

## THE STATE OF AUSTRALIAN ARCHITECTURE

### Preface:

I have been asked by Architecture in Australia to write this account of Australian architecture as it stands today. It is quite a challenge, not only philosophically but also in diplomacy. Oh, for the dear dead days when students had enough spare time, enthusiasm and rudeness to analyse and criticise the practicing architects' work! A student, from whom all must always be forgiven, should be writing this. A student could name names with temerity, whereas I have had enough of pack drill and what follows is, I must warn, stronger on generalisations than it is on names and examples.

The first thing to be said about Australian architecture today is that it is old-fashioned. I mean this literally. It may often be quite up to date in matters of technique and structure, but it remains now, in the jet and telly age, every bit as far behind the fashion of world architecture as it was behind the styles of the times last century. The great fashions started during the last twenty years by Le Corbusier in Europe or Louis Kahn, for one example, in the U.S.A. have taken as long to reach our shore as the Gothic Revival or the International Style did, and rather longer

than Art Nouveau or Queen Anne took. This is strange enough, for the modern Australian architect is a reasonably avid reader of his profession's many admirable and profusely illustrated international magazines, and most practitioners make a point of travelling abroad every five years or so. They see and know perfectly well what is going on, but if what they see challenges a vision they already hold it seems that they are inclined to reject it. Thus, even today, in Australia, veneers of all sorts are held in high regard, 'brut' concrete remains generally unacceptable, the ribbed, chipped surface for stripped concrete introduced by Paul Rudolph and facetiously called 'knitted concrete' has not yet appeared, the top-heavy look is unknown, and windows remain almost as popular as ever. This rejection of world fashion by Australian architecture is probably its strongest attribute. It would ~~be~~ in fact be something to cheer about if one could be convinced that the rejection followed careful consideration and was not based largely on conservatism. Unfortunately it is only the more sophisticated fashions from overseas that are rejected, and then only temporarily, until they have been around for a decade or more. Local inbreeding of fashion is active all the time; for instance the present, passing flush of clinker brick and brown creosote or the rage for that Neo-Mansard roof.

Australian architects are not as unsophisticated as this suggests. They are men of the world; some can even dominate a board of non-architects. But they have enough professional



problems on their minds to draw their attention away from a low-pressure area, and the creation of vital architecture is one such area. They are no less jealous than the architects of any other country of their professional reputations, which means among other things that they would like to be well considered by their colleagues. This is in fact almost essential compensation for the indignities of everyday practice. But it is enough to be well considered on the planes of professionalism and worldly success. Architectural achievement is almost irrelevant. In Europe or America, any architect who is thrashing to keep afloat in the ocean of talent knows that the plaudits of colleagues are hard won. Over there the stimulation and intellectual exchange is intense at the creative architectural level, while here it is scaled down in proportion to population to a slack sort of bonhomie. Occasional lay praise from a politician on opening day or a feature in a home magazine gives about all the professional incentive and stimulation the architect can expect or hope for. *Contrary to the impression given by the old-fashionedness, in reality* Australian architects are no more stupid, ill-trained or untalented than those of any other country, but compared with those of Europe or the U.S.A. they are far less alert, less experimental and less forward-looking on the creative ~~artistic~~ level. And the simple reason is our isolation, which produces an ingrown profession and inbreeding of ideas. Our amiable professional brotherhood has produced practically no competitive intellectual or artistic spur for its fellows.

Anyone who has tried to make a collection of architectural photographs for some Institute essay in public relations knows the difficulties of prising pictures out of most architects' offices, however much prestige seems to be associated with the venture. I imagine that applies to the collecting of material for this magazine. In the U.S.A., by contrast, architects say that to have work published in the A.I.A. Journal is to arrive. In Australia, <sup>to</sup> apathy and under-developed professional pride is not confined to architects. The overall design climate is drowsy. Many good graphics men, typographers, industrial designers and their allied craftsmen and artists seem to lose heart a year or two after they leave the Tech. They live in an Australia which is even less stimulating than the architects' Australia, where original talent is even less in demand, subtle qualities even less recognized and intellectual exchange among the creative leaders even more exceptional.

It is true that architects recognize each other regularly in one or two annual awards like the Sulman, and the Victorian and Queensland Chapters' architecture awards, but the motivation behind these activities is, or has become, essentially public-relational. A boost to architectural practice all round is anticipated from the attendant publicity. The awards are not notable for the especially distinguished advocacy at the jury level nor the intellectual discussions which follow the selections.



