

## **Materiality, monumentality and modernism: continuing challenges in conserving twentieth-century places**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

It is now more than 25 years since the Sydney Opera House was first nominated to the World Heritage List in 1980, a mere 7 years after it first opened. This action was indicative of an emerging interest, at an international level, in the recognition of 20th century places as culturally valuable. Over the next decade, the first 20th-century places were inscribed on the World Heritage List starting with Auschwitz Birkenau German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp, Poland (1940-1945), inscribed in 1979 and the city of Brasilia (1956), the youngest place ever to be inscribed in 1987. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a surge of interest and international activity in the conservation of recent heritage, the formation of influential international organizations such as DOCOMOMO, engagement by existing conservation organizations such as ICOMOS, and the Association for Preservation Technology (APT) and the emergence of many interest groups focused on specific issues or periods such as Art Deco and the 1930s.<sup>i</sup> A number of inter-war and post-war houses were bequeathed to, or acquired by organizations like the National Trust and opened as house museums, including architect Harry Seidler's 1950 Rose Seidler House in Sydney and Ernő Goldfinger's house, Willow Road in London.

This wave of interest prompted governments in some countries to consider the identification and protection of 20th-century heritage, initially from the early-modern era and almost exclusively for their architectural significance. By 1994 there had been a series of large international conferences on the conservation of 20th-century heritage<sup>ii</sup>. These events demonstrated that there was still much to be done, both on shoring up recognition and support for the conservation of the recent past and also to solve the emerging technical challenges.

In principle, the philosophy and methodology adopted for the conservation of 20th-century heritage should be no different to that utilised for places from the more distant past. However, during this wave of activity in the late 1980s and early 1990s there was recognition that philosophically, conservation had entered new ground; a passionate and intense debate ensued. Two camps were represented; "traditional" conservation practitioners who argued for the application of the existing philosophical approaches, tempered by the specific requirements of the conservation practice at hand, and DOCOMOMO, who specifically argued in favour of design authenticity over material authenticity and suggested a new philosophical approach was therefore necessary.

Conservation is seen by some practitioners as a moral act and claims nobility through its well established tenets – its charters, guidelines, legislation and close-knit groups of professionals. Despite its origins being traceable to earlier times, as a defined area of professional practice with shared international concepts, it is largely a 20<sup>th</sup>-century movement. Modernism has a similar trajectory, with a probably larger group of international disciples. The ideals of modernism were translated globally quicker than any other architectural movement due to improved communication methods, greater movement of practitioners (due to the rupture of war and the resulting patterns of mass migration) and the increased travel generally. Like conservation practice, modernism and its followers strove for universal truths, reinforced through international manifestos and key texts<sup>iii</sup>. Importantly, the early protagonists of modernism also proffered the first international charter for conservation – locating their work within its historic environment and context, rather than rejecting it as is so often claimed<sup>iv</sup>.

The early period of conservation of 20th-century heritage saw these universal truths collide and questions arise as to whether the fundamental tenets of modernism conflicted with current conservation practice. The question that generated the greatest debate was whether the accepted conservation norms could be applied to the conservation of places representing the modern age; specifically around the question of material conservation and whether authentic fabric could be conserved without compromising their design intent.

After the initial flurry of contention, and as the 1990s progressed, DOCOMOMO's view shifted slightly as practitioners explored the problems and attempted to find solutions to these issues, and some consensus was reached about how to proceed. This largely amounted to recognition that the existing philosophical approaches, as laid out in the conservation charters, were broadly applicable to the conservation of the recent past, but there were some specific technical challenges that necessitated judicious, case by case consideration. Lateral thinking, creativity and flexibility in application of the existing tenets enabled practitioners to accommodate the materiality of the modern era; specifically and most problematically issues arising from innovative construction and use of materials. It was not thought necessary to identify a specific or new philosophical approach to the conservation of the 20th century. The aim for some working in this area was to mainstream modern conservation, to reduce the controversy, identify a common methodology and get on with it. The way forward was developing, documenting and promulgating cases studies in order to build a body of experience and knowledge that could be shared by practitioners working to resolve these issues. Getting significant heritage places from the 20th century protected and conserving them appropriately through existing frameworks without creating a new or different philosophy was the aim, recognizing that a new methodology or response to the philosophy may be necessary.

Much has been achieved over the last 20 years; there are now some 15 iconic architectural ensembles on the world heritage list including urban areas such as Tel Aviv's White City, buildings such as the Sydney Opera House and complexes such as the Central University City Campus of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. There are cities trading off their 20th-century heritage status such as the art-deco city of Napier in New Zealand and mid-century modern dominated Palm Springs in California. There is also a considerable body of professional interest and conservation knowledge that has been developed over the last 20 years. But, there are still many challenges. Clearly we have not yet achieved widespread recognition and support for the conservation of 20th-century places and in many parts of the world there is still a palpable level of fear, antagonism and hostility for the protection and conservation of anything but the architectural icons. Lack of public support has hampered professional efforts, that much is clear; a concerted effort is needed to address this. This issue is not the subject of this paper, but it is impossible to separate it from any potential solutions to dealing with the practical conservation issues. Experience has shown that when strategic listing programs are carried out, unless these are accompanied by an education or awareness raising component, and information for owners on conservation, then listing will remain controversial and potentially unsuccessful.

