

ABSTRACT

Unloved, over-loved or just misunderstood? Modern architecture – the problem child of heritage

Putting the terms modern architecture and heritage together would seem to suggest an oxymoron. But everyday practice, sound scholarship and commonsense tell us otherwise. There is, of course, no reason why a recently constructed building or place considered historically significant across a range of criteria might not be considered heritage, worthy of preservation. But the fact of the matter is that 20th century architecture, especially that produced after World War II, engenders its own very special oxymoron – a love-hate relationship that bedevils its very existence, or at the very least often complicates easy judgment, sensible management and faithful retention. Over the past decade, there have been many and various success stories in terms of modernism and heritage but an equal number of less favorable outcomes. This paper examines the ambivalence that can be directed towards modern architecture and the internal ambivalence that lies within modern architecture and which works against the idea of heritage. This will be done by highlighting, mainly through Australian example, four syndromes: the difficult typology; the difficult idiom; the difficult comparison; and the difficult house. Where appropriate, some glimmer of therapy will be identified, a course of treatment that requires of both public and professional a level of re-education and self-reflection.

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