INTRODUCTION

Lights out please. In the summer nights, one dreams.

'House, patch of meadow, oh evening light.'

Suddenly you acquire an almost human face.

You are very near us, embracing and embraced. (Rainer Maria Rilke)

Architecture is an art that is well able to combine the world of dreams and fantasy with that of reality. The mixture can produce sentimental, private visions such as that expressed above, or visions of a more public, dynamic nature: the realm of possibility is endless. Unfortunately this union is not often achieved.

It is only by the dreams of a person or of a people that the reflections of society are expressed as interpretations of that reality. Most buildings are mere reflections, and even as such have value. However, it would behove us to take stock of our dreams and ideals at this time to see how they relate to our buildings.

The world seems to be holding its breath to keep its balance in the face of doom and gloom. The summer is a good time for dreaming, so we take this issue of Arcade to explore subjects of a dreamy, fantastic, or visionary nature. The first dream we explored was an eight page format, which enabled us to present you with the following: an article on the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, prescriptions for the use of humor and wit in architecture, a presentation of some great civic dreams, a review of that expressed above, or visions of a world of dreams and fantasy

Dennis Andersen

words were read by hundreds in Seattle newspapers late in 1906, and must have astonished a population unaccustomed to such potential world-wide attention. But the germ of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition of 1909 arose from such pronouncements, and in very short time, business, political and social groups were clamoring for direction, for a theme which would make Seattle an international focal point. In one short day, local managers raised one-half million dollars in support of the planning, and so the inevitable result took shape. Frantic real estate developers extolled the virtues of various undeveloped areas to the west, north, south and east of town: Magnolia, Mount Baker Park, Washington Park and Woodland Park were all considered, but it is archaic in short time to favor the heavily wooded slopes of the University of Washington campus. University officials, desperate for new buildings, extracted promises for permanent structures from the Exposition, and finagled funding from the State Legislature as a modest enticement. It excitation and enthusiasm over the University site created a moment's pause in the popular mind (there would be no consumption of alcohol in that area) certain city planning offices and real estate men did not remain idle. The Seattle Parks Department rapidly dusted off and presented the 1903 Olmsted Park Plan and recommended the rapid completion of road work and boulevard systems, street car lines and plantings. Director General Nadeau, speaking in a downtown Seattle made alternately muddy and dusty by gouging and regrade work, pleaded "... to the civic pride of our fellow citizens, that they may individually and collectively unite in the cleaning up of the city, making presentable all unseemly places, and by the planting and cultivation of flowers, shrubs and trees, sodding and parking of lawns and parking strips cause Seattle to be—that to which Nature has so generously contributed—a city beautiful.

Hotel buildings were erected by the dozen in a short period, property values soared both downtown and in the University District, and unsavory eviction stories did little to diminish the city's sense of mission in reaching for the obscure benefits the Exposition would bring.

The San Francisco firm of Howard and Galloway was selected as supervising architect for the Exposition. It came as no surprise, perhaps, to even well-established local firms that outsiders were engaged to direct this complex and often hectic undertaking. John Calen Howard, later among those who directed the stunning Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco (1915) proved not to exert the autocratic influence Daniel Burnham exercised during the 1893 Chicago exposition. Politely turning away from John Olmsted's recommendation for an "ancient Russian theme" in the architectural program, he outlined "designs on classical lines" for the major structures. Dazzling Beaux Arts whiteness characterized the architecture of the large official buildings encircling what is now Drumheller Fountain on the University campus.
When you see a funny building, you might not pull your car over to the curb, puzzled in helpless mirth, but the chances are you'll know you've seen something out of the ordinary. How can a building be humorous or non-serious? We might ask? After all, buildings are designed to serve needs, an expensive investment, and are intended to provide shelter and workspace, but not a comedy routine. Yet the language of architecture, like the spoken language, provides opportunity to express humor and wit. As long as the human spirit is the motivating force behind any creation, there is the possibility that irrepressible good humor will leak out.