Aside from issues of public perception, professionally there is still confusion about how to approach conserving 20<sup>th</sup> century places, therefore a need to revisit the philosophy or at least communicate better it to a wider audience. The preoccupation with the philosophical approach during the early 1990s was prompted by the lack of experience, but this is no longer the case. Conservation of 20<sup>th</sup> century heritage has been characterised by continual revisitation of the philosophical issues and the discussion appears circuitous rather than progressive. Whilst much progress has been made, clearly conserving the modern is not yet mainstream in most places, in the public or professional realm.

### **CONTINUING CHALLENGES**

The recently established ICOMOS International Specialist Committee on 20th-century heritage (ISC 20) has defined its scope of interest around four key issues specific to the conservation of the 20th century; identification, including issues arising through lack of recognition (particularly for places from the second half of the 20th century); technical issues, arising out of the specific construction technology and materials used and design & functionalism; issues arising out of specificity of design and social context, and the adaptability of modern buildings to new uses<sup>v</sup>.

This paper focuses on the challenges arising from technical and adaptation issues and design and functionalism or put another way, materiality and monumentality. These are issues that have been written about at length over the last 20 years, relatively comprehensively<sup>vi</sup>. However, as a keen observer of the progress that has been made and the roadblocks to making modern conservation mainstream, there appear some other issues that are influencing the outcomes, which are explored in this paper. These relate to:

- the role of the original architects in the conservation process,
- the influence of architectural photography and publishing,
- the reinterpretation of "modern" as a stylistic design trend at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and

- shifting concepts of architectural monumentality.

### **Technical issues or how the materiality of modern places affects conservation**

The technical challenges that arise when conserving 20th-century places undoubtedly pose the most difficulty and where the conflicts arise with the application of the current philosophy and methodology. The legacy of 20th-century architectural history and theory is rich and diverse. However, it is the evolution of modernism that has affected the most significant change to the built landscape over the last 100 years. Modernism was conceived with the aim of expressing the opportunities and optimism of the new age. Modern architecture instigated a break with traditional architectural forms, planning and the use of materials. Architecture, which was to be the highest form of artistic expression, was based on a new vision of artistic abstraction, a new understanding of spatial qualities, utilized new technology, structural innovations and new materials. Mass production and prefabrication were to provide the infrastructure of a new society, to raise levels of hygiene, amenity and standards of living. Architecture was considered a powerful tool in social reform.

The introduction of a many new materials – plastics, different types of glass, fiberglass, synthetic rubber, fiberboard, metals and so on, the use of new component based building systems and the use of traditional materials in new ways are characteristics of the post-industrialised building industry. Architects exuberantly used these new materials in ways that were not fully understood in terms of their long-term performance or safety, nor how best to detail them to achieve longevity. Traditional construction methods were largely abandoned to create the new functionalist machine. The need for wide-scale construction to rebuild after the destruction of the second- world war pushed the industrialization of the construction industry to a new level, with economy, efficiency, speed and labour savings as primary objectives. The deskilling of the building industry and need for economy together has resulted in poor workmanship and correspondingly poor quality outcomes.

The built-in material problems and lack of maintenance often associated with buildings from the recent past inevitably exacerbates deterioration. New materials were often naively believed to be maintenance free, although many buildings did have maintenance programs included as part of the architects brief that have never been implemented. Regular maintenance is vital for the longevity of buildings of any age, and yet there are specific access issues for some types of modern buildings, high rise for example, that have considerable cost implications. The development of 'maintenance free' treatments, coatings for concrete buildings for instance, can often create new problems by introducing additional maintenance cycles to maintain the treatment.

The specific issues that relate to the life-cycle of modern materials pose new problems that require creative solutions. The misapprehension that modern buildings and structures were low maintenance compounded many of the material and construction problems discussed above. Many 20th-century buildings have not stood the test of time well and their perceived inability to age gracefully has challenged fundamental conservation principles such as 'do as little as possible' and 'reversibility'.

Over the last 20 years there has been some progress in addressing these technical problems. DOCOMOMO and APT continue to run special workshops on common 20th-century material conservation issues such as concrete, cast stone, metal windows, stone cladding and curtain walling. There has been some advancement in repair methods and the adaptation of contemporary repair methods to conservation needs, but also the realisation that in some cases repair is not possible and large-scale replacement or even reconstruction may be necessary. In these cases the level of significance of the place and cost to repair it become a difficult balancing act. Frank Lloyd Wright's 1924 Ennis House in Los Angeles, the largest and most elaborate of Wright's concrete textile block houses is a case in point. Years of deferred maintenance, and an earthquake in 2004, left the house in a perilous state. This was however, the catalyst for the formation of the Ennis House Foundation. In 2005 the Foundation bravely launched its strategy to save this iconic house. The repairs to stabilize the main retaining wall and foundations, the roof and other areas have to date cost over \$6 million (US) and an estimated further \$10 million is needed to complete the conservation works<sup>vii</sup>. The house is stunning; the problems staggering. The textile block system suffers from severely corroded steel reinforcement, which is not continuous and runs in voids between the blocks (the steel is

therefore completely unprotected from corrosion). The cement is poor quality and porous. There are no current repair methods to cope with these problems. This wonderful building has relied on the sheer will and fundraising capability of its passionate Foundation to meet Wright's boast to his client that "...the final result is going to stand on that hill a hundred years or more. Long after we are gone it will be pointed out as the Ennis House and pilgrimages will be made to it by lovers of the beautiful - from everywhere."<sup>viii</sup> As this paper is completed and as a result of California's grim financial condition, the Foundation has advertised the house for sale in the hope an aficionado will take on its care.

