



Foreign Parts

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INTRODUCTION

Images of Africa in the 1950's, snapshots of dugouts passing the mailboat [fig 1], a pet monkey, a car crossing a river by ferry [fig 2], show a world that was hard to move in and cut up by harsh natural landscapes in ways that were distinctly pre-modern. These indige-



fig 1 *Outside Freetown*



fig 2 *Nigerian ferry*

nous settings are at odds with the kind of images appearing around the same time in western books and journals about African architecture. Kultermann, Richards and Fry and Drew¹ emphasised the continuities between their sites of research and practice, portraying the buildings of modern architecture as joined, if somewhat spaced parts of a continuous spatial project. In their narratives, modern architecture in Africa shared many dimensions, physical qualities, terms of reference, technology, engineers and programmes.

These singular narratives fashion an image of disciplinary legitimacy and continuity. In imaging modernism, we fill in the gaps that really exist between the actual buildings and visualise them fitting into a connected

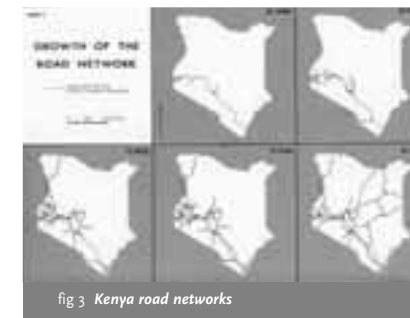


fig 3 *Kenya road networks*

context in which they construct a series or an environment that is seamlessly new and empty. The media of modernism, of framed and retouched photographic images, tours and exhibitions link a series of highly dispersed buildings and make us see the buildings of modern architecture as collective discourse.

The significance of these narratives is that they allow us to focus on architecture as a trace of institutional networks and flows of investment. Soja observed as early

¹ Kultermann, Udo. 1963. *Neues Bauen in Afrika*. Verlag. Munich: Ernst Wasmuth Tübingen; 1969. *New Directions in African Architecture*. London: Studio Vista; Richards, J.M. ed. 1961.

New Buildings in the Commonwealth. London: The Architectural Press; Fry, Maxwell and Jane Drew. 1956. *Tropical Architecture in the Humid Zones*. London: Batsford.

as 1968² that modernism in Africa has to be understood spatially, not only through the nodes of infrastructure but in the connectivity between nodes [fig 3]. Following Lerner, he illustrates how modernism is linked with the growth of media, capital and trade, which all create forms of flow between physically dispersed sites. In these terms, understanding modern architecture as a singular discourse provides insights into the spatiality of capital. Moreover, as King shows, the intertwining of colonialism with global trade and investment has shaped many of these linkages and connections within the spatial logic of the metropolitan/peripheral relationship³. One can map the dispersal of modern architecture within Africa onto, for example, a map of educational exchanges with the west, which in turn conflate with earlier established routes of trade.

So despite the physical separateness of many buildings within modern architecture in Africa, the sense of their connectivity is neither professionally neutral nor without a critical value. This vision, however, has several shortcomings. A reading that effectively sees buildings only in terms of the conditions of their production is necessarily myopic. Such a reading, for instance, discounts the continuity of built form once their use value within a system of production is exhausted. It abstracts buildings from their immediate context and excludes the other layers of connectivity, specifically indigenous ones that exist within and around them. In doing so, it negates the temporal life of buildings and the investment of other social actors in their reproduction as they age and change.

In the last decade there has been a resurgence of interest in the production of modern architecture in sub-Saharan Africa⁴. It is more and more well documented how in the 1950's, the colonies of France, England, Italy and Belgium recruited architects and planners from the metropolis because there were few, if any, locally trained ones. Many of these expatriates brought with them a passion for modern architecture to these exotic, foreign parts. The metropole's interest in their work was reflected in the publication of work from the colonies until the 1960's, which was the end of colonialism in Africa.

What has remained less scrutinised is the post-colonial life of the same buildings. At this stage some of the continuities that existed between modern buildings in the colonies began to unravel. The physical remnants of the earlier period lost some of the spatial logic behind them as the colonial institutions were reformed. The new generation of locally trained architects developed more multiple and less programmatically bound architecture: a series of more fragmented experiments, linked by their reference, often critical, sometimes anachronistic, to the original and foreign model of postwar colonial modernism⁵. By the 1980's, under

the impact of structural adjustment policies, many of the remnants of social services that sustained modern architecture practically collapsed. The built traces of these programmes were even more cut off from each other, spare parts for an engine that no longer even started.

