

The Invisible Political Economy of Architectural Production

David Harvey

Look at Canary Wharf in London's Docklands and what does one see? A collection of buildings by some of the world's better known architectural firms – one building by I.M. Pei, two by Skidmore Owings and Merrill, one by Kohn Pederson and Fox and the 800 foot tower designed by Cesar Pelli – lavishly appointed and equipped to be Europe's most prestigious, most elegant, most beautifully manicured and above all most internally efficient office complex. Each of the buildings is, within the limits of its own style and space, competently executed and in some cases designed with some flair. The finishing and detail is exquisite and attention has also been paid (unlike most of the haphazard development of London's Docklands) to how each building might offset the other as part of a complex whole in which visual interaction, both from afar and from close at hand, might prove imposing and even, perhaps, intriguing.

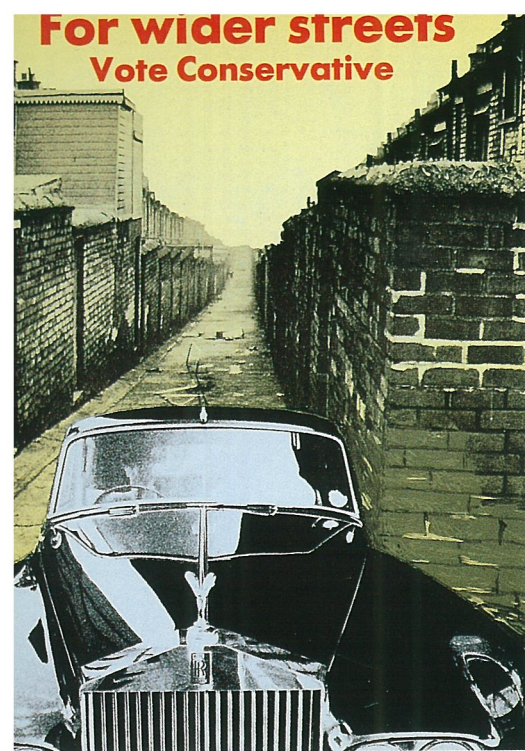
But if Mies van der Rohe was right and architecture is indeed 'the spirit of the age conceived in spatial terms', then presumably we should also take account of the 'spirit' of that age which led Canary Wharf's developers, Olympia and York, to go bankrupt in the biggest property company crash the world has ever known (owing some \$20 billion to banks and other creditors). For many, the whole complex has, as a result, come to be read as the last instance of the insane, credit-fuelled real estate boom of the late eighties.

Not, of course, that the physical design of the complex is above criticism. There are, to begin with, questions of scale ('But why does it have to be so tall, Mr. Pelli?' asked Prince Charles of the tower's architect). It has all the air of a moribund office space that will wake up only when the rhythms and flows of office work dictate. There is no truly liveable space in sight. The only attempt to instill any sense of life, diversity and difference relies on playing the game of upscale ethnic commodity markets (Peruvian rugs and Brazilian beauty products) on the ground floor shopping spaces and creating neatly manicured flower-pot spaces elsewhere so that at least something other than money might be seen to grow in the place. It announces the death of public space and the street as a site of heterogeneity and difference, and commemorates the universal and homogenising uniformity of money power without even a trace of guilt. It will take tremendous dedication and effort on the part of London's more ambitious street-dwellers, skateboarders, performers and urban ravers to create anything at all out of this hostile, alien and isolated terrain. Even the Situationists at their best, would have had a hard time to liberate this space, even for a day, from its pervasive and oppressive business-class, space-age mix of surface glitter and inner gloom.

Hardly surprisingly, there has been a certain reluctance of office workers to get trapped in such a sepulchral place – presuming they can get there, given the lack of any decent transportation infrastructure to access the site. The employees of the conservative *Daily Telegraph* newspaper, whose proprietors were apparently determined to be one of the first on board Margaret Thatcher's flagship Docklands Development project (she began her 1987 electoral campaign with a political stunt in the Docklands to make the point that her brand of capitalism could fix up anything), are reputed to hate the place. The civil servants whom the government are now considering as filler for the empty unlet spaces (with an extra hour's commuting time) and hence as a hidden bail-out for the project are hardly enthusiastic. They are probably viewing with alarm the latest reports which say that the Department of the Environment is actually going to buy one of the buildings to house their own offices as part of a deal to galvanise investors to continue funding for the project while simultaneously helping reluctant corporate tenants and their office workers shed the feeling that they are about to be stranded on the far edge of some space-age financial monitoring station.

