

UK Newsletter 17

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The Eindhoven Statement
DOCOMOMO exists to:

- 1 Bring the significance of the Modern Movement to the attention of the public, the authorities, the professions and the educational community concerned with the built environment.
- 2 Identify and promote the recording of the works of the modern Movement, which will include a register, drawings, photographs and other documents.

- 3 Foster the development of appropriate techniques and methods of conservation, and disseminate knowledge of these throughout the profession.
- 4 Oppose destruction and disfigurement of significant works.
- 5 Identify and attract funding for documentation and conservation.
- 6 Explore and develop knowledge of the Modern Movement.

Editorial



The importance of having an effective lobbying group is evident when looking at campaigns such as those to save Robin Hood Gardens and Birmingham Central Library (p3), where the campaigners often seem to be calling the shots, and officialdom answering to them. Look at the prospects now for RMJM's Commonwealth Institute, once threatened with de-listing, now potentially a new home for the Design Museum. Organisations like Docomomo and the 20th Century Society, along with all those dedicated letter-writers, emailers, meeting attenders, scanners of agendas and minutes, are a hugely powerful force; they can and do effect change.

The fantastic though rain-sodden Moscow Study Tour (pp4-5) was a major highlight for those members able to escape work commitments like Elain Harwood of English Heritage who writes for us here, and Clementine Cecil adds to the picture with her critique of the work of Melnikov (pp6-7).

Three members of our Working Party attended the Docomomo Conference in Rotterdam in September, based at the

extraordinary Van Nelle Design Factory, restored by Docomomo co-founder Wessel de Yonge. Their accounts (p8-9) of the 10th Anniversary of the organisation's foundation, and exciting plans for Iberia to take on the headquarters from 2009, open a new chapter which can only mean even better joint working and more effective campaigning at such a crucial time for many of our threatened post-war buildings.

Our student volunteer Chris Keady reviews a lecture (p10) by Irene Scalbert on the groundbreaking work in the 1960s of Jean Renaudie, of architecture which was socially as well as architecturally revolutionary.

And we reprint here, for those who missed it, an obituary by Prof Tim Benton of Paul Overy, who just last year took part in our hugely popular What Is Modern? Conference.

Lastly, but not finally, we are all delighted that Dennis Sharp and Sally Rendel persevered long and hard and have finally published their book on Connell Ward and Lucas, my BD review reproduced here. Make sure you get to their seminar at Cowcross Street on 9 December; details on this page.

Emma Dent Coad

FUTURE EVENTS

25 November 2008

'Modernity and its Discontents'
Deyan Sudjic, Director of the Design Museum and long-term advocate, writer and editor of design and architecture publications is giving the Docomomo Annual Discourse.

The abstract for the talk is thus: 'The political uses of modernity have had mixed results. Contemporary architecture and planning were the weapons used by Attaturk, to establish Modern Turkey, a course that was followed with less successful results by the Iran of the Shahs, and, at a couple of steps removed, by Saddam Hussein. Is it possible to divorce modernism from the political aspects of architecture, as Philip Johnson would have had us believe? Is there a correlation between architectural language and the meaning of building?'

At The Building Centre, Store Street, London WC1, 6.30 for 7pm. Bookings and further information from the Coordinator Philip Boyle on 020 7253 6624. The annual lecture is supported by Forticrete.

9 December 2008

'Connell, Ward and Lucas: Modern Movement architects in England 1929-1939'

Dennis Sharp and Sally Rendel will be discussing their long-awaited monograph, published in September by Frances Lincoln.

Dennis has written widely on CWL and his firm Dennis Sharp Architects renovated Lucas' Flat Roof House. Sally is an associate with Penoyre and Prasad, and an editor and author.

At 6.30 for 7pm at ABA Gallery, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1 6EJ. Bookings and further information from Philip Boyle on 020 7253 6624.

CAMPAIGNS

It's a whole year now since Birmingham City Council applied to the Department of Culture Media and Sport for a Certificate of Immunity from Listing on the 1974 Central Library designed by John Madin.

A surprising turn of events was the publication in June of this year of the English Heritage report recommending Grade II listing. This caused a flurry of activity from the Leader of the Council who was reported to be pleading with as many officers, elected members, and business leaders as he could to write to Minister to persuade her that the Library wasn't worth listing.

Supporters of the Library have meanwhile gained some positive media coverage in the Architects' Journal, Building Design and the One Show (BBC1) as well as praise for the building from Lucinda Lambton (Radio 4).

We remain optimistic that the Minister, Margaret Hodge, will decide to list the building but have no idea when she will announce her decision. Whatever she decides we intend to go on challenging any redevelopment of Paradise Circus site that requires the demolition of the Library.

The Council has so far refused to name a developer for the site, no plans or developers' briefs have been published, and the level of demand for Grade A offices on which the scheme will depend, may not be known until 2013.

James Dunnett, who has been a keen supporter of the Library, will be the guest speaker at the first Annual General Meeting of Friends of the Central Library on 29 November.

Alan Clawley
Secretary
Friends of the Central Library

Campaigns

Dennis Sharp and Clementine Cecil

Co-Chair Dennis Sharp wrote to the Minister of State for Culture etc concerning her decision not to list the estate Robin Hood Gardens:

“Your decision has caused alarm and concern for the future of this housing which is regarded as an important achievement and contribution to the development of housing at local and international level. We see no reason why its qualities that merit conservation could not be retained by means of an informed and respectful upgrading renovation at reasonable cost to successful current standard, ensuring a long future for these buildings without its unsustainable demolition.

We are also concerned at a reported remark attributed to you that you thought that a drawn record of the buildings would be a sufficient method with regards to heritage in this case. This is a familiar and frequently argued issue within our organisation and is sometimes appropriate. However in this case there are characteristics in scale, circulation, spatial definition, landscaping and the materials of the buildings, which can only be appreciated because the buildings themselves are there and just would not exist in any form of visual record.