What remains of this modernist project in the post-colonial era? One way to look at the modernist project is to see it as fragmented, inconclusive, even abandoned. I am unconvinced though that modernism in Africa is simply debris; like most Africans, I wonder about how to make use of its spare parts. What elements, formally speaking, resist appropriation, and what elements support new and hybridised spatial uses? How can the notion of a modernist language be rethought, given our experience of modernism in Africa? Is the fragmentation of modernism that accompanied the movement's dispersal into Africa something of a positive quality that offers scope for human agency through imagination, experimentation and inversion? Is this not a quality that much contemporary architecture strives towards, in Africa and elsewhere?

DESTRUCTIVE MODERNISMS

The most prolific era of modern architecture's spatial dispersal in Africa began after the Second World War, peaked around the period of Independence from 1957 to the mid 1960's, and then tailed off towards the end of the decade. Quantitatively speaking, a fair body of built work within Africa relates to the canon of modernism that had developed in the colonising nations of Belgium, Germany, Italy, France and England. Between 1945 and 1952, for instance, the French spent £56 million on built infrastructure, some 20% of their public expenditure⁶. The Belgian development plan of 1949 budgeted £285 million, half of which was for transport infrastructure. The British government's capital expenditure in Uganda between 1955 and 1960 was £30 million. The amounts of money spent on development were offset against the vast profitability of the colonial enterprise. Most, if not all modern buildings were linked, directly or indirectly, to programmes of development. The typologies of modern architecture in Africa reflected the history and geography of colonial expansion: ports, hotels, housing, banks, post offices, military buildings, hospitals, schools and, around the time of Independence, universities.

Although much development was carried out with the consent of local elites⁷, tensions soon became evident between those sites and subjects that benefited from development and those excluded. Even the generally optimistic portrayal of modern architecture in early sur-

veys such as Kultermann's already hint at the unevenness that accompanies development:

“temporary” districts...have been put up by the millions in Africa, and – although intended for temporary use – have become permanent housing: the bidonvilles, the tin-can towns, and similar shanties at the edges of urban centres stand as testimony...⁸

At the same time as linking the sites of modernism with other nodes and centres in the world systems, the infrastructure of colonial modernism destroyed connections that existed within their context. For critics of developmentalism, such as Escobar, the continuity of the modernist project was at the price of continuity with and within the traditional environments in which it was placed⁹. Large scale engineering projects such as the Volta Dam in Ghana, for instance, displaced thousands of villagers. The establishment of commercial agriculture broke down traditional systems of working land. Forest habitats were cut down. Urban housing fragmented traditional family structures. The list is endless.

The counter discourse to colonial modernism proposes disassembling the project, if necessary through processes of physical demolition. Fanon's position on this predicts actions taken in Algeria, Ghana, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Kenya, the Congo and Mozambique:

‘The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters. To wreck the colonial world is henceforward a mental picture of action

which is very clear, very easy to understand and which may be assumed by each one of the individuals which constitute the colonized people.’¹⁰

Yet Fanon's proposal is, in effect, as utopian as the colonial modernism it proposed eliminating. A network cannot be inhabited, any more than a continent can be built over. The fate of post-colonial modernism was, instead, to mutate into fluid and contradictory situations that Africans learned to negotiate in creative ways¹¹. As the new national states foundered, economically and politically, as institutional linkages between projects became more tenuous, informal networks were set up as compensation that simultaneously appropriated and reorganised modern spaces. As contrast to the broad spatial narratives of colonial modernism, myriad stories of tactical survival now come out of Africa. As Simone says young urban residents in Africa, it is impossible to conflate their approaches to self-organisation with the sorts of behaviour expected of developing citizens. His proposal is that we try to adopt a posture of watching and understanding that will make visible their instrumentality:

‘I am interested here in more diffuse but no less concrete ways in which diverse urban actors are assembled and act. What are some of the ways in which urban residents are building a particular emotional field in the city, trying to restore a very physical sense of connection with each other?’¹²