While architects demonstrate by such a general mood of ~~artistic~~ <sup>creative</sup> inertia that they are not particularly interested in each others' work nor excited by the plaudits of their peers, it follows that the patrons among the public are not greatly impressed by the profession. Thus, for example, Australian architecture has brought upon itself recent successful colonising bids by higher-pressured American firms. Australian boards of directors are very easily convinced that neither the talent nor the know-how is available for their needs in a local profession that thinks so little of itself on the creative level. Similarly every governmental department seeking a higher architectural standard for some specially eminent building automatically gropes for the advice of some titled gentleman from England or perhaps a smooth salesman from San Francisco - that is, from an Overseas Expert, from anyone other than an Australian architect. This is no doubt another consequence of being a small and remote country, yet such lack of assurance does not apply to all other branches of Australian endeavour. Australian scientists and painters, for instance, deservedly are prophets honoured in their own country. As things are going, Architecture promises to be one of the last professions in the country to reach an ordinary operating level on what is popularly recognized as World Standard.

Nevertheless, as I have said already, the relative freedom from the erratic forces of fashionable competition and from excessively over-stimulated creative energy is by no means necessarily bad. It could be the most valuable characteristic of Australian architecture. It allows comparative freedom of movement to anyone who seeks a genuinely original and responsible architecture. Let us hold on to that while we look further.

It follows from the apathy on the creative professional plane, from the dearth of architects' architecture, that Australia has a high proportion of very broadly popular architecture. Any observant visitor arriving from an older or an even luckier country, as well as any observant Australian returning home, inevitably is struck with amazement or amusement by the peculiar vulgarity of Australian building. Again I use the term literally. Most Australian buildings are clearly anxious to attract and to please the greatest possible number of eyes. This is the only reason for the exceptionally high proportion of buildings which are besprinkled with visual seasoning to suit the lowest common denominator of public taste: broken face bricks, feature brick inserts, <sup>curly</sup>wrought iron, <sup>'abstract'</sup>stained glass, chequer-board tiling, split-stone panels, and so on. These things often enough are used to adorn buildings which were conceived with the utmost econom<sup>y</sup> austerit<sup>y</sup> and sterility of



imagination. The inner suburbs of most cities are becoming increasingly crowded with apartments, motels and other tight investment buildings which are pared down to the meanest limits of shelter: load-bearing brickwork stretched up as high as it will go with all projections shorn off: sans eaves, sans sunshades, sans trees, sans everything but colour. The architectural profession can point out, with the end of its umbrella, that most of these buildings are not done by its members. They are mostly designed and sub-contracted by do-it-yourself developers - amateurs who are not exactly package-~~dealers~~ so much as brown-paper-bag <sup>-dealers</sup> ~~merchants~~. The profession is indeed inclined to raise its eyebrows if it does notice an architect's name connected with any of these enterprises, guessing that the professional fees have been cut back as close as the eaves overhang. But really we cannot turn our backs on them as simply as that. We of the Institute cannot dissociate ourselves from these mean and nasty buildings any more legitimately than the medical profession can dissociate itself from diseases and disasters which still wrack the non-private-patient stratum of society. Whether we like it or not (and if we know what is good for us we should like it) the community looks to us still for guidance and holds us responsible for all buildings, whether or not an architect was involved with them. Despite governmental departments, package-dealers, merchant builders, and all other

modern irritants of the professional architect, he is, amazingly, still standing on a rickety Doric pedestal in the public eye. He is held responsible for the mess far beyond the borders of his own contribution to it. He is still ultimately respected and counted as the constructional father-figure to whom all must eventually resort for appeal when the environment becomes unbearable. And this is not only flattering; it is justified. We architects cannot dissociate ourselves from the lowliest developers' flats because nearly all their unfortunate tricks were learned from us. What an example we have set to them in so many of our most consciously 'aesthetic' works! Look at our churches, for instance, the buildings which are most anxious to rise free from the commercial box.