But humor and wit happen far more frequently in conversation, in literature, in the theatre and film, than in architecture. There are a number of probable reasons for this. For one thing, architecture is always a major investment of private and public money. Also, the practice of architecture involves many people over a long period of time and depends on joint decision-making. Design committees tend to deaden any originally humorous intentions. Third, wit and humor require a barrier for their impact, and buildings are not often temporary. Further, most humor is verbal, while architecture can be thought of as non-verbal.

The means of a building to convey humor often require some special attention or a team effort on the part of the viewer. Yet some buildings manage to overcome all these obstacles and have been known to make viewers smile, point, and laugh. For example, the famous BST Products showrooms which were designed by James Wines of SITE, which feature a crumbling facade in one case and a broken corner in another, startle the viewer at first. What a relief to find that it is only a building that is happening. It was just the way that one looked like! Surely this is humor in architecture. It sure isn't normal.

Not all abnormal buildings are humorous — some are simply bizarre. Objects which are bizarre are singular in appearance or character — one of a kind. Humor, however, often involves the rediscovey of the familiar, though at first glance the familiar may be disguised. Any number of definitions of humor have been proposed over the preceding centuries, but the general consensus is that humor is the bringing together of two or more incongruities which arise to illustrate some fundamental absurdity. A deliberately crumbling building is certainly absurd. Wit, on the other hand, is seen as a more intellectual quality, requiring the keen perception and cleverly apt expression of an unexpected connection between things which are generally unrelated. Humorous buildings require both a witty building and a perceptive viewer.

But how is humor in architecture expressed? How can a building's silent form speak? The answer is: in its own terms. Metaphor is a technique of architectural humor as well as of literary humor. Used as a sales device in Deschwan's Shoe Repairing in Bakersfield, California, the metaphor reads, 'This building is a shoe.' Another metaphor, 'This building is a bird' is one reading of Saarinen's TWA terminal in New York. Unlike the machine joke of the shoe-building, Saarinen's building is architectural shorthand, making no claim to be effortless, graceful flight of birds and, by extension, the effortless and graceful flight of man. The first is an example of a technique being used humorously; the second is in a witty way, where a message about an idea is conveyed as the street metaphor.

Another technique of architectural humor which is shared by the spoken language as well is Allusion. Charles Moore's Piazza Italia in New Orleans, for example, alludes to the noble history of architectural form and its importance in the history of Italy, at the same time creating a successful urban park. Ben-jamin Latrobe's marine capitals in the new American Capitol of Washington did not borrow from antiquity, but alluded to it in order to suggest the birth of a new order in a new republic.

Metaphor and Allusion are devices which can be expressed through architecture, but which originate in literature. In searching for examples of architectural humor, I found that many of the buildings made use of the opportunities for expression which architectural form itself made available, though sometimes mixed with metaphor and allusion. These architecture-specific techniques may be found alone or in combination with each other. Each is distinctive and can be separately identified in a number of examples which follow illustrate. In the order of their appearance, the names of these techniques are: Distortion, Distortion, Metaphor, Metaphor, and Combinations.

One of the first decisions made in the course of designing a building is the choice of a site. Sometimes a site is selected because it is a good, practical place to put a building. Over time, the surrounding environment may change, resulting in an unintentionally funny situation, such as the classic "Eye-catching" False Fronts, Ornament, Anthropomor-phism, Fawns, Distortion, Mismatch, and Combinations.

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The use of a False front to contradict the purpose of the façade of the real building is another way to have fun with buildings. The absolute best example of this is Erskine's book on the subject. In the famous architecture book "Bizarre Architecture," Somehow in Wisconsin a branch office of the Security State Bank was set up in a trailer in a trailer camp. In an effort to look more like a bank, a trailer was decorated with a pedimented facade which was placed in front of the trailer. The false front emphasizes the familiarity of the real bank, and is an example of the notion of 'securing' implied in the bank's name.