There are reasons of architectural and historic interest for listing which we would summarise as follows:

- 1, This is a strong group of buildings providing a unique sense of space and one of only a few such places achieved by the Smithsons who were members of the international modern movement group known as ‘Team Ten’ a group committed to the need to rethink the parameters of social housing.*
- 2, It is one of a unique group of historic housing designs in Tower Hamlets which includes the Lansbury Estate, and Balfron Tower/Carradale House Estate, which are both listed.*
- 3, It is one of a few housing schemes in the UK to take slab block form, horizontal circulation (street decks), landscape design and enclosed space as a unique group. The others being Alexander Road, Camden, and the Byker Estate, Newcastle, both of which are listed.*
- 4, The quality of the design in achieving high standards with respect to the inclusion of a high level of parking and service access without affecting pedestrian circulation at ground level, and the size of access decks with generous front door setbacks.*
- 5, The quality of design to reduce noise by care in both plan and section, and by the use of precast concrete components which also produce (as a result of repetition) rich elevational patterns.*
- 6, the unique block relationship to landscape is a reinterpretation of the historic Inns of Court London and John Wood’s crescent in Bath.*

From comments attributed to you in the press that your decision was a finely balanced one, and clearly not easy, we would ask that notwithstanding the pressure for decision, and the urgent needs not least of those living in Robin Hood Gardens and the Local Authority, that you reconsider your decision not to list and recommend Robin Hood Gardens for listing. We would also support the representations made to you recently by the 20th Century Society for listing.”



The demolition of the Central House of the Artist (CHA) in Moscow (Nikolai Sukoyan and Yuri Sheverdyaev, conceived 1950s, completed 1979) was announced at the end of August this year. The CHA houses the C20th collection of the State Tretyakov Gallery, the best collection of Soviet art in the world, that includes Constructivist masterpieces. The other part of the building is used for commercial exhibitions. Nicknamed "the suitcase", the CHA is a modern interpretation of the Doges Palace in Venice: the ground floor colonnade carries the heavier volume of the higher stories. Its interiors are large, spacious and well lit. Broad flights of stairs connect the floors and create generous landings that are also exhibition spaces. The present building is situated on a large area of land on the Moscow River. The new project takes in the entire plot and is a hotel complex, containing a gallery. Demolition in Moscow is profit driven and buildings such as this are focussed on because of their size and because, until now, the public has reacted indifferently towards their disappearance.

The announcement to demolish follows the unveiling of Project Orange by Foster and Partners in Cannes earlier this year. Apparently designed in collaboration with Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov’s wife, Elena Baturina, the building is in the form of an orange, in the process of being peeled. Foster and Partners say that the building is not yet site-specific, but Baturina’s involvement indicates that she has an idea of where she would like Project Orange to be. The CHA was built using money from the Artist’s Union. The defenders of the building say that the Mayor’s wife secured rights to the building in a murky behind-closed-doors deal.

Moscow’s architects and intelligentsia are rallying to defend the Central House of the Artist with a series of flash mobs, press conferences and petitions. Boris Bernaskoni, a young rising star among Russian architects, gave out a manifesto outlining his proposals for the site at the Venice Biennale. His manifesto is called ProFoster/Interface and articulately lays out the case for adapting, rather than demolishing CHA.

Bernaskoni believes that the case of the CHA marks a crisis point in relations between the authorities and the people of Moscow. The manifesto includes a map of Moscow illustrating how the CHA and its park are a reflection of the Kremlin only a mile up river: yin and yang, one representing the power of the state, and the other, the creative force of the people. While they remain in balance, the country can function, as soon as one is removed, there will be chaos.

Opposite:

Jean Renaudie, Cité des Etoiles, Givors, 1974-81.

This page:

Nikolai Sukoyan & Yuri Sheverdyaev, Central House of the Artist, Moscow, 1950s-79.

Moscow Study Tour May 2008

Elain Harwood reports on a soggy but building-packed trip

Did ever a tour begin in such strange circumstances? Or was ever wetter? By chance our tour began the night the European Cup was due to be played in Moscow for the first time, but whether our august organiser, Philip Boyle, was aware of this when he made arrangements back in 2007, nobody could have foreseen that the finalists would be two English clubs. The questions 'Manchester United?' or 'Chelsea?' dogged our visit, the locals puzzled that an English-speaking group could be there for any other reason. Our accommodation, in two massive blocks that formed only a small part of a hotel development designed for vast Soviet conventions reinforced the anonymity of mass travel.



Moscow is a bleak city even without four days of near constant rain, with dry socks at a greater premium even than a coffee stop. Brave Simon that resorted to wading across the six-lane ring road in flip flops! But the conditions made the buildings in their present generally crumbling condition even more evocative, and there was plenty of the highest quality to see. The beauty was that we saw all the greatest hits of Moscow's brief constructivist flowering in the late 1920s.

And what a place to start! The future of Konstantin Melnikov's house of 1927-9, still owned by his family, remains uncertain. It was remarkable that the Socialist authorities should grant a plot for a private house, and still more remarkable that it survives. The building combines a modern aesthetic with deep symbolism that reflects Melnikov's Anthroposophic ideas with patriarchal traditions, within a structure largely of brick in the form of two concentric circles of equal width but different heights that represent two linked wedding rings. The ground floor, with its dining room filled with paintings and a kitchen, is given over to the life of the body, the second floor to the life of the mind – asleep, in the

curious bedroom arrangement of a circle divided into three by low partitions, and awake in the double-height living room cut through by the second cylinder to create a low buffer zone. Above the bedroom is the double-height studio, with a narrow balcony leading on to the roof. The living room was lit by a great stained glass window, while the other windows are all hexagons that form a net of diffused light.