Australians who work and believe in the importance of design are few enough and unimportant enough in the community. Even so, they seem reluctant to join forces for concerted effort. In the northern hemisphere the dividing lines between the old categories of designers are blurring. In the schools and in associations and in practice, mixed groups of architects, planners, industrial and graphics men - for instance, Elliot Noyes's office - are forging a new profession: just Design. In Australia, despite one or two brave essays in this direction, the tendency is to maintain a hierarchy of separate designers



working in separate cells of ascending importance, with the architect in the top one with the thickest carpet. Obviously there has been some professional justification for this arrangement, but the moral justification for the architect's highest office can only be maintained while he is the vital leader in design.

A new cul-de-sac subdivision in the heart of ruined Toorak, Victoria, where once the society architect reigned, is occupied by six houses all built within the last twelve months. Three are by builders and three by architects. The most prominent of the builders' houses has a hipped tile roof and multi-pane windows in its brick veneer walls: very stale and conventional. Yet the bricks are painted white and its tiles and woodwork are dark brown in a safe but timelessly attractive contrast. The most prominent of the architects' houses is up on pipe stilts, has a flat roof and a strangely contorted plan with a feature

panel of Italian ceramic tiles on a main splayed wall. This probably is not a <sup>very</sup> popular house. Its vulgarity is of a strangely esoteric, professional kind. It exploits, or tries to exploit, a dozen different elements of what used to be the contemporary architecture of the rest of the world about fifteen years ago. A small proportion of tasteless architects and laymen no doubt thinks that it looks up to date. Yet from every other standpoint the builder's house must be judged superior. A quite extraordinary number of the dreadful buildings around us are in fact done by architects, and not only by architects whose early training or habits were acquired on the Continent. Several of the worst at large were born, bred and educated here. Anyone who has done any kind of teaching at an Australian University school of architecture must share the traumatic experience at intervals of recognizing the name of one of the students who passed briefly through his hands sometime long ago on a board outside a hideous monumental denial of every principle of architecture.

Such appalling work does happen in some other parts of the globe. There is a little in Singapore and on the east coast of Africa, and in parts of Ceylon, and in one or two other areas that might be described as developing. ~~(Some of the younger architects in those places were Colombo Plan students at Australian Universities, anyway.)~~ Similar depths of



vulgarity are plumbed in other over-developed places like Miami, Las Vegas and Monaco, yet there a certain amount of sophistication, richness and wit often relieves the details. There is sophistication and wit in parts of Australia too, of course, but where else in the 20th Century world outside can you find respected adult members of an Institute playing about with such things as two-tone broken-face brickwork? It might be thought that the category of architect is too loose when it includes people of such diverse attitudes to the integrity of the end product.

All in all, I think we must admit that the ordinary Australian architectural scene is uninspiring, not to make too much of it. It is uninspiring because even in much of the best or most advanced or most thoughtful work there is little or no clear or consistent sense of a movement, let alone a sense of direction or promise.

This again may be inevitable in a small, remote and comparatively young country. Yet it is possible to talk about an Australian school of endeavour in other walks of life. It is possible to see the fuzzy outlines of an Australian school of painting. It is possible to define centres of movement and directions in Australian medical and general science. And oddly enough it is possible to conceive that architecture in Australia could eventually acquire a direction, for two reasons. One is that if once had such a sense. The other is that one can imagine a

majority of the people who are in any way concerned - all architects as well as builders, investors, industrialists, housewives, anyone with a financial or social interest in building - one can imagine them all agreeing on one overall objective. Indeed they do already, they have for a century, and at intervals still they voice it. The trouble is, it is a literary rather than a visual objective. It is: an Australian Style. Sometimes in the case of laymen the objective voiced in this phrase or plea is no more than one of the last twitches of a dying nationalism. Sometimes in the case of architects it is the side effect of a sober and practical attempt to build most suitably within local conditions, as free as possible from foreign influences. In any case, the problem of transmuting the desire for something we can call our own into a concrete image has baffled half a dozen generations before the present one. Also it must be admitted that such a desire is undeniably dangerous and can lead to extreme reaction. Yet it is something else of potential value to hold on to while we look further for signs here of an original and responsible architecture.

Resorting now to the selective blindness which architects usually adopt when viewing the world, ignoring the great majority of non-architected or commercial-architected rubbish and considering only the work of architects who can be classed as serious or creative, let us consider the subject as set: what is the state of Australian architecture?