### *Life span*

The generalisation that modern buildings and structures were designed for a limited life-span has not been helpful to the conservation cause. When the post-war listing program was initiated at English Heritage in the early 1990s this was one of the many arguments levelled against listing buildings from this period, and conservation efforts for buildings of this period. However, examining the philosophies of the early 20th century modernists, it is only those described as 'futurists' that specifically address this in the early life of modernism. There is some evidence to suggest that the experimental nature of the modern era as regards the use of new materials in new ways meant that in some cases less thought was given to longevity, rather the focus was the role of architecture in social change. There is however, counter evidence that some architects placed a very high value on creating enduring, well constructed buildings with great attention to their long-term performance. In the fiscally austere post-war era architects had very limited budgets and the shortages of steel, timber and other materials meant that in some cases the quality of the building was compromised. The attempts to rebuild economically with the emphasis on manufactured components and the deskilling of the construction labour force did not purposely create "throwaway architecture", but the longevity of many buildings from this and the previous era have resulted in buildings that have a reduced lifecycle. Certainly there are examples of buildings designed for a limited life-span and these pose a specific philosophical question when it comes to their conservation. Exhibition buildings and other buildings designed as temporary structures are however, different from those that were designed without regard for permanence. It is important to distinguish between these two different philosophical issues when making conservation decisions.

No matter whether intentional or not, it has become apparent that modern buildings generally require initial (medium level) repair within about half the time of more traditionally constructed buildings – usually about 25-30 years after construction. Major repairs may be necessary within 50-60 years rather than the 100-120 years commonly documented for the more traditional building stock<sup>ix</sup>.

To date, with rare exceptions, it is usually the case that the original architect will argue that efforts should be made to retain their building rather than accept it has a limited life. The argument for intentional short life span is one that has been used to argue demolition on a number of occasions. Costs of repair against cost of new build will always be an argument used against conservation. However, this approach is unlikely to continue as sustainability audits are required in new development applications and begin to be used for assessing the environmental impact of new work against adaptation of existing structures. However, whilst energy audits often prove the environmental value of retaining traditional buildings this may not be the case for buildings designed from the mid-century onwards, which were conceived at a time of seemingly inexhaustible and cheap energy and constructed of materials that are high energy to produce. Unfortunately sustainability measures currently in use are limited essentially to energy audits. Life-cycle, social and cultural sustainability have not yet been integrated into these assessments, an issue that poses a huge threat to heritage conservation as the green-building movement gathers momentum.

These technical issues are interwoven with issues of design and functionalism, which are constantly cited as being the third area of difference for the conservation of 20th-century places.

### **Design, functionalism and how the monumentality of the modern has affected conservation**

The often claimed conflict between reconciling design authenticity with material authenticity in the conservation process has preoccupied discussions of 20th-century heritage conservation for some 20 years. This was heavily influenced by DOCOMOMO, who since the outset honestly and unashamedly declared its interest to be specific to the architecture of the Modern Movement. Its members' interests include the

continuing validity of modernism as an architectural ideology **and** in recording and conserving its legacy. The scholarship and energy of DOCOMOMO and its members has been hugely influential in the way the identification, protection and conservation of 20th-century heritage has been approached. This polemic has been helpful in forwarding discussion and ensuring there is a good understanding that the materiality of 20th-century places may not be at the core of a place's significance. However, ultimately conflicts between design and material authenticity must be balanced, with **significance** at the core of decision making.

The realisation of the concept of functionalism – an important characteristic of the Modern Movement - poses a number of conservation issues. These include; how functionally obsolete buildings can be adapted for new spatial and planning requirements (given the specificity of design, large expanses of glazing and so on). Secondly, how to retain design features integral to the building's significance that are materially problematic. Thirdly, how buildings can be upgraded for modern environmental performance. The issue of scale can be a challenge for identifying compatible uses for very large buildings. Lastly, there is the economic viability of repairing large buildings (cost of repair and adaptation).

The issues listed above (a list developed nearly 20 years ago) continue to be cited as a problems specific to 20th-century places<sup>x</sup>. However, it is debatable whether functionality and therefore adaptability are any more problematic for 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings than those of any other era. There is the argument of scale, but, is finding a viable new use for the 19<sup>th</sup> century textile mill at the centre of Saltaire model village in Northern Yorkshire any less of a challenge than finding a compatible use for Rotterdam's 1929 Van Nelle Factory. Saltaire mill now houses a variety of functions, such as shops, offices and a gallery. The former Van Nelle Tobacco Factory has reemerged after conservation as the Van Nelle Design Factory, a business hub housing a variety of functions.



Figure 1: The Van Nelle Factory in Rotterdam (1926-29) designed by Johannes Brinkman with L.C van der Vlugt and Mart Stam. The characteristic curtain wall is of primary importance to the building, both technologically, architecturally and aesthetically.

Specificity of use and design is not really unique to this era, despite the centrality of the concept of “form follows function” to the ideology of modernism. The large number of new building typologies that emerged during the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been cited, and is acknowledged as a problem for conservation. This is mainly a problem where the use is identified as central to significance but the use is now redundant. Places that are outmoded socially, technically or functionally from other eras face the same issues. Eighteenth and nineteenth century prisons, lunatic asylums, and industrial sites for example that at the time were socially and architecturally progressive may now be socially and functionally redundant and difficult to adapt without major intervention. Hospitals from any era need to be upgraded and modernized to meet current standards of hygiene and medical practice, which may conflict with the architects’ ideas about the role of design in improving patient’s health.

