HAWKS, DOVES, AND FLIGHTS OF FANCY

by Reyner Banham

"Murky chaos" is how Philip Johnson saw the condition of architecture in 1960. But even one of America's most thoughtful architects could hardly have foreseen how much murkier the prospect would become.

Almost half of the qualified architects in the most depressed architectural centers, such as New York and San Francisco, are reckoned to have been unemployed in recent times. The profession has yet to recover fully from the 1975–76 slump, when the value of all new construction (including homes, factories, and public buildings) actually declined by 5 percent, compared to 10 to 15 percent increases in each of the previous three years. Recent graduates of the more than 100 U.S. schools of architecture are still having trouble finding jobs; half of those graduating since 1971 have taken work in unrelated fields. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, competition for jobs in architecture—where annual salaries for licensed professionals average $20,000 to $25,000—will be intense throughout the 1980s.

The problems are not only economic. Left leaderless by the passing of two generations of dominant father figures, from Le Corbusier to Louis Kahn, the architects of the once self-assured Modern Movement appear directionless, guilt-ridden, and divided in the 1970s. After a century or so of Messianic, reformist zeal (shared by politicians and social thinkers) that equated social progress with technological progress, the Movement now finds its products despised, its practitioners out of work.

The profession clearly has reason to be concerned, not the least because the demand for new architectural design has been declining far faster than the demand for buildings. One result: The support staff (e.g., landscapers, draftsmen) in architectural firms is actually growing faster than the number of architects, which has held steady in recent years at about 50,000.* Archi-

*Who are these 50,000? According to a 1975 survey by the American Institute of Architects, the typical AIA member is white, married, male, and 46; 0.7 percent of its members are black, 1.3 percent Chinese or Japanese, 0.9 percent women. Some 75 percent of all architects are AIA members.

tects are also beginning to do out of expediency what founding Modernists from William Morris to Walter Gropius had urged on principle: Eliminate the distinction between architect and builder. In practice, this has tended to happen at the great and small extremes of the profession. The very large, omnicompetent architectural firms like Houston's Caudill, Rowlett and Scott—big enough to dicker with banks and argue with governments—serve at once as designers, engineers, consultants on law, lighting, landscaping and you-name-it. (Caudill, Rowlett and Scott employs 100 architects out of a total staff of 300.) They routinely deliver finished buildings for a comprehensive fee to such clients as multinational consortia and Arab oil shaykhs.

The Tough and the Tender

In like manner if not scale, individual architects in lower Manhattan, downtown Washington, and other areas have been turning themselves into expert recyclers of discarded buildings, drumming up their own financing, bending their own backs to the labor involved, often guinea-pigging as their own first tenants, and generally *not* behaving like members of a gentlemanly, liberal profession. Ironically, the recyclers are almost the only group of architects who have lately escaped public odium (although there is growing concern in some areas that inner city restorations are forcing low income families from their neighborhoods). They lovingly breathe new life into familiar old structures. Even big firms are getting into the act. If there is one piece of recent architectural work in the United States that seems completely beyond criticism, it must be the extraordinary restoration of Boston's 18th-century Quincy Markets–Faneuil Hall area by Benjamin Thompson Associates.

Most architects, however, are neither in Kuwait nor Manhattan's SoHo. They work not for corporations or themselves, but for small firms with a staff of perhaps a dozen. They still do business according to the written and unwritten rules of the

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profession, keeping their fingers out of construction and high finance. Their relations with a client tend to be personal. But even this "silent majority" of architects experiences to some degree the conflict between the "tough" and "tender" approaches to the profession, between what might be styled the "hawk" and "dove" stances.