But then what more could we expect, given the spirit of the age which produced such a use of urban space? For Canary Wharf is the product of massive investment by financial institutions in an office complex designed to house other financial institutions which themselves make money out of, among other things, real estate ventures like Canary Wharf. When that spiral becomes a circle then small wonder that it snaps, as it has for so many property developers in the Docklands and elsewhere as well as for

For wider streets Vote Conservative



Klaus Staeck, 1974

the bankers who finance them. What is not immediately visible about Canary Wharf is exactly its relation to this process of money-making and money circulation. Yet here, too, it does not take much imagination to visualise the space as a pure product of the money which circulates through it. Think of Simmel's observation: 'To the extent that money, with its colourlessness and its indifferent quality can become a denominator of all values, it becomes the frightful leveller – it hollows out the core of things, their specific values and their uniqueness and incomparability in a way which is beyond repair. They all float with the same specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money'.★

★ Simmel, G., 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in D. Levine (ed.), *On Individuality and Social Forms*, Chicago 1971, p. 330.

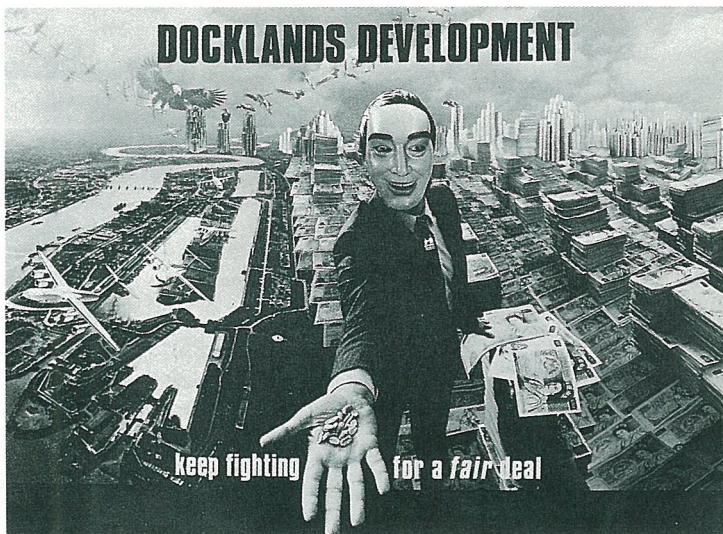
Then think of Canary Wharf, floating like a lost ark downstream from the City on the tide of the Thames, and floating even more emphatically in that moving stream of money which hollows out the



Hilton Hotel Pool, Sidney, 1984

core of things and destroys all alternative senses of value. Even the most habituated and thoroughly socialised office-worker must feel some sense of loss when they find themselves consigned to the hollowed out core of nothingness which lies at the heart of financial capital. When money destroys the community it becomes the community, said Marx, yet most of us resist, in some way or other, that simple equation. Even the capitalists demur, but the only way left for them to compensate for money's hollowing out and levelling powers is to accumulate more and more of it. So when they build, they build up and up to clutch at the only distinction that monuments to capital have left: to scream at the skyline of every capitalist city that 'I am bigger, larger, richer and more important than you!' But it does not take much to see through that bravado. The moving stream of money, having passed like

the hand of mammon across the land, flows on and on leaving all kinds of places that once were awash with the stuff drained quite high and dry. Just before the bankruptcy of Olympia and York, it was reported that the interest bill alone was draining cash at the rate of £40,000 an hour. While that may be quite invisible to the seeing eye, it poses a potentially deadly physical threat to large swathes of London's built environment. If nothing flows in, then only reserves can flow out and when reserves run dry only bankruptcy remains and that implies the devaluation or even physical run-down and destruction of some portion of the built environment. Not that Canary Wharf will necessarily fall down. It is often the case, Marx commented, that those first in the field in projects of this kind fail, but those who take over from them reap the surplus. Canary Wharf will almost certainly be snapped up at a fire-sale price by some investor or other, in exactly the same way that Olympia and York became so big and powerful in the early eighties by snapping up properties cheap in New York City at the bottom of the real estate cycle and making huge profits on them on the up-turn – why Olympia and York entered the London market at the peak of the boom is still a mystery unless it is to be explained simply in terms of hubris. The problem in London will lie with all of that secondary surplus office space which now lies half empty and which, lacking the accoutrements and attractions of Canary Wharf, may indeed bite the dust physically as well as financially. But no matter, the beacon of financial power at Canary Wharf ought still to be visualised as an obelisk commemorating those who lived and died by speculative greed. But, sadly, it was not only the speculators and their financiers who got hurt. The obelisk of Canary

