

# The Thirteenth Lecture.

*A Politics of Prefabrication*



Stanhope prescribed a **maximum tonnage of steel structure** per square metre of floorspace. My Structural Engineering consultant was Chris Wise. He was the brilliant Arup Engineer who went on to design the 'wobbly' Millennium Bridge. Wise followed Stanhope's brief with such enthusiasm that My Big Panel Prefabricated facade **bounced so energetically it needed 50mm-wide synthetic rubber joints between the panels**. Foster's Sainsbury Gallery was a **neoprene rubber building decorated with foam-filled aluminium panels**. The aluminium degraded, then the foamed insulation. The entire exterior had to be re-skinned. Covering a masonry wall in a network of huge synthetic rubber gaskets would also be **more expensive** than merely prescribing steel beams stiff enough not to 'bounce' the floors!

**The frame costs only 12% of any building.**

Wise was punching above his weight (excuse the pun). But the conceptual failures of the leaders of my medium, their **Corbusian 'turn' to Engineering** and the **intellectually puerile numeromancies of Proportion** had left me defenceless. Wise left Arup's before his bridge went into wobble failure mode. He set up his own very successful consultancy.

**JOA had begun with Stanhope by rejecting the prohibition of scaffolding. Now we rejected the Union-Busting drive towards 'lightweight buildings' that eliminated on-site craftsmen.**

Our 'consultant Team', installed by Stanhope to "help us follow the system" were **unsympathetic**. Why did JOA not choose some ready-made external walling 'cladding' system from Germany? They were expensive. So they were **good for fees - especially as the 'cladding-package-manufacturer' did almost all of the Consultant's work**. What was wrong with 'rainscreen' anyway? SOM did it, HOK did it. Foster and Rogers did it. Even Foggo did it. Everyone did it!

**Who were JOA to reject 'rainscreen' - and on 'technical grounds' as well? Architects existed to draw facades. The 'Team' did the rest.**



As Marshall McLuhan wrote: "The Medium is the Massage". The most powerful medium of any exhibition is always the image. So, for the correspondent of the Times Newspaper, JOA won the contest in the British pavilion. Not only did our design hit the image-spot but it broke the taboo on 'Decoration', sported a sort of 'Order', was accompanied by a 'book' in four languages and was 'Lipton-commercial'. I only became gradually aware (it took years!) of how much I had offended my Professional colleagues. Stirling, my old Tutor in his matching turquoise shirt and tie turned away and would not speak to me at all. Foster also. But then Foster, like HRH, is said to sack anyone who speaks without being spoken to first. Luckily I was not in his employ.

When the shiny Venetian water taxi called to take the British Pavilion Five to the Phyllis Lambert lunch they managed to avoid telling me. I had to take my own, at crippling expense. I sat next to an American of whose work I had never heard. He seemed very concerned that my watch was only a Casio. Like an officer's mess, the one subject off the menu was the only one common to us all- Architecture. I understood then that the wristwatch is to the Man of the Hour what the bag is to the Woman of Taste. I suppose I should not have been surprised that the event was dull. This was a roomfull of the greatest Architects on the Globe. But there were no speeches, no wit, no banter, just ingenious haptics fawning on the bountiful Ms. Lambert. Islamic fanatics die to end up in a paradise of bare-chested virgins. US architects fight to have their paper Archives vaulted into the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal. There they can be transmuted into the Academic gold of PhDs by admirable scholars - and so on and so forth (Ubu Roi-style)..



The view North up Bishopsgate reveals all that is needed to record the slow collapse of the attempt, begun in the late 1950s by such as Kahn, after the dismal Architecture of Euro-Welfare Socialism, to invent an 'iconic density' to Modernism of the sort found in the 'rejected' Architectures of the so-called 'past'. The 'Chicagoesque' SOM block was followed, further away, to its right, by a markedly blander pink-granite rainscreen Plattenbau. Then, on the otherside of the round street-corners in my next illustration, any attempt at iconic density collapses into a folded-metal aestheticism.

These two corners, if read from the top left (of the pink granite Plattenbau), across the street to the right illustrate the final collapse of any attempt to clothe the City of London in an Architecture of iconic density into a shallow aestheticism that any graphically-trained felt-pen doodler could push. I knew the City when it was an Armada of Classicised limestone galleons riding a wet asphalt ocean out of the London fogs. Now it just another Business Park doing its thing out of 'Big Shed' Credit Warehouses quite vacant of any Architectural culture. The only difference is that 'its thing' is what Jane Jacobs called 'Cataclysmic Money'.

## It was useless going upstream to the 'Client', or 'Owner'.

Rosehaugh-Stanhope were worse than any Kafakaesque State Bureaucracy. Lipton proved to be **uninterested in anything 'technical' designed by his Architects**. He **refused to pay** for any 'prototyping'. JOA's Texan Clients built a **whole, full-size room** and then a 4/5-scale bay of **three-storey facade**. Lipton paid, **grudgingly**, to prototype **one-fifth of one** MasonryTile. JOA paid for the **other nine parts** of the two Masonry Tile prototypes. Lipton saw **no point** in such 'invention'. Did not his little blue book say that "Everything has to come out of a Catalogue"? Lipton had laid down his mysterious criteria and, as said the brush-cut Young Turk of a Bovis project manager for whom JOA now effectively 'worked',

**"YOU DESIGNED THE 'CLADDING', YOU FIX IT!"**

It was then that Lipton, presumably despairing of their usual Architects acceptance, by osmosis, of the '**Stanhope Way**', gave me an actual copy of Stanhope's little blue book, JOA were asked to read it and annotate our answers to each of their by no means short list of Architectural Dos and Don'ts. At this point I began to get angry. Who were these people, **who knew nothing about Architecture or City-Planning**, to dictate every small detail to me? **Lipton had a good eye**, but what, really, did he know about these subjects? **Being reduced to tricking up a pretty facade was not what even the Orthodox pre-WWII Modernism was about - AT ALL**. Indeed the 'facade' was virtually tabooed by Modernist Orthodoxy. Yet here were some of the best of my Profession eagerly jumping through Lipton's hoops. **I took his little blue book and began to write** (as requested), my analysis of every single one of his instructions. Vincent Wang, reading these asked: "John, why do you beat us up so much?" Architecture can be a cruel Mistress!

# BROADGATE WAS POST-BIG BANG DEEP-SPACE CITY.

**EVERYONE HAD A CRT.**

This was 1980's post-big bang Geeksville where shares no longer traded face to face between sturdy garden-digging athletes, wandering around the 'Floor', up from the suburbs every day with a rose in their buttonhole. The door had opened to the faceless world of 'screens' that would, ultimately, exclude the human dealer entirely, giving investment over to the alchemists of algorithms splitting 'spreads' in micro-seconds.

The picture to the right shows the day-lightless body of SOM's Chicago-esque Broadgate facade. Here, locked down to their chairs by the frightening prospect of 'missing a trade', the brightest brains of Britain would burn-out while gambling London's fiscal reputation for the sake of a personal 'bonus'.



Broadgate lies to the left of this cut through the Bishopsgate SOM building. Daylight failed to penetrate to more than a fifth of its usable floorspace. But its 'citizens' were not looking at the view. Their gaze, locked-down to their chairs from Japan's dawn to America's dusk, was of the magical numberscreen of a Dealer's CRT.