First let us look at its changing character. The architectural leadership that was indisputably Melbourne's all through the first half of the 20th century passed to Sydney sometime just before 1960, and simultaneously altered its nature. Melbourne's leadership had been based on vitality and originality. If it fell short of <sup>being transcendental</sup> ~~fantastic~~ the Melbourne school was at least adventurous and iconoclastic in a way most uncharacteristic of Melbourne society generally in her later years. Robert Haddon and Desbrowe Annear were not only avant-garde. The more notable thing is that they were also about the most socially successful and fashionable architects in Melbourne during the first two decades of the century. It was in Melbourne that Griffin, by chance if you like, realised the most ambitious and imaginative buildings of his world-wide <sup>(and increasingly world famous)</sup> career. And when at last the 20th century revolution <sup>began in</sup> ~~came to~~ Australia in 1934 it was entirely Melbourne's show. No other Australian city experienced anything remotely approaching the sheer excitement of the newness of the work in the mid-1930s of Mewton and Grounds, Seabrook and Fildes, Edward <sup>F.</sup> Billson, Best Overend and the few others. There was nothing like it till at least five years later in Sydney, and not for some fourteen years elsewhere, thanks to a war. Then after that war the excitement continued in Melbourne. For nearly ten years afterwards, until the mid-1950s, the architectural atmosphere was charged with a passion for adventures ~~in the art~~

hardly less fervent than that of the Utopians of Germany -  
 after another war and on another side. What a feeling of  
 fight and challenge spread through Melbourne's little  
 architectural world at that time! What promise at the new  
 University School of Architecture when Brian Lewis took the  
 first Chair, and Roy Grounds was for a while senior lecturer  
 to a largely adult ex-service student body. What enthusiasm  
 abounded when the latest Peter McIntyre or Kevin Borland  
 house was unveiled! It was the European revolution happening  
 all over again, a generation later. What sensations, what  
 excitement, what inexperience! It was a time of some awful  
 errors but of many brave tries, and perhaps it was the only  
 time in our history when we were not old-fashioned, when visiting  
 architects from other countries could find evidence of ideas  
 which they had never seen at home. This little, late skirmish  
 in the development of modern architecture was unlike the con-  
 temporaneous two-man revolution in Sydney, led from separate  
 highly individualist<sup>c</sup> camps by Harry Seditler and Sydney Ancher<sup>respectively</sup>.  
 The Melbourne activity of the 'fifties was a movement consolidated  
 by the weight of a generation of pioneers behind it. It  
 seemed to have impetus and direction and the promise that  
 the architectural art was <sup>sur</sup> ~~moving~~ing or stumbling forward ~~for~~  
 ahead of the other arts and technologies for  
 the first time in the history of Australia.



Whatever happened to that promise? It subsided in Melbourne ten years ago, in 1957, after a final fling around the time of preparation for the Olympic Games. The two climactic buildings of the period are on opposite sides of the Yarra River at Swan Street Bridge: The Olympic Pools Building and the Sidney Myer Music Bowl - symbolically, <sup>popular</sup> palaces of sport and culture respectively. These buildings had in common tensile construction and Bill Irwin, an engineer with the courage of his architects' convictions. As well they had the essential ingredients of the Melbourne school: a great structural-functional idea carried out with an enforced austerity and a voluntarily cavalier technique. Shortly after them the Melbourne movement passed out under the weight of two or three new annual layers of graduates freed from the anxieties and stimulations of the post-war period. It was this new breed of Australian graduate, with more training and worldly-wisdom, which came forward during the next ten years when the centre of architectural creativity swung to Sydney.

The Melbourne school was forward-looking, daring all and damning all aesthetic rules. I remember <sup>Peter McIntyre, as</sup> the architect of a big home design show at the Exhibition building, in the days before these became commercial and hopeless, deliberately mixing his colours to offend. Violent puce and oranges (now a fashionable combination, but hideous at that time) were juxtaposed to jar the visitor into recognition that a revolution was under way.