Melnikov also designed four garages in Moscow, as well as several unrealised grandiose schemes when he was in Paris. The most elaborate was that for buses in Obrazatsov Street from 1926-7, now being remodelled as a Jewish cultural centre. He conceived a staggered plan with doors at each end and one side so that the buses could drive in and out without reversing. But the vertical and horizontal stained glass panels, and round windows above the doors created a play of light through the interior that went beyond utilitarian demands. Nearby was the former Intourist Garage of 1933-6, again with a great arc of glazing across its front ending in a circle, but only partly realised. The motif appears again in his Gosplan garage, further out in the suburbs and built only in 1936.



Melnikov's other great buildings are his clubs, including the Svoboda Factory Club of 1927-9, now luxuriously remodelled with hideous classical decoration, and the extraordinary Rusakov Club of the same date. Built for the Union of Transport Workers, for whom Melnikov was also building garages, the wedge-shaped plan contains a strangely high auditorium with three separate balconies in a row that are cantilevered into the street, designed so they could be used separately if required, and though this is now hard to appreciate the effect remains dramatic – and influenced countless blocks of university lecture theatres around the world. The Burevestnik Club, also from 1927-9, is now the Russian Avant-Garde Foundation, with a collection of architectural drawings; its extensive restoration seemed at odds with the warts and all dereliction we saw elsewhere – how can DoCoMoMo ensure that a balance is struck? One club that survives in something like its original state is the Palace of Culture of the Likhachev Automobile Factory, where ballroom dancing was in full swing to the sound of Tom Jones. Designed in 1931-7 by Melnikov's rivals the Vesnin Brothers, it hangs on the edge between constructivism and classicism, massive in scale although only part was realised – a large theatre and sports facilities were never realised.



Another theme of the weekend was workers' housing, and the first of these we saw was the most famous and intriguing of all. For Mosei Ginsburg, the Narkomfin flats of 1928-30 were the result of many years' investigation into affordable dwellings, a long

block of maisonettes linked to blocks of communal and service facilities. The concept of duplex spaces arranged in a 3:2 section and reached by galleries every third floor is familiar to us from post-war housing, but to see the complexity of the real thing in its advanced decay, yet with exquisite timber detailing, was a revelation. Almost as emotionally challenging and in some ways more dramatic was the student dormitory designed by I. S. Nikolaev in 1929, a combination of communal facilities with minimal sleeping quarters reached through shower areas or via a steep ramp. A much larger student housing complex, seen in the better weather of Sunday morning, was that by B. N. Blokhin, B. V. Gladkov, and A. Zaltsman of 1930, four blocks with glazed stair halls set in courtyards shielded from the street by a long link range.

Opposite:

left: The group at Sokol, with our guide Sergey Nikitin centre.

centre top: Avant Garde Russia and Capitalist Realist Russia side by side (Narkomfin)

centre bottom: Gosplan Garage, Melnikov 1936

right: Spiral stair to rooftop observatory, ZIL Palace of Culture, Vesnins 1931-37

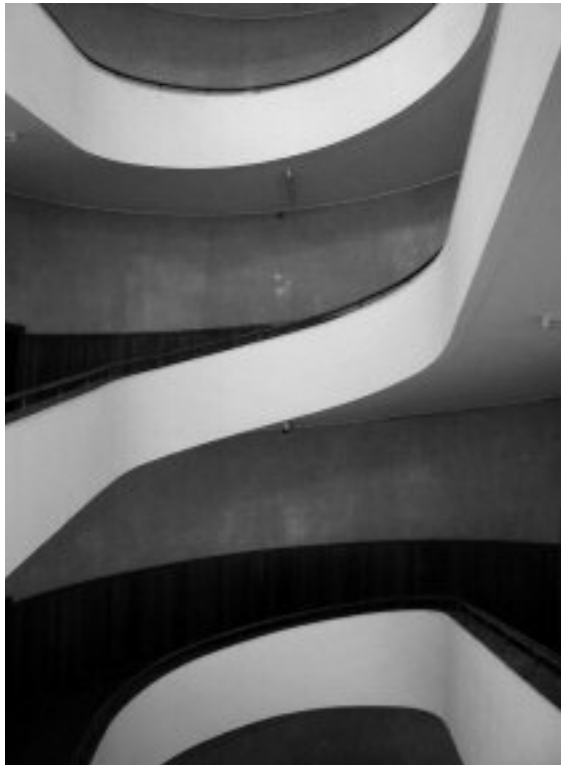
This page:

left: Tsentrosoyuz Building, Le Corbusier 1929-36

top right: Narkomzem, A.V. Schusev 1928-33, with our guide Anna Bronovitskya left.

bottom right:

Tsentrosoyuz with author foreground.



The highlight of the trip and worth the rigours of the conditions alone was the opportunity to see inside Le Corbusier's Tsentrosoyuz Building, won in competition in 1929 and built slowly and with variations until 1936. A complex and still secretive building, intended for the training of visiting small collectives, it was designed to be seen from a grand boulevard realised only fifty years later, and the entrance is on the other side, amid a free façade of offices. What is striking is how the building is clearly at once the work of Le Corbusier in its details yet is wholly in keeping with the work of the Russian constructivists, particularly in its use of ramps to reach the main auditorium, set amid a forest of columns. This space is most remarkable as it prefigures Le Corbusier's similar foyer in the Assembly Building at Chandigarh, another interior not widely published.