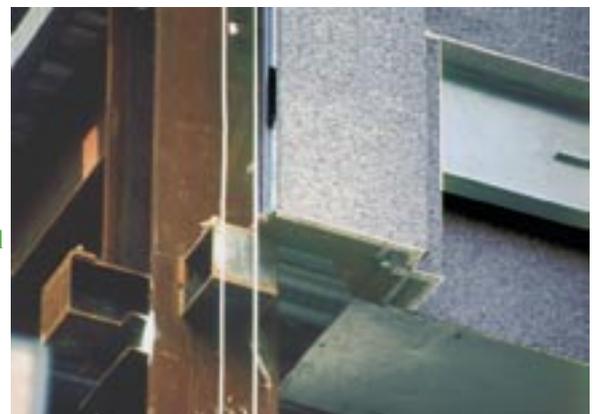
One sees here all that Stanhope left of the on-site building tradesman: an amiable bunch of crane-mechanics hired by the overseas maker of these so-called 'external claddings'.

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## NONE OF THIS MUCH CONCERNED STANHOPE'S ARCHITECTS.

To the right shows how Bishopsgate's sliced granite is glued to the corrodible, and thin, galvanised steel sheet, before that, in its turn, is hung onto the steel framings that project wherever needed, like stubby arms, from the rolled steel columns.



Granite is used only because it can be sliced thinner (and therefore lighter) than softer stones. The bolts glued into its hidden side are fixed to thin steel sheets before being fixed to the heavier frame. The corrosion that always occurs between metals remains undetectable.



*It can be seen from this how well steel deserves its epithet as the whalebone in a facade's corsetry. Steel can be cut and glued like modelmakers plastic or the older balsa-wood. Its strong projections can be drilled for bolts or used to adhere the 'glue' of electric-arc welding. As to the 'cladding', what could be clumsier than this boxiness and lack of the small 'mouldings' which grace the members of 'old' buildings? This pre-fab tries to satisfy the desire of the Public for solidity and 'gravity' (that so surprised Vincent Wang), and entirely fails.*



*The bluish colour of the folded steel galvanised mullion has been enhanced so as to pick it out. It clearly shows how these thin, and relatively short-lived members, used normally only for industrial buildings, are the structure that actually hold the granite slabs up in the air, far above the busy streets of the City of London. This was the same U.S. constructive technique used in 9/11.*



*The prevailing flatness of mechanically-cut granite is here alleviated- at a large increase in cost. The slight curve of this platband replicates the cornice-sima of the Parthenon. The effect is gentle. Yet it is clear, from the very thin-ness of the stone, that nothing more ample could ever be obtained from this 'Beaux Arts Lite'.*



*SOM's heroic attempts to retain access to Classicism and the American Beaux Arts while lightening the weight of its giant prefabricated facade-panels results in a surface as impoverished in profile as it starved of texture and colour.. The mistake was to subscribe to the cult of Natural Materials. For the result is a mere 'paint-job'. Precast concrete offers far more sculptural freedom.*

After struggling to make sense of his complex of imperatives a picture began to dawn in my mind. As always with such things, when the details come into focus in a larger view, one wonders why one did not see the whole picture before.

Perhaps it was helped by the sight of Prime Minister Thatcher opening her successful re-Election campaign of 1987 in the skating rink of Broadgate.

I thought little of it at the time. What PM would not want to be associated with the biggest and brightest new development in the Square Mile? For Thatcher it was especially good because it was all 'Private Sector'. And what Developer would not want the 'testimonial' of a P.M?

A second clue might have been the extremely tortuous procurement routine introduced by Stanhope. I had not used it before. My own 'method', which had brought me, in 17 years, from nowhere to standing next to Stirling, representing Britain abroad, was aptly put by Peter Murray, creator of Blueprint magazine and numerous other initiatives, when he said, when meeting over coffee in the RIBA:

"John you are the only Architect I know whose buildings look exactly like his drawings".

What could I say but: "Peter, that is what I thought Architect's drawings were for!". Certainly this is why JOA always went up-stream to the manufacturer of building components and essentially did his 'shop-drawings' for him. Obviously, in order to do a manufacturing drawing successfully, one must understand, very perfectly, not only the functioning of the component, but the process of its manufacture!

All of this Lipton prohibited. I could not understand it. JOA were admired for the time we spent making sure our designs came out exactly as intended. How was this bad for our Clients? Our reputation was precisely as a firm that made an Architectural silk purse out of a Constructive sow's ear. Peter Buchanan, introducing my first talk at the RIBA, said that "JOA were unusual for countering the trend to give responsibility for detailed design to the Contractor".

## Lipton pays lip service to 'art'

A TERRIFIC — and embarrassing for some — row has erupted up on Ludgate Hill over the intended construction of a 600,000 sq ft development by Stuart Lipton's Stanhope and Godfrey Bradman's Rosehaugh.

As if the construction industry was not having a hard enough time, I now learn that the project has had to endure the wrath of the Royal Fine Art Commission which has called the proposed building "a major architectural catastrophe" and announced it is "profoundly dismayed" by the design efforts.

All of which is particularly embarrassing for Lipton, who was the first developer to be appointed a Royal Fine Art commissioner.

Lipton is known to pride himself on his patronage of modern architecture, so the commission's disapproval of the scheme is a personal and

professional blow. The complaint is that the designs lack coherence, threaten views of St Bride's from Carter Lane and suffer from a "split personality".

Sherban Castacuzino, Romanian-born secretary of the commission, does not mince his words: "We are very critical indeed of the scheme."

He has been in discussions with Lipton on possible improvements but says he is not so much interested in concessions to good taste "as just making the whole thing better".

The project's fate will be decided this week, when the developers will be told whether or not they have obtained planning permission. In the meantime Lipton appears to have taken the criticism to heart. His secretary tells me he has left the country, and left instructions that his whereabouts should not be divulged.



● Stuart Lipton: not quite the ticket for Ludgate Hill

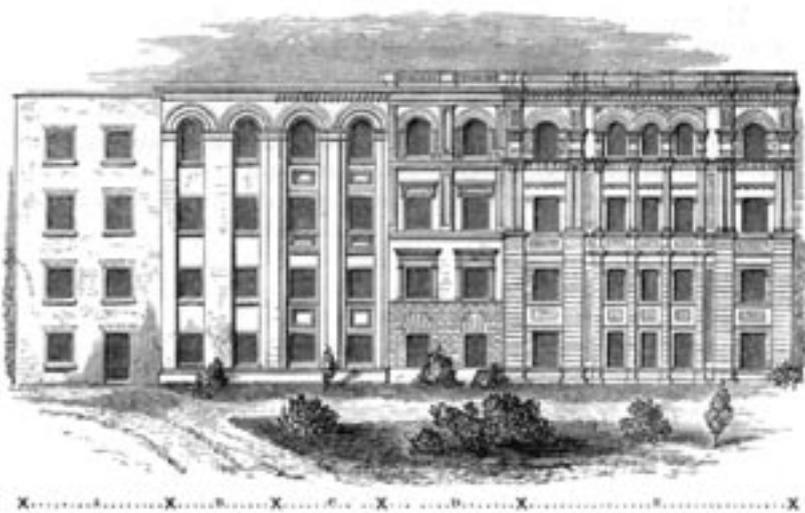
*One of the happiest parts of Britain is the way that we play games with 'Chinese Walls'. We can be a member of a powerful institution that judges our work very adversely and merely leave the room during the hatchet job only to return and fill one's seat once more to judge others. Though, in this case, according to the hardy Sunday Times reporter, Stuart L. seems to have left the country altogether!*