Simone's approach of using stories to illuminate moments of change and creativity within post-colonial African cities can be built on by locating such moments spatially, to use the persistence of architectural form as a way of reading and understanding such transformations. As examples, I want to look at two buildings, in South and West Africa respectively, and to locate them in the multiple geographies of flow and fragmentation that characterise the contexts through which they were

2 Soja, Edward. 1968. *The Geography of Modernization in Kenya*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

3 King, Anthony D. 1976. *Colonial Urban Development*. London: Routledge and Paul 1980. *Buildings and Society: Essays on the social development of the built environment*. London: Routledge and Paul 1990. *Urbanism, Colonialism and the World-Economy: Cultural And Spatial Foundations Of The World Urban System*. London and New York: Routledge.

4 See 'Lagos' in Rem Koolhaas et al. 2000. *Mutations*. Barcelona: Actar, de Meulder, Bruno. 2000. *Kuvuande Mbote: Een Eeuw Koloniale Architectuur en Stedenbouw in Kongo*. Antwerp: Houtekiet; Casciato, M and E d'Orgeix eds. 2005. *Modern Architecture in Africa*. Paris: Docomomo.

5 Le Roux, Hannah. (2004) *The post-colonial architecture of Ghana and Nigeria*. *Architectural History*, Vol 47 p361-392.

6 Hailey (1956) *An African Survey*.

7 *On the eve on decolonisation in the Gold Coast the proposed expenditure for educational buildings was increased fivefold by Nkrumah's party*.

8 Kultermann, 1969, op. cit. p22.

9 Escobar, Arturo. 1995. *Encountering Development: The making and unmaking of the third world*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

10 Fanon, Frantz. 1968. *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove Press. P41.

11 See, for example, the descriptions of urban life in MacGaffrey, Janet and Remy Bazenguissa-Ganga. 2000. *Congo-Paris: Transnational traders on the margins of the Law*. London: The International African Institute; Enwezor, O. et al (eds). 2002. *Under siege: Four African Cities*. Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz and Simone, AbdouMalik. 2004. *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

12 Simone, 2004, op cit, p32.



fig 4 Aiton Court from street



fig 5 Aiton Court, 1938



fig 6 Aiton Court original plan

constructed, understood, used and altered. In these examples, we come to see modern architecture as a resource with unforeseen capacities to be re-imagined, inverted, and recycled. Through these processes, the two buildings reintegrate with those contexts that at their time of construction were cut off from them. At the same time, they serve as ports of entry into modern and global realms, as aspects of their critical location within post-colonial geographies.

AITON COURT, HILLBROW

Aiton Court is an apartment building in Johannesburg's highrise flatland of Hillbrow. When the building was designed in the mid 1930's, it developed the formal approach of the seminal Peterhouse, which, with vehicular circulation at ground floor level, strip windows, a roof terrace with solarium and an entrance hood and v-pole explicitly cites the work of le Corbusier [fig 4]. The architects of Aiton Court were Angus Stewart and Bernard Cooke; Cooke had worked on the drawings of Peterhouse, designed with Rex Martienssen, leader of the so-called Transvaal Group, to whom le Corbusier had dedicated the second volume of the *Oeuvre Complet*. Images of Aiton Court similarly circulated in modern movement literature, published in *the Architectural Review* (1937) and *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*. Aiton Court was pioneering in its architects' adoption of a modernist formal language, reflecting the Transvaal Group's preoccupation with a visual modernity. Aiton Court, however, can be located in another mobile locus. The production of the pre- and post-war urbanity of Johannesburg relied largely on capital from émigré families who were shifting reserves from a risky Europe to the security of brick and mortar investment.

Aiton Court is shaped by a highly speculative approach to building, whereby the land was built over at a very high density. The relatively light structure and repetitive elements allowed an economy in construction that was attractive to developers. The apartments are arranged in two parallel blocks, a four storey one on the northern street edge and an eight storey block on the south side, each the full width of the site [fig 5 + 6]. Between the blocks was a courtyard. Herbert Prins, an architect who lived there in the 1950's, said 'it was a beautiful place. You came in through a red pivot door, that was usually open, and there was a fountain in the courtyard'¹³. The apartments were designed to tight minima for single occupancies [fig 7]. The upper floors of the rear block contain rooms with shared ablutions, while the apartments are studio flats with an enclosed corner for coo-



fig 7 Aiton Court interior, 1938

king. The position of the caretaker's flat at ground floor level, overlooking the street and entrance foyer allows for substantial control of the building.