The Sydney school was no less dedicated or serious-minded but it was of quite different character: conservative and aesthetic. The Sydney school, which also began with domestic work, as all architectural movements do, had no time for looking wistfully to a reluctant technological future which kept retreating beyond one's grasp. It looked back, hoping to find what was best in the recent past and hoping to re-do this even better. Something of value that it was able to rediscover in the uninspiring local vernacular was a native cunning with brickwork and carpentry. The Sydney school adapted these qualities of technique to a sophisticated architecture of strongly conceived forms. It grew up quickly in the work of a new generation: Woolley, McKay, Jack - to grab three names, you will add others - and it gained weight with the impressive volume of consistent public works done by Peter Hall and others under E.H. Farmer, who added a little stripped concrete to the palette. Before long however the conceptual basis predictably was watered down by followers until practically all that was left were the rough dark bricks and the brown creosoted off-saw timber, a tamed Australian romantic kind of brutalism. Nevertheless there was quite enough of this, and it was quite presentable enough, to constitute the nearest thing to a regional style seen in this country for more than a century. To use a term popular at the time, it was a grassroots movement. Its language could be understood by the spec. builder, not to mention the student of architecture. It was not quite capable of transplanting itself intact into the urban heart of Sydney, however.



There naked constructional materials remained the rarest of sights and veneering continued to be the chief occupation of many architects. The State Offices and the Water Board buildings nevertheless maintained the direct geometrical strength and something of the erector-set rationale of the Sydney movement. (Meanwhile in Australia Square Harry Seidler continued his own professional development almost as far removed from the others as when he first went out <sup>singlehanded</sup> from the Breuer camp to do battle with the municipal philistines).

The Melbourne school had subscribed to the philosophy that to stand still and cease experimenting was asking to be swept away into an intellectual stormwater drain. The Sydney school has ~~known of~~ no such compulsive progressive drive. It was even responsible for reviving the material that was once most despised by youth: ~~the~~ Marseilles-pattern tile. In some seductively beautiful examples of the Sydney school, such as Ian McKay's sophisticated bush carpentry in the Sulman-winning C.B. Alexander Presbyterian Agriculture College, the style revels in subtle romantic allusions to times or places unspecifically remote. Yet in its everyday application the Sydney school's technique is more pointedly reminiscent. It recalls something of California, especially Ernest Kump's nostalgic California. This may be purely coincidental - the two sides of the Pacific independently arriving at about the same conclusion - although it is apparent

that travelling Australian architects are frequently most highly impressed by Californian work and its relevance to ours. The present Sydney school has in fact much in common superficially with, if you can remember it, the Californian Bungalow style of the 1920s: the same rugged, ragged clinker bricks and earthy colouring and nutty-crunchy textures. Isolated individual buildings of the highest quality and of great promise for the future of Australian architecture are being built in Sydney, as they are in most cities, but the Sydney school, the remarkably consistent movement, is still not <sup>a</sup> wholly satisfying end to our search. It is just a delightful regional phenomenon for which we must be truly grateful. Beautiful as it can be, its anti-technological reaction is sometimes too pointed, and its lack of dedication to the present seems to dull its chances of enjoying much of a future.

While Sydney became the centre of creativity other parts of Australia were not necessarily asleep. The most remarkable waker of the 1960s was in fact Perth. The unexpected and almost unlimited mineral finds in the vast West Australian outback were reflected in an unfamiliar air of confidence along St. George's Terrace. This translated well into architecture. It was something entirely different from the boom conditions of popular Surfers' Paradise which usually bring out the worst side of the most popular architects. Perth insisted that it was experiencing not a boom, which could bust, but the beginning of a new era of prosperity with foundations solidly based in the mineral



discoveries. The architecture was inclined to match this feeling with much less showiness than all that new wealth might have led one to expect. The ordinary commercial buildings of Perth and suburbs had a perceptibly more restrained demeanour than was usual. Even blocks of flats had cleaner habits and a little education, and there was a tendency to greyness everywhere which was so remarkable after all the brittle colouring of the east. It almost led one to believe that another regional style was in the making. If so it was still too young to be counted on.