On the list above only the issues of upgrading to contemporary environmental performance and cost are really unique to 20<sup>th</sup> century places. The environmental performance issues may be problematic if the building has large expanses of glass or suffers from excessive heat gain or loss due to its materiality, and the design of many modern buildings make the introduction of services more problematic. However, modern architecture introduced the concept of building physics and many architects paid great attention to appropriate environmental design and appropriate use of technology for heating and cooling. Their execution, experimentation and subsequent material failures means that not all modern buildings have performed well. But again there are good examples of skillful conservation works that have managed these issues. Cost can be more problematic for 20th-century places due to the lifespan of the materials and the need for more radical intervention more often in a building’s life cycle.



Figure 2: Interior of the Van Nelle Design Factory after its adaptive reuse for modern offices. A 'building within a building' has been created to house the new office and business functions and manage the environmental requirements without major intervention to the facade. Double glazing the facade would have had a major impact on its significance.

Adaptation for viable new uses or new functional requirements can pose difficult practical challenges, but it is important not to single the 20th century out as the only era facing these challenges. To do so is likely to reduce support for their protection and conservation. This over emphasis, or over concern for design integrity is getting in the way of moving forward and poses some dangers to mainstreaming modern conservation. Including examples of successful 20th-century adaptive reuse projects in conferences and publications and showcasing how the issues have been managed is key. That is not to undermine the significant challenges, but what is needed is a focus on good solutions, rather than continual rehash of the difficulties.

The success of organizations like DOCOMOMO, the Twentieth Century Society and others in raising awareness about 20th-century architecture means that at this stage, the majority of 20th-century places recognized to be of heritage value are listed for their architectural or artistic merit. The more recent the place, the more likely it has been identified as being significant for its architectural value and quality. The focus on architectural significance and the introduction of design quality as additional criteria for assessing significance as judged against the tenets of modernism and the general building stock, helps explain the importance of design intent in the debate on authenticity and integrity. Quality cropped up in response to fears about how to assess post-war architecture when there is still so much of it about. English Heritage's post-war listing program in the early to mid 1990s, opened the listing process to elicit public opinion. Post-war architecture was generally unpopular and its effect on the British urban landscape was widely lamented. English Heritage's assessment process added quality of design as an important qualifier to architectural significance. This required a more sophisticated architectural analysis of buildings proposed for protection and focused attention on design. The City of Montréal is currently developing its criteria for the local listing process. The process and the criteria include a number of interesting aspects, such as how artistic value has been defined. Two aspects for consideration in artistic value include the quality of design, and the importance of the designer in the history of the discipline<sup>xi</sup>.

There are these additional factors that have elevated design authenticity in conserving modern buildings and structures. These include the role of original architects, the availability of (often professionally shot) as-built images, the current fashionableness of modern architecture (the cult of the modern) and the rise of the modern monument or celebrity architecture.

#### *The role of the creator in conservation*

The architects of the 20th century, whose work we are now conserving, have played an important role in the conservation process. Firstly it is the architects of the era who themselves put forward their creations for protection and conservation. The Rose Seidler House in Sydney designed by Harry Seidler for his parents, 2 Willow Road in London designed by Ernő Goldfinger as his own residence and architect Patrick Gwynne's house, the Homewood south of London (1937-8) were all gifted by the architects and their families to organisations renowned for their skill in conserving and presenting buildings as museums<sup>xii</sup>. Whilst it is common for families to bequeath a property to such organisations and in many cases retain some connection, what is different is that for the modern house it is often about preserving the purity of the design intent and the relationship of the architecture to the original contents that is the rationale for the bequeathal. The significance is less about the houses' historical significance, rather the aesthetics and architectural significance of the place as symbolic of that moment at which it was realized. In a much older house time has allowed the development of other values, such as historical and or social significance. In the modern house it is about capturing the moment – the house as a work of art. The intent in the bequeathal is influential in the conservation process.

The second way that the original architects have influenced conservation, is that despite the described practical problems associated with conserving buildings from the more recent past, the fact that the design and construction process for a modern buildings are still in living memory offers the potential to understand them in a way that has not been possible before. The architect may still be able to explain the building's



raison d'être, the construction process, why certain materials and methods were selected, maintenance expectations and so on. It is important therefore to maximise this potential. The subject was discussed in more detail by others participating in this conference, but it is interesting to see how the creator has influenced the approach to a building's conservation.

Some architects faced with the conservation of their own building seek to improve them, replacing cheap mass-produced materials with more expensive crafted versions in recognition of their shift from affordable standardised homes to those of architectural significance. Some will want to evolve them, introducing new architectural ideas that they have evolved over time. Harry Seidler's first set of proposals for the conservation of his Parrawi Road or "Igloo" house (completed 1953) included the introduction of new verandas with a curved plan, an architectural motif that is seen in many of Seidler's buildings from the early 1980s. The rectangular form and straight lines of the existing house are quite different in character to the work proposed nearly 50 years later. In the recent work to Seidler's Mellor house in Castlecrag (1950), new high-quality materials were introduced replacing the original materials that were chosen for reasons of economy and the limited availability of many materials typical of the post-war period. The aesthetic was "improved" through this wider repertoire of high-quality materials. The architect's view was that better quality materials would have been used originally should they have been available and the client had a larger budget.