The servants' rooms on the roof of the rear block represented a particularly local inversion. Up until the 1960's, most cleaning staff were male African migrant workers. The visibility of these workers riled colonial sensibilities and they were located in either in the rear of the property, or, when land values precluded this, on the rooftop in rooms set back from the street line. Where in most cities there are penthouses, in Johannesburg are tiny, high windows [fig 8].



fig 8 Aiton Court servants quarters

In the post second world war period¹⁴, older buildings became subject to rent control. It was impossible to raise rents beyond inflation rates, and then only by appeal to a board. Finding capital for major repairs, such as to waterproofing or lifts, was difficult. With the return on investment no longer secure, smaller buildings like Aiton Court became subject to speculation. By the late 1970's sex workers began to use the premises, something that seemed to justify the illegality of the building's next reoccupation. From the early 1980's, Johannesburg's inner city was becoming racially mixed. The process was an uneven one. The suburb was still deemed a white group area, and landlords were breaking the law by accommodating tenants from other race groups.

The mother of Aiton Court's current owner was one such 'illegal' black tenant. In the early 1980's, after she was evicted from a flat in the building across the road in the early 1980's she moved, in desperation, into

Aiton Court. She then became the caretaker of the building and, in her daughter's words, 'found a cesspool of crime and cleaned it out'¹⁵. In the mid 1980's she bought the building with an exiled politician and proceeded to allow it to be used in a strategic way, so that it became a strategic point in the desegregation of Hillbrow.

The mid 1980's in South Africa was a time of fervent underground political activity. The opposition African National Congress was banned and in exile, but the organisation, its cadres and sympathisers nonetheless operated through covert networks, creating structures that aimed to transform civic life and disrupt apartheid governance. The response of the state was to enact legislation to curtail movement, and to give the police unlimited rights to detain and even execute activists. The role of Aiton Court as a site of resistance within this context was threefold. It became a building within which coloured and Indian tenants were welcome. Some of the flats in the building housed operatives who were in hiding from the police, and the courtyard, the fountain since covered over, became the locus for fund raising affairs that supported the legal costs of detainees and political activities. According to the owner, the building's spatiality supported such clandestine work: 'they all knew how to escape out the back stairway into the alley'.

Amongst the organisations that benefited from the activities at Aiton Court was Actstop, a support network for tenants who faced eviction from inner city flats on the grounds of race. In the wake of their activities, as well as redlining policies by banks, African tenants started to move into Hillbrow and most of the remaining white residents fled, along with many middle class Indian and coloured tenants. Speculation amongst building owners became widespread, and many of the blocks owned under sectional title went bankrupt. By the mid 1990's many buildings in Hillbrow were slums. Tenancies of up to twenty people per room were reported¹⁶. Services, particularly lifts, broke down and were not replaced. Electricity and water supplies to many buildings were suspended by the municipality as the buildings ran up appears in payment, either due to administrative neglect or the pocketing of charges by the landlords. Within a decade many of the buildings of Hillbrow became severely rundown. The area also saw a rapidly growing influx of immigrants from other African states, particularly Nigeria, the Congo, Zimbabwe and Malawi. For new arrivals, Hillbrow offered anonymous,

¹³ Interview with Herbert Prins, Johannesburg, July 2005.
¹⁴ See Morris, Alan. 1999. *Bleakness and Light: Inner city transition in Hillbrow, Johannesburg*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press.

¹⁵ Interview with Rehana Rawat, Johannesburg, 2005.
¹⁶ HBRI, 2001. *Hillbrow Berea Regeneration Initiative*. Johannesburg.

cheap rooms to rent and social networks, often located within the same buildings, through which opportunities for survival could be negotiated.

Hillbrow, by the end of the twentieth century, was notoriously lawless. The Nigerian community had become associated with drug dealing and linked with the sex industry, which had become institutionalised in about 25 buildings in the area. In some cases, the owners of buildings lost all control to armed gangs who both lived in the buildings and extorted rent from other tenants.