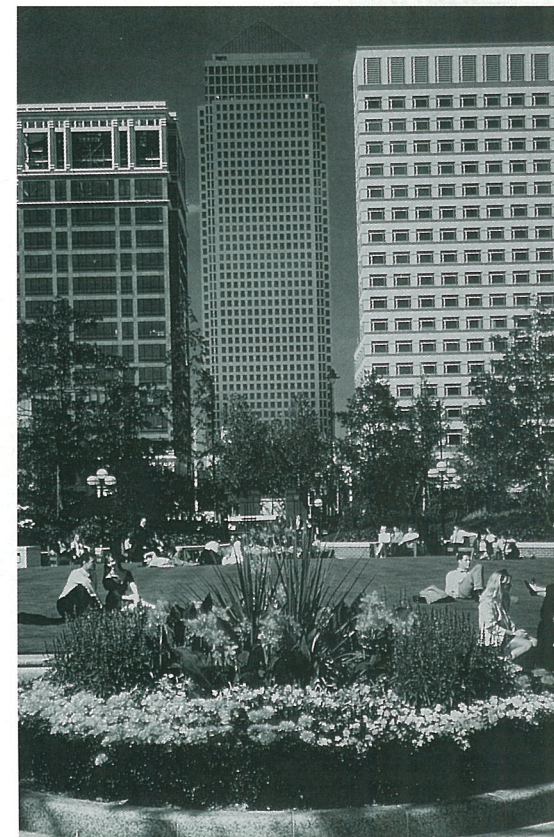


Docklands Community Poster Project, *The Changing Picture of Docklands*, photomural in Wapping

Wharf also commemorates the victims of an eighties politics of urban apartheid. 'The fortified wall which had once circled the docks,' David Widgery suggested, 'was not so much torn down as rearranged as a series of fences, barriers, security gates and keep-out signs which seek to keep the working class away from the new proletarian-free yuppie zones.'★ Canary Wharf cuts itself off from any relation to its potential neighbours. Olympia and York made some attempts to mollify restive local populations and reconcile them to their inevitable fate, though the employment compact which was supposed to link indigenous workforces

to construction and other jobs never worked and irate local residents are suing them for compensation for the deleterious health and other effects of ten years of blight, disruption, dirt and construction noise. But the overall project has to be seen in the context of the despoliation of a whole zone of London of its human resources. Said Widgery, a local doctor long resident in London's East End: 'Mrs. Thatcher's chosen monument may be the commercial majesty of Canary Wharf topped out only two weeks before her resignation in November 1990, but I see the social cost which has been paid for it in the streets of the East End: the schizophrenic dementing in public, the young mother bathing the newborn in the sink of a B-and-B, the pensioner dying pinched and cold in a decrepit council flat, the bright young kids who can get dope much easier than education, wasted on smack. I also see the pain of those trying to cope in the social services whose collective provision the Thatcher era systematically derided, underfinanced and then "reformed".'

★ Widgery, D., *Some Lives! A GP's East End*, London 1991, p. 219.



Cesar Pelli, Canary Wharf Tower, London, 1989

? How come the American Grand Old Party and the English Tories got re-elected time and again, often by a landslide? What is their edge over their hardly less conservative rivals? Do we have to take your words as criticism of the concept of democracy?

! I have never regarded the electoral victories of Thatcher/Reagan (and later, Bush and Major) as massive landslide victories. The rate of abstention in elections in the USA has been so high in most presidential elections that Reagan was in fact getting elected with only 26 percent of the eligible vote (which itself was much less than the potential voting population). In Britain, the highest score the Conservatives have ever achieved is 43 percent. What we have had in these countries these last few years is an electoral dictatorship of minority right-wing governments. This in part could continue because of the failure of the left to define a significant alternative. As soon as someone like Clinton offers even a glimmer of hope (even though I do not consider it a real alternative) he gets elected.

