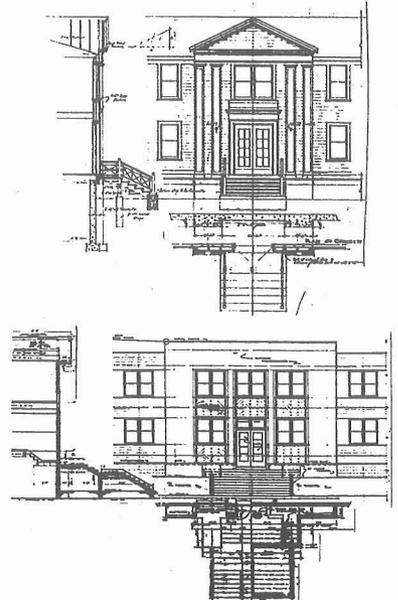
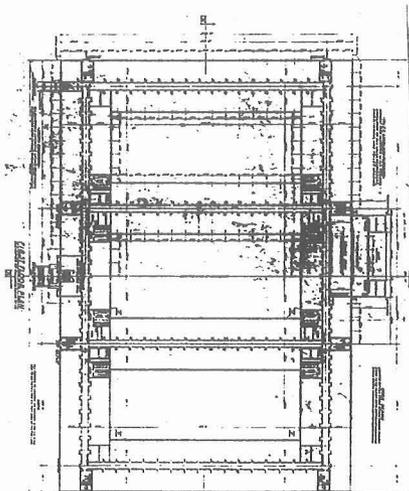
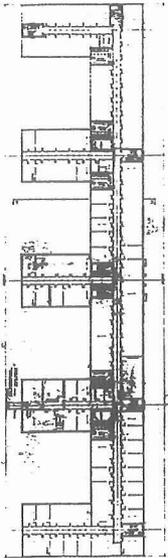


KEN HAYES

Aerial Photo of Ottawa, National Aerial Photo Survey, Line 4519, Roll 54-15 #202 (1954)



All Plans and Elevations: Cartographic + Architectural Archives division, National Archives of Canada

WAR SIRENS

No Proper Names, - those all public buildings carry-, No Patrimony, Nor Architect's Name, No History, No Name-of-the-Father, No Privileged Voice. Outside of Rhetoric, in them Architecture does not Speak: Hysteron Proteron, Forces Supercedes Charm and in doing so reveals its Ambiguous Agonism. Instead: Immediately Political Configurations, Collective Assemblies of Enunciation, obscurer but more powerful, like SIRENS on the Periphery of Culture, full of deathly Allure. War is a matter of ~~Spe~~ the Voice, but not of Speech, of Song! Heralded by War Songs, the Sirens of Asceticism. We sing of the Beauty of War. Death LYRICS. Songs for-of the Dead. Do they singSPEAK for Everyone? That at Least is their Intention. Is this then Beauty, TOTALizing Beauty, which, like the sirensSIRENSof Circe, NoMan can resist? War Songs. War SirenSIRENS Funny, isn't it, How the Second Great War is perfectly summed by the SONGSsung?, That Those who lived through it remember mostly The Songsongs. ? During War Every Thing SingsSINGS! Not Architecture Parlante: anArchitecturewhich Sings! SSlogans on Every Voice, in Every Ear!!.

"A" BUILDING

"B" BUILDING

"C" BUILDING

"D" BUILDING

"E" BUILDING

"F" BUILDING

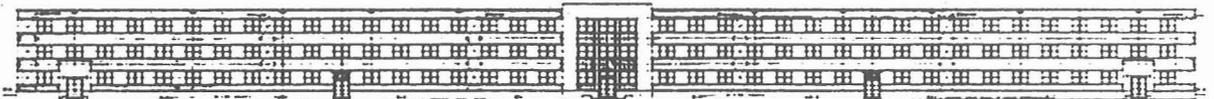
"G" BUILDING

"H" BUILDING

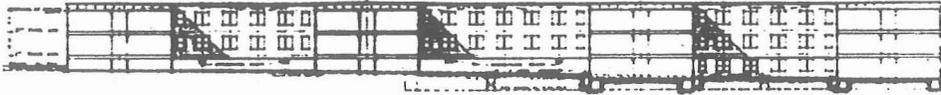
"I" BUILDING

THE TASK AT HAND: THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE HISTORICAL MOMENT

The "temporary" buildings built in Ottawa for the ~~Admin~~ administration of the Second World War seem to me to constitute what might be called a phenomenon in the architectural representation of power. Called forth in a moment of crisis, like a civilian reserve, these buildings expose the mechanisms of control, and do so in the Capitol, the very place that power was already to have been on show. In them a strange doubling occurred, an uncanny supersession: the crusty gothic buildings molt to reveal the shiny white larva of Modernism. To suggest that they might be the inculcation (origins) of Modernism in Canada could only cause incomprehension, and the disavowal of those who would prefer its transmission to have been through properly "cultural" channels. These buildings have been literally "out of the question".