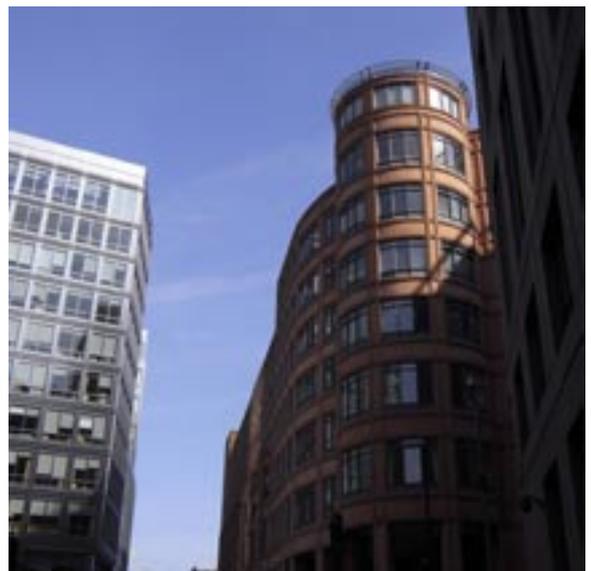
*No. 1 Appold St, on the other side of the giant Broadgate scheme, was built later than the Beaux-Arts Plattenbau on Bishopsgate. It only goes to prove that when a 'legible' composition, with an entry-arch and cornice-roof, is stripped of any pleasant and plausible detail it is worse than no 'legibility' at all. Such failures were the genesis of Decon, in which EVERYTHING aims to be a 'illegible'.*



The 5-storey 19C city-building on the left, just outside Broadgate, was one floor lower than ours. To build it today would cost less than the new, granite-skin Beaux-Arts, fully-prefabricated Plattenbau across the street. No Architect trained in the 21C even knows the names of the parts of its Architecture, let alone the names, or the profiles, of the small 'mouldings' which enliven its surface. The composition is 'Industrial' taking a cue from Roman Viaducts and Horrea. Its 'parts, of brick and 'cast stone', came out of catalogues and 'how-to' manuals. If anyone doubts the 'rubberiness' of brickwork - examine its 'bang-on-regardless' corner-turn! Architecture, though still without a rationalised iconics, was, by then in Britain, a 'classless' medium, intuited by all. Note the new so-called "Flower-Pot Building", a pink tower that closes the view up Appold Street.



James Ferguson published, in 1865, with scaled woodcuts, his revised and expanded 3-Volume "History of Architecture in All Countries, from the Earliest Times". His Introduction shows five elevations to explain the difference between Building, to the left and Architecture, to the right. The building in Appold Street, above, closely resembles the intermediate stages B & C - a happy state that could be described as both 'Building' as well as 'Architecture'.



Appold St, as it kinks to the West, reveals a glass and steel box opposite what came to be called the 'Flower-Pot' building. Half-way through building Broadgate, Rosehaugh-Stanhope re-discovered terra-cotta, a material much-favoured by the Babylonians.

## WHY WAS THIS SO WRONG?

*Aesthetically,  
JOA innovated.*

*Technically, we did not.*

JOA always used industry-standard technologies. It was our Architecture that was radical, not our Physics. JOA have paid our P.I. Insurers a quarter of a million pounds. Yet never, in 37 years, have JOA made a claim. Physically, I am either a conservative, or I just understand how a building works. Yet here was Lipton with the instruction that the Architect must not detail his project. The detailed drawings must be given over to the Building-Element Contractor. Indeed Lipton ultimately insisted that our whole building was to be 'Novated' to another firm of Architects -



*This was the 'unacceptable face of capitalist deshabille' in which all that matters is the bottom line in these Big-Shed Credit Warehouses. Facing South and getting too hot, ineffectually protected by internal blinds they show the posteriors of cheap Mdf filing cabinets. Could anything be a more venal facade to a city's public realm? Can one wonder that Thatcher was able to say "There is no such thing as Society" when it's urban proscenium is framed by such yuppie stys as these?*

*"some men in nylon shirts" - as he put it.*

This firm would fake-up something vaguely similar to the 'Design-Architects' pretty drawing. This was guaranteed to make, literally, a mockery of any design. Not only was one to specify out of catalogues of components 'arrived-at' by Architectural illiterates, but one's whole building was to be re-drawn by the same "nylon shirted" Suburbanites!

Then, to add injury to insult, the Architect was required to literally sign every one of the manufacturer's technical drawings of the bowdlerisation of his design, while giving a guarantee that it was technically satisfactory! I would be expected to inspect, and add my technical 'approval' to, how the man from Vienna faked granite with enamelled steel, how the aluminium truck maker from Holland faked concrete, or the lady from Rome faked everything in cast glass. My old firm of Fitzroy Robinson told me that the pressure of all this legal creativity had caused them to take in, as a full Partner, a professional lawyer.

*Lipton's own 'magic circle' City legal team, led by the formidable Anne Minogue, told me with pride that they "re-wrote the Building Contract every year".*

*This, again, I could not understand.*

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF IT ALL?



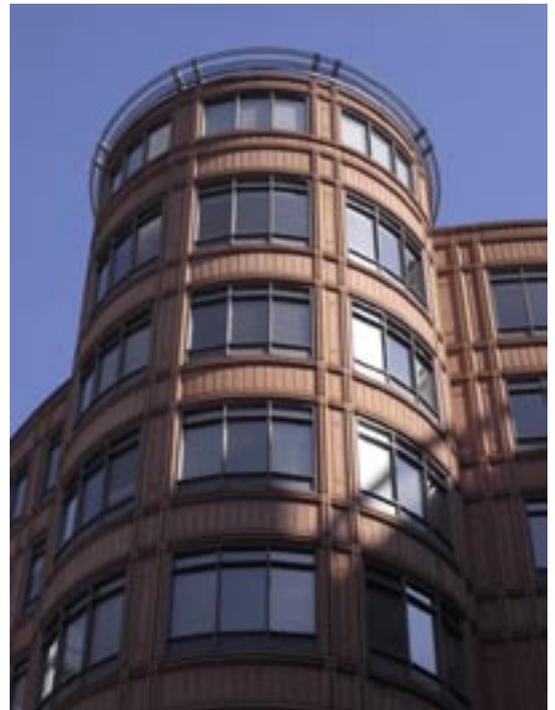
*Reminiscent of Mondrian's painting 'Broadway Boogie-Woogie'. Art can be commentary. But a City is not Art, or even Fine Art. It is reality. The reality here is in-your-face, f\*\*\*-you iconic illiteracy.*



18 years old when photographed, the 'flower-pot's' material is not as beautiful as it's granite-skinned base. But at least it can be 'inscribed'! It begs the question (which all Architects avoid): of What To Write.

**Our detailing was conservative and technically intelligent. Our component and material-sourcing was local. But above all, our information-flow to the Contractor kept ahead of his needs. By JOA's third project, in 1980, we, ourselves, the Architects, wrote half of all of our Bills of Quantities.**

**As a young Architect I understood that the best practice was to ensure that one never had to read the contract at all. The building process, in Britain, ran according to well-worn routines. If one kept ahead of the game, something that could be done by simple hard work and hard thinking then the process went along reasonably well. JOA could do this because our overheads were low and our staff ALL architects. We never employed a single secretary, receptionist or filing-clerk. Computers abolished them.**



The corner of many city-blocks used to be 'towered and turreted'. Gentlemen never stepped-out without a hat, or ladies without gloves. Why? It is the business of an iconically-sophisticated Modernism to determine the reasons. Only then can an iconically-rich lifespace ensue. At least the 'flower-pot' material can be built to a smooth radius, rather than the clunky segments of 'Plattenbau-Rainscreen'.



