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An architecture-of-the-future is as impossible as the future itself. But an architecture for a present that extends into the future is both possible and, today, uniquely desirable. Even in an age of extreme self-awareness, it remains the unquestioned role of architecture, by critique or by affirmation, to provide us society with an expression of that society’s “highest” understanding of itself and its situation in the cosmos. An implicit—sometimes explicit—component of this expression is a sense of the temporal continuity of that society: architecture is the most visible evidence, and thus the greatest possible expression, of survival. An oft-remarked characteristic of our present society, however, is its lack of conviction about such issues of continuance. This is because the business of self-awareness is criticism. In pursuing this business, we have, it seems, given up (or lost) a felt connection to our future. This condition has found an expression in an exciting and vital critical architecture, but it is understandably incapable yet of supporting a mainstream or vernacular architecture. Like a critical society, a critical architecture is, by definition, tied to the object of its criticism. As the status quo, such an object can exist only in the present tense, and a critical architecture can find existence only in the problems it uncovers/expresses in its critique.

Yet there is an inescapable component of futurity in all constructions that persevere in time. Even when glancing backward, the classic architectures

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House Tract

This critical project for a house in the suburbs of Southern California (Malibu Ranch) is intended to serve as a flexible prototype for replication in these characteristically undifferentiated tracts: a parallel tract, refining and enriching the original. As the land values in these postwar housing tracts skyrocket, the modest original bungalows are being systematically torn down and replaced by speculative contractor-designed houses which max out the available envelope in the service of maximum marketability, elevating the neighborhoods with their consumer mentality.

A young developer has approached the architect with the task of designing a “house for a young family” in this area that would be a critique of this unfortunate trend by demonstrating: (1) that maximum value does not equal maximum volume, (2) that dwelling can be an active pursuit rather than a passive condition, (3) that the fusion of the structure of the suburban nuclear family can be a source of growth and architectural excitement rather than fear (it is this fear that is usually buried under the excessive square footage and more amenities.)
of the past found their programs in
the promise of immortality to their
patrons (whether individuals or
society). This desire for survival
and continuity has disappeared
from the cosmology, but not the
epischeme. Jaded by critique into
despair, or vaunted by fanatism
into silliness, the futurity of the
object, and a conviction about the
future it might impart, is deferred.

Instead of these extreme attitudes,
we can imagine dealing with
futurity more constructively.
Indeed, we would propose an
architecture based upon a
"reasonable present vision" of the
future: an architecture for a present
that will become the future. This
formulation is nothing new—it is
implicit in the hoary Commoditas
(reasonable) Firmata (present)
Vernata (visions)—but it is
unusual: in an "age" marked by
extremes of conformity and
revolution, a well-considered,
reasonable vision is radical indeed.

Astronauts' Memorial
To be located at the Kennedy Space Center,
this vast reflective plane—a 40' by 50' sheet
of polished black granite—will be tilted and
rotated by a computer-controlled tracking
system, keeping the sun behind the slab. Mirrors
on the back will direct the Florida sunlight
through the inscriptions cut into the granite
monolith. The whole technological apparatus
sits on an elevated position so that it will interact
with the ever-changing atmosphere. This
winning entry to a rational competition will be
built.

Photos courtesy of Holt Henshaw Plus Jones
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