As idf, occasioned by the circumstances of a nation at war, we were allowed a prophetic vision of the empty possibilities of Modernism then never allowed to forget, even as we reiterate them in our hysteric amnesia. Modernism, like war, made claim of crisis to liberate the most radical reduction.



All other building activities halt, or rather are absorbed into a single gigantic effort involving vast expenditures that leave the populace organized but incapable of properly political action. Collective Assemblies of Enunciation. These are after all obviously not individual buildings, with a claim on unique subjectivity, they ultimately constitute one building, without parts, where nothing shows division of distinction:— one is a women's residence, other are offices, acephalic, command headquarters, undoubtedly present, shows nowhere different. All that is possible, indeed all that is desirable is the continuance of the effort toward a goal that seems infinitely distant. One here must identify only with the task at hand. Each one must do his part: children buy Victory Bonds with pennies. These buildings compel one to live in a here and now, but not as an access of the concrete, this is the here and now of a total mobilization, entirely provisional, deliberately unsettling us from the earth. There's no life like χ it. Totalitarianism did not occur just in Germany or Russia, it occurred wherever it was opposed/exposed as well.

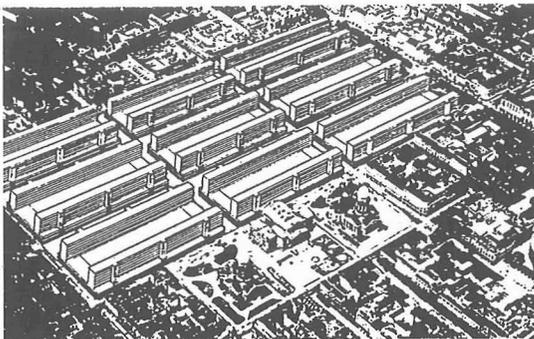


Someone once professed to me an admiration for the architects of χ M the nineteen-fifties, and made it clear he admired them in their self-order, their capability, almost as functionaries. I then think of myself the times I was told what I lacked was composition, self-composure.

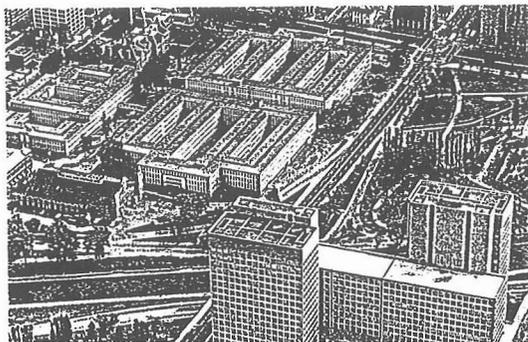
The demands of the new age are felt keenest and the architect is repelled by the sure knowledge of building, that which proceeds without him. The first buildings are dignified by the application of clapboard classical details around the entrances. Later these are translated into a modern idiom without any alteration of the syntactic order of the elements. Transformation from classical to modern. Both atavistic and modern.



Apparently empty of consequence for the city, they are part of its history, but themselves leave no legacy of form. But is this so? Don't all χ the subsequent buildings take place under their sign, the sign of the always temporary measure, already invalid, already vanished?



L. Hilbeslemer: Project for a New Commercial centre for Berlin, 1926.
In the Shadow of Mies: Ludwig Hilbeslemer, Chicago Art Institute.



