

1908 July 7th Lake
1908 July 8th P.M.

Bregenz and Cologne museums made him an ideal choice for LACMA, and the DIA project suggested he could make a leap in scale and complexity.

'I knew we wanted an architect with a great sensitivity to the site', says Govan. 'At first, we never considered what a new building would look like – neither of us thinks that way. I showed him Rem's plan and we exchanged ideas, using words like transparency, accessibility and non-hierarchical. I wanted a horizontal museum with no primary facade; one that can be approached from any direction with all the galleries on one level.'

The allocation of space had been worked out in 2000; now it was time to consider the ways it could be used to intensify the art-going experience. Too many museums (MoMA is a prime example) behave like sharks, constantly moving forward, adding wings and gobbling up everything in their path. Govan decided to stay within the footprint of the old complex and accept a closed form that cannot be added to. 'When the envelope grows too large it burdens the site and the budget, while diminishing the quality of the experience,' he insists. 'We should consider other sites in the county for future growth.'

Removing staff offices to a new building across the street helps add 7,000 square metres of display space, which should be sufficient for the next 25 years. There is no closed storage; rather, secondary items are tightly clustered and put on public view, in contrast to spare displays of one or two exceptional pieces. Signature works, such as the huge Tony Smith sculpture, will be installed at points of entry, and visitors will move around the periphery on what Zumthor calls 'a transparent veranda rather than a Beaux-Arts spine'. Break-out areas punctuate the grid, and a rare Persian carpet surrounded by steps evokes the enclosed garden of the 2012 Serpentine Pavilion. The museum

was designed from the inside out and that process generated the shell; now the interior has to be fleshed out and the exhibition can only hint at what that holds in store. The plinths will house ancillary functions and provide multiple points of access.

What makes this project so extraordinary, besides the originality of its form, is the extended period of gestation. Client and architect rethought every aspect of an encyclopaedic museum, as though the institution was beginning from scratch. Govan wants to increase attendance while providing more opportunities for quiet contemplation. He seeks a configuration that would allow art works to be rotated to tell different stories, dissolving the boundaries of geography and historical chronology. The linear narrative of Western art doesn't work for pre-Colombian and Asian cultures, where time may be considered as a circular phenomenon. Walls can also be eliminated or moved inside, to provide a seamless link between the urban landscape and interior spaces, and allow selected objects to be on view, day and night. Most remarkably, the solar panels that cover the roof will generate more energy than the building consumes, greatly reducing the cost of the operation.

If the trustees approve the scheme and are able to raise the funds (currently estimated at \$650 million), the new museum could open in 2025. It will take vision and philanthropy of a kind that LA has rarely manifested in the century since swashbuckling pioneers conjured a metropolis from the desert. Govan is convinced it can be done, and the construction of Piano's Resnick Pavilion and major site-specific art works, as well as a quantum leap in acquisition funds support his case. LACMA's collections are exemplary; they deserve the finest frame. And a city that routinely settles for second-rate architecture needs a worthy civic hub.

OXFORD, UK

Back from the dead

Tom Wilkinson

As a gang of estate residents dressed in frock coats and ratty wigs stared severely at us from the screen – looking like an acrimonious reunion of the Adam Ant fan club – I felt a pang of recognition. It's not often that an academic paper has such a visceral effect, but David Roberts' research into the demise of social housing hit close to home, literally; Roberts and his collaborators have been investigating the demolition of a 1930s neo-Georgian housing estate in East London, and its replacement by mixed-occupancy

faux-modern flats – one of which I inhabit (perhaps that frisson was something more like guilt).

Presented at the conference *Stylistic Dead Ends? Fresh Perspectives on British Architecture Between the Wars* (St John's, Oxford, 20-21 June), the film showed residents discussing their condemned estate while dressed as characters from Samuel Richardson's 18th-century novels, after whom the neo-Georgian blocks had been named. These invocations of Richardson's moralising tone – once naively, by idealistic planners, and now questioningly by the inhabitants of the homes those planners built – remind us that the query in this event's title is not just a matter of academic interest (démodé buildings are



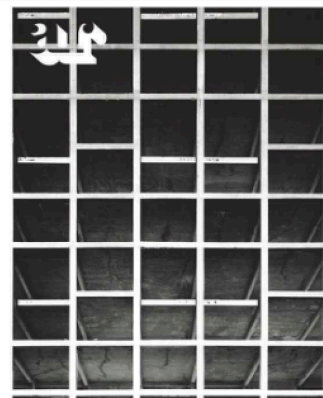
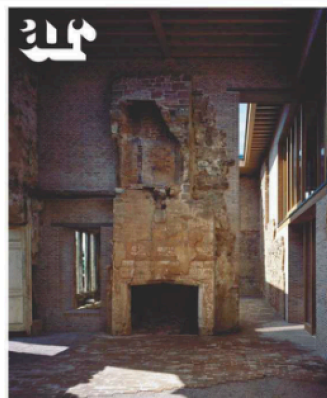
The demise of social housing was highlighted by residents dressed in Richardsonian garb

more easily demolished, after all). That the battle between Modernism and its alternatives continues, and continues to have a real impact on people's lives, was the abiding impression left by this thematically rich conference (put together by Neal Shasore and David Lewis).