A very different experience, and a relief from the rain, was to explore Moscow's metro system, first planned in 1931 and begun in 1935 to follow the two main road arteries cut through the city as part of the General Plan. Further stations followed, and the most spectacular in their classical Soviet decoration are war memorials. Yet each is different, and in the development from the relative lightness of Mayakovskaya (c.1935) to the heaviness of the 'Circle Line' stations of 1950-4 the reaction against modernism in the Soviet Union becomes fully apparent. It may not suit DoCoMoMo tastes, but the sight of an underground train rushing into sight under a line of chandeliers has a surreal charm Stalin surely never intended.



Anna Bronovitskya worked wonders to gain access to so many buildings, Philip Boyle held the trip together seamlessly, & superb notes from Matthew Wickens. James Dunnett gave a talk on UK conservation, much appreciated by our hosts. The abiding memory, however, is of the enthusiasm and jollity of the DoCoMoMo comrades, braving all adversity in the pursuit of seeing fine architecture.



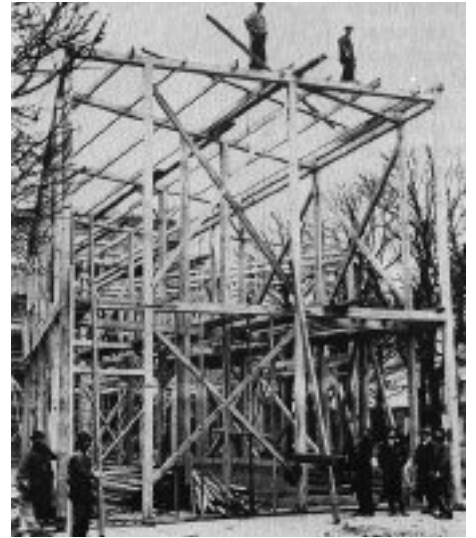
Konstantin Melnikov - by Clementine Cecil

"You think that I consider myself a genius? No, I am an architect – it is the same thing."



the suffering, like that of the Russian nation in the 20th century, does not stop there. The fate of Melnikov's legacy, particularly his own house since the fall of the Soviet Union reflects the great difficulties and clashing interests of the post-perestroika age.

Melnikov studied at the Moscow School of Art Sculpture and Architecture, an exciting centre of artistic activity in Russia attended at one time or other by most of the leading members of the Russian avant-garde. He graduated from both the painting and architectural departments. He was a talented painter and draughtsman. In his later years he wrote a great deal, with a kind of exalted energy, also found in his buildings. He later wrote of his graduation: "a noteworthy coincidence: in one and the same year, 1917, I finished my education and in the same year finished that life in which I had lived the previous 27 years. It's good that I was 27 – a stalwart age, not yet stuck in one's ways. Having received the title Architect, I entered into Architecture, standing on the edge of a precipice."



Although not a committed Communist, like many other architects, Melnikov welcomed the spirit of change that the revolution brought and was happy to work with the new regime. Moscow was made capital of the new Soviet Union in 1918. This factor, combined with the loosening up of trade laws in the early 1920s,

Every now and then one comes across figures in history whose fate is so in step with the currents of their time, that by studying their lives and legacies one can understand more clearly the period in which they lived. Konstantin Melnikov is such a man. His humble birth and then patronage by a wealthy industrialist, the start of his professional life coinciding with the 1917 revolution, his rise to fame that paralleled the intense energy of the early soviet state, and then his eclipse, a result of Stalinist terror that led to his de facto house arrest – all this reflects the revolutions, highs and lows of Russia's 20th century. Melnikov was informally rehabilitated in the sixties, but



led to some major commissions for Melnikov. Unlike many of his peers, Melnikov did not belong to one particular architectural movement. This gave him a greater flexibility, which in part explains his large volume of commissions. It also left him vulnerable to attack later on, when the architectural establishment were searching for a scapegoat when homogeneity and socialist realism was called for in all the arts.



The 1920s was Melnikov's decade: following his winning design for the USSR pavilion at the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs in Paris, he was the toast of Moscow. This triumph was followed by a series of worker's clubs. These were an alternative to church as a meeting place for factory workers, and were to keep them from excessive drinking. The Burevestnik, Svoboda, Kauchuk, Rusakov and Frunze worker's clubs were all built in the last years of the 1920s.

Opposite:
top left: young Melnikov
bottom left:
Commissariat of Heavy Industry, Moscow (Narkomtyazprom) competition entry 1934
bottom right:
Bakhmetevskaya St, 'Leyland' Bus Garage, Moscow 1926
top right: USSR pavilion under construction, Paris 1925
This Page:
top left: Blueprint of Melnikov House as built.
bottom left: Rusakov Club, Moscow in 1927
right: 'Leyland' Bus Garage redevelopment as Garage Gallery by Roman Abramovich's girlfriend.



The apex of his creativity was the Melnikov House (1927-1929) built in the centre of Moscow. He was given the plot of land on the grounds that it was a social experiment that would then be applied to mass housing. The house is ingenious in design and construction. Melnikov's approach was common to the entire avant-garde period: he used traditional materials – in this case bricks and timber boarding - but applied them in a non traditional way. He thought that cheap, low grade materials could be used if the stress was dispersed over all parts of the structure. Catherine Cooke described the walls of his double-cylinder house as a 'load-spreading cage'.

The ceilings and floors were dropped in like the top and bottom of a barrel. They have no beams, instead they are made of a grill made of planks with notches in them criss-crossing each other. This was stiffened by a structural ceiling above and below of diagonal tongue and groove boarding.

Because there were no corners, beams or internal load bearing walls, the house has large, well-lit interiors. The house is equipped for many more windows than it has – the walls are full of openings that could be used at any time to create more. The hexagonal windows are all double glazed, which helps with insulation, while a sophisticated system of flues keeps the house warm.

Today, Melnikov's buildings are enjoying a renaissance of interest. The Frunze, Svoboda and Burevestnik Clubs have been refurbished and partly restored and the Kauchuk is under wraps at the moment. Techniques are crude, for Russia has no experience of sensitive, thoughtful restoration of 20th century buildings, but nevertheless, there is a will to preserve them.