Stanhope had to build fast enough to suit their no-strike funding model. A global search discovered no terracotta factory big enough to serve them. It did find, amongst other craft workshops, one in San Francisco, dating from the magnificent period of the 1920s US Moderne. The problem with terra-cotta is that it bankrupts those who use it on a large scale. It shrinks unpredictably when it is fired to a 'biscuit' and does so again when fired to fix its coloured glazes. So this building is made of the through-coloured concrete that JOA uses for our own Architecture!

**JOA's simple ambition through all of what the 'Design Architect' of today would regard as 'drudgery' was merely to have, as Peter Murray observed, "the building come out like the drawings".**

**The 'technical guarantees' that Lipton required of his Architects struck me as specious.**

What Court would transfer a design fault from one party to the other merely because he signed a drawing of a machine in a material and method which was clearly outside his own experience and even his own industry? JOA refused point-blank to do so and have ever since, whatever any Client wanted.



This is standard office-tower American fireproofing of a steel frame of the sort used on the Twin Towers. It uses insulating board, wrapped in reflective metal foil. It protects steel for the half-hour it normally takes to evacuate a building. It can be increased by adding more layers of foamboard. Here, on SOM's Bishopsgate it is not extended onto the external face of the steel.



The older way, of casing steel in concrete, or even merely reinforcing the concrete with steel bars, results in a more durable structure. It is hard to design it so that it gives occupants less than one hour to escape. It also stops steel from rusting. A building with ambitions to stay up more than a few score years would use stainless steel brackets to secure the 'external cladding panels - and not galvanised steel, as here. But then, in the USA, office buildings, and all their air-conditioning, elevators, etc., amortise in fifteen years - ready to be ripped down and out and be built anew.



Here, the relation between the skin and the bones of the building is clear and logical. The bones, reinforced with steel are the colour of ash that is plain cement. The skin is more complex. It carries a stronger colour. Its colour is arbitrary and is chosen by the designer. It has a more complex surface form. These forms could be 'inscribed' with more 'iconic' interest, were our livespace culture more iconically literate. Compared to the constructive confusions of steel and granite Bishopsgate, this is a simple and even elegant technology. It is free to assume any form and colour and is as durable as it is fireproof.

The second half of the 20C saw, after the furious carnage of WWII, the **founding**, by Corbusier and Kahn, amongst others, of an Architecture that **did not turn its back on the previous 9,000 years of the Medium**.

The quadration of the Trenton Bath House, its **four giant corner-columns**, and its **pyramidal entablature** all reified the icons of Egyptian and Hellenic Classicism. Corbusier's Jaoul houses, though more acceptable to the mainstream, and magical in themselves, seem merely vernacular in comparison.

**Structuralism** partially **founded** this enterprise. As usually occurs, fellow-travellers of a less rigorous ambition, eager for a quicker solution to the quest, **diverted the universalism of Kahn** into a **mere revival of Neo-Classicism**. Then, aware of the intellectual puerility of such a 'turn' proclaimed its 'impossibility'. Such was the **fretful message of the Venturis**, from which stemmed the **Deconstructed "Age of Trash"** whose epithet was canonised by Koolhaas.

Those less interested in impressing the 'Critical' thirst for novelties, or, as in these illustrations, more constrained by the realities of livespace-industry commercial practice, developed a **constructive technique of great beauty**. A strong **armature**, called the '**frame**' increasingly exiguous in the girth of its members, could support a '**cladding**' of **any colour, surface and plastic amplitude**.

All that was necessary to the **progress of livespace-design** were solutions to the ambitions illustrated by the '**changed**', post-WWII, Corbusier and the equally transformed Kahn (whose pre-Trenton work was hack).



The designer of the cladding to the 'Flower-Pot Building' has subscribed to the **archaeologically illiterate 18C** myth of 'Platonic Carpentry', that Architecture is derived from structure. His cladding has a **baroquely lignic exuberance** that is entertaining to the eye, if not to the mind. His colour is equally beguiling - replicating the **terra cotta** revetments (or wood occasionally stained with blood), of the **earliest timber temples** with a hue that defies time as effectively as its original.

**None of this should be taken as an adverse comment.** The Architect has many concerns of legal, financial and even humane gravity. He **works within the culture** created for him by the leaders of his profession and, above them, the **few theorists** it sports today. It must be to them, ultimately, that the Practitioner will look to carry the **responsibility for the intellectual failures** of the 20C.

Why has the Practitioner been left with **nothing more effective to guide his hand** than an **18C myth of structure** (which we must thank for the entertaining ribbing of the Flowerpot) along with some **19C, Ruskinian, compulsions** about "being true to one's materials", which we must thank for the granite slices on what is conceptually an over-all grey paint-job.

*Concrete, the plastic, mouldable, colourable, sculptable, wonder-material of the 20C, is used for both bones and skin. Even the round skin of the corner tower is actually made to a smooth curve. How different to the clumsy segments imposed by the big cladding-tile rainscreen illustrated on page 261.*

**Why is the Practitioner served so uselessly by the 'Savantocracy' when the Profession had, under its hand - when working in the late 1980's - a pre-cast concrete industry capable of synthesising any shape, colour or surface? What else could it be but the total failure of iconographic literacy and theory?**

## **AND DOES THIS NOT EXPLAIN THE POINTLESS TECHNICAL COMPLEXITY OF BROADGATE?**

When **starved** of any formal, plastic-design culture the poor haptics of my profession turn to what they know best - the **drug of technicity**. All that was needed to progress were the technologies illustrated by the Flower-Pot building. All else has been the **futile elaboration** of the **means** to building.

**THOSE COMPLICIT IN THIS SELF-SERVING TECHNOPHILIA HAVE NOT ONLY DESTROYED THEIR OWN MEDIUM AND THEIR OWN PROFESSION, BUT THE CITIES ARCHITECTURE WAS INVENTED TO CREATE.**



*The cladding is free to step in and out and up and down. The fact that its detail is dull is not the fault of the material, but of the Designer. Invented at the end of the 19C, concrete was developing rapidly in the latter decades of the 20C. There are mixes that can pour into fine detail and coatings that resist acidification by airborne and water-borne pollutants.*



Two Ludgate buildings designed by SOM. The smaller white one fronts onto Ludgate Hill, the street-proscenium to St. Pauls. It puts on a face of being Architecturally cultured by using artificial stone - otherwise white pre-fabricated concrete. The dark building behind is another Credit-Warehouse clad in a proprietary metal rainscreen.

**If I sign a Building Element Contractor's drawing, as I did in the case of a recent £M2.5 German Glass roof, I sign only that it reproduces the conceptual dimension of my design, mediated by its iconicity. JOA accept no responsibility for its physical performance. That remains with the specialised 'steel and glass' engineering' of the manufacturer.**

## **LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO LEARN EVERY TECHNOLOGY ON THE PLANET.**

Design is complex. If a party, whether Architect or Building System Manufacturer, originates a design, the blame for any material design defect lies securely with its physical designer.

**Who ever heard, today, of anyone being sued for defective aesthetics, or having the design-culture of an Architectural Illiterate? Yet JOA were always perfectly happy to accept the responsibility for physical design, providing JOA did the technical drawings.**

Instead of this the Architect was required, after he had made the coloured illustrations that charmed the Councillors on the City-Planning Sub-Committee, to write (but never to draw) a 'Performance Specification'.