The architectural "hawk" takes a tough approach: "Glass is still the cheapest first-cost enveloping membrane, rectangular floor plans are still the most convenient, the energy crisis is not yet critical enough to rule out full air-conditioning, and whatever your old environment was like, I'm in business to provide you with a better one!" The most representative U.S. hawk at present (certainly the most envied) is John Portman, whose glitteringly faceted towers, such as Renaissance Center in Detroit, are now a standard adornment of striving U.S. downtowns. Portman's solution to urban problems is typically hawkish. He provides a cleaner, better, brighter (and violence-free) environment *inside* the glass fortress as an alternative to the urban mess outside. Unfortunately, it is becoming clear that the new glass "downtowns" can drain the streets of trade and people, leaving them more deserted and dangerous than ever.*

Small Is Invisible

The "doves" have few conspicuous successes (or failures) to their credit, in part because their current approach tends to follow E. F. Schumacher's slogan, "Small is beautiful." This inevitably produces less visible results. (One of the few truly "visible" dove buildings is the Centraal Beheer office complex in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands. This "house for a thousand people" achieves an intricate intimacy by giving practically every office worker a desk on a semiprivate balcony overlooking interior courtyards.) In England, Sir Hugh Casson's new apartments in a historic neighborhood near Salisbury Cathedral are so inconspicuous that many would-be critics have apparently been unable to find them. In the United States, dove architects have begun to fill some of our more remote areas with highly individual dwellings of energy-conscious design (that is, run primarily on sun, wind, and sweat).

Ideally, dovish house design incorporates "user-participation" in the planning process. There has been one no-

*One super-hawk building that has had exactly the opposite effect is the Centre Pompidou in Paris, a highly adaptable culture machine of glass, steel, and exposed, overscaled, color-keyed plumbing. It makes no concessions to the neighboring 18th-century buildings, yet, mysteriously, has revitalized the area in a way American urban planners have yet to equal.

THE TOP TWENTY

In 1976, the American Institute of Architecture (AIA) asked 75 top U.S. architects to list what they considered the "proudest achievements" in American architecture. They named a total of 175 structures; the 20 receiving the most mentions are listed below.

Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia led the field with 29 votes, trailed by Rockefeller Center with 22. Tastes change. An AIA poll in 1948 failed to elicit any mention of the University of Virginia and showed the Folger Shakespeare Library (Washington, D.C.) in the No. 1 spot.

The results of the 1976 survey:

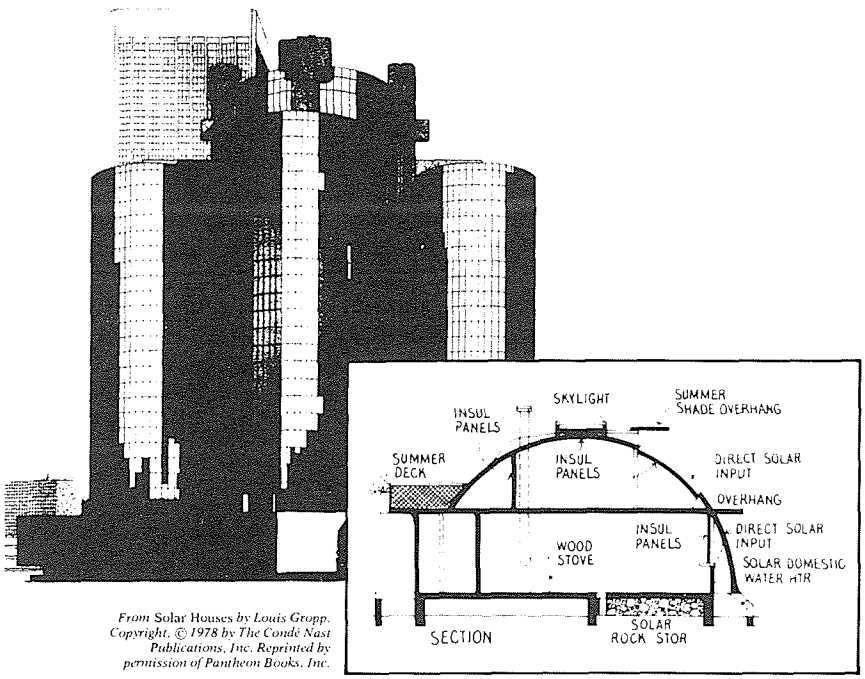
1. **University of Virginia,** Charlottesville, Va.: Thomas Jefferson, architect, 1826.
2. **Rockefeller Center,** New York City: Reinhard & Hofmeister; Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray; Hood & Fouilhoux, 1940.
3. **Dulles Airport,** Chantilly, Va.: Eero Saarinen, 1962.
4. **Falling Water,** Bear Run, Pa.: Frank Lloyd Wright, 1937.
5. **Carson Pirie Scott Building,** Chicago: Louis H. Sullivan, 1899.
6. **Seagram Building,** New York City: Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson; Kahn & Jacobs, 1958.
7. **Philadelphia Saving Fund Society,** Philadelphia: George Howe and William Lescaze, 1932.
8. **New City Hall,** Boston: Kallman, McKinnell & Knowles; Campbell Aldrich & Nulty; Le Messurier & Associates, 1968.
9. **Trinity Church,** Boston: Henry Hobson Richardson, 1877.
10. **Lever House,** New York City: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1952.
11. **Robie House,** Chicago: Frank Lloyd Wright, 1909.
12. **Brooklyn Bridge,** New York City: John A. and Washington Roebling, engineers, 1883.
13. **Johnson Wax Co. Building,** Racine, Wis.: Frank Lloyd Wright, 1939.
14. **Ford Foundation Building,** New York City: Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo Associates, 1967.
15. **Grand Central Terminal,** New York City: Reed & Stem; Warren & Wetmore, 1913.
16. **Glass House,** New Canaan, Conn.: Philip Johnson, 1949.
17. **Gateway Arch,** St. Louis, Mo.: Eero Saarinen, 1967.
18. **Monticello,** Charlottesville, Va.: Thomas Jefferson, 1770.
19. **Monadnock Building,** Chicago: Burnham & Root; Holabird & Roche, 1893.
20. **Reliance Building,** Chicago: Daniel H. Burnham & Co. 1895.

table success in this area: The Swedish architect, Ralph Erskine, working out of a storefront office, produced in Newcastle, England, a mile-long, but varied, "megastructure" dotted with colored sheds of wood and corrugated plastic—a dramatic "humanization" of the giant apartment block that Erskine might have built had he not consulted the prospective tenants.

The Mystique of Draftsmanship

The average architect would prefer to give Erskine all the credit, anyway. Participatory design is a dove extreme that makes most architects nervous. If people can design their own accommodations, who needs architects? Why bother with the long (7-to-10-year) training in the niceties of design that the average professional must undergo? If there can be such a thing as a *defensive* hawk posture, a fair number of younger middle-aged, conspicuously well-educated, and internationally linked architects have now adopted it. They stand firmly on a traditional view of architecture as, above all, an art of form. Implicit in this approach is an abandonment of the moral imperative to improve society and change the world by the creation of totally original design. This retreat from Utopia is also an oblique retreat into erudition rather than originality. "Contrary to Modern Movement theory," wrote Lance Wright, editor of the London *Architectural Review*, "imaginative copying is always a more architectural art than 'original invention.'"

The most persistent hero of this trend has been Liverpool-trained James Stirling, who has looked to the 1920s and '30s for inspiration. Stirling is animated by a fundamental preoccupation with drawing, the most secret ritual in the arcana of architecture. The mystique of draftsmanship is something that architects fall back on when they are in a falling-back mood, and most of the so-called Rationalists—an almost purely theoretical troupe of architects who lecture on college campuses and are masters at the drawing board, but produce few buildings—are falling back into much further reaches of history than Stirling. Their work persistently evokes elementary block-like forms, pitched roofs, the vault and the column, the circle and the square—in short, the geometric monumentality of the visionary architects of the French Revolution. "Visionary" is indeed their operative word. Anything goes so long as it's not actually going to be built! Yet there are buildings that come perilously close to such exotic visions: The long "extruded section" of Cesar Pelli's Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles, paneled out in ethereal blue glass that reveals nothing of its interior workings or con-



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John Portman's hawkish Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles (1975), and plans for a dovish contemporary solar home in Illinois, designed by Michael E. Jentzen. Most architects avoid such hawk and dove extremes.