Until until Lotus died that ornament is crime. It was a perfectly normal part of architecture, and was sometimes used to humorous effect. Take the portals of Gothic cathedrals, for instance. The store carvings often depicted fantastic creatures, as well as caricatures of expected figures, such as philosophers, doctors or clergy. In modern times, Robert Venturi highlighted the importance of television in people's lives by planting a gigantic gold television antenna atop the Guild House in Philadelphia, a residence for the elderly.

A child's drawing of a house usually shows a peaked roof, two windows and a door, all arranged as if it were a face. As a matter of fact, many buildings, unintended or otherwise, seem to be about to burst into conversation. Such buildings illustrate Anthropomorphism. Carved into the Joggers' Pavilion in Tokyo, a Japanese architect Kansasami Yamashita built this residence. The door-as-gaping-mouth of the house spills a concrete revenues at the base of a wall. The Mannerist architect, pointing to the persistence of the image of house as face.

Life according to Jacques Barzun

The detection of an apparent flaw in a building almost always guarantees an amused response. A flaw results from a discrepancy between what is and what is expected. It must not be a threatening flaw, such as a broken potted plant. But consider the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Since the structure is stabilized and has endured for centuries, it is not a threat as if it were intended to be that way. The idea that someone would build a leaning building (or not fix it) is quite funny. Another type of flaw is the apparent state of incompleteness. Buffalo has the beginnings of a grand old stone building, with massive stone arches and deep window pockets—but the entire structure is only one storey high. It looks, and is, a truncated. Since the building is occupied, it is clear that no more work will be done. Even though in fact the building is all that remains of a once taller structure, its present shorn-off condition lends itself to the illusion of an incomplete building. Three other types of funny flaws are: 1) apparent misplacement of doors, stairs, windows, etc.; 2) misalignment of graphics and architecture, certain patterns of acceptability are forced together, intentionally or as the result of renovations which disregard the pre-existing condition. Unlike unions emphasize a disparity rather than gloss it over. A charming example is the Kittenger Furniture Factory in Buffalo. The building is a product of the factory. A residential scale bay window was grafted onto the front of an old industrial framed-and-fill factory, and furnished with an artificial fireplace, rug, sidechairs and lamps. This bay window is a protuberance, a mismatch of style and a funny 3-D advertisement. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a turret-of-the-century brick high school with twenty foot high glorious stained glass windows illuminating the stairwells was modernized. The modernization consisted of enclosing the entire structure with a coating of brick, covering up all windows and making no new ones. Only three entries break through the brick. But, in a single humanist gesture, part of the old building was allowed to remain...of the once inspiring colonnaded main entry are four three-story columns busting through the new skin. It is at once pathetic and hilarious.

Another easy-to-recognize technique is combination with another art form to produce a humorous effect. Music, art, sculpture, color may all combine with a building. An enchanting flight of stairs at MIT in Cambridge produces invisible musical notes when it is ascended or descended. Suddenly one's perception of what up and down and stairs are is altered. The combination of graphics and architecture may be humorous, as the Italian Manierists illustrate with the amazing trompe-l'oeil antics of Giulio Romano and others. In New York City, a skyscraper's serrated roofline lends itself as a perfect background for cigarette murals, with the components on the building's top guides the pattern of the heights of the cigarettes which pop up from a pack painted on the side of the building. It is a good marriage of form and function, at the same time appropriate and ridiculous.

Just because it is possible for buildings to be humorous doesn’t mean there is a lot of it in the world. And contrary to the impression given by some of these examples, Buffalo is NOT the only place it can be found! For all the reasons mentioned earlier, it is difficult to create humor in buildings, and overcomplicating public resistance is but one more reason. From reviewing these and many other humorous examples of architecture, certain patterns of acceptability keep appearing. There are five major ways to introduce humor into a building. Without being accused of frivolity or irresponsibility, First, and wit and humor are okay if they are in the details. This allows a building to maintain its responsible appearance while at the same time being playful in its parts. For instance the Piazza in his capitals, as well Frank Gehry in his Guggenheim in Bilbao, in his sidewalk impression, and others.