Setting out the case for a more panoramic view of 20th-century architecture, in his keynote lecture Alan Powers argued for the inclusion of what he called Otherism: a neglected tradition of 'good-mannered Modernism' descended from stripped classicism, refracted through Goldfinger's 2 Willow Rd, and ending in the subtle vernacular of Tayler and Green – before being killed off by the Brutalists.

As Powers and Tim Benton discussed, the time seems right for this project: the autos-da-fé of the '20s and '30s have dimmed, and the bad-tempered tone of the postwar reappraisal of Modernism's legacy has mellowed. In the '70s, when Benton helped curate the *Thirties* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, knickers were still very much in a twist. The tantrums of the antis corresponded to the triumph of Modernism in architectural history – and to the end of its dominance in architectural practice. But despite the collapse of Ronan Point, the narrative related by Pevsner and co had become a new orthodoxy.

Though this narrative has been amended in recent years by people such as Powers and Elizabeth Darling, it has not – Powers argued – been fundamentally challenged (although as Jessica Kelly's paper on the AR's former editor JM Richards showed, some had been challenging it since the '50s). This event set out to conquer those dark regions of interwar architecture that once lay beyond the historian's pale: neo-Georgian housing estates and neo-Gothic crematoria, Islamicising petrol stations for the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, the Neoclassical coda of Charles Holden's career,



Half of this year's Stirling Prize nominations have graced the AR's cover: from left, Astley Castle by Witherford Watson Mann; Niall McLaughlin's chapel at Ripon College; and Park Hill renewal, Sheffield by Hawkins\Brown. Congratulations to our cover stars!

Herbert Baker's blowsy imperial bombast, Tudorbethan shopping parades, and the Art Deco mansions of monkey-loving nudist Oliver Hill. Were these all stylistic dead ends? (And, I wondered, did this tradition ever really die – doesn't it keep coming back, zombie-like, in speculative suburban housing, the palaces of Chelsea oligarchs, and Sainsbury's superstores?)

One of the biggest challenges presented by this macaronic buffet of oddballs, losers and the terminally infra dig (as Andrew Ballantyne argued in his paper on Tudorbethan housing) is weaving these various strands into a narrative using the current methods of architectural history. Despite recent decades of Poststructuralism, the discipline still often sets out with the assumption that cultural productions reflect the zeitgeist – but Ballantyne thought that the wild variety of interwar architecture voided any chance

of identifying a unified spirit of the period.

There is certainly a need to incorporate what he calls 'Tudoresque' suburbia into the history of interwar architecture. It is, as Ballantyne pointed out, where many of us live – and his work of historical recovery is for this reason vitally important. But instead of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, we could ask if a more nuanced Hegelianism than this slightly straw-mannish version could be deployed to explore the conflicting forces coexisting in one historical moment.

One dialectic that did emerge quite clearly in the course of the conference was between two architectural languages, the symbolic and the spatial. The latter, popularised by Giedion, thrives today – especially in phenomenologically inclined criticism – but the symbolic potential of architecture (so the argument goes) was largely suppressed along with ornament by the Modernists.

In light of this, several speakers reexamined architectural sculpture, and indigenous theories of architectural symbol were unearthed (most notably in a paper by Neal Shasore on facades and the public in the writings of Arthur Trystan Edwards). You might ask how new this revisionism is: wasn't interest

in the symbolic potential of architecture rekindled some time ago, in the '70s? Preempting this criticism, Alan Powers dismissed the Postmodern moment as 'a carnivalesque re-enactment of Otherism played by Modernists'. While there's something in that, I don't think we can question the sincerity of some current architects working in the Postmodern tradition: practices such as FAT, who are critically engaging with architecture's 'stylistic dead ends'.

Perhaps this activity reflects the same spirit of conciliation that animated the conference itself. Reflecting on the tone of the discussions, Powers related a remark made to him by Andrew Saint: 'this is an incredible event, Alan: no one is angry!' But there is still plenty in the legacy of interwar architecture worth fighting for – not least the ethos of public housing.

AR COMPETITION

Emerging Architecture

The ar+d Awards are the world's most prestigious awards for young architects with a prize fund of £10,000. This year's jury includes Diébédo Francis Kéré from Burkina Faso and Manuelle Gautrand from France. The entry deadline is 30 August. Full information can be found at architectural-review.com/emerging



Monkey-loving nudist architect Oliver Hill