It is clearly important to engage with the creator where possible; however it is also important to be able to place their advice in a framework or context for making conservation decisions and to recognise the differing perspectives between creator and conservator. With significance at the core however, decisions about materiality and design can be made.

#### *The role of the photography and architectural publishing*

The role of photography (initially black and white and later colour) in reinforcing the importance of the appearance of modern buildings when recently completed cannot be overlooked. The rise of architectural photography as a profession runs parallel with the globalisation of modernism and certainly it played an important role in its promulgation. Post-war, photographers like Los Angeles based Julius Shulman played an important role in showcasing emerging architects work from the mid 1930s on. Shulman's prolific documentation of Californian modernism in the 1950s and 1960s made him a central figure in developing the image of modernism in the post war-era<sup>xiii</sup>. His huge archive of over 260,000 images and associated material collected over seven decades, now housed at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, attracts more researchers than any other in the Institute's collection.

Access to contemporary photographs has provided historians of this period unprecedented access to visual information, which has also been of tremendous benefit in conservation. However, "...photographs mislead in many ways, beginning with their incapacity to represent size objectively and the ease, with which the lens may be moved laterally, raised or lowered, tilted and swung."<sup>xiv</sup>

The black and white images of the Modern Movement capture the architects' interest in form over materiality; they rarely include people or the context. They are cool, smooth and use contrast to emphasize the stripped down detailing and functionality of their subject, images that leave no room for the patina of age. By comparison the iconic post-war images of Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation (1947-52) depict the monumentality of the building but also emphasise the relationship between form and aesthetic. The power, strength, and conviction of the building is self evident but, unlike earlier photographs of buildings these emphasise its materiality, the use of exposed, concrete. The photos clearly show the board marks from the formwork, the rough utilitarian use of concrete, representing economy and honesty in materials and relating its materiality to its function as social housing. Shulman's colour photos from the 1950s capture the relationship between in and outdoors and demonstrate the photographer's natural affinity with Californian modernism. The widespread use of contemporary photographs of Californian modernism including the recent republishing of Shulman's images has been influential in achieving the widespread appeal of mid-century modernism in California<sup>xv</sup>. His images often include the occupants of the houses, clearly display the furniture, fittings and objects and depict the everyday lives of the users, making the buildings appear less monumental than earlier photographs of the Modern era.



There are many anecdotes on how such images have influenced people's understanding about the buildings and have directed their conservation. It took some time for people to accept that the inter-war European houses were not always pure white as they appear, but that colour was as important in architectural expression. When many of the windows came to be replaced at the Connell Ward and Lucas's White house in England in the 1990s, a debate about their colour ensued. Previous replacements had introduced powder-coated white window frames based on the fallacy that the house had always been painted white. In fact the house was originally painted sugar-almond pink with black windows, but prior works and contemporary black and white photographs reinforced the misconceptions about architecture from this period, presenting them as far more minimalist than they actually were.

#### *The fashionableness of modern architecture*

The popularity of the mid-century aesthetic has prompted a stylistic revival, reinterpreting and translating mid-century modern into current fashion in clothing, furniture, interior design, and architecture, but has also skewed our understanding of the period, elevating aesthetic value to a principle position. Whilst this has assisted in raising awareness and appreciation for the recent past it is also dangerous if this popularity is not sustained. Long-term appreciation for the heritage value of a place cannot rely on stylistic popularity. Once out of fashion again, which is inevitably will be, appreciation for the 20th century will fade (except for the icons) unless we can embed it in a more lasting and meaningful way. The social aspirations, technological advances and resulting materiality of the 20th century needs to be recognized as well, rather than focusing so intently on the aesthetic significance. This is why material, scientific, social and other values need to be better explained to a wider sector of the community and these aspects integrated into the conservation of places from this era.

Additionally a more comprehensive understanding of the 20th century is needed that includes those places outside the framework of modernism. There have been efforts to address this issue and the focus is starting to shift and expand. ICOMOS ISC 20 is working to develop a broad thematic framework for assessing the significance of 20th century places in consultation with DOCOMOMO and the International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH). This shift/expansion is evident in thematic studies underway in many parts of the world on a broad range of aspects of the 20th century and themes such as industrial development, war and nation building, mass migration and so on are being used to explore the 20<sup>th</sup> century's history more accurately. This broadening of the historical perspective as it relates to cultural heritage sites is also demonstrated in initiatives such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation's America's 11 most endangered places list. This year, eight of the eleven sites included date from the 20th century and only three represent modernism's contribution<sup>xvi</sup>. This list includes two sites of social significance. The list includes the hanger that housed the bomber the Enola Gay prior to its deployment to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan in 1945 at the Wendover Air Force Base near of Salt Lake City, Utah. The other is the Dorchester Academy in Georgia, a site with a long history of association with the education of African Americans and the civil rights movement.

This trend or excitement for the aesthetics of modernism will no doubt pass as it has for Victoriana. Right now this has assisted in developing a salvage industry for modern buildings and the reproduction of modern furniture. In some places it has helped to mainstream modern conservation. There is evidence of this in Los Angeles where post-war modernism dominates the built landscape. There is appreciation for modern architecture generally in the community. Mid-century modern is a selling point for real estate agents, there are copies of Eames tables, sofas and tables, Nelson lamps and Cherner chairs everywhere. The five-year Survey LA project currently underway by the Los Angeles City Council with support from the Getty Conservation Institute seeks to identify LA's historic resources on a GIS data base linked to the planning system<sup>xvii</sup>. It is organized as most studies, thematically and historically. One of the key themes is Modernism. This means that the study can address modern heritage within its broader context as part of the continuum of Los Angeles' history, recognizing its unique contribution to the urban, social and historical development of the city.