"B" building prior to demolition, Feb. 3, 1977.
Ottawa Journal, Ottawa Civic Archive, New DND Headquarters, Foreground

Let us dispel the idea that may form that we're talking here of ~~the~~ the austerity of a cool architectural Modernism. Their austerity is in every way different than that of architectural Modernism. However much the avant-gardes New Objectivity tried to still in ~~itself~~ the tendency to affect, it necessarily did so as a trope, polemical form, as rhetoric. Compare these buildings with the proposals of Hilberseimer, the most radical in this regard. Hilberseimer's 1926 project for the insertion of a set of regular blocks into the centre of the city of Berlin can only be understood dialectically with that city, as critique. The war administration buildings simply disregard the city, even as they conform blandly: au dessus de la melee of the capitalist city, not engaged at all. What is most close to war seems most distant from conflict; silent, calm, rigidly composed.. A state of crisis. Modernism too, made the claim of crisis to liberate the most radical reductions, to demand of us the severest self-repressions, always with the promise of the complete revision of a life grown unbearable in even the smallest things.



But let us also dispel right away the idea that these buildings ~~may~~ have a simply "objective" austerity, the consequence of measures necessary for the war and a condition of their temporality. This austerity is not a consequence: it is an exhortation to austerity, to perseverance, to life lived provisionally, to the endurance of temporary privations. They call up all the Stoic virtues. These austerity measures are temporary. But, like the temporary escalation of bureaucratic and state intervention justified by the war, we know that they'll be difficult to free ourselves of. The end of the epidemic also exposes us to the means that permit such an end, namely those mechanisms which discipline, control and irradiate the social sphere.



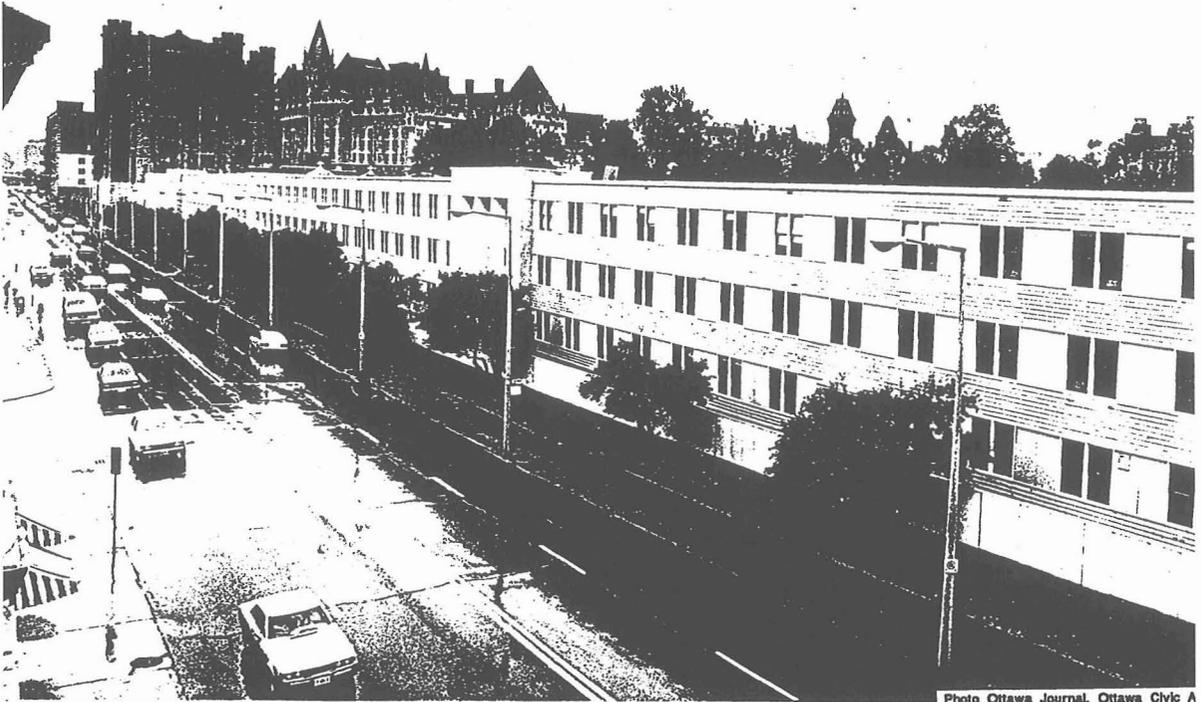
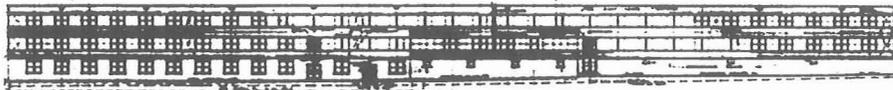


Photo Ottawa Journal, Ottawa Civic A

The mystery of these buildings is not the same as that of the buildings that surround them, their darkness or secrecy, it is their radiance: an effect of invalidation shines oddly about them. Like a Freudian revelation they are blatant but remain unseen, justified by the moment, and afterward an aporia always overlooked. The "grey eminences" of old power, the hidden operators discernable only vaguely in the direction of events, in their sudden turns, the untying of knots, emerge: a secret society in broad daylight.