During this period, Aiton Court, perhaps by virtue of its benign relationship with Actstop and its ownership by a resident Indian family, remained a relatively secure and well-managed building. Gates and a security guard's booth were put up. The single biggest change was the introduction of Islamic faith based activities on the ground floor of the building. An Islamic prayer facility, known as the Hidayat Jamaat Khanna, was located in two flats for the ground floor that had been combined. On Fridays, to cater for a large congregation, the guards set up a portable mihrab, loudspeaker and carpets under the portico on the street edge, and drape canvas over the bars to create privacy on the north. The entire courtyard area becomes a prayer facility, marked to the public only by the sound of the call to prayer and the green paint on the ground floor columns [fig 9].

For some of the tenants of Aiton Court, the building, despite its poor physical maintenance, is a desirable place to be [fig 10]. The low rentals are a significant reason for this. Anne-Marie has been in the building for nearly ten years, and brought her daughter up there. They stay in a studio flat in the north block. They feel the building is secure, and people are trusting enough to leave washing to dry on the solarium terrace.



fig 9 Aiton Court before prayers



fig 10 Aiton Court courtyard, 2005



fig 11 Aiton Court rear block

As I write this in 2005, Aiton Court is subject to a series of new reimagining, located within a precinct identified as the core of urban renewal in Hillbrow. The neighbouring building to the east, dating from the 1960's, has been renovated. Aiton Court, after looking relatively well kept for a decade, is now one of the shabbiest buildings on the block [fig 11]. But the visions for its future are diverse. The building's modernist provenance, its capacity to provide affordable rental housing, and the owner's interest in sustaining its function as an Islamic Centre, while not necessarily incompatible, promise to throw up new dialectical tensions between the building's physical structure and use.

BOYLE STREET

In 2001, the house of Godwin and Hopwood in Lagos was published in Wallpaper magazine. The images showed a canonic and serene modernist space, complete with classic furniture, caught in a timewarp. The images, however, bely the highly mobile functions of the house over its fifty year lifespan, which in turn reflect the shifting dynamics of personal and public life in this time.



fig 12 27 Boyle Street from park, 1960

The house's designers and owners, John Godwin and Gillian Hopwood, went to Lagos in 1954 to work, initially, for the expatriate firm, the Architects' Co-Partnership. John ran the office and was involved in the design in their first building in Ibadan. In 1955 he left the firm and, along with his wife, Gillian, herself an architect and AA graduate, set up a practice, called Godwin and Hopwood. In 1958 they acquired rights to build on a piece of land in Boyle Street, on Lagos Island, and they designed and built a house that was to be their office and home¹⁷ [fig 12].



fig 13 27 Boyle Street from park, 1960

The house's structural system was based on a single module of the standard school designs that they were working on, a single span of reinforced concrete six metres wide, resting on load bearing walls close to the east and west boundaries of the site. The building had four storeys of accommodation and an open roof terrace. At the rear of the property they developed a garden and a single storey building for servants' accommodation [fig 13]. While the east and west walls face onto a Yoruba compound and a house, later an office, on adjacent stands, the north and south facades are open and the major windows and balconies are located here. The openings to the south have a view over a small park as well the city.

The internal circulation of the house was rationalised into two axes. The first was a stack of staircases in a single run that went from the ground floor, the reception, to the third floor. These stairs subdivide the floors into the nominally public and more private rooms. To the east, almost entirely concealed by interior paneling, a spiral staircase runs the height of the building and serves each floor and the roof terrace. This staircase was intended for servants to move to the upper rooms, particularly the kitchen, without passing through the offices or bedrooms.

The initial scheme of the house is highly rationalised in its construction of categories that binarily divide spaces according to divisions of public and private, work and leisure, servants and masters, open and closed, structure and infill, and even gendered realms. The staircases provide both the transitions and divisions between some of these realms. At the same time, however, the house is somewhat ambivalent. The concealment of the servants' staircase, while not unusual within modern villas, is at odds with modern ideals of transparency and emancipation. In containing a space for work, it contradicts modernist planning, as codified in the Athens Charter of separate zones for public and private life. The house is conceived instead as a complete structure for family and working life and in that way is highly progressive from a feminist point of view. It would have been enormously difficult for Gillian, as the mother of a young son and a baby daughter, to play the sort of major and pioneering role in the practice that she has done without the support of the house's design.