Second, wit and humor are okay if they further the building's function. This is especially true in small commercial buildings, where an eye-catcher has a time-honored history of acceptability. If a humorous building generates more revenue or higher attendance, then it's okay. Third, it's okay if the client wants, then build it. Moore's Piazza D'Italia was the result of client and public cooperation and suggestion. If the client had direct design input into a project, then humor is one possible and acceptable outcome.

Fourth, sometimes wit and humor solve design for them. The fake facade used to create an inexpensive impression of a bank was a brilliant use of humor to create the impression of a bank allowed under such conditions. Better if the building will probably never be built, fantasy and humor may reign. The false facade will become the new paradigm is not yet determined. A variety of 'new' architectures are being created, from the geodesic humorously with the futility of the design solution, an awkward problem and low budget became art. If humor can make the most of a minimal opportunity, then it's okay.

Fifth, if the building is temporary, anything goes. Fairground architecture is often temporary, and is therefore acceptable under such conditions. Better if it is temporary. Pumphrey in his sidewalk impression, and the false facade were clearly deliberate jokes, most often making a visual pun on the phrase 'news- paper column.'

Wit and humor add meaning and personality to buildings and places. They indicate that man and animals play, only man can make humor and wit and laugh at his own creations. When man has mechanized and executed low the warmth which is increasingly in demand in architecture. The rebellion against flat-topped glass boxes is well under way. Modern architecture itself will become the new paradigm is not yet determined. A variety of 'new' architectures are being created, from the geodesic humorously with the futility of the design solution, an awkward problem and low budget became art. If humor can make the most of a minimal opportunity, then it's okay.

Architectural Mismatches can be created by unrelated styles, materials, or functions are forced together, intentionally or as the result of renovations which disregard the pre-existing condition. Unlike unions emphasize a disparity rather than gloss it over. A charming example is the Kittenger Furniture Factory in Buffalo. The building is a product of the factory. A residential scale bay window was grafted onto the front of an old industrial framed-and-fill factory, and furnished with an artificial fireplace, rug, sidechairs and lamps. This bay window is a protuberance, a mismatch of style and a funny 3-D advertisement. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a turret-of-the-century brick high school with twenty foot high glorious stained glass windows illuminating the stairwells was modernized. The modernization consisted of enclosing the entire structure with a coating of brick, covering up all windows and making no new ones. Only three entries break through the brick. But, in a single humanist gesture, part of the old building was allowed to remain...of the once inspiring colonnaded main entry are four three-story columns busting through the new skin. It is at once pathetic and hilarious.

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He was dismissed in 1792 for "French, born this day 1754. Pierre Charles L'Enfant, having become "unmanageable at the site of the federal Museum. Northwest Gallery of Fine man living in Portland. Foley's work has been repeated on September 27. Furnishings by Bentwood furniture by Steven Foley, a self-trained designer of information. Repeated on September 27.

Joseph Paxton, English engineer, born this day 1801. Also known as a gardener, he master-minded the gardens at Chatsworth in 1828 for the Duke of Devonshire. His early experiments in greenhouse design led him to submit, undertook, his grand plan for the Crystal Palace at the International Exhibition of 1851 held in London.

ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY: Exhibit of the work of 15 regional photographers. A.I.A. Chapters, off Fifth Avenue, Fourth Avenue, 3rd Street, 3rd Street, and 34th Street. Gallery hours: 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Thursday through Sunday.

WHAT IS A CYANOTYPE?: Evening talk about cyanotypes at 7:30. Eric Williams/Anne Johnson Gallery, 221 E. Pine, 623-7078. Gallery hours: 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Thursday through Sunday.

RECENT EVENTS: These are free every day from noon to 1:30. Opening September 1.

HARBOR STEPS: Draft EIS is now available for the project at First and University. There will be a meeting with the Department of Transportation and Land Use. Comment period ends August 20.

LAWRENCE: "Maintenance Art Magik," a showing of works by Mieke Lederer. Chen, with sanitation workers and garbage -- an unlikely topic for art, but one which explores the process and social issues of man and garbage, and of Gallery. August 16-18.