The most high level restoration job is that of his Bakhmetevsky Garage, built in 1926 to house a fleet of Leyland buses. The roof is by engineer Vladimir Shukhov. Oligarch Roman Abramovich's girlfriend, Dasha Zhukova, has opened a gallery there, called Garage. Many original elements were lost during restoration, but the pointing has been well done and the essential space has retained its form and grace.

Controversy continues around the future of the Melnikov House. Owner of half of the house Senator Sergei Gordeyev and the architect's granddaughter, Ekaterina Karinskaya, who is executing her father Viktor's will, are at loggerheads and until they find a compromise, no progress will be made. Viktor Melnikov, a painter, stipulated in his will, like his father, that the house should become a state owned museum to father and son. The Melnikov archive, consisting of a large number of his paintings, drawings and writings, is kept in the Schusev State Architecture Museum, Moscow.

10th International Conference 16th-19th Sept'08

James Dunnett, Matthew Wickens and Philip Boyle report back from Rotterdam

The dominant memory for me of the Rotterdam conference more than of any of the other five international conferences I have attended, more even than the Bauhaus in 1992, is the building it was held in – the massive Van Nelle Design Factory (Brinkman and van der Flugt, 1927), gleaming in the uninterrupted sunlight and in its new-found, Europa Nostra Award-winning role as centre for offices and studios for design- and media-related enterprises. (It was part of the sale agreement whereby Van Nelle – still of course very much a going concern – parted with the building and the name attached to it, that it should always be known as the Van Nelle Design Factory, to distinguish it from the company's actual up-to-date plant). The single, strong, multi-storey, fully-glazed rectangular block of the Factory, its zones still designated by their historic names of Coffee, Tea, and Tobacco, its skyline boldly emblazoned with storey-height sans-serif letters spelling its name, its facades punctured by the tangle of conveyor belt housings, shaped and framed the whole event. The all-pervasive polygonal columns with their mushroom capitals became a familiar sight, as did the stair towers with their two interlocked flights of stairs. The conversion, about which Wessel de Jonge gave a fascinating paper, has indeed been carried out by him with exemplary taste.

forceful scale as the Van Nelle Design Factory. The third conference in Barcelona could not of course actually be held in the Mies Pavilion, and the fifth in Rafael Moneo's Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm is somehow more memorable for its setting on an island than for the building itself, acceptable though that was. The sixth in Brasilia was of course memorable both for the city and for the Niemeyer-designed school of architecture where it was held – a sinuous linear street-like building with courts planted with riotous tropical vegetation. But it had obviously had very good use, with the street constantly clogged with hordes of students. So the sheer scale of directness of Van Nelle, where everything could be held under one roof, and its pristine crispness, stands out. Possibly some more attention could be given there to sound absorption (and is being given to it, says Wessel), without having to mask the mushroom capitals. As at all these conferences the frustration always remains of only being able to attend any one lecture in the parallel sessions at one time.

One of the most concentrated sessions that stays in the mind was the Debate about Robin Hood Gardens, when both Alan Powers and John Allan spoke, and another on Strategies for Mass Housing, with Beatrice Mariolle about the French approach and Henrieta Moravzikova on what is claimed to be the largest housing estate in Europe, outside Bratislava (these Debates do not feature in the Proceedings). Another impressive session was devoted to the repair and refurbishment of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, papers being given by staff of Integrated Conservation Resources Inc., USA. Altogether an entirely worthy tenth International Conference.

Unlike James this was my first international conference but I too was struck by the magnificent, and appropriate, setting. Having visited the Van Nelle factory under restoration as part of my first Docomomo event in 2000 it was fantastic to see it teeming with life. Given the limited space I would like to mention a talk and a debate which particularly caught my attention. The first ties back to the Moscow tour as it was about Anatole Kopp (1915-1990), (by Anat Falbel from Brazil) whose book about 1920s Russian Town planning is an invaluable source. We heard how Kopp gained a scholarship to MIT but was drafted for the French army and became a POW. He later escaped and made his way back to America to finish his training. Having qualified as an architect he returned to France to work for Paul Nelson on the Hospital at Saint-Lo but as a committed member of the Communist party he was denied membership of the French Architectural Board. He went on to write more than ten books including one of the first accounts of post-war reconstruction. Unfortunately only his account of Soviet town planning has been translated into English. The final debate on the use of Post-War churches was also illuminating highlighting alternative uses in Holland including the conversion into apartments of Van den Broek & Bakema's 1956-57 Resurrection Church in Scheidam and one church now used as a supermarket! All in all a fantastic event in an unforgettable setting.

This page: Van Nelle Ontwerpfabriek (Design Factory), Rotterdam, Brinkman and Van der Flugt, 1931, renovated 2000-2007, Wessel de Jonge.

Opposite, bottom: Zonnestraal Sanatorium, Hilversum, Jan Duiker & Bernard Bijvoet, 1928. Restoration 2000-ongoing, Wessel de Jonge.

centre: Groothandelsgebouw, Rotterdam, H.A. Maaskant, and W. van Tijen 1949-51.



Thinking back, after the founding conference on the unexceptionable Eindhoven campus, to the second at the Bauhaus, newly refurbished and carrying an overwhelming weight of historical meaning: it was indeed awesome to be there in the recently reintegrated eastern Germany, to stand on those famous balconies, sit in that lecture room, and see the houses of Gropius, Klee, Kandinsky... but the buildings are not on the same

COUNCIL MEETING

The Full Council Meeting lived up to the tradition of these events:

'Large numbers';- 37 countries' representatives, equipped with thick agendas in bright red folders, and a chair to sit on, plus a considerable number of attendees without red folders and without chairs, who stood, and at opportune moments chipped in with pointed comments.