SOM's Ludgate Hill building shows, in the 'Ardoise' pattern of the spandrels, that delicate ornamental refinement is possible with factory-cast concrete .



## One could build a pulp wall with these huge tomes...

Filled with masses and masses of computer-downloaded generalised techno-text they were supposed to ensure that the Building Element Contractor could be held to account over the Physical performance of his 'merely visual' interpretation of the Architect's 'design'. Bovis administered the production of these useless catalogues of physical performance. They used a four-cypher numbering system I had never seen before. JOA used the CISfb system from Sweden used by most Architects in Britain.

Such 'filing systems' interested me. But when we asked of its origin we were told not to worry our pretty little heads about such things, and to merely trot-out the endless lists of futile 'tests'.

When JOA came to actually work in the USA we discovered that Bovis used a coding employed by the AIA and Sweets Catalogue - an entity that filled around eight feet of shelf-space. Bovis obliged us to use it for the convenience of the big firms of US Architects, like SOM and HOK, who were opening offices here and across the channel as the Cold War came to its end.

The computer-drawn arch-springing demonstrates, with an iconic stupidity that appears entirely genuine, that this 'heavy' wall is nothing but Granite-Plattenbau-Rainscreen wall-paper. L.B. Alberti did exactly this in the Pal. Rucellai. But the difference is that he knew what he was doing, whereas this Architect no longer does.

A young Architect today has the unappetising choice of churning-out either 'Big Sheds' for Realtors who subscribe to Rem Koolhaas' divination that the Present is the Age of Trash, or Neo-Classiical Repro for the supposedly Kultured, whether for themselves, if very wealthy, or that portion of the lifespace set aside to support the values of the heroic Age of Gold long past. Nowhere, today, is there any field on which to build that basic ambition of Modernity, a cultured lifespace suited for the culture everyone believed that 'progress' (as it was understood at the beginning of the 20C) was delivering. The received understanding today, is that this Utopianism simply evaporated during the horrors of the 20C, such as its achievement in doing away with around 100,000,000 humans between years 1930 and 1960.

I prefer, myself to believe that there is a less 'heroic' explanation for the fall of public, or common, culture. It is the failure, mainly through a bathetic ignorance, laziness, venality and sheer lack of invention, of those whose work it was, at every level, to delineate this 'common culture'. The two SOM buildings to the North of Ludgate Hill (one Shed, one Kulturmy) illustrate, at the highest levels of contemporary achievement, this enervating polarisation. Like two pall-bearers, one black and one white, they stand on each side of the 'Absent Corpse of Modernity'.

**But Bovis had no inkling, at all, of its origin!**

The fatally destructive result of these legalistic Performance Specifications was the over-testing of building components like windows by setting retired propellor-driven aircraft engines to throw such ludicrous volumes of water that well-established details and their equally economical and well-established British workshops were destroyed and went bankrupt.

**THESE WERE PRECISELY THE DETAILS AND FIRMS WHICH JOA USED - WITH NEVER A PHYSICAL DEFECT! THE UK'S CRAFT INDUSTRY WAS DESTROYED!**

A third clue came to me when, at the same time as I examined Broadgate, I also organised visits to buildings being built in the Square Mile by other Developers.



I found, to my **surprise**, that the buildings being put up by the **established Pension Funds**, such as had financed Peter McKay of McKay Securities, **not only used external scaffolding** but wrapped even this in fabric-reinforced polythene. They seemed **quite happy to use stone**, and even the humble **brick**, hand-laid by masons and bricklayers. The masonry mortar was pre-mixed. It arrived in **plastic tubs** that were craned-up in exact time to suit the **bricklayers rate of production**. No one was wielding a whip to the craftsmen. They sang and bantered, **as they had on my own sites** - happy to be doing a proud job - building in the **centre of the financial world**. Indeed I began to think that the Pension Funds **deliberately hid** their building's constructive immodesty, unwrapping them suddenly, like Strip-Teasers, and daring the market to pay the exorbitant price of a **brand-new (virginally-white), money-market palazzo**.

## **PERHAPS IT WAS AFTER VISITING ONE OF THESE (FOR TECHNICAL INTEREST) THAT THE PENNY FINALLY DROPPED.**

Broadgate itself was built over the extensive goods-yard of the City of London's Kings Cross Railway Station. It sports a raised pedestrian deck that is legally private and patrolled by guards who prohibit photography. The iconography of its Architecture, to the left, is a round, shiny infantility (according to the analysis of Edmund Burke) and, to the right, Nihilistic in the way its granite 'brises soleil' 'cross-out' any hope of an otherwise legible facade. This is a 'Serlian' theatre 'bracketed' between Chateaubriand's American " from Primitivism to Decadence without the intervening period of Civilisation".

The reason that Stanhope built in the way they did and the Pension funds built in the way that JOA was used to, even during our short Professional life, was **nothing to do with 'Modernising'**, or in any way improving **build quality, value to the user, Architecture, or contract law**.

**THE BUILDING INDUSTRY NEGOTIATED THE WAGE RATES FOR THE WHOLE COUNTRY EVERY YEAR. IF THE NEGOTIATIONS PROVED DIFFICULT, THE UNIONS STOPPED WORK ON A JOB OF THEIR CHOOSING.**



Exchange Square is early Broadgate, before it had attempted to essay, in Bishopsgate, the inclusion of an iconically richer Architecture. The facade to the right is another example of Burke's infantility of glossy shininess. This time, in order to relieve its iconic sterility, it allows the citizen to peer at some inedifying metal parts of glazed skin. The anti-thrill of this revelation only certifies that we gaze-upon a determined iconic incompetence. The rest of this 'cool' theatre of Credit Warehousing, is what are called, in my Trade, 'stick and panel' prefab blocks.



Stuart Lipton and Godfrey Bradman with Margaret Thatcher at Broadgate for the ground-breaking ceremony in 1985.

The Unions liked, for this purpose, to choose a big project in the City of London. Time is very precious in the City. Strikes there hurt more than anywhere else. The huge Barbicnn project was, I seemed to recall, stopped for months. No building owner wanted to have the biggest building site in the Square Mile.

But Lipton, and Rosehaugh-Stanhope, were becoming known as the initiators of the biggest projects in the City.

He was achieving this enviable status by, it seemed to me, a bold and simple strategy. His sites had no workers. So how could he suffer a strike? A guaranteed no-strike construction timeline could attract the sort of funding that did not normally like to be tied up in bricks and mortar for twenty years. This 'alternative' funding allowed the Developer access to a sufficiently increased scale of borrowings to assemble larger sites, design the buildings, and erect one or two. The Developer could then bring a Surveyor from a Pension Fund to see the first building.

## THIS WAS THE REASON FOR THE PROHIBITION ON SCAFFOLDING!

It was nothing to do with improving the technology of the construction process. For it was more difficult, more dangerous and more costly.