CABIN FEVER: "Canoe Carnival," where you can meet your (hopefully) friendly neighborhood Spencer's Cove. 3:00-6:00 P.M. Pacific Science Center.


August 1981


2. LECTURE: "Solar Site Surveying." How to tell whether solar energy will work for you. Seattle Public Library, Downtown.

3. PIKE PLACE MARKET: The "new" Sanitary Market opens today at Pike Place Market.

4. OPEN HOUSE: The Pilchuk School, built around 1910-a building around 1910. A building with an antique farm wagon with horses. Baby animals, spinnakers and weavers and squaw-dancers will be on hand to highlight the celebration. Look for details of these and other special events in this August issue of the Pike Place Market News.

5. OPENING: The "new" Sanitary Market opens today at Pike Place Market.


7. BIRTHDAY: The Pike Place Market celebrates its 74th Anniversary August 14 and 15. There will be a ball dance con- test on Friday, special musical events and an antique farm wagon with horses. Baby animals, spinnakers and weavers and squaw-dancers will be on hand to highlight the celebration. Look for details of these and other special events in this August issue of the Pike Place Market News.

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ART IN PUBLIC PLACES: The Washington State Arts Commission has published a brochure describing nine sites at Washington schools holding open competitions for direct purchase of art or commissioning of an artist. Deadline for artist submissions is September 15. For more information, call Sandra Perichal in Olympia, 753-8600.


INVENTIONS: Magical machines by John Zangari, Seattle Pacific Science Center, through November 1.

SEPT. 1


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WORKSHOP: Communication Strategies for Architects, by Roy Backman, Associate Professor from the Department of Architecture, University of Washington, October 2-3, 7-9 PM. Admission free. For further information, telephone 682-7669.

WORKSHOP: Architecture and Design. October 4-5, 5-10 PM. Admission free. For further information, telephone 682-7669.

SWING MOSAIC: "The Architectural Education: The Three-Year Master's Program," work of students currently engaged in the program at the University of Washington, Art Center, September 4-5, 10-4, Admission free. For further information, telephone 682-7669.

CABINET: "The Architectural Education: The Three-Year Master's Program," work of students currently engaged in the program at the University of Washington, Art Center, September 4-5, 10-4, Admission free. For further information, telephone 682-7669.

EXHIBIT: "Architectural Education: The Three-Year Master's Program," work of students currently engaged in the program at the University of Washington, Art Center, September 4-5, 10-4, Admission free. For further information, telephone 682-7669.

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Grant Gustafson

on to give the four requirements of a creative object: it must be 1) unusual, 2) appropriate, 3) a cogitation (imagination beyond the current state of the art) and 4) a condemnation of meaning. To encourage creativity we may lose predictable lives so as to provide greater opportunity for unexpected encounters and actions prompting creativity.

As the talk continued, audience in­
terest seemed to wane without some visual stimulus. The speaker also began to reiterate his points. The question/answer period brought out more of Howard’s sincerity and commitment, dissipating some of the mixed emotions and cynicism among listeners. His mission —
to demand original thinking — dis­
regarded his work, as an example. Whether this work fulfilled his own strict standards was never revealed, to some a cop out. But, as he said that evening, “if you came to see my work, then you came for the wrong reason. Slides have be­
come architecture and the images are now being ripped off by other archi­

tects. To see my buildings they must be seen in the flesh, as architecture was meant to be seen.”

In other words, “do as I say, not as I do.”

As designers we are inundated with visual images which are mass marketed around the world. However, we must lead a refreshing but discontinuing interruption, compelling many that evening to ex­
amine their own pursuits for ways in which to inject more creative action.

The premise of City Fair is a marvel­
ous one — to celebrate creative solu­
tions to urban problems. A monumen­
tal undertaking by its organizers, staff, and hundreds of dedicated volunteers, City Fair is more than its exhibits; it is an urban forum for issues to be raised, alter­

ations discussed, and information and experiences shared. Yet for all the in­
creased publicity and the caliber of the exhibit itself, this year’s event failed to draw a large audience or to impress many of those who attended. Why?

