

## What did it all mean?

In *Duncan Hall* we had, after 40 years of patient labour 'broken all the taboos' on Composition with an Entablatured Ordine with huge capitals (albeit inky black), Scripted Surface (including a vaulted ceiling), Symmetry (even bi-axial symmetry), Colonnades, Arches, Enfilades ad infinitum, and all carried out with (as J.B. Alberti advised), that "levity proper to serious matters". For this JOA earned the bitter hostility of the Faculty of Architecture. Fortunately, as they neither governed us, briefed us nor paid us it had no positive effect. Indeed it seemed to recommend our design to the Building and Grounds Committee and to seemingly large parts of the 'Town and Gown'.

I was reminded of a survey of the late 20C, by the Royal Institution of British Architects in which my colleagues answered, on a scale of one to ten (declining from unity), what they considered important. Number One was "Repeat Business". The last, Number Ten, was "Public Opinion".

Then, coming forward thirty years to the point when these scriptings were finally completed, and ready for the printers, I discovered the main entrance to the 2014 Venice Biennale. This reiterated the hoary canard of the 'Platonic Carpentry' argument for the genesis of the Parthenon's Hellenic Doric and after 2500 years, an equally unpersuasive genesis for Modernity from elevators, escalators, doors, windows baths and water-closets. Yet this too was strange because Professor Rem Koolhaas, whose curatorship this Biennale was, had been invited, in 2012 for a Centenary Lecture at Rice University, by Professor Sarah Whiting, who once worked in OMA, Koolhaas's firm.



This, the Main Entrance to the 2014 Venice Biennale, the premier Public Architectural Exhibition of the Globe was intended to make the point that 'Architecture' as it is commonly understood, is no longer possible because of the advent of all the wonderfully complex tubing and piping that only Architects (bless them) know how to handle. Corbusier himself canonised this pathetic level of incompetence by quipping: "Pour Ledoux, c'etat facile - 'pas des tubes". When Visitors penetrate this building, the central one for the whole Biennale they find huge rooms filled with a builder's catalogue of Doors, Windows, Elevators, Escalators, Baths and even Water Closets. The purpose of the whole Biennale, which is, this year, especially extended in time, and to which all the exhibiting countries were forced to conform, was to persuade the Public that the Architecture of the 20C, and the foreseeable future, was descended from no other source than these everyday mechanisms. The proposed 'ethos' was that this was a somewhat tragic business. The 'painted ceiling' that was being obscured, well really 'wiped-out', by the encroaching tsunami of tinny 'trash' was wonderful, arcane, "intensely iconic" but now, sadly beyond the reach of the 'Modernity' which the whole Exhibition was also at some pains to establish as the final and only way to build the Human Lifespace. The corollary to this 'sad business' was that the best hope for Mankind was to cultivate the few, the very few Genius Architects who could, as my late Tutor Peter Smithson put it back in the 1960's: "Drag a Rough Poetry out of Reality". Yet JOA had proved, years back, that this was not 'reality' at all. It was a fiction imposed upon the Public to advantage the Architectural Profession while denying the Public the use of the powers of Architecture itself.



One of the most important schools at the Polytechnic is for Architecture, Surveying and Building. The Headmaster, John S Walkden (FRIBA, Dist.TP, MTP, FRAS) interviews all students before acceptance, and here he is talking to 19-year-old Peter Adams, whose father is President of the Town-Planning Institute in Britain. His uncle holds a corresponding position in the United States of America, and his grandfather was Founder-Member of the Institute. The model in front of the desk is a proposed concert hall for the Regent's Park site, built by Walter Gropius, an ex-student of the school.

Nothing seems to have changed since my entry into Architectural Studies in 1955. Lecture Four: "The Great Escape", reports how 'Headmaster' Walkden, of the Central London Polytechnic would inform his mid-1950's tyros that Architecture was now a fit subject for illiterates who had "lost their charisma when the Profession abandoned the Orders". We were required to read no book-list (not that the other English schools prepared their tyros for anything but the L'Architecture Autre manuals of Giedion, Pevsner and a the mistranslated books of the perverse genius of Corbusier. Our only 'literature' was manufacturer's catalogues. What can a design culture produce that begins with the cheapo workarounds of mass housing except what Professor Koolhaas' so aptly describes as our "Age of Trash"?

Was it credible to believe that Dean Whiting had so inherited the antipathy of Dean Lars Lerup to JOA's horrible resurrection of the corpse of the longed-for death of Architecture that she had omitted to show Duncan Hall to Professor Rem Koolhaas?

## I did not know what to believe.

I KNEW ONLY THAT THE WHOLE PROPOSAL OF THE 2014 VENICE BIENNALE WAS NOT MERELY TECHNICAL AND INTELLECTUAL NONSENSE BUT THAT IT DENIED THE PUBLIC THE POWER THAT ARCHITECTURE COULD GIVE THEM OVER THE DESIGN OF THE URBAN LIFESPACE TO WHICH, NOW, IN THE EARLY 21C, OVER HALF OF THE GLOBE'S HUMAN POPULATION HAD COME TO BELONG.

I could no longer resist the conclusion that what might have begun as a desperate 'turn to technicity' at the *fin de (19C) siecle* demise of the West's Iconography had now become a merely political ideology whose main purpose was to keep the design of the human livespace within the control of building technicians, the titular chief of whom was (albeit shakily) still the Architect. Further to this conclusion had to be the thought that this smokescreen of 'technicity' had the advantage of obscuring the manipulation of the livespace by Agents whose ambition did not include the edification of the Public, or their introduction to any nobler purpose, function or power than the getting and spending of salaries - in short the be-and-end-all of Consumerism.

WHO COULD DOUBT, AFTER SUCH EVIDENCES, THAT THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE ARCHITECTURE FROM ITS PRESENT-DAY EXTINCTION, WAS TO TAKE IT OUT OF THE CONTROL IT PRESENTLY SUFFERS AT THE HANDS OF THE PROFESSION, AND BEHIND THEM, THE "REPEAT BUSINESS" FROM THE 'PROFESSIONS OF THE LAND'.

The Degree in Iconic Engineering/Architecture/Urbanity should be taught as an 'Arts' subject so that it could educate a growing number of intelligent and active people who would then know how to take control of their own livespace - the essentially 'Urbane' livespace of the 21C.