It was very much the spirit of that age which we call the eighties, particularly in Thatcher's Britain and Reagan's United States, to deliberately marginalise and beat down whole swathes of the working class population who, from the standpoint of the ruling interests of the time were thought to have acquired far too much influence over capitalist affairs. The eighties was not, it must be said, an easy time for world capitalism in general – with low growth and heightened international competition –, but politics also played its role. A starkly honest version of Thatcher's politics in Britain, for example, has been given by Alan Budd, an economic advisor to government. The eighties policies of tackling inflation by squeezing the economy and public spending were, he suggests, 'a cover to bash the workers'. 'Raising unemployment was a very desirable way of reducing the strength of the working classes. What was engineered, in Marxist terms – was a crisis in capitalism which re-created a reserve army of labour, and has allowed the capitalists to make high profits ever since.' ★ Interestingly, Stockman (Reagan's hatchet man at the Office of Management and Budgeting the early eighties) tells a similar story in his book of reminiscences: the budget deficit of the United States was deliberately created and allowed to become astronomical in the early eighties in order to force reductions in welfare expenditures and social programmes on a recalcitrant Congress and a resistant U.S. public. ? It may seem wrong to invoke all this in connection with Canary Wharf, yet it is important to visualise the connection which otherwise eludes the seeing eye. For Canary Wharf is a piece of architectural production which relates to its period and place and which in all sorts of ways reflects the political economy of its times. It is, as Widgery put it, 'the most ostentatious example of a process by which multinational commercial developers, largely financed and controlled from outside Britain, have been allowed to create a new "free market" metropolis.' Within a metropolis. It has also been central to the re-shaping of London's urban space in ways reflective of an increasing segregation between the rich and powerful and their favoured financial institutions on the one hand and an increasingly marginalised and impoverished population on the other. The eighties was a decade in which the rich got very much richer and the poor became significantly poorer and that has been inscribed into urban space either by increasing territorial

Capitalism is always about individuals making money by whatever means and that has nothing whatsoever to do necessarily with making long-run rational allocations of financial resources.

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segregation of populations or by exercising ever tighter social (even military) control over the uses of urban space. 'A typical action', reported Widgery 'is that of a group of high-income Dockneys (the yuppy Isle of Dogs residents' self-designation) who sued their private landowners because they failed to curb the "nuisance" of indigenous neighbours who had the propensity for shouting and hanging out washing'. 'As the walls have come down in Eastern Europe', Davis remarks in the quite different context of Los Angeles but in terms which are remarkably appropriate for Canary Wharf, 'they are being erected all over (our own cities)'.

But how and why could all of this happen in the way it did? A useful way to reflect on that question is to situate Canary Wharf against the background of the temporal and spatial changes occurring within global capitalism in the eighties. The recession of 1979-81, although it was, as we have seen, politically exaggerated by both Reagan and Thatcher, was real enough. It implied no easy end in sight for the difficulties into which global capitalism had lapsed after the long post-war boom came to a shuddering halt in the deep recession of 1973-5. Fundamental to this recessionary process was yet another bout of what we political economists call 'overaccumulation' – a periodic condition of capitalism in which idle capital (manufacturing capacity, goods, facilities, or money) lies side by side with surpluses of labour power (the unemployed or underemployed) and there seems no way to bring the two elements of production together because the prospects for profit are so poor. In the manufacturing sector, overaccumulation is typically manifest as 'deindustrialisation' and 'rationalisation' of existing job structures. The effect is to put workers employed in manufacturing and ancillary activities under the strong disciplinary threat of unemployment and in the process leave working class communities as derelict and despoiled zones of human despair, left high and dry by that flowing stream of money that has sucked the living labour out of them for so many years in ways that the developers of Canary Wharf, itself left stranded, will never have the misfortune to know. Symptomatic here was the fall in registered employment in the London docks from nearly 25,000 in the late sixties to barely 4,000 in 1981 and its ultimate total demise, leaving

something like a 32 per cent male unemployment rate in the area by the mid eighties and a terribly depressed set of communities in London's East End. ?

