are no more persuasive, even within this tradition – unless the non-axial, asymmetric plans and buildings of, say, Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli, the Piazza del Quirinale or Michelangelo's Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome also fail the test of reality/civilisation. As do those presumably anomalous structures the Erechtheion and the Propylaea on that icon of classicism, the Acropolis at Athens – another irregular, asymmetric, non-axial layout.

## 4.	Embedded continuity

Historical continuity? In southern Africa, as elsewhere, such assertions are, and must be problematic. Take, as a case in point, that vision of a previously "*more graceful Johannesburg.*" Grace? For whom? For migrant mine-labourers forcibly dislodged from their land? For tough, rough immigrants and small-scale entrepreneurs from Europe as well as for mine-owners, top banking personnel, stockbrokers?

Which cultural continuities? Those represented by Great Zimbabwe; those like 'expressionist' Tswana architecture – of African settlements

throughout the region, and, indeed, across the continent? Of our many small-town Main Streets, the Hindu temples, of the summarily demolished debris of apartheid – the old Fordsburg area in Johannesburg ... District Six, Cape Town ... Cato Manor, Durban?

Then there are those historically validated, 'time-honoured' elements of classical building. Here too there are grounds for incredulity. For example, the sweeping arches that open to the inner spaces of the Bank City complex. These are suspended from rather than, as in classical precedent, proffer support for the structure above (with, incidentally, spaces in the massive quarter-circle, concealed, voids at each corner for some three Soweto houses apiece). The deep loggias and porches of Caesar's Rome – suited to varied usage in that and our climate – have become vestigial: narrow balconies or niches the width of the columns they accommodate. And those columns: stripped shafts, bald, sorry relics of the vigorous, structurally decorated 'orders' of ancient Greece.

5.   The scenery of classicism is set, the substance eludes.

Then, axial planning, pre-eminently a device of the mid-15th to 16th century Renaissance in Italy – an earlier, formidably confident neo-classicism. This was seigneurial space: stretches of medieval cities were razed – the occupants dispossessed – to make way for the new social order, the anticipated future. Space dedicated to the service of autocratic grandeur: geometric piazze, squares; straight, wide avenues; large, finite buildings ... Controlled, commanded, ordered – the 'ideal city' of the Quattrocento; impressive, triumphal urban vistas. Not quite, though, the prospect presented in the less auspicious setting of Bank City: coarse, speculator-modern office towers, bland extensions to other crude neo-classical facades, the tacky baggage of central city advertising ...

On these and like counts, the image of neo-classicism seems false, distorting; particularly the aloof, remote social symbolism of our local, Edwardian-classic office buildings. Stylistically imported at or soon after the close of British colonial rule – but not the close of white dominance – they bear the marks of the period: late Victorian pomp, declamatory grandeur, ponderous formality, self-conscious solemnity and, of course, social exclusivity. Many of the models

from which they were drawn are, after all, in the City of London; the home, then, of economic dominion, of imperial banking.

There, as here, these buildings represented power, social sway. They were, and remain, seats of establishment. They helped to legitimate a divided social order, Disraeli's two nations. Clad with the approved insignia of a supposedly authoritative past – especially that of ancient Rome, an admired earlier empire – their already consider-able authority was endorsed, reinforced.

Is this the appropriate means of bringing order to the crass com-petitive individualism of building in Johannesburg, in southern Africa? Is this a way of according symbolic meaning in an open, multi-cultural, pluralistic, new South Africa?

Bank City: "*a sound and lasting image*," a reaching for "*the best in ... South Africa's architecture*"? Or yet another facet of a world-wide crisis in professional design; one in which architecture is being reduced to styling, to contriving forms that sell? Often, as in this instance, these are adopted from selected pasts; from the imagery of historically dominant, culturally bumptious or indifferent groupings. Simulation for/by a social minority.

This, "*the eclecticism of the present*," large or not, trite or unruly – all "*barren and fruitless*," all grossly pretentious – litters central and suburban Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban ... Heritage – an ideo-logical minefield.

