

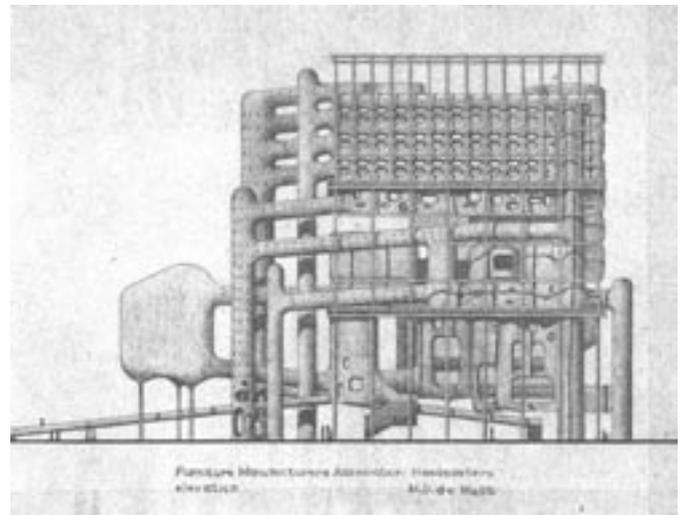
ON THE ENTRY OF THE STUDENT COHORT OF SEPTEMBER 1955 WE WERE TOLD THREE THINGS BY JOHN S. WALKDEN THE AVUNCULAR 'HEADMASTR' OF THE ROYAL CENTRAL LONDON POLYTECHNIC. IN 1992 THIS BECAME THE 'UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER'.

The first was that "Architects lost their charisma when they abandoned the Classical Orders". The second was that "Architecture was no longer a literary medium". The third was: that, as an aside, "I believe that my son is likely to be picked for the British Olympic swimming team". These inscrutable rubrics were all that he ever told his new students. After this, he removed himself to the invisibility of the Administration.

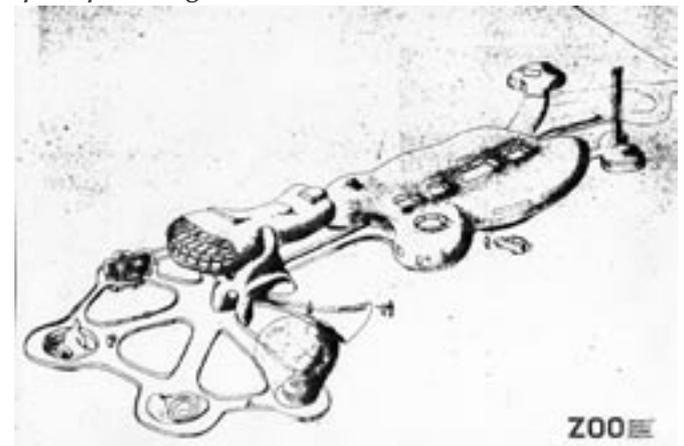
We novices had neither a sense of the term 'charisma' nor of the departed magic of the Classical Orders. We already knew that the Polytechnic was unique, even in the anti-literate 1950s, in having **no entry-level book list at all**. As to his son, it is clear, with hindsight, that Walkden was a disaffected Classicist who regarded the human athlete as a paradigm of the Hellenic ethos. He found himself teaching in a changed, post-war, world that was not to his taste. One never saw him after his oracular advice - unless one fell into some academic difficulty.

We students swam in an ethos in which the only sure **flotation** was to be obtained from such **certainties as the bare physical dimensions of space-planning and the cheapest, "catalogue culture" construction for housing and schools.**

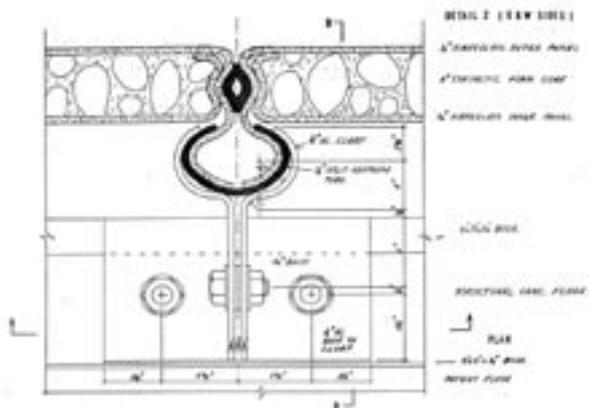
It must hardly be surprising that, denied the inspirations of both history and philosophy, we, the neophyte-technicians of the **dissimulatory ethos of Welfare**, should 'raise our game' by turning to **mechanical engineering for interesting sorts of 'piping'** and to **bio-mechanics (of the D'Arcy Thompson sort)** for more amusing (sexier) sorts of space-plumbing than the prefab boxes prescribed by our Tutors. There was a dim intuition of a **'vitality'** that would later be termed **"Vitalism"**, by the rare intellectuals, such as **Robert Jeffrey**, who studied the design of cities.



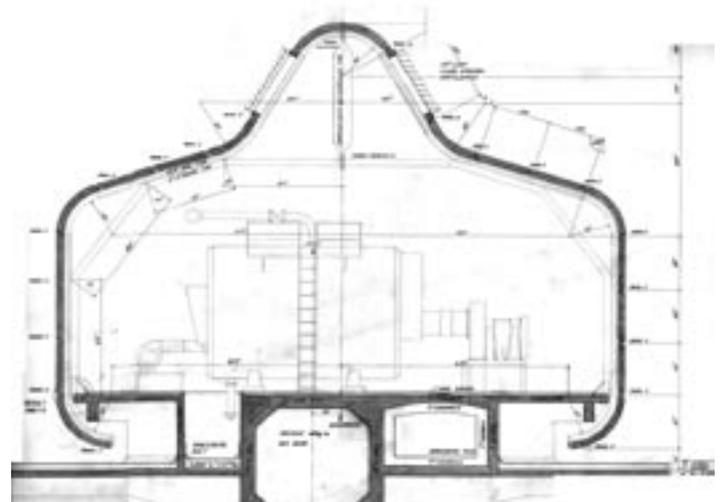
This design, created by Michael Webb in 1957, became a canonic image of the rebellion against the insipid (and illiterate) Meliorism of the Festival-Welfare styles. It registered our desire to assimilate the rejected culture of industry, the machine, engineering and making generally. Webb dissected the spaces of a building from its putative 'technical' support, a bony structural frame. The spaces, 'liberated' from orthogonal constraint, became pure, that is to say Functionalist, space-plumbing.



Design for a Zoo. 1957, by Bennetts, Harvey, Marden and Outram, shows the optically aggressive nose of a Boeing B50 above a sprayed concrete organism whose forms pursue a rigorously bionic pragmatism



The novelties of my Boilerhouse, for the AA in 1958, were the syntactic foam-filled curved fibreglass panels sealed by the sort of huge neoprene gaskets canonised by Foster at the Sainsbury Centre 20 years later, in 1978. I took them from Eero Saarinen's 'blue-suit-style' GM Labs in the USA. I gave them a 'Brit (Pop) Blob' aesthetic that took another 40 years to 'mature' into 'Cool Britannia'-if that is the right verb for such haptic infantilities.



Cross-section through my roof-top boiler-house, 1958. Peter Cook, who later led the Archigram group, wrote in AD51/12/1981, that this design was the "first time he had seen anything that would later be denoted 'High-Tech'."