The Boyle Street house's functional ambivalence and structural logic have allowed it to be reimagined and

¹⁷ This section of the paper draws on my experience of staying in the house for two weeks in 2002, as a guest of John and Gillian, while

researching modern architecture in Nigeria. Thanks are due to them for their great hospitality during this period.

reshaped extensively since it was built while staying in the hands of its original owners and designers. Nigeria's volatile history forced, to an extent, the household's re-configuration, but within a certain framework that, whenever possible, returns to an increasingly distant vision of the house's original order.

In 1960, a year after the house was completed, Nigeria became independent. For some expatriates this was a sign to return to Britain, but John and Jill remained in Lagos and secured some significant commissions to develop post-independence infrastructure, including the police college in Kaduna (1961-). The house was well used, with an office of half a dozen associates and assistants at the bottom end, as an image of John and the children playing with trains on the terrace shows, a nuclear family above [fig 14].



fig 14 Godwin and hopwood 27 Boyle street, 1960's

In 1967, a civil war broke out in Nigeria as the oil rich east attempted to secede. The children were sent to boarding school in the UK, creating something of a void in its central spaces. By the 1970's, the reunited Nigeria was highly prosperous due to oil money and the practice grew to over thirty people. The house became all office and John and Gillian moved to another home in the neighbouring suburb of Ikoyi.

When their son, now also an architect, returned from the UK to help them in the practice John and Jill converted the terrace into a small flat for him [fig 15]. As Lagos developed in increasingly unforeseen and uneven ways, and traffic on Lagos Island became choked and polluting, the picturesque views to the south disappeared and the third floor balcony was closed off, and curtains installed¹⁸. Air conditioning was installed throughout the house. The front garden became parking space for additional cars.



fig 15 27 Boyle street back view, 2002

In the 1980's, the International Monetary Fund began to implement structural adjustment policies that curtailed social spending in Africa. The result was recession in most countries, and the collapse of many utilities. The electricity, water and telephone services to the Boyle street house became unreliable and were supplemented by a water tank, a generator, and a satellite phone on the roof. The staff, which included two drivers and a receptionist, were needed to help complete basic transactions such as the payment of bills, to deliver mail, or to get through to another phone number, which had become incredibly complex and time consuming activities.

By the 1990's new partners and assistants joined the firm. Like most of the emerging Nigerian middle classes they lived on the mainland. Access across the bridges to Lagos Island, the city's commercial and administrative core, had become a gruelling two to three hour odyssey, so the partnership opened offices in nearer Somolu. John and Jill moved back to live in Boyle Street. Now only occasional office meetings were held in the building and the offices served more as a study than a production site for the practice.

As the house became progressively emptier, the couple's forged new connections with the post-colonial context, including the Nigerian Institute of Architects, the architectural faculty at Lagos University, and an NGO, Legacy,

to document vernacular buildings for conservation. The Nigerian community also honoured the couple with the title of chief. At a local scale, they joined a street committee that had come together to control access to Boyle Street and to keep its drains clear. John commissioned an artist to paint a mural opposite the house. At the same time, their activities outside Nigerian circles meant extended absences from the Lagos home, living abroad and attending conferences. In these periods the house now stood empty, guarded at the base by the servants. A night watchman was stationed at the gate, and he traded in a small way, selling sweets from a box on the street [fig 16].



fig 16 27 Boyle street, 2002

In 2002 I stayed in the house, which is still in beautiful condition, with almost all the original fittings in place. Many of the original hierarchies had been substantially dissolved. The living quarters were on the three upper floors, with the second floor a guest room and the roof terrace converted to a bed sitting room for John and Jill. The study was in the rear room on the first floor. The secretaries moved up and down the main stairs in their administrative duties. The house was now more a locus

for a series of complex transactions with the outside world than the self-contained ark that it had been in the 1970's. The day's activities seemed to revolve around negotiations with drivers, struggles to dial up to the internet service provider, travel arrangements, making of payments, communicating with family abroad and meeting with partners. Some of the staff also made discreet use of its central location, two drivers and numerous telephone lines to organise their own lives.