6.   Heritage and anomie

All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men are at last forced to face with sober faces the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men (Marx & Engels, 1847, cited in Berman, 1982: 89).

The geography of capital transcends national boundaries; most people experience a world that is dominated by international capital. Since the mid-1970s in particular, this pervasive penetration has wrought far-reaching restructuring processes (Chomsky, 1995: 5-20). Different localities, though, have been affected differently; at global, regional, national and local levels. Change alone has been constant – all that is solid melts into air ...

This, the second wave of modernisation following World War II, has occurred with particular emphasis in urban settings; in buildings and city layouts, in architectural and urban design. Previously neglected, socially segregated and shunned neighbourhoods have become desirable localities for 'yuppie', upwardly mobile groups (Smith & Williams, 1986). Remnants of the redundant, decayed centres of the first machine age – such as the industrial heartlands, the mines, the docks – are now suitable cases for urban regeneration.

Few, if any of us, can be certain about who or where we are. Our identities, like the very ground beneath us, are in threatened or in continuous upheaval.

This sense of dislocation, of alienation, is keenly felt in the metropolitan conurbations of capitalist enterprise. Here, as a case in point, new terms have gained currency; terms that depict the present as being distinctive only in that it is not the past. Apparently, we now live in a world of post-industrial, post-modern, post-feminist, post-enlightenment, post-marxist reality. We live in, we are post-history. The relevance of overarching, grand narratives – i.e., of history – has been rejected in the name of that other hoary narrative, the mythical Golden Age.

The idea of heritage has been used to package this world-wide anomie. Heritage has become a cover, a balm for soothing, quietening, the recently dispossessed as well as those who now aspire to social leadership. The former are told they must be 'realistic,' they must give way to modernisation, to post-Darwinian, survival-of-the-fittest modernisation. For the latter, the past is up for sale, as is all else they touch. They, the 'gentrifiers' among them, seize hitherto avoided neighbourhoods. They buy legitimacy and status in the form of Victoriana or of sub-Georgian and similar revivalist mock-ups. They acquire the recycled facades of social power; historic fronts behind which interiors are gutted to make way for 'mod. cons': it is not just conspicuous consumption but consumption and reproduction of past history that comes to signify social distinction. With its architectural renovation and decoration, urban conservation employs this more modern system of social signification. The new middle class does not buy simply a deteriorated house when it takes over a slum, nor does it just buy into future 'equity'; it buys into the past (Jager, 1986: 81).

Robert Hewison is among the first, and most forceful, of the analysts who have addressed what he depicted as "*the heritage industry.*" Denouncing this development in Britain, he coupled it with wide-spread decline. For him, a society whose spokesmen and women, whose intelligentsia, are obsessed with representing the present as a sanitised version of the past – as, that is to say, Heritage – is one whose leading members are incapable of confronting their social future. They, the 'opinion makers,' fear what is likely to come. Hewison, 1987 posits two contrasting stances; heritage as against history. Heritage, he argues, is focussed on lifting 'themes' from the past, on treating the past as a warehouse for readily recaptured meanings; the past as scenography. History, on the contrary, is an analytic, a critical activity: its practitioners interrogate and interpret rather than appropriate the past. Patrick White, Hewison's con-temporary, shares these broad distinctions. In doing so, he draws on George Orwell's much cited, deeply chilling observation:

> *Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past (George Orwell, in Wright,1985: 215).*

Both men contend that the past is not unproblematic; history is more than a collation of facts waiting to be parcelled and con-sumed. They argue that, by drawing selectively on elements of the past, the entrepreneurs of heritage have compounded people's difficulties in making sense of the alienated, alienating world about them. By treating heritages as a means of encouraging consumption – of hurrying the turnstiles in museums, of pushing tourism at new marinas, of selling homes in refurbished, look-as-good-as-old, neighbourhoods – the proponents of heritage as business have confused rather than helped to clarify contemporary dislocations.

