

## **Insects and Other Fireworks**

Will Alsop:

Will Alsop successfully put across both his architecture and his personality when he addressed a crowded and eager audience at Pentagram. In the lapidary words of Chairrnar Martin, "No British architect beyond the lustrous quartet is mentioned with more enthusiasm" and we now understand why.

Alsop feared A&A was a plot to divert architects fees to artists. However like many architects he even liked artists quite a lot for some of the time and employed them whenever possible. "The best relationship between architect and artist is when the architect does not think of him as an artist and vice versa but as fellow members of a team to change the environment - members who should be natural allies in the face of such unnecessary passengers as quantity surveyors. It's a matter of trust, I enjoy working with artists and that's the only way to promote the relationship." The only practical advice he could give came from Bremen where he is a professor. Asked how to bring the two sides together, he advised them to become friends and suggested they should build a bar where artists and architects could talk to each other. "The Germans. having agreed something is a good idea, do it: here, we dont." Rationalism is the part of the intellect that we develop in order to avoid being embarrassed by the spirit. Decoration allows the lazy and slothful to believe they are dealing with the spirit - when they are not. The spirit itself, which lifts us out of ourselves is embodied in aesthetic experience.

The slide show began with early influences. More House, Northampton, by Peter Behrens which people said was ugly but he, as a child already liked for the flat roof and the C.R.Mackintosh interiors for Basset Lowke. His imagination also ran along the beaches and boat hards of the North Sea coast: a lifeboat station with its turntable. We acquire a history and connections "which the Paternoster designs do not allow for" - but which can be brought out knowingly by artists such as Turner and Richard Long and Andy Goldwater or unknowingly, by the Ribblesdale viaduct for instance.

Alrop uses paintings to explain ideas and as an excuse to think about the project. "Anything valuable is designed in 20 minutes' - but worked out in as many months or years. We

were shown the Regional Government offices at Marseilles, situated on and over a motorway but somehow, "related to moving by bicycle". It was a non-hierarchical design, but the president ended up on top, "because he had to keep an eye on the sea. " The elliptical council chamber was separated from the offices" as a political act''. He was now working on the facade with Brian Clarke, "who should have been involved from the beginning"

The designs for the Potsdamer Platz with Broce McLean are similarly dependent on a strategy developed through paintings. We then moved through the inventive designs for which he is famous. Tottenham Hale station with the McLean murals; the water theme which made him think of floating flowers resulting in a network of floating ~9n bridges and rafts and Cardiff, where the proposed fresh water lake with a dam from Pier Head to Penarth Dock is the catalyst for work, in addition to the now well known elliptical Bay VIewing Centre.

A scheme to light the dam by sheep wearing miners helmets having been rejected, he has worked with Gareth Jones on a series of event-experiences en route, such as artificial swans to enliven the view from the half-way house cafe. A Jubilee line station," as pleasant an experience as South Kensington with its light and garden"; holiday apartments at La Baule, "an act of love"; a communications tower inspired by the "endless" effect of Brancusi's sculptute; a boxing hall for the Berlin Olympics

Alsop used to paint before he trained as an architect, then while working on a project for the Riverside Studia;, Hammersmith, he saw McLean's paintings and got interested again and began to use paintings to show his ideas to clients without being too specific. They liked it: unlike the sharp lines of a drawing pen, people felt they could engage in discussion without being threatened. It also helped him to introduce colour into the city without it being an afterthought - a pathetic attempt to cheer things up.

' 'You explore ideas whether or not you have a client" - practising your art, discovering possibilities, pleasing oneself - this in the end will produce better buildings. Will Alsop, architect-artist extraordinaire still needs to integrate with artists to ride the wave of creativity. It

was difficult to leave such an inspiring lecture without feeling optimistic about the possibilities of the future.

Hans Brill