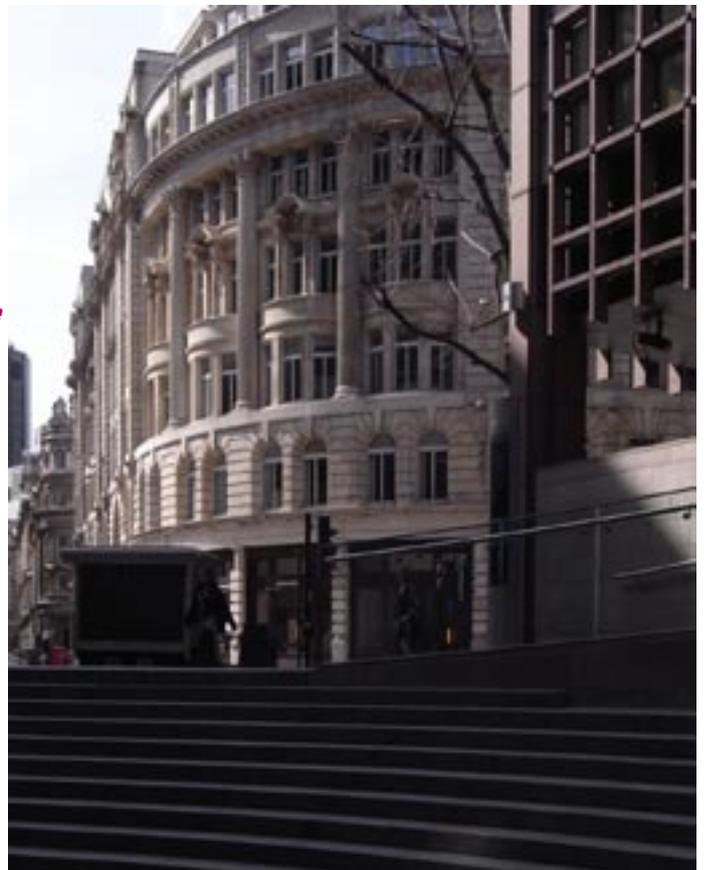
It was certainly nothing to do with improving the ability of a building to become Architecture.

It was so that, with only one side of a new building complete, its sliced Brazilian granite rainscreen's fully glazed windows could be seen free of scaffolding.

The Pension Fund Surveyore could touch the polished skin of the one fully-finished side. He could believe in the project even when it was only a steel cage with only one side paper-hung onto it. He would then be prepared to re-fund the enormous new project on long-term, cheaper borrowing.

The Developer was able to escape from the relatively higher costs of the funds used to assemble and initiate the project. Developing in this new way allowed one to avoid the dangers of being the largest building-site in the City of London, and the target of a 'national' strike.

Lipton had not only managed to 'crash' the Property Developers Club, he had crashed it to such effect that he was now the owner of the biggest projects in the very City of London - and strike-free ones at that! How could Margaret Thatcher fail to be impressed by such a performance? Indeed it so impressed 'modernising' New Labour, of which Thatcher remarked that "Blair was the best Conservative Prime Minister we have", that New Labour abolished the Royal Fine Arts Commission and put Stuart Lipton in charge of its sucesor. Lord Fawsley ran the RFAC with a light hand. It had no statutory power at all. Its force was that of the power of educated opinion, or if one wants to be more naked, 'good taste' - something one either has, or has not. Lipton had it, which is why he headed New Labour's (Arts Elite) CABE.



A main entrance, from the central parts of the city, which lie to the South, into the famed Broadgate precinct. Looking back, the Explorer will see what he is leaving for the New World of Lipton. He will discern the 'useless' Old World of urbane Architecture. He may contrast its amiable plastic inventions (with an Architecture too profuse to name in a single caption), with the red granite grillage (to the top right) that covers, as with lush prison bars, all the new buildings he will see. What can one say of this granite graph- paper except that it signifies nothing except the ghastly truth that the Future, which is now upon us for the last 100 years, is a time of unprecedented symbolic desuetude unworthy of the species that is our own.

**Planning Committees respected the laconic oracularity of the RFAC's opinions.**

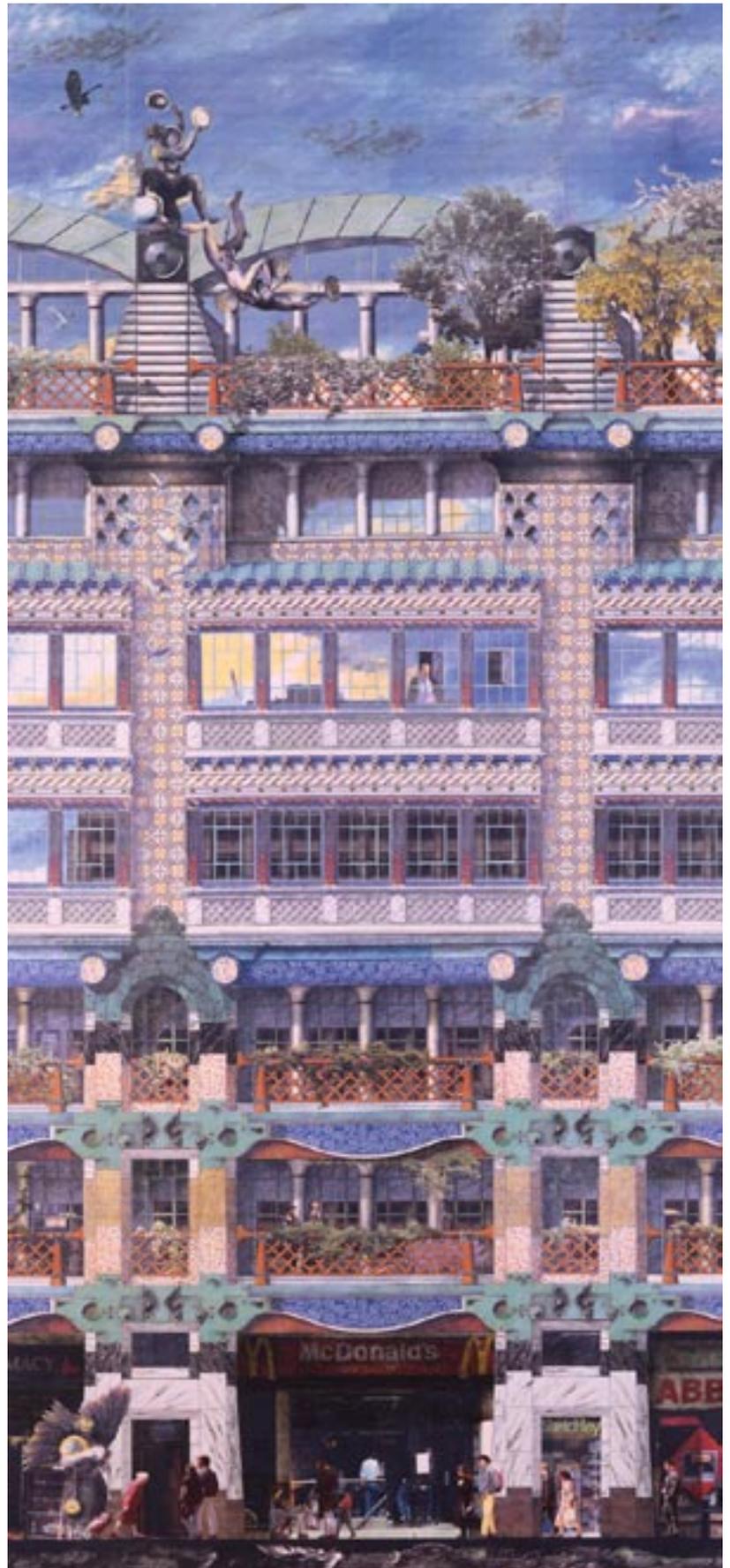
Towns and Cities used them to negotiate a better design out of Developers and even, who were more recalcitrant still, Statutory Bodies. Lipton, a Developer from beginning to end, had to resign from New Labour's Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) over 'conflicts of interest' in certain developments that CABE were judging. No one took CABE's opinions as anything more than an ideological arm of New Labour politics that soon became soiled by Professional and Commercial special interests. The one thing CABE, under Lipton, failed to preserve from the RFAC, was any view representing a seriously cultivated and educated opinion that was external to either the New Labour Arts mafia or Union-Busting Total Pre-Fab.