In order to change the world, one needs first to understand it. The historical sensibilities and imagination necessary for such under-standings are undermined by tidying-up the loose ends of the past, by purging history of conflict and struggle, of process:

> *Both the simulacrum of Heritage and the great national narrative of Victorian and Edwardian history must be replaced by a version of the past that does not exclude conflict and change (the hidden agenda of Heritage being to exclude these irritants), and which admits the existence of contingency, the possibility of accident, and the reality of winners and losers* (Hewison in Corner & Harvey, 1991: 17).

> *Those who choose to inhabit, eagerly to embrace the consumerist pretences of heritage are, ... condemned to seek History by way of [their] own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach* (Jameson, 1991: 25).

The notion of 'regressive modernisation'. Hall (1988: 2), captures the sense and the reality of the processes by which significant changes have been made palatable, have been disguised by dressing phenomena in historical drag. The 'histories' so produced are, invariably, cleansed, sanitised; they are portrayed in seductive colour rather than in harsh black and white (Samuel, 1984: 276). In such processes history is made a guarantee against modernity; the past becomes a means of acquiring historical legitimation (Jager, 1986: 81).

7. History – contested social territory

There are, fortunately, instances in which some, a handful of South African architects do attempt to resist the seamless flow of borrowed heritages, of regressive modernity. In the case of new buildings, these efforts turn on the hugely complex task – especially in urban, industrialised conditions – of forging local, southern African architectures. This is exemplified by the tough-minded reachings for regional, contemporary meaning and form in the intellectually committed, the solidly searching work of, among others, (Jose Forjaz in Davey, 1995; Claude, 1995; Chipkin & Stacey in Lipman, 1991).

Instances of this radical modernist impetus are less easy to locate in the area of restored historic buildings; particularly among the many that embody the gross racial injustices of South African history. Accordingly, I turn now to an example drawn from my own design work – the now almost ten years occupied Workers' Library and Resource Centre in Johannesburg (August 1994).

The Library, a democratically run, non-profit company was established in 1988 to serve the needs of workers, whether organised in trades unions or not, employed or otherwise. Administered by an elected committee, its activities are "*non-sectarian – we encourage free and open debate, regardless of political affiliation*" (Workers' Library pamphlet, undated). This commitment arises from the context in which the Library was instituted, and nurtured.

Throughout the apartheid decades, black people were excluded from public libraries; whites, including white workers, were encouraged to develop their skills. Facilities were made available to them. While they had open access to schools, occupational training – and libraries – black children were limited by the Bantu Education Act, 1953, which bound them to preparation for restricted types of work. For them, formal education was not compulsory; indeed, their parents, the poorest section of South African society, were required to pay for distinctly inferior schooling. It was against this background, and a rapid growth of the democratic labour movement, that some trades unionists began, in the 1980s, to address worker education. Since this was the very period during which black schooling was frequently de-stabilised by political protest, attention of this nature seemed the more necessary.

Centres of information and knowledge, such as the Workers' Library, were established. Under- resourced – and, thus, largely dependent on voluntary, co-operative energies – their exponents sought to redress vast, entrenched inequities. They did so from, among other disadvantageous circumstances, inadequate premises; a condition which members of the Committee wished to rectify.

The challenge of a formally prepared brief (building programme) for an architect is, in our design experience, a rare occurrence. Our commission for this project was no exception. We were required to formulate what was to pass for a brief by working closely with the Committee in two informally conducted procedures. First, following their enforced move from unsatisfactory, makeshift accommodation in a central-city office building, we were invited to attend Committee meetings at which frequent, intense debate about alternate premises took place. Second, with Committee members, we inspected and advised on a number of suggested possibilities, including the final choice.

This comprised a kampong (an hostel) for black, male migrant workers plus a house – initially occupied by a white manager – and three terraced cottages for white artisans. These dwellings are separated from the hostel by shack-like rooms for the mostly female domestic workers who were employed by the whites. This ensemble – firmly segregated by gender, race and class – is situated in Newtown, Johannesburg on what was the site of the City Council's Electricity Department.