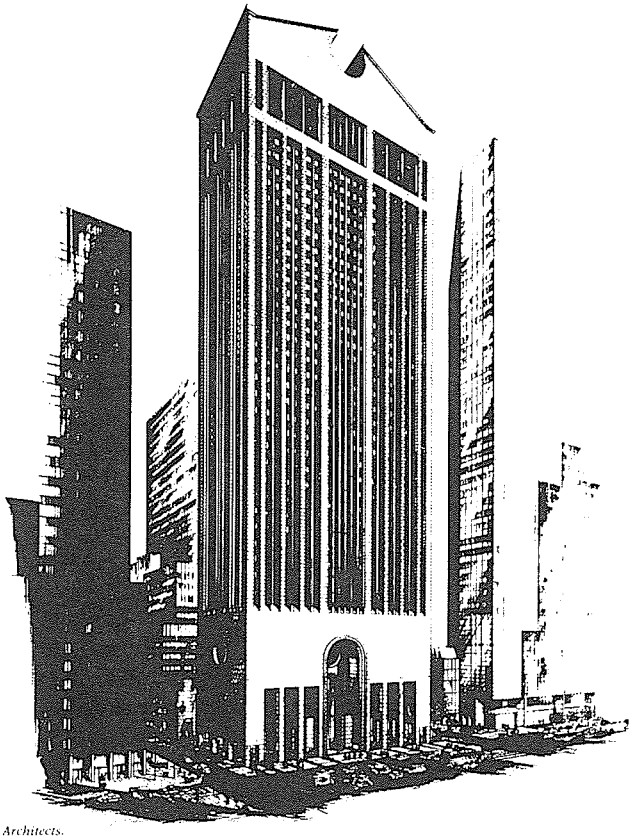
struction and makes it look like a giant perspective drawing on the sky; or the bent "extruded sections" of the roof of Arata Isozaki's library in Kita Kyushu, Japan.

Ever noted for the formalist qualities of its modern architecture, Japan seems to be where postmodern tendencies really thrive, in the work of Kisho Kurokawa above all others. Kurokawa has lately done a few urban business/residence towers that could almost be taken for a kind of running criticism of all the skillful anonymities of modern architecture. Thus, his Sony Tower in Tokyo has been "eroded" to reveal its stairs and prefabricated bathroom units for at least part of its height, as if its skin had fallen away, leaving the guts in public view. A similar "erosion" of the classic rectangular format can be seen in Hugh Stubbins's recently completed Citicorp Tower in Manhattan. Its top is sheared away at an angle to provide for an (inoperative) solar energy installation; its lower parts have been eroded until little more than four giant columns survive, rising

from an underground plaza containing a church, a modish furniture shop, and much else.

This more fanciful formal mode, with its elements of spoof and satire, appeals to all sorts of architects, as is now demonstrated by one-time Modernist and sometime hawk Philip Johnson. Johnson's design for the new Manhattan headquarters of AT&T, revealed to a bemused press last March, calls for a tower with its top slashed off two ways for plant and equipment, with a curved gap in between, producing what has been described as a neo-Chippendale cresting. At the street level, Johnson proposes the classical geometry of columns and vaults, derived ultimately from the Renaissance architect Alberti, and presented in a manner that must make the Rationalists feel they are being subtly teased. The architectural cognoscenti have so far tried to treat the AT&T building as some kind of joke: "They'll never build it like that!"

Won't they?



Philip Johnson's design for the new AT&T headquarters in Manhattan. Even if it is never built, the project may well survive in history books as an appallingly accurate jibe at the present state of architectural art.

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