'Great setting';- Top floor of the Van Nelle with views of Rotterdam lit up at night.

'Late Night';- 22.00 start, and inevitably end in the small hours of the morning.

'An atmosphere of disbelief that decision making could be so fraught';- A final vote at 1.30 in the morning on the Iberia Proposal for taking on the head quarters in 2009 which was accepted now by 18 votes to 16 votes for a revised proposal to be brought back for voting in December, and three abstentions.

'Enthusiastic welcome for new countries';- Full representation for; Canada-Atlantic, Curacao, and Guatemala. Provisional chapters; Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay

In addition our own co-chair Dennis Sharp received a personal honour.

'Curiosity about the next Conference in 2010';- The proposal by Louise Noelle (who came and gave us a talk on Felix Candela not long ago) for Mexico City on the theme 'Living the Urban Modernity' was accepted.

This whole event was presided over with passion and authority by Maristella Casciato, who together with the Parisian team are still in harness until they hand over to Ana Tostoes and the Iberian team in 2009.

CONFERENCE TOURS

The quality and depth of Modern architecture within and around Rotterdam takes some beating, so even though much was familiar, anticipation was high.



The 'within' Rotterdam tour started at Groothandelsgebouw by H.A. Maaskant, and W. van Tijen 1949-51, a defiantly expressive concrete clad mixed office and retail complex. Designed for an economic kick start immediately post war it has aged well due to its flexibility and generous circulation. Its elegant concrete detailing is a fine counter to Perret's more sombre contemporary work at Le Havre. This tour also ended on a high as the light was fading, again by W. Van

Tijen but this time (pre-war 1932-34) with Brinkman & van der Vlugt, The Bergpolder flats, still looking immaculate and fresh. This was the first high rise residential slab block, that bred so many lesser copies in the post-war period. The surprise was the radiant simplicity of its planning and unsurpassed elegant prefabrication. Both the above should be on all students must see list before they are let loose in the real world.

The First 'around' tour covered the highlights of Hilversum & Utrecht. The interior of W.H. Dudok's Hilversum Town Hall 1928-31 (that again was so copied) was opened up for us and we could all 'pretend we were getting married' and follow the magnificent sequence of spaces, volumes and stairs that lie behind the famous De Stijl facades. Then Zonnestraal Sanitorium, by Duiker and BijVoet, 1925-27, and now almost completely rehabilitated with loving care by Wessel De Jonge. In its ruined state in the past it was always the most moving sight. Now what staggers in its rebirth is its fragility, which stems from the original innocence of the way they put concrete, steel and glass together in what was to be a work of limited life, and is now magically still there as an inspiration to us all.

The "second around" tour covered south Amsterdam. This started with Aldo van Eyck's Orphanage of 1955-60, sadly surviving (not demolished) but meaningless as a low scale office complex. The only remainder/reminder of its poetic intent being the roofscape of coffered domes so evocative of Aldo's beloved Saharan desertscapes (when viewed at first floor level), and now surrounded by relentless suburban sprawl.

Again the final visit produced the greatest surprise pleasure; the Library of the Betendorp Housing Scheme 1921-28. A pioneer socialist experiment in concrete two-storey garden suburb housing with a community spirit that survived through the occupation to today (even with working corner shops). The small library has a cruciform plan of different height volumes but a central link space, open vertically from internal cill level to all the spaces around it, like one of Frank Lloyd Wright's small pre Usonian houses, but simple, calm, and warm.

These are the qualities you experience in the best Dutch Modern architecture, and which makes tours like these so important.

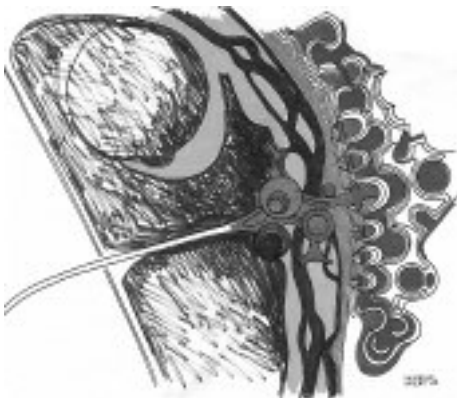


Jean Renaudie

Chris Keady on Irénée Scalbert's Lecture

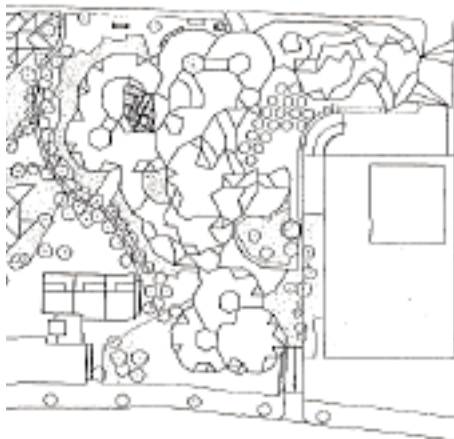
In his 2004 book titled *A Right to Difference*, Irénée Scalbert describes the bleak state of social housing in 1960s France—4,000-unit grands ensembles, a sort of compact suburbia: 'In no country in Western Europe did the construction of housing submit to the rationales of industry and administration more completely.' Into this stagnancy quietly burst Jean Renaudie, whose work is less often recognised than, for example, the high-profile housing projects of Le Corbusier or Paolo Soleri.

Scalbert, a distinguished author and expert on Renaudie, spoke to Docomomo members at 70 Cowcross Street on 19 March, following an introduction by James Dunnet. Scalbert framed his talk by noting the approaching 40th anniversary of the May 68 social movement in France; 1968 was the year Jean Renaudie left his partnership in the Atelier de Montrouge and struck out on his own.