Four areas of accommodation were called for: a museum of working-class life in early twentieth century Johannesburg – the most easterly terraced house, the domestic servant's rooms associated with this dwelling, and the eastern wing of the hostel; reading rooms, offices and storage for the Library – in the two remaining terraced cottages; meeting, seminar and similar communal spaces (eg., study rooms, exhibition areas, rooms for film and video productions) for members – in the remaining kampong accommodation; office and ancillary rooms for a trades union/university research group – in the detached house.

The homes for whites excepted, the unsuitably ventilated, ill-lit, over-crowded buildings housed people from the poorly paid, acutely exploited, socially insulted, culturally insulated ... the deplorably accommodated black domestic and industrial workers of South Africa (Cock, 1980; Ramphele, 1993).

We and our clients do not view the buildings in this project as precious objects, as architectural gems to be preserved. For us, they are work-a-day artefacts which – the hostel and the domestic servants' shacks expressly – were erected and used for repugnant social purposes. They record, they commemorate, they speak of grotesque, inhumane values. As such, as part of the particularly morbid South African history, they serve as salient reminders.

Consequently, my design colleagues and I sought as consistently as seemed feasible to repair or replace decayed or severely damaged portions of the built fabric: for example rotted roof timbers, crushed and perished brick-work and mortar jointing, smashed and missing doors and windows. Concomitantly, we have attempted to embody more humane values in the areas of the refurbished kampong which are not part of the museum. Here we have added insulated ceilings, controlled ventilation, a full electrical installation and, in our view, similar essentials. A mezzanine floor was added in order to make the best possible use of the enclosed spaces. These additions – including new toilets – differ explicitly in materials, construction and finish from what existed previously. They are, quite patently, contemporary insertions in a restored building.

In short, we have sought to embrace the anti-scrape approach which William Morris advocated more than a century ago: to treat relics as readable records of their times (Thompson, 1977: 226-242).

We have sought to "*remember the history of the past, make history in the present, and teach history in the future.*"

8.   A concluding comment

Shifts in the global market of capital have been accompanied by changes in the manner in which many aspects of culture have been given material expression (Harvey, 1989). In architecture and urban design, this modernisation has been marked by a directly anti-modernist cultural trajectory; by the thrust of post-modernism (Harris & Lipman, 1986).

This is presented as, inter alia, a response to perceived modernist derelictions: in particular, the purported modernist failure to articulate local senses of identity, to create vernacular 'places' to which people are attached rather than universalistic 'spaces' which they merely occupy. Post-modernism is offered as an antidote to modernist ills; as a cultural practice that has been scoured of social, utopian, aspirations. Eschewing the often socialist goals of many modernists, post-modern designers claim to operate exclusively in what they choose to depict as the realm of established aesthetics.

Accordingly, post-modern architectural and urban forms tend to evoke, even to re-represent admired precedents. In the main, these comprise serial repetitions of past models which have been regarded as successful (Harvey, 1989: 92). In the post-modern lexicon, local identities are universally experienced as being rooted in selected aspects of European culture and history; particular emphasis being placed on beaux arts readings of favoured instances from, say, ancient Greece, the Renaissance and subsequent European neo-classicisms (Zevi, 1978). Such instances are borrowed, purchased, from the past to be hung on contemporary structures with their contemporary facilities, equipment and patterns of use.

A critique of the symbolic nostalgias of post-modern design must, thus, be founded on acknowledging the specific local contexts in which designers work. What, as a case in point, one need ask is post-modern Tudorbethan or neo-Georgian architecture in late-nineteenth century South Africa? Whose memories do such buildings stir, whose nostalgias do they gratify, whose cultural roots are being recognised?

In these respects at least, current architectural and urban design historicisms are expressions of consummate alienation. They are symbols of not-belonging: those who identify with them are not from here, from southern Africa. They are from elsewhere. They have transformed this land, made it their's. Paradoxically, post-modern architecture in South Africa represents a desire to erase, to dismiss local senses of place. It is an European architecture, one which is not-African. It is pre-eminently an architecture which abolishes local memories in the name of selected, preferred histories.