Perth, nevertheless, is <sup>the</sup> most likely of all Australian cities to see greater things in the near future. For it is the one least troubled by another rather sad quality of Australian building that should be mentioned. This is a pervading social quality rather than a narrowly architectural one. It is our ability to compromise and avoid extremism of any kind, or to put it less kindly our timidity and lack of dynamism. Originality and imagination are not outlawed here, but they must be kept strictly within recognizable bounds. Enlightened eclecticism is the rule, and diffidence the dominant characteristic of our pragmatic, poor man's affluent society. Thus the piecemeal growth of our cities. Even the quite dazzling development of central Sydney is characteristically fragmentary. Thus the appalling inertia in freeway construction despite our being proudly third or fourth from the top in world car-ownership. Thus the absence, outside Perth, of great urban <sup>plans</sup> ~~areas~~ <sup>the kind that mark</sup> of many American and Canadian cities. It is not just a question of money. When bold schemes are

proposed there are always regulations or councils ready to cut them down to Aussie size, as happened to Australia Square. The single exception to this rule was the boldness that shaped Sydney Opera House, in every sense, up to 1965. And look at that now! The prevailing atmosphere is overcast with caution. Within the campus of a university every building must be by a different architect. This is partly to avoid arguments and professional jealousy but mostly to avoid commitment to the supposed monotony of a single architectural conception. The Australian brand of egalitarianism applies to architects, not to architecture. Thus most of our newest, planned universities are made to look as quickly as possible as piecemeal as our oldest, unplanned ones. That is deliberate, popular policy, and while it is approved by most clients or patrons of architecture one would be unrealistic to expect much architecture capable of raising the spirits. Ideas are not wanted in building; they are only tolerated if they can justify themselves immediately on economic grounds. This conservatism is the quality most responsible for the enormous differences between our development and that of the United States, which we like to think we are emulating. It separates us by a gulf wider than the Pacific from Canada, with which we have so much else in common, socially and economically. Canada has men in responsible positions who are young enough in mind and spirit to let architects in their twenties actually build the sort of projects that they designed at university and which in Australia are locked up in University



studios forever; for instance, Israeli-born Moshe Safdie's Habitat 67 in Montreal and Australian-born John Andrews' Scarborough College near Toronto.

All over Australia in these late years of the 1960 decade fine architecture is being built, more undoubtedly than at any time before, but nearly always it is lonely, insulated from anything visually sympathetic by square miles of mediocrity or mess. What I suppose we are looking for - most people who feel an interest in this country's cultivation - is something as coherently and characteristically Australian as a shearing shed or the view of Alice Springs from the air, but which at the same time uses the technology of this half of the 20th Century to solve the new problems which confront us. Some may see the answer in some sort of homestead form with veranda and posts mass-produced in post-tensioned fibreglass interlocking pieces. Much fairly harmless nostalgic amusement may be enjoyed along such a line, yet it is by no means the satisfying conclusion to our search. It implies that architecture follows emotional form, which we know is false. Architecture follows functional needs as well as structural resources, however deviously and with whatever sly, secret motives. So when we say we want an Australian style we mean only that we want a genuine style that is appropriate for the special set of conditions applying now in this unique culturally-emergent country.

Can we exploit the peculiar qualities already mentioned - the unsophisticated freedom from involvement with international fads, the general, genuine, submerged desire for something we can call our own, even the caution - can we exploit them in the interests of better architecture?

The international architectural scene which is outside our window, influencing us indirectly but not involving us, is marked at this time by a great debate. (It has of course passed through the period of the great shapes which produced the Sydney Opera House). The subject of the great debate is, to put it simply and crudely: concepts versus computers; or, if you like, Expressionism versus ~~computer-technology~~; or, 'Can the expressive qualities of architecture justify a departure from strictly functional-structural rationalism?' This question splits architecture in the northern hemisphere into antagonistic factions. It is an old debate which we have heard before but now it is reaching a climax. This is because the impersonal black glazed skyscraper needles and slabs, sometimes literally designed by computers, like Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's hundred-storey obelisk under construction in Chicago, are getting too big to ignore, <sup>yet means</sup> while the Expressionism of others like Kahn, Rudolph, Johansen, Stirling, Lasdén - not to mention Yamasaki, Johnson, and the Japanese - challenges the computer with human concepts and visions. One aspect of the debate concerns the merits of the technique or attitude commonly known as the New Brutalist, which is really a brave name for



<sup>Secondhand</sup>  
~~copies~~ of Le Corbusier, and somewhere makes a third point of a philosophical triangle.

Characteristically we are experiencing none of these extreme things. Any Australian building that looks bland enough to have been designed by a computer is likely to have some ingratiating contrasts of colour or texture introduced to relieve the monotony, while most other buildings drop into a compromised category of formalism that falls rather short of full-dress Expressionism. We have no New Brutalism; Le Corbusier has had less influence in Australia than anywhere else in the world.