The political choice of the Thatcher and Reagan governments, however, was to blame capitalism's evident failures in the recession of 1979-82 (which they themselves partially engineered) on the excessive power of organised labour and on the burdens placed on entrepreneurial endeavour by excessive state regulation. Deregulation and privatisation, coupled with attacks upon trade unions and the welfare state, became crucial aspects of a government policy which bore all the hallmarks of naked class aggression. The deregulation of financial services was regarded in this light as one of the keys to economic success. Free up financial capital flows and financial services, the argument went, and the natural proclivity for money to seek out the best rate of return would lead to the reallocation of economic resources in such a way as to provide the grounds for renewed economic growth. The further implication was that national boundaries should also become much more permeable to capital flow and that financial capital should be able to operate more freely at the global scale. Territorial barriers to capital flows were reduced as were state powers to regulate the inflows and outflows of capital. But, at the same time, concentrations of financial power never seen before emerged in the world's financial mar-



Hong Kong

kets, based primarily in New York, Tokyo and London. Led by New York, London was one of the first financial centers to follow the deregulation game in what came to be called the 'Big Bang' of 1986. This was touted as the way to make London economically secure by positioning itself as switching point within the never-ending flow of money and as host to the seemingly unlimited variety of financial services that would accompany that. Overaccumulation in the economy in general could be absorbed within the world's financial system at the same time as all that unemployment in the London Docks could be offset by the booming employment in financial services. And that booming employment would mean burgeoning demand for custom-equipped high-tech office space.

The project had all manner of defects. Deregulation did not necessarily lead to better allocations of economic resources. Instead, it provided abundant opportunities for corruption (Ivan Boesky, Milken, Guinness, the BCCI banking fiasco) or speculative recklessness (the Savings and Loan scandals in the United States lost some \$300 billion in a decade, much of it on reckless real estate ventures). Capitalism is always about individuals making money by whatever means and that has nothing whatsoever to do necessarily with making long-run rational allocations of financial resources. Deregulation and privatisation merely provided multiple opportunities for financial wizards to get rich quick simply by punching the right numbers into their computer screens. Dockers, furthermore, do not easily convert into



Blade Runner, movie by Ridley Scott, 1982

? It is not very long ago that full-scale protests were launched by the victims of the governmental and capitalist politics you describe in no uncertain words. The demonstrations however were targeted against substantially less flagrant developments. At the time unions displayed strength. So-called left-wing political parties – Labour in England and on the continent, and to a lesser degree Liberals in the U.S. – succeeded in implementing measures such as capital gains sharing, participation councils, and social housing programmes. You sketch a monstrous condition of our time, you volunteer arguments which resemble all properties of an apocalypse. How can a critical movement fall silent the moment interests of large sections of the population are more tampered with than ever before?

! The critical movement has in part fallen silent because of institutional repressions (organised by minority electoral dictatorships as well as through capitalist control of the media) and the massive effects of deindustrialisation and unemployment. It has also failed to mobilise anything more than an often fragmented political response out of its own soul-searching and disarray. But the potential for massive response is always there, as we have seen in Britain in the public response to the Tory government's proposals to destroy coal mining production and, with it, one of the strongest bastions of working class politics.

? Viewed from your ethical points of departure, this is no less than hell. Your theoretical inclination towards diagnosing the crime contradictions of capitalism, might signal an oncoming revolution. No such thing however is about to happen. How much more time do you grant capitalism?

! Capitalism, as a political-economic and social system, is in a very sick state. I do not say that we are into the 'ultimate' crisis, but plainly the supposed victory over communism has been a hollow one (witness Germany) and the power centres of capitalist development over the last decade or so – Japan and Germany – are experiencing all sorts of difficulties. What I fear most of all is collapse of capitalism into warring trade blocks (of the sort that arose in the thirties) as a prelude to nationalist/fascist takeovers in significant parts of the world. The left has to get together in the face of threats of that sort.

stockbrokers, and long-term structural unemployment became more and more of a chronic problem in the midst of get-rich-quick financial capitalism. And then came 'Black Monday' of October 1987, which saw the crash of the stockmarket which forced financial institutions to cut back their employment. The vast debt-bottling plants and swathes of office space under construction across London suddenly lacked tenants as profit margins shrank in the financial sector and as brokerage fees and all manner of other business dried up.?