Post-modern design is, in addition, an attempt to demonstrate that its publics are part of the cutting edge of the advanced industrial world. It produces a set of symbolic forms that bring comfort, a sense of familiarity and well-being, to those whose lives are bound up with tracking the global circuits of finance capital. It is the nostalgia made concrete of corporate executives and the like. It is a nostalgic balm for those who have been caught up in the disorientating mael-strom of modernisation. It is an architecture of fantasy, of fantastic forms.

Such indulgent reveries are, of course, far removed from the every-day realities of the society which its practitioners claim to give ex-pression. Can it be otherwise when the overwhelming majority of people in the region are no strangers to being forcibly uprooted, dislocated, to being culturally repressed? Can one seriously claim that their experiences are adequately, or partially, embraced by drawing on the nostalgias of the minority; of those who so recently imposed separate development, apartheid, as a means of pre-serving cultural differences?

Where modernist designers have struggled to understand and interpret history, post-modernists scramble to recycle, to re-live the past. They fail to confront the sterile impasse which Adorno summar-ised with such immediacy,

> *Anyone seeking refuge in [even] a genuine, but purchased, period style house, embalms himself alive* (Theodor Adorno, in Wright, 1985: 224).

References

Aslet, C. 1988. Classicism of the Year 2000. In: *New Classicism in Architecture and Urbanism*, *Architectural Design*, Profile 71, p. 5 9.

Berman, M. 1982. *All that is Solid Melts into Air: the Experience of Modernity*. New York: Penguin.

Claude, D. 1995. Space and Symbols, *Architecture, Society, Culture*, p. 11, November.

Chomsky, N. 1955. (interviewed by David Barsamian). The Prosperous Few and the Restless Many. Odonian Press.

Cock, J. 1980. *Maids and Madams: a study in the politics of exploitation*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Corner, J. & Harvey S. (eds.). 1991. *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*. London: Routledge.

Davey, P. (ed.). 1995. Flood of Light. *Architectural Review*, p. 59 61, November.

Frampton, K. 1985. Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance, In: Foster, H. (ed.), *Postmodern Culture*. London: Pluto Press, p. 16 30.

Hall, S. 1988. *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*. New York: Verso, especially Part Two: Questions of Theory.

Harris, H. & Lipman, A. 1986. A Culture of Despair: Reflections on "Post Modern" Architecture. *The Sociological Review*, p. 837 854, November.

Harvey, S. 1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. USA: Blackwell, especially Part I, Chapter 4.

Hewison, S. 1987. *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*. London: Methuen.

Jager, M. 1986. Class Definition and the Esthetics of Gentrification: Victoriana in Melbourne. In: Smith, S. & Williams, P. (eds.), *Gentrification of the City*. Boston: Allen & Unwin, p. 78 91.

Jameson, F. 1991. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso.

Jencks, C. 1981. *The Language of Post Modern Architecture*. London: Academy Editions.

Lipman, A. 1991. Vision in Steel. *Leadership*, pp. 28-50. August/September.

Morris, W. 1994, *Gothic Architecture*. In: Cole, G.D.H. (ed.), William Morris, Nonesuch Press.

Ramphele, M. 1993. *A Bed Called Home: life in the migrant labour hostels of Cape Town*. Cape Town: David Philip.

Rowe, C. & Koetter, F. 1978. *Collage City*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press

Samuel, R. (ed.). 1989. *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*. Volume III: National Fictions, New York: Routledge.

Samuel, R. 1994. *Theatres of Memory*. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture. London: Verso.

Smith, N. & Williams, P. (eds.). 1986. *Gentrification of the City*. Boston: Allen & Unwin.

Thompson, E. P. 1977. *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. London: Merlin.

Wright, P. 1985. *On Living in an Old Country: the National Past in Con temporary Britain*. London: Verso.

Zevi, B. 1978. *The Modern Language of Architecture*. Seattle: University of Washington.

Worker's library. 2003. mimeographed leaflet. Approx. 5,432 words of text, South Africa, August.