Balboa Highlands is a tract development of about 100 houses in California's San Fernando Valley and one of three areas of developed by Joseph Eichler in the 1950s and 1960s using well known architects. Aimed at middle income families, the houses featured compact and efficient open plans, creating a relationship

between inside and outside through the use of atriums, skylights, and high-level glazing. In Balboa Highlands local appreciation prompted residents to raise awareness for the significance of collective value of the homes. A tour in 2000 was the catalyst for widespread local appreciation and formation of an action group who began to lobby for recognition and protection of the area as an historic overlay zone. These houses and other Californian Eichler developments are now highly sought after; there are a number of dedicated websites and at least two real-estate firms who specialize in their sale and include all sorts of information on their care and conservation on their websites. The community driven appreciation of the houses has resulted in a practical, needs-driven approach to their care. Although there are still issues, modern is mainstream in Los Angeles, an accepted part of the historic landscape, and it is not just the icons that are recognized as culturally significant. These types of approaches contextualize the 20<sup>th</sup> century and include grass roots actions that will secure a continuum of interest in the period.

#### *The rise of the modern monument*

It seems that a need for monumentality has been attached to the selection of 20<sup>th</sup>-century places worthy of protection. Even everyday buildings such as modest family houses are revered as “modern icons”. And yet the social aspirations of modernism were to make well-designed houses affordable for the masses. Houses that were efficient, modest and improved the health and lifestyle of its inhabitants. There are three 20<sup>th</sup>-century houses on the World Heritage List with more on the way<sup>xviii</sup>. Whilst there are approximately 20 residences on the World Heritage List from earlier periods most are grand complexes, castles and royal residences set within large landscapes of great historical, social and architectural significance. There are many important houses from other eras that are not on the list. Perhaps their significance is confined to national or regional significance, presumably by virtue of the fact that there was not the same publicity open to their architects at the time so they did not achieve the same level of global fame and influence. The iconic nature of the great works of modernism has been affirmed by the advances in photography and commercial publishing, the emergence of a sophisticated architectural press, the rise of the architectural profession as global industry and the engagement of the original architects in the conservation of their own buildings and by virtue of the fact they may be so different from the surrounding urban landscape or building stock.

The recent phenomenon of celebrity architecture – those landmark buildings described by Charles Jencks as “enigmatic signifiers”, has elevated the new architectural monument to status of a great art work<sup>xix</sup> and arguably has also influenced the conservation of 20<sup>th</sup>-century heritage. This type of architecture has emerged at the same time that conserving modern heritage has become a distinct area of work and at a time when the concept of heritage has broadened from monuments to encompass the greater tangible and intangible values that together connect the place to its context and community. The architectural language of the celebrity icon is derived from late modernism but has shed the social and cultural aspirations that were so central to its ideology. For example, Frank Gehry’s brief for the Guggenheim Museum (1993-7) was “to do for Bilbao what the Sydney Opera House did for Sydney<sup>xx</sup>. But the Sydney Opera House was not the first of these blockbuster, city identity creating buildings, Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation, Marseilles, and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum in New York are precursors. Unité d’Habitation’s iconic stature is derived from its powerful social ideology which comes from its function as public housing and the way architecture has been used to improve the life of its inhabitants.

Jencks in his 2005 book *Iconic Building* contrasts the celebrity building, driven by commercial needs and whose role it is to stimulate interest and investment in cities through attention grabbing, provocative buildings with the traditional monument.

*In the past, important public buildings such as the cathedral and the city hall, expressed shared meaning and conveyed it through well known conventions.*<sup>xxi</sup>

These important public monuments may be a museum as is the case with Bilbao, but since the mid 1990s may equally be a department store, an apartment building or even an addition to a suburban house. It is not to say these buildings may not be fabulous, but how many monuments does the urban environment need and what will it be like in the future where the buildings are all unrelated, each vying for attention and without the traditional hierarchy of monumentality that enables a reading of the urban landscape as it relates to function?

Modernism has become the adopted language for these emerging monuments to economic global success and somehow this is creating some confusion about how to deal with modern monuments generally. Where

design is now the only meaning or significance that can be attached – the social cultural meaning of the monument is gone – design is all – we are dealing with a new cult that will continue to put forward new challenges for some time to come and is confusing approach to conserving places from previous generations. Miles Glendenning argues that this phenomenon threatens future public alienation against 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism, when the world tires of the cult of the celebrity, and urges the professions to differentiate between the true monuments to the modern era and starchitecture<sup>xvii</sup>.

This interpretation of the modern as monumental has affected our approach to the conservation of the recent past, is another reason for the focus on issues of design authenticity and aesthetics, and has constrained the ability to move conserving the modern into the mainstream. The trouble with conferring monumentality on the modern and making design its primary significance is that it stifles the ability for places to change. Conservation seeks a balance between continuity and inevitable change. This may be fine for the true icons of the modern era, those places where the genius conferred in the architecture is so extraordinary that conserving authenticity limits change without losing significance. But for less iconic 20<sup>th</sup>-century heritage places, change may be inevitable if they are to survive.