Timing certainly played a part. City Fair opened on a sunny July Fourth weekend. Traditionally, “heavy” issues do not go hand-in-hand with hot dogs, ice cream, and fireworks displays, even when spoon-fed with ample helpings of entertainment, as City Fair tried to do. It was not the appropriate time to go shopping, either, and City Fair was a veritable supermarket, its store win­
dows enticing consumers to buy an idea or an issuer or a service.

There should have been something for everyone. But Seattle is inundated with fairs and festivals. Numerous alternatives for a person’s limited time and monies means that some events will be sacrificed for others. City Fair may have been this year’s sacrificial lamb.

It would be well for the City Fair folk to ask some searching questions. First­
ly, is a “designer’s showcase” a fair? Some highly polished and remarkably diversified displays shared the stage with “timed-clock” entries which ideally would make a strong center of the family area.

Did all that effort result in “all the fun of a county fair”? No. County fairs are planned only minimally. They rely upon entertainments and events in which the crowd partakes. City Fair was so planned that the spontaneity and vernacular character of a county fair — or city life, for that matter — was lost to the public.

Secondly, the “supermarket” ap­
proach to information giving must be questioned. Exhibit goers have short attention spans; faced with thousands of photographs and words in fifty dif­
f erent settings, they undergo “informa­
tion overload.” The exhibits weary rather than stimulate the viewer; he or she remembers little or none of the experience. Used properly, exhibits are an ideal medium for focusing attention. But at City Fair, they competed for at­
tention and could not successfully ful­
fill their functions.

The workshops further added to the confusion. Spread out over ten days, they ran the gamut from public housing to improvisation, from food co-ops to stress management. Had it been possi­
ble to provide one day for each of the major issues — health, food, housing, energy, and environment — these work­
shops would not have been so poorly attended. Better publicity would also have allowed for the kind of public dialogue that was envisioned by City Fair staff but rarely materialized.

Reducing the scope of City Fair would produce an event that, while not so flashy, would have a greater and more lasting impact. Entertainment may attract crowds but is not necessarily appropriate to the message of City Fair. City Fair is a celebration, but it is not a frivolous or an educational experience that would profit from dropping the connotation entire­
ly. After all, a fair has cotton candy. City Fair promised us cotton candy, but it didn’t deliver.
CONTRIBUTORS NOTES

Dennis Andersen is the Library Specialist in charge of photographs and architectural drawings at the University of Washington Libraries.

Steve Cecil has been studying the history of planning and architectural projects designed for downtown Seattle which were never built. An exhibition of some of the projects he has encountered will be held at the AIA offices in late October and November of this year.

Larry Kreisman is the director of a local exhibit design firm and was the designer of the Piano Craft Guild housing exhibit at this year's City Fair.

Ann Schubert is currently practicing architecture in Buffalo, New York. She lectured on Humor and Wit in Architecture last February at the Fantasy Conference sponsored by the San Francisco Institute for Urban Studies.

CANNON BEACH—There were walruses, mermaids, dragons, frogs, dinosaurs and even a castle or two Saturday at the 17th annual Cannon Beach Sand Castle Contest.

Overall winner of the contest was a "dribble castle" called "Hobbitat" made by dribbling sand into the shapes of towers and bridges.

Judging of all the sand work was done on the basis of concept, overall appearance, intricacy and efforts for teamwork. Entrants had three hours to complete their work before judging began.

There were 745 persons participating in the competition this year, divided into age groups of 8 and under, 12 and under, 16 and under, and 17 and over. Most worked with a crew of five or more, making a total of 391 sand creations.

Some creations made political or social statements: save the whales, keep on recycling, a memorial to John Lennon, a nuclear reactor with a gleaming sun in the foreground, a Mount St. Helens model with a triumphant "Harry Lives" written in front.

Others were pure fancy. There was a mermaid embracing a unicorn, a dragon seemingly certain to shoot flames at any moment and a group of Artesians "or what we think are Artesians," said Margaret Finley, one of the builders. "We just came up with the idea last night."

AMALFI - Chiostro del Paradiso

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