One of CABE's bathetic achievements was to fail in the attempt to invent a MEASURE OF BEAUTY ON A SCALE OF ONE TO TEN. Could anything be a better illustration of the city-planning vacuum caused by Blair's personal failure to conjure a vision for his own country?

Ship containerisation had eliminated the political power of the Dockside labourers, the first 'craft' to ever go on strike in London. Thatcher's war with the coal-mining Unions was designed to shut down an unprofitable industry. Thatcher's entry into the Cold War and her de-skilling of Britain appear, on the face of it, to be an attempt to eliminate that class of worker who uses his hands as part of his technique. Can one call it a 'Final Solution' to the problematics of the 'Working Class': No 'Workers', no Revolution? Was this a Liptonian Solution on the largest scale - the ending of all hand-work. Was this the apotheosis of the MeritoCrazy? Was it the ultimate 'trahison des clerks' - the supremacy of the pen-pushers, happy to live amongst 'secondary-reality' computer print-out all day? Does it explain, now that first Thatcher and then Blair casualised, de-professionalised and de-skilled the British workforce, why Britain eagerly imports skilled, that is well-trained and cultured, 'workers' from the ex-Communist Empire in Eastern Europe?

Once this picture had formed in my mind it became hard to eradicate. It made a sort of sense: **Stuart Lipton: Cold War Warrior.**

**I wrote this fiscal and political analysis back in 1989.**



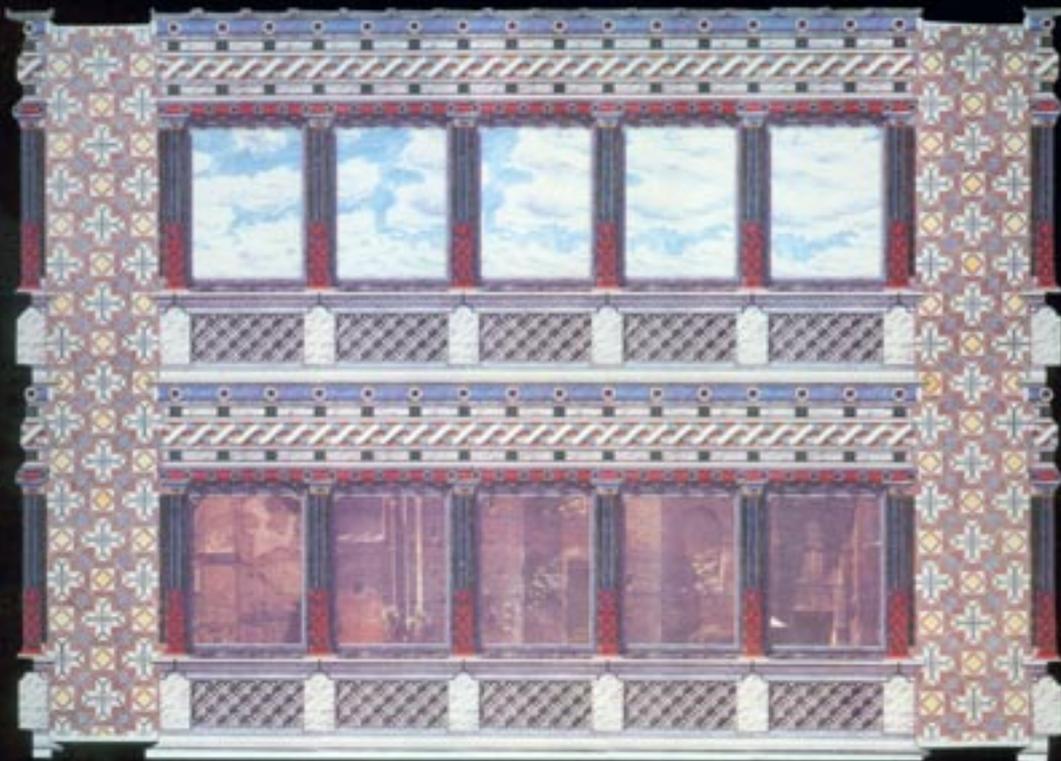
Everything I learnt about first Broadgate and now Ludgate made me more determined never to submit to the Stanhope ethos. So, every time I was blocked, I just made my design more beautiful. Then, out of the blue, the British Council asked us to exhibit at the Venice Biennale. We made 200 QVS into the subject of our room, creating three huge photorealistic collages.

# APOLLO

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS

FEBRUARY 1990

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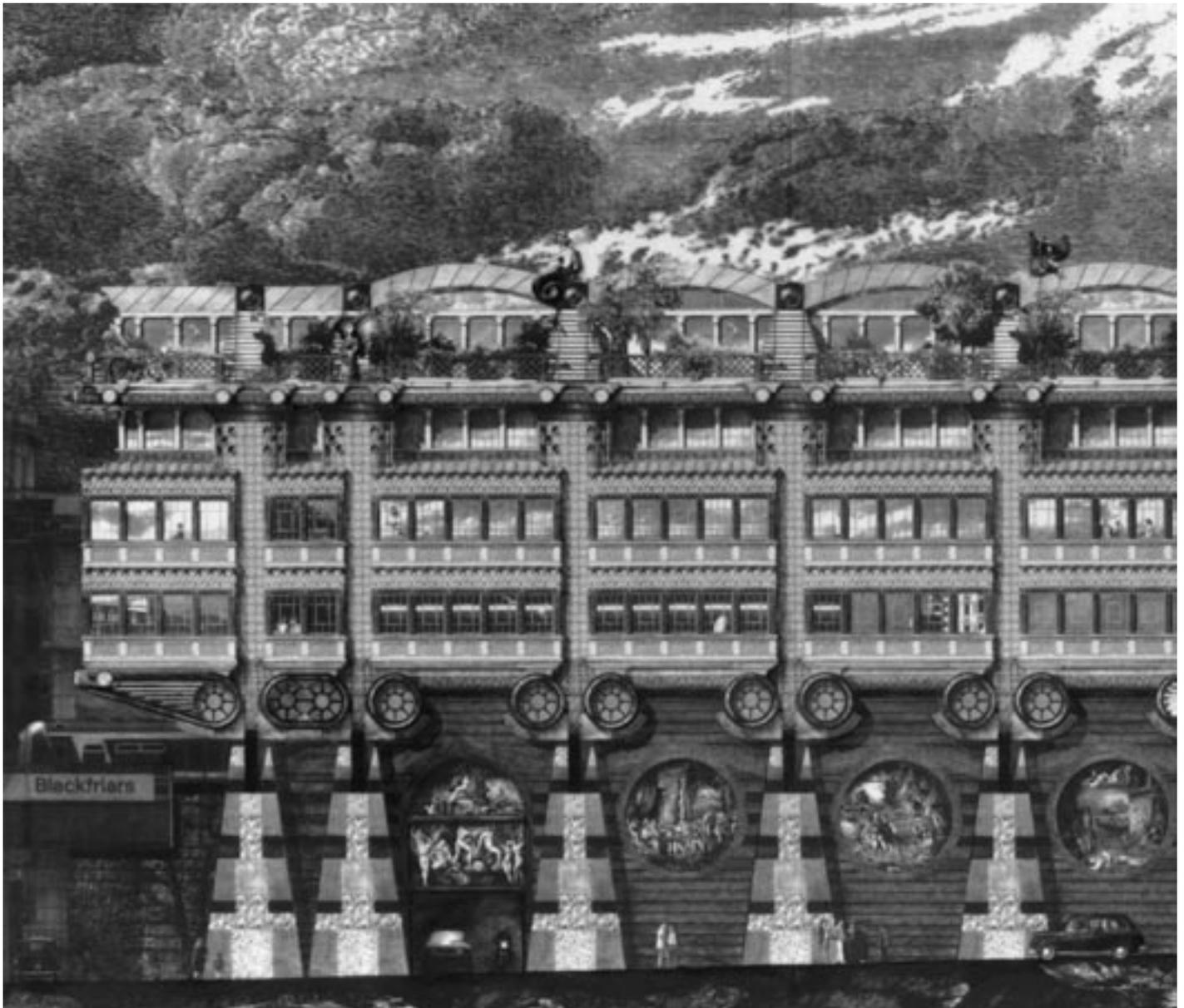