In the future these starchitectural monuments will be significant for their aesthetics, image and building form and will no doubt ensure the continuation of the discussion on materiality versus aesthetic as they come around for conservation. How these places will be judged and how the plethora of iconic places will be distinguished between only time will tell. Given the direction that concepts about heritage are moving, with increasing emphasis on connectivity with communities and deeper social meaning, this will be a future challenge. These musings may seem diversionary, irrelevant or superfluous but are merely attempt to highlight the pitfalls of equating modern with monumental and highlight how this is a barrier to mainstreaming their conservation.

## MOVING FORWARD

So where do we go from here, how do we mainstream the conservation of 20th-century heritage so we can eliminate some of the conflict and controversy and gain consensus on how to move forward? The following 14 thoughts are offered up as ways to move modern conservation into the mainstream. Many of these ideas have been around for some time and some are already beginning to be put in place, but they are included here for completeness.

### *Recognition and the listing process*

1. Broaden the scope of 20th-century heritage from its current archi-centric focus to include landscapes, urban planning, industrial heritage and socially significant places. The 20th century was one of unprecedented change, mass migration, globalization and technological advancement. Its heritage should celebrate its achievements and the rich and the diverse responses to the rapidly changing world.
2. Integrate the identification of the achievements of the 20th century in regional/area based studies, and provide a means to assess legacy of the 20th century within the continuum of the historical timeline.
3. Develop approaches to the identification of 20th-century heritage that include public awareness raising initiatives as the **first** step and **then** an integral part of the listing process. Recognise that unless there is community support the protection of 20th-century places will remain contentious.
4. Be initially judicious (rather than comprehensive) in our selection of 20th-century places for protection to allow time to build public confidence and understanding. The Darwinian process of natural selection that has occurred for heritage of earlier eras means places that have survived have also demonstrated that they can be sustained. For example where function is central to significance and the function no longer exists the place may not meet listing criteria. Technical performance may be important if the fabric of the place is central to significance. If the fabric is unable to be sustained then significance may be diminished to the extent that the place should not be protected. Perhaps consideration of a the building's performance both technically and in fulfilling its intended use where

these issues are central to significance need to be considered as part of the listing criteria or a longer timeframe may be necessary to judge the recent past.

5. Acknowledge the practical and technical issues at the same time that as the identification and protection stages to give the building owners more confidence in the listing process and their ability to sustain their properties. This could be achieved by providing information on how these issues can be addressed to owners as part of the process or by heritage agencies preparing guidance on typical issues prior to commencement of listing process, or at least in parallel.
6. Recognise that modern places are not all architectural monuments significant for their image and design. The emphasis on design authenticity may in some cases be entirely valid but places whose values endure through time have deeper connections with community and place that need to be better understood; a broader understanding of values may develop over time. Start with significance and understand all the values to make balanced conservation decisions.
7. Enjoy the popularity brought by the modern stylistic revival and but don't rely on it – fashion fades. Capitalise on it while it lasts but build longer-term appreciation through embedding the cultural meanings and values of the 20th century in other ways rather than purely aesthetic appreciation.

#### *Philosophy and methodology*

8. Recognize the philosophical issues that are unique to 20th-century heritage conservation and stop getting bogged down in issues generic to conservation practice. It is not helpful to single 20th-century places out as problematic for reasons that affect other places from other eras. Perhaps it is necessary to have a charter or declaration about the small number of specific issues where lateral application of the existing conservation philosophy is necessary. Recognise the existing philosophical starting point is important but as with any other conservation project it may be necessary to deviate from the path to meet the specific circumstances.
9. Package any charter or declaration with guidance on other issues that may be common to other eras but the response or methodology for developing the response may be specific to the characteristic of 20th-century places. In preparing such a declaration or charter reflect on the last 20 years of experience and keep it simple.
10. Develop a central source of information on case studies and examples from projects that may have tackled the issues, drawing on the tool box developed over the last 20 years of practice. Such a resource(s) could provide a vehicle to share information and showcase solutions to how others have dealt with the philosophical issues.

#### *Technical issues and sustainability*

11. Acknowledge that the technical problems are the primary challenge to conservation of 20th-century buildings and structures. As stressed above it is important to be proactive in developing policies and solutions that address these issues in advance of, or integrated it into, strategic listing programs. Government and responsible agencies should be ready to offer guidance on solutions to practical and technical problems to owners. It is not enough to identify these places without these types of information being made available.
12. Acknowledge the potential issues relating to the sustainability agenda or more specifically the green-building agenda. Sustainability is not just about green buildings but this seems to have become the panacea. The way sustainability is being measured and translated into policy and measureable targets is one important way to address the global challenges related to climate change. But this approach is a threat to heritage generally, particularly for 20<sup>th</sup> century places.

13. Develop responses and solutions to this threat by demonstrating role of heritage in the broader sustainability agenda, and lobby for a more accurate and truthful measures in assessing the long-term impact of buildings on the environment and in meeting sustainability aims and objectives.
14. Develop and share solutions to coping with conflicts for meeting green-building standards and modern buildings and be careful in listing things that will be difficult to ever be sustainable. Research work is needed to assist in this task and needs to be scoped. Building a body of experience through showcasing case studies is also important.