Afterward, these buildings, interim measures only, dis-ease us when they persist, as some did for forty years, like a lodger who moves in and stays overly long, becoming mistaken for the host by the newly arrived. It is the decorum of power they disturb by actualizing its potential and exhibiting force itself, but then persisting beyond its justification, long after it should have been removed from the stage. I'm inconsolable that I never saw them there.



Trying to speak of these buildings architecturally is hopeless. We could call them radically atavistic types, say that they recall Durand's rational permutations of inert forms, or Hilbeseimer's museal Gros-Stad, but we know them to have no such provenance. Products of other criteria, the irregular economics of a country at war, on appropriated land, their formal consistency belies their novelty, as if they participated in a formal world mostly unknown to us, only intimated in our daily lives. The rapidity with which they were built itself suggests an invasion, the setting up of a camp.



"...the Veterans' Land Act has outlined a policy which covers rural home ownership... However, the equity capable of being won by the veteran depends on some very important qualification... there is a degree of control of both the veteran and his property; for the competence of his family in respect of rural living may be taken into account... The subsidy and low rate of interest accorded the veteran going on the land ... cannot easily be duplicated when urban housing comes to be considered. In view of the acceptance by the veteran who goes on the land of somewhat fewer amenities than are to be found in urban centres, the question arises as to how far it would be sound public policy to increase unduly the attraction of urban centres. There is no doubt that housing projects will be a favoured form of post-war reconstruction policy, and questions of town planning, zoning, low-cost production, financing and municipal, provincial and Dominion cooperation will require attention. In Canada, the time is ripe to anticipate and prevent any further growth of slums, whilst engaging in determined efforts at slum clearance immediately the war is over.

R. England, A Commentary on Civil Reestablishment of Veterans in Canada. (1942)



CMHC Housing, Chicoutimi, early 1960's, The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation:
40 years of Excellence, Canadian Government Publications, 1985

JUST WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES TODAY'S HOMES SO DIFFERENT, SO APPEALING? A CODICIL ON "CIVIL REESTABLISHMENT"

The first National Housing Act was passed in 1938, primarily as a belated response to the effects of the Depression. Before this Act could result in any homebuilding it was curtailed by the rise of the War. In 1941 an Order-in-Council created Wartime Housing Limited to undertake provision of housing urgently required by the workers who had been attracted to major urban centres by government exhortation to work in wartime industries. This rudimentary agency had as its major task negotiation with municipal governments and financial provisions: in the next nine years it produced 45,930 dwelling units with an investment of \$253,869,000.

A second National Housing Act, "An Act to Promote the Construction of New Homes, the Repair and Modernization of Existing Houses, the Improvement of Housing and Living Conditions, and Expansion of Employment in the Postwar Period" was passed in 1944, following the recommendations of the Curtis committee on post-war reconstruction, which itself followed the Marsh Report of 1943, Canada's charter for post-war social security, a milestone in the enunciation of social responsibility by government. In 1945 this was furthered the passage of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation Act, which was able to build a substantial staff of well trained and experienced personnel. Its main activities were, however, in the field of mortgage financing; only gradually did the corporation acquire staff members who were interested in and knowledgeable about the disciplines of community planning, architecture and social welfare. Until the creation of the Ontario Housing Corporation in 1964, there were not more than two dozen full-time jobs in the field of public housing outside of the CMHC.

By 1960-61 the number of approvals required for a project by the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority exceeded fifty and the last fifteen years of efforts had produced under 15,000 dwelling units. During the years 1958-63 only thirty-eight dwelling units were actually completed for occupancy by low-income families in the Metropolitan Toronto Area. In retrospect the main hindrance to production appears to have been the desire on the part of highly trained and specialized officials of the federal agency to achieve excellence in the Canadian Public Housing Programme.

All information from Rose, Albert, Canadian Housing Policies (1935-80), Butterworth + Co., 1980

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Hayes, K., 'Austerity Measures', *Splinter*, no. 3, 1990. Co-edited with Barry Isenor.