To return to the image of the house in Wallpaper, it is very much one of an empty house. As John and Gillian finally considered selling Boyle Street, their own ambivalence about their location had made it almost impossible for them to imagine the house otherwise. Although they spent half a century in, or returning to Lagos, they could neither stay nor allow their space to be appropriated. Whatever becomes of the building, it is remarkable that after this period it remains imaginable in the state in which it was first created. This vision is not as singular as the house. Perhaps the west continues to view the spaces of colonialism in the same light.

REVISIONING MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Contemporary images of modern architecture in Africa that have appeared in western media within the last few years - Koolhaas's Lagos, Plissart and de Meulder's Kinshasa, Tillim's Johannesburg and Holler's West Africa - revisit modern architecture fifty years after the heroic period of its construction¹⁹. These pictures offer a visceral critique of modernism based on strategies of juxtaposition that show the modern, colonial city as a decaying backdrop to human life, lived without the elements of formal work, functioning services and urban management that constituted the logic of the buildings' creation. In their place, people are shown taking part in a series of more or less improvised activities that mingle elements of tradition, in the form of worship or music or food, with icons of modernism, such as school uniforms, radios, paraffin stoves and cars.

If modern architecture as it appears in these images has a haunting presence, as de Meulder suggests, for those architects, both western and African, who have been brought up on a visual diet of empty and spotless modernist icons, it is not only because of the shocking filth and decay of the buildings. The images constitute two unsettling and apparently contradictory visions.

¹⁸ Akinsemoyin, Kunle and Vaughan-Richards, Alan. 1977. *Building Lagos*. Lagos: F&A Services.

¹⁹ See images by Marie-Françoise Plissart in De Meulder, B. 2002. 'Kinshasa, the Hereafter of Modern Architecture' in Henket, Hubert-

Jan and Heynen, Hilde. 2002. *Back from Utopia: The challenges of the modern movement*. Rotterdam: 010 publishers. 160-173, by Tillim, Guy. 2005. *Joburg*. Skira and Harvard Project on the City in Koolhaas, 2000, op. cit.

In the first vision, the project of architectural modernism is a failure in Africa. The buildings are shells, void of any aesthetic qualities that are respected by their tenants, and impossible to maintain. In the second vision, the buildings are, on the other hand, highly lively and animated settings, replete with sounds, social relations and multiple functions. In this vision, they are preferable to the sterile modernisms of Western institutions that are the backdrop to everyday lives characterised by monotony, order and cleanliness.

I want to build on this more optimistic reading. The stories of buildings like Aiton Court and the Boyle Street House would suggest that colonial modernism by virtue of its internationalist roots and transnational diffusion has become an indelible part of Africa's geography, and that neither the promise nor the destruction of modern architecture have been anything near completely achieved. What we see in the images of modern architecture in Africa is a series of overlaps, between leftover infrastructural elements that link sites of modernism to its other parts, and the new imaginaries of mobile urban residents. As the visions of new uses are developed, the value of its physical structure is taken into account and reinhabited, rather than erased. Modernism, at worst, is a sort of landscape of recyclable material and at best serves as scaffolding for the renewal of the city's social structures.

If we are content to see modern architecture in Africa today as a zone of overlap and not in absolute terms of loss or return, we can envision the not inconsiderable areas of existing modern infrastructure and built space as sites of re-inhabitation. In many cases this precipitates physical projects, exemplified by the reinvestment in Asmara, the rehabilitation of Hillbrow, the redevelopment of Accra's city centre, the renovation of Africa's universities, and the refurbishment of South Africa's football stadia for the 2010 World Cup.

At the same time, we can glimpse, in the mutated modernisms of Africa's foreign parts, the lost promise of modern architecture as a socially responsive practice. The intimately scaled flows of people and practices through which local networks re-establish themselves within the spaces of modernism suggest that there are physical traits that make these particular spaces open to change and revitalisation. Both the buildings of Boyle Street and Aiton Court possess a capacity for condensation and atomisation, structural rationalism and functional ambivalence that have not been incidental in their varied and rich microhistories. In revisiting modernism in Africa we should be open to discovering and creating analogous intersections of canonic form and human agency.