The issues relating to materiality and monumentality have occupied much of the discussions in relation to conserving 20<sup>th</sup>-century heritage. Conservation is always, in the end, case specific and different practitioners will make different decisions. The current limitations on technical knowledge and available repair methods mean that our ability to be absolutely faithful to conservation principles may at times be challenged. Where significance is at the core of decision making, balancing design and material matters becomes a rational process, but still subject to individual interpretations. Conservation is however, a process embedded in its own time, not an end in itself. That is what makes it interesting.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>i</sup> For a comprehensive account of the history of the conservation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century see Prudon, T. 2008 *Preservation of modern architecture*. John Wiley and Sons: New Jersey, Chapter 1 pp. 2-22
- <sup>ii</sup> DOCOMOMO's inaugural conference was held in 1990 with conferences every two years from that point. English Heritage held two conferences; *Modern Matters* in 1994 and *Preserving Post War Heritage* in 1996, APT held *Preserving the Recent Past* in 1994 and *Preserving the Recent Past II* in 1996. (See References)
- <sup>iii</sup> The International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) 1928-1959, involved an influential group of architects whose intent was to formalize the architectural principles of the Modern Movement, and embed architecture and urban planning's role as an economic and political tool to reform the built environment.
- <sup>iv</sup> CIAM produced the *Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments* in 1931, essentially the first international charter for conservation. The Charter is downloadable at: [http://www.icomos.org/docs/athens\\_charter.html](http://www.icomos.org/docs/athens_charter.html)
- <sup>v</sup> The ICOMOS ISC 20's creation and interim management group was approved by ICOMOS Executive Committee in 2005. The first meeting was held at the ICOMOS General Assembly in Xian, China in 2006 and the first elections to the Committee at the General Assembly in Quebec in 2008.
- <sup>vi</sup> The conference proceedings cited above and other texts included in the references all include a number of papers on this issue. For a recently summary from a practicing architect's perspective see Allan, John. "Points of

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balance: patterns of practice in the conservation of modern architecture". In *Conservation of modern architecture*. Eds. Macdonald, S, Nomandin K, and Kindred B (2007) Donhead, Shaftesbury, UK

<sup>vii</sup> Ennis House Foundation literature [www.ennishouse.org](http://www.ennishouse.org)

<sup>viii</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright in a letter to Mr. & Mrs. Charles Ennis 1924. For information of the Ennis House see [www.ennishouse.org](http://www.ennishouse.org)

<sup>ix</sup> Thorne, Ross. 1997 "Quality, longevity and listing" In Stratton, Michael (ed.) 1997 *Structure and style: conserving 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings*. E & FN Spon, London pp. 200, 201 In examining typical building repair cycles these figures cited in the early 1990s have been borne out over the last 15 years.

<sup>x</sup> This list was initially developed in 1994 then modified in 2007 in Macdonald, S. "Authenticity is more than skin deep: conserving Britain's post-war concrete architecture." In APT Bulletin Bronson S. and Jester T. (eds.) *Special issue: Mending the modern*. Volume XXVIII, Number 4 (1997) pp38

<sup>xi</sup> From personal discussions with Jean Laberge, Architect, City of Montréal in April 2009.

<sup>xii</sup> The Rose Seidler house is under the care of the Historic Houses Trust a government run body that manages 14 sites in NSW. The National Trust in England is a charity responsible for the care conservation and display of over 350 properties including 2 Willow Road and the Homewood.

<sup>xiii</sup> De Witt, Wim. 2007 "The living memory of modernism/ about the collection" In *Julius Shulman: Modernism rediscovered*. Taschen, Cologne

<sup>xiv</sup> Ackerman, James. 2001 *On the Origins of Architectural Photography* Mellon Lecture, Canadian Centre for Architecture (CAA). Downloadable at: <http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/item/default.asp?tttype=2&tid=8493>

<sup>xv</sup> Julius Shulman's work has been widely published since the late 1990s by Benedikt Taschen who has specialised in architectural books since the late 1980s.

<sup>xvi</sup> National Trust for Historic Preservation 2009 America's 11 most endangered historic places, is available on line at: <http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/11-most-endangered/>

<sup>xvii</sup> Survey LA is the City of Los Angeles's first comprehensive historic resources survey that is intended to provide an important planning tool and provide the basis of a historic preservation program for the City. The survey area encompasses some 880,000 land parcels and will be carried out over the next 3 years. The Getty Conservation Institute is providing assistance through funding and technical support. See [www.preservation.lacity.org/survey](http://www.preservation.lacity.org/survey) and [www.getty.edu/conservation/field\\_projects/lasurvey/index](http://www.getty.edu/conservation/field_projects/lasurvey/index)

<sup>xviii</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup>-century individual residences on the world heritage list at the time of writing include; the Tugendhat Villa in Brno, the Luis Barragan House in Mexico and the Rietveld Schröder House in the Netherlands.

<sup>xix</sup> Jencks, Charles. 2005 *The iconic building*. Rizzoli, New York

<sup>xx</sup> Op. Cit p. 12

<sup>xxi</sup> Op. Cit. p.7

<sup>xxii</sup> Glendenning, Miles. 2008 "The Trojan horse: contemporary 'iconic' architecture and the falsification of modernism". In: *Proceedings of the 10<sup>th</sup> international Docomomo conference, the challenge of change: dealing with the legacy of the Modern Movement*. Eds Van den Heuvel, D., Mesman, M, Quist, W., Lemmens, B. IOS Press, Eindhoven