From the beginning his partners had their doubts about Renaudie's proposal for the new city of Le Vaudreuil, and the project commission confirmed those doubts by rejecting the proposal. Le Vaudreuil's site was a series of bluffs and scooped-out amphitheatres descending sharply from a plain to the Seine. A large part of the fuss over his proposal arose when Renaudie insisted on high-density blocks on the steep slope rather than a low, sprawling development on the plain above. In the *Le Vaudreuil* album, Renaudie included this quotation from the biologist François Jacob on the bacterial cell: 'At every level of this organisation, one encounters phenomena of communication operating in every direction.' Renaudie is, of course, using Jacob to analogise his keen interest in the 'complex integration of functions.' His drawings for *Le Vaudreuil*, while they couldn't possibly be called 'plans,' illustrate nonetheless the arrangement of

circular elements with a sort of connective tissue. The stacking and connecting of the elements ensured, as Scalbert wrote, that 'each element acquired signification through its combination with others.' Renaudie wrote in the June-July 1968 issue of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*—a significant date, of course—that architecture 'is the materialisation of the complex structure according to which human relations are organised.' But the partners were sceptical. Renaudie's decidedly abstract drawings and sketches further confused his colleagues. 'It is a project that simmers over the fire of contestation: against consumer society, against the administration of the future new town and, perhaps, against the Atelier de Montrouge itself.'



After the commission rejected Renaudie's proposal for Le Vaudreuil, he left the Atelier de Montrouge in a huff. In 1969 he was

introduced to the director of public housing of Ivry-sur-Seine. Ivry was one of numerous Paris suburbs with large central areas designated for 'urbanisation,' which often entailed large housing projects. According to Scalbert, the *Le Vaudreuil* album particularly appealed to the young, communist administrator, and Renaudie was eventually commissioned to design several component buildings of Ivry's urban renewal.

Scalbert noted in his lecture that Renaudie's designs for Ivry were somewhat of a change in method after *Le Vaudreuil*. In the *Casanova* building (1972), Renaudie introduced 45-degree angles in both interior and exterior walls. Scalbert identified this as revolutionary concept: '[the diagonal] thoroughly undermined the system of concrete diaphragm walls that dominated the building industry. This, in turn, threw into question the entire rationale underpinning the conception of mass housing.' Renaudie rejected the common system of dividing a block into smaller blocks, instead making each unit unique. His intention was to make the social housing system more like a collection of 'architect-designed houses' (Scalbert's term) and less like cookie-cutter 'units.' Scalbert pointed out that Renaudie had no way of knowing the future tenants of these dwellings, so he designed them as spaces he would like to live in. They may vary widely in floor area and room arrangement, but each one—even those on upper levels—includes a terrace garden, forming a cascade of green shelves when viewed from above. Renaudie expanded upon this variety in the *Jeanne Hachette* complex (1975), which has a multitude of odd angles, suggesting a fractal origin. His partner Nina Schuch did in fact give Renaudie a book on fractals by Mandelbrot just as the *Hachette* complex was finished, but he never did read the book!

Renaudie followed the Ivry projects with several more, both built and unbuilt (some completed after his death in 1982). He drew upon both the circular stacks of *Le Vaudreuil* and the proliferation of diagonals of Ivry in his study for the new town of Vitrolles. The last major work completed before 1982 was the renewal of Givors, south of Lyon, in which Renaudie again created a cascade of varied, angular dwellings, terraces, and services now beautifully encrusted with trees and vines. As Scalbert put it, 'the architecture was all in the foliage of the plans, in the wandering lines of concrete soffits and parapets, in drawing and in walking.'

Connell Ward and Lucas

Modern Movement Architects in England 1929-1939

Emma Dent Coad reviews Dennis Sharp and Sally Rendel's new book



Opposite:
left: Proposal for the new city of Le Vaudreuil, Atelier de Montrouge, 1968.
centre: Ivry-sur-Seine, Jean Renaudie, 1972-84.
This page:
top: Cover Illustration
bottom: The Vitamin Cafe, 419 Oxford Street, Connell and Hargroves 1931. A 'food reform restaurant' aimed to educate about health through diet. It used a polished metal-faced plywood called Plymax.

Modernism was a dirty word in England when Amyas Connell and Basil Ward from New Zealand, and the Englishman Colin Lucas formed Connell Ward and Lucas in 1929. Their house at 66 Frognal Road, still much loved and resplendently restored, was 80 years ago called 'one of the greatest pieces of vandalism ever perpetrated in London'. Despite the times, they catalysed each other's work and created for their enlightened clients buildings of great subtlety, using experimental techniques and new theories. It is extraordinary that a practice working together for just five short years would produce such a groundbreaking body of work, much of which forms our architectural heritage.

Dennis Sharp and Sally Rendel's book, which has been many years in gestation, gives a coherent and three-dimensional picture of these 'first Modern houses in England', with a wealth of drawings and images, contemporary and recent. Throughout the book comments and anecdotes from the architects' families and contemporary accounts, transform what would anyway have been a first rate historical account into a fully rounded and gripping drama. As it is written by architects who can write with fluidity and explain technical innovations in plain English, and is also a fully referenced academic piece of work, it is impossible to conceive of any publication more complete.

Opening with biographies of each architect, there follows an historical and cultural round-up of a time when Art Deco ruled, a style that '...smacked of optimism and tasted of decadence'. This was a time overshadowed by classicism and the fine art approach, but both New Zealanders shone at Cambridge. In around 1933 they met Colin Lucas at the point when he was just finishing his Flat Roof House, and thereon joined the small but

influential group of Modern thinkers, artists, sculptors and musicians, many from Europe, who became their clients and friends. They were Rome scholars and travelled Italy and Europe.