Architectural Ornament: David Watkin, Colin Amery

A Saleroom Discovery: Giambologna's *Fata Morgana*

Richard Hamilton in Conversation

'Architectural Ornament', the despised medium apostasised by Loos as "tattooing", examined by Apollo, an 'Art-Market' journal outside my everyday horizon. Its recomposition of my 'prefabricated facade panel' became its cover. Its text avoided the iconography which would have proved a conceptual link to its normal subjects.. The idea that a 'modern' design could be generated from 'meaning' was too incredible, even for this arcane journal. The cast glass 'cancelli' in the spandrels came from Nazeing Glass, ash-tray and signal-lens makers in Northampton. It was the only material which JOA had not already used during the fifteen years of JOA's history of building. The views 'reflected' in the lower tier of windows were of the brick viaduct, then being demolished, that had carried the railway over Lugate Hill. One had the responsibility to replace it with something better than Mitteleuropa Plattenbau..



### QUEEN VICTORIA STREET.

### PORTE-COCHERE ENTRY TO No. 200

### A RAILWAY RUNS FROM

*The Elevation that helped 'pull to permission' the biggest project ever submitted to the Court of the City of London. It was the smallest of the four buildings, barely 5% of the total floorspace. It was the only design that the relevant Public Authorities actually liked. It was the only one that was not built. This was partly because there was very little lettable space, once the railway had 'ruined' the lowest three floors. But the real reason is that I would not allow Stanhope to give it to the 'men in nylon shirts' to turn it into a parody of itself. I had a stand-up row in front of the little 19C building on the right. Some months later I wrote asking S.L. to put £1M into escrow for me to encash the moment I felt his nylon shirts had sufficiently bowlderised my invention. It was our last correspondence.*

My 'Analysis' was inscribed under the different questions and directives in Stanhope's 'little blue book'. Vincent Wang complained: "John, why do you always beat us up so much"? But what was I supposed to do, **acquiesce in my own suicide?** I was, later-on in my career, to be offered much bigger inducements to that end than the runt of an office-block with a railway through its heart! The 'Stanhope Method' completely destroyed my ability to inscribe my architectural culture into the parts of the human lifestspace that I had been asked to build. **If I could not design my buildings, from the outside in and from the inside out, then I could not carry-on doing what I had managed to do - from nothing, with the most commonplace projects, for 15 years.**

# Who were Stanhope to ask JOA for this sacrifice?



**HIGH LEFT TO LOW RIGHT BEHIND THE WALL OF 'TONDOS'** Existing 19C Building.

JOA had already built everything on this facade. It was merely a further step in scale to the employment of everything we had invented since 1974, when I founded my bureau. Stanhope absolutely refused to use this knowledge. They said they were importing US building methods. I found that this was not the case. When, finally, the telephone call came from the USA I found a tightly-unionised, craft-based workforce. The difference was that the US builder is highly mechanised. He also has a high wage and a high social status. It was not the USA that Lipton was importing, but the Class War of Mittel-Europa.



*I fell in love with the 'alchemical' colours of Majolica when I first found it in the Wallace Collection*

We had a shouting-match on the Black Friar Lane, in front of the little 'Victorian Gothick' remnant in the drawing above. Stuart liked to know when he could push his Architects no further. In the end, I was glad 200 Queen Victoria Street was never built. I went on to build its Architecture in Cambridge, Holland and Texas. Classicism is not a 'vernacular' and Urbanity, though it houses different cultures, is more to do with 'Man', then with men.

For me, the Song is always more important than the Singer. But then I have no desire to qualify for the witticism of Braque: "Picasso was a good painter. Now he is only a Genius".



*I had to insert something into the giant tondo's of the Viaduct. These 'coloured plates' (!) were perfect.*

*AFTERWORD for the THIRTEENTH LECTURE: 'THE POLITICS OF PREFAB'.*

*If the 'Redevelopment of Central Areas', published by HMSO in 1947, during the Attlee Administration, can be described the 'End of Urbanity' in city-planning. The use of ultra-lightweight, globally-sourced, pre-fabricated building construction, by Rosehaugh-Stanhope, can be argued to mark the moment, in Britain at least, when Urbanity was no longer rendered possible even at the level of individual Buildings. This was the End of Urbane Architecture.*

*Urbanity is not only streets and buildings. These are a sine qua non, as the literal-minded Hilberseimer and Gropius proved with their microclimatically illiterate slab blocks. Urbanity is the lifestspace for intelligent, if not intellectual, talking animals. Surface-inscription exists for the human mind - not the human hand, foot or buttocks. Rosehaugh-Stanhope, with their ingeniously-crafted method of union-breaking, drove building construction towards an ultra-lightweight, globally-sourced, prefabrication. Not that many Architects trained since WWII knew how to 'decorate' successfully. But the Profession had begun to experiment with it in the 1960's and was, by the 1980's, getting somewhat better - if still deficient in its textual support - otherwise called 'Theory'.*

*Sourcing a facade in Minnesota, so as to open competitive bidding to a global market, well outside the ability of any British Union to master, and ridding the building site of all building operatives except crane crews, defeated the habit of the British building unions to stop work on a prominent City of London site while negotiating the next year's wage rates. It was unsurprising that Margaret Thatcher opened one of her successful re-election campaigns in Broadgate.*

*Try as they might the Architects appointed by Rosehaugh-Stanhope found themselves driven towards the lightweight, hung-from-above curtain wall, whose ultimate form was a sheet of glass. JOA did develop a polychrome, prefabricated panel facade for them. But Stanhope objected to the number of different 'trades' and processes it combined. There was no technical drawback to this, at all. We had proved them ALL on our previous buildings. All were 'industry-standard' building techniques. Stanhope's objections were that if there were so many technologies on the one prefabricated panel then it made it too complicated for them to sue a Contractor for defective work. It was useless for us to argue that JOA's projects had never, in 15 years, been sued for anything.*

*Stanhope suspected that their whole strategy was technically 'problematic'. They 'prided' themselves on re-writing the entire building contract every year. Then they loaded their Consultants and Contractors with novel 'liabilities' for which we had to obtain new levels of insurance. It was destructive on more fronts than one. JOA refused to play. If Lipton would not be part of my project, I would not be part of his. I told him clearly why in 1988, in writing. We parted, to go our own ways as 'good friends', as the years have shown.*