Despite every critical thing I have said - and we all have heard much more cruelly critical things said about our architecture by many people ranging from frustrated sculptors to Governors-General - I believe that there is a solid body of serious, progressive architectural thought in this country that could transform the situation if it were less amorphous and had a consolidated presence and voice. This would be the voice of vital architecture, which is not, of course, the same thing as the voice of the Institute. Our Institute, like every other one, must represent fairly everyone in the profession whether they believe in architecture or not. But I have in mind the majority of sensitive men and women trained since World War II, and a smaller proportion of those who grew up before the war, all of whom ostensibly and sincerely subscribe to what may still be called most simply the modern movement. Irrespective of all the

international fads and the local fluctuations in vulgar taste these people hold inviolate a code of integrity and goodness in architecture, essentially the same code as the one that bound the rebels of Melbourne in the 1930s, which was the same one that motivated the pioneers of modern design around the turn of the century. It is ungrained in the 20th Century and, as we all know well, it goes something like this:

Fulfill the function of the building within itself and within society; respect the nature of materials and structural realities; press technology and methodology into ever higher efficiency; renounce all historic allusions and irrelevant beautification; give the building strong expression - but of itself, not of the architect's ego.

To advocate that code is not to cry for the stars or for a return to the way the Bauhaus or any other of the pioneers interpreted the message. The code merely encourages responsibility and integrity. It does not relieve the architect of the task of creating, but it does give him a solid foundation for his ideas. And ideas with integrity are, of course, all that Australian architecture needs to snap out of the old-fashioned or second-hand routine, to regain a sense of confidence and self-sufficiency, to come out of seclusion and join the world.



The difficulties in the way of putting ~~these~~<sup>the</sup> code into effect have been formidable and lots of us have grown tired; others of us have never tried hard enough. Yet still there are very many Australian architects believing earnestly in the code, give or take a word or two, waiting for the real opportunity with the really enlightened client to come along. The trouble is that he may never come, at this rate. All over the world enlightened clients are rare enough, and in underpopulated Australia there is more need than in other countries to try to cultivate <sup>(them, to awaken)</sup> in the community more understanding of and sympathy with the basic architectural code. I do not want to exaggerate the relevance of clients' taste to architectural results, yet we know that it takes at least two to make good architecture: a receptive client as well as a convinced architect.

In explaining to ourselves the phenomenon of so much poor, dead architecture in Australia we are inclined to accept as an interpretation of recent history the proposition that the 20th Century design revolution came to Australia about 1950 but was a bit of a fizzle; Functionalism turned out to be a false god and all the rest of the dogma had disappointing results. Half-heartedly we wait for some better philosophy to turn up. The truth is that the revolution still has not come, not to Australia and not to many other countries. Looking back now it is easy enough to see what happened here. The forces of revolution that were boiling up in Melbourne before World War II were diverted

and dissipated after the apparently easy successes of contemporary design against pseudo-historical nonsense in the first decade after the war. Suddenly about 1955 it looked as if the revolution had succeeded and a rational architectural millenium had practically arrived. But really all that had happened was a modernisation of some building techniques combined with the adoption of another decorative period style. Certainly it was a fairly recent period. It was the International Style, barely a quarter of a century old, with Australian fruit dressings. And although the dressings varied it was just as much a superficial, decorative style as Spanish Mission, which was the last one to pass through. It is still the style of the bulk of Australian architecture. This vulgar hybrid won, and the revolution for a 20th Century architecture of integrity was frustrated.

So now, some twelve years later, it is high time to revive the revolution, to lose patience with the poverty of so much of our architectural scene, and to show some determination to build a more real and consistent architecture based on that shelved morality which we know to be valid. Manifestoes and marches, exhibitions and pamphleteering are out of fashion, yet it is a situation which might have produced all these a generation ago. The believers in all design fields will have to find some way of getting together to build up a consolidated strength if they are nor prepared to let Australia continue wallowing contentedly in her cultural backwater.



One must have faith that the real thing will come to Australia some day. If it comes from outside, as all the decorative styles have, it might turn out to be disappointingly anonymous. But if it is our own, an original and responsible contribution to the world-wide theme, it will look peculiarly ours without doubt. Our egalitarianism, arrogance, diffidence, pride, busyboddiness, and all the other perverse social characteristics incubated here in our seclusion will involuntarily colour it Australian.

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