After a full account of their evolving ethos and approach, and the inevitable battles of ideology with professors and the architectural establishment, the book has case studies of their main projects, some by the group and others by individuals. They avoided the Beaux Arts tradition of a room for each function, planning instead around the clients' lifestyle and the prevailing concerns of sunlight, natural ventilation, hygiene, internal bathrooms, lack of servants, and car ownership. The social programme of their European counterparts was not an issue; this was England and it was a technical and cultural movement for those who could afford it; the social programme kicked in post-war.

I have been lucky enough to visit some of these houses, during Study Tours organised by Docomomo and led by its co-chair Dennis Sharp. There are favourites – High and Over, 66 Frognal. There are personal delights – Potcroft, the Sun Houses, rooftop gardens, flexible space flowing into the outside. And there are surprises – the use of colour, health food shops, and sadly, Colin Lucas' grim post-war Ferrier Estate. Eventually they went their separate ways, focussing on their strengths and interests, but this book is a testament to five years of fruitful and groundbreaking collaboration.



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Copies of the book are available from BookART and Architecture, 1 Woodcock Lodge, Epping Green, Hertford, SG13 8ND, UK, £35 inc post and packing.

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Paul Overy 1940-2008

Obituary by Tim Benton

In 1969 Paul Overy, who has died aged 68 from pancreatic cancer, published *De Stijl*, a little classic on the Dutch art movement (1917-25), for Dutton Vista. He followed this up with a more substantial book of the same title for Thames & Hudson in 1991. The movement, best known in the work of Piet Mondrian, is a difficult subject to explain, both for its abstract forms and the complex spiritual and theoretical ideas which underpinned it, but then Paul was a natural communicator. His books, articles and reviews consistently presented a clear and subtly probing perspective on the arts.

His is the best writing on the Dutch cabinetmaker and architect Gerrit Rietveld (1888-1964) because he was comfortable with the apparent contradictions in Rietveld's work, between avant-garde form and comfort, experimental and serial production, de Stijl aesthetics and the knowhow of the joiner and cabinetmaker. Paul's introduction to the book on the Rietveld-Schröder house (1988) places the reader at the heart of the fragile, abstract but also sensual life of the house that Rietveld and Truus Schröder designed around her, and then their, lives from 1924 until his death.

Paul wrote on Wassily Kandinsky, Josef Albers and many other leading figures of British and European modernism. His books and articles, always based on thorough research, made these sometimes unpopular subjects accessible, while communicating the passion and idealism which motivated them. With time, he adapted his modernist enthusiasms to incorporate feminist and post-colonial critiques.

He also drew on a wide range of cultural references. Writing on postwar British sculpture in 1991, he referred to the music hall double act Flanagan and Allen performing in one of Humphrey Jennings's documentary-style films, the Festival of Britain, Henry Moore, Richard Long and Anthony Caro, and finished with the Tate & Lyle Golden Syrup tin, with its biblical lion, bees and honey, as a deeply ironic image of post-imperial cultural ambition. His detailed study, in 2000, of Brian Housden's controversial house a few doors down from Paul's own house, in Hampstead, north London, at No 78 South Hill Park, likewise covers a very wide range of cultural references and critical arguments.

Modernist architecture has often been condemned as cold and antiseptic, like a hospital or operating theatre. Paul's last book, *Light, Air and Openness: Modern Architecture Between the Wars* (2008), confronted this slur and demonstrated convincingly that interwar modernist architecture was indeed influenced by concerns about hygiene and the attempts to cure tuberculosis by the application of sun and fresh air.

But Paul was alert also to the symbolism of the sanatorium as a "pristine white 'clean machine', a cruise ship that took the patients on a magical voyage ... from the old unhygienic and unhealthy world of the past to a new life of physical and mental health, fresh air, sunlight, hygiene and cleanliness". The slogans "light, air and openness", repeated in books, films and political campaigns of the period, connoted the yearning for escape from the dirt of city slums.

Paul negotiated this territory with his habitual subtlety, passing smoothly from the social to the visual, from the theoretical to the practical, not without some healthy scepticism for good measure. And it is the quality of his writing which remains in the memory. It was so moving to see him, pale but calm in the hubbub of the book launch at Burgh House in Hampstead last February, acknowledging his friends' tributes.

Born in Dorchester and educated at University College school in Hampstead, Paul never lost his early interest in literature. His grandmother, Ethel Major, had been one of the Hardy Players - performing the work of the Dorset writer - and his father was an avid reader. Paul admired the Dorset dialect poetry of William Barnes, and his French was good enough for him to translate French poetry professionally. Paul insisted on a special sixth form curriculum, including art, English, history and French, in defiance of traditional English specialisation. In 1962 he went up to King's College, Cambridge, to read English and philosophy.

Later he was an art critic for the Listener, New Society, the Financial Times, the Times and the International Herald Tribune. From 1982, his criticism mainly took the form of long review articles in journals such as Studio International, Art Monthly, and Art in America. He covered a wide range of art practice, always bringing out the distinctive qualities of the people he dealt with. If he always had his own critical point of view, the job was done with such subtlety and grace that the victims hardly felt the blade go in. He was an inspiring and conscientious teacher, at such places as Goldsmiths College, the Royal College of Art, and notably at Middlesex University, as reader and then senior research fellow.

From 1982, Paul shared his life with another historian of modernism in design and architecture, Tag Gronberg. Her fascination with the decorative and with Viennese culture helped to modulate his convictions. One of his most subtle and delicately shaded critiques of modernism, *The Whole Bad Taste of Our Period: Josef Frank, Adolf Loos, and "Gschnas"* (2006) must surely have benefited from Tag's deep understanding of Viennese culture. He was a wonderfully kind, generous and thought-provoking friend.

• Paul Vivian Overy, art historian, born February 14 1940; died August 7 2008

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