The search for financial solutions to problems of capital overaccumulation in the eighties had by then also spun off into the real estate sector in a very big way. Real estate borrowing in Britain shot up from less than £10 billion in 1987 to close to £40 billion in early 1992, while in the United States, even after a year of solid shake-out which followed upon a decade of extraordinary growth, the debt mountain on real estate borrowing topped \$160 billion. Here, too, the climate of deregulation of financial flows, laxer planning restrictions all coupled with grumbling problems of overaccumulation in general, led to a sudden flood of surplus capital into the construction of the built environment (office space, shopping malls, etcetera) without a thought that this could or even certainly would (as many past speculative episodes had showed) create a situation in which overaccumulation of assets in the built environment



Anthony Hernandez, Landscapes for the homeless, 1989

was likely to become a serious problem. Nowhere did this become more spectacular than in overproduction of commercial office space which, by 1990, already exhibited an appallingly low and quite unremunerative occupancy rate in most of the world's major cities, including London. The crisis of overproduction of office space which has broken out over the last few years, with all sorts of ramifications for the viability of financial institutions (to say nothing of the developers) is, then, a thoroughly predictable aspect of capitalism's general penchant for overaccumulation. Furthermore, the slackening demand for office space pointed down a very slippery slope. As the developers of office space went into bankruptcy they left even more massive problems for the financial sector which meant even less demand for office space. Spirals built on feedback effects of this sort can just as easily point down as up. And it is exactly in such a context that both the production of Canary Wharf in the midst of that flood of surplus capital into the built environment during the late eighties and the financial collapse of its developer, Olympia and York, at the moment of withdrawal after 1990, has to be placed.

But to look at the question solely in temporal terms is also to miss something vital to the story. Of all the material forms that capital can assume, the financial form is by far the most geographically mobile and hence most global in its field of action. It is not always easy to lure it to earth from out of the telecommunications ether in which it is typically wont to float. And if it is to become transformed into

a fixed and long-lived physical element in the built environment, financial capital increasingly demands all manner of strong inducements and guarantees. State powers (national or local) become crucial to offering such inducements and financial capital increasingly looks to come down to earth only in those places where its returns are guaranteed or subsidised and its risks minimised. Competition between places to attract inward investment of any type has, as a consequence, become much sharper as community after community falls over itself to offer more and more inducements to capital to come to town. London, for example, was in clear competition with other financial centres for business (not so much with New York and Tokyo with which it tended to share the spoils, but with Frankfurt, Basle, and other European rivals). Canary Wharf was meant to make London Europe's most attractive financial centre precisely by virtue of its qualities and to make sure that as little of that supposedly lucrative financial business as possible went abroad. But if Canary Wharf was to perform that function, then it first had to be built.

Inter-urban competition on the European scale for financial services has become acute in recent years. National governments and municipalities behave like the Cargo Cultists of Papua New Guinea, who seek to lure passing aircraft to earth by building imitation landing strips in the vague hope that some might land. This comparison is not so far-fetched as it might seem. In the Canary Wharf case a suitable landing strip was prepared to lure in totally unregulated foreign finance capital to build the office space that would lure major financial institutions to set up in London. The London Docklands Development Corporation, set up by the conservative government in 1981, had all sorts of powers devolved to it (it was also enabled to circumvent the wishes of democratically elected local authorities at will) with the express purpose of luring in capital of the sort needed to support the Canary Wharf Project. The Docklands Consultative Committee estimates that the LDDC expended something of the order of £1.3 billion of public moneys to prepare the ground for a project that was supposed to be a monument to the spirit of free enterprise capitalism and private entrepreneurial endeavour. Ironically, when the govern-

The rebuilding of urban space becomes, as it were, a 'spatial fix' for capitalism's overaccumulated capital. The game of completely re-shaping the interior spaces of cities, shifting its populations around at will, disrupting older and received ways of living and where necessary clearing out whole populations from off their preferred terrain, is background accompaniment to the 'hymn to greed'.

ment was faced with panic demands that it bail out Canary Wharf not only to save London's competitive position in the struggle to bring in financial services but also to prevent some threatened *melt-down* in the world's financial markets, it at first demurred on the grounds that it had already put in enough! Later, as we have seen, it has opened the way for a covert subsidy to the project by proposing to move one of its largest departments into the complex either as tenant or buyer. But the plain fact is that Canary Wharf, for all the governmental proclamations to the contrary, is a state subsidised project which has been nevertheless used to proclaim the virtues of private enterprise.

But here another even more localised element of spatial competition enters into the picture. For though the famous Square Mile that is the City of London appeared to be running out of space and although the buildings there were difficult to adapt to the high-tech needs of modern financial services (compared to the ability to custom build in Canary Wharf), it turned out that relaxation of planning restrictions and the coming on the market of some new development opportunities around railway stations like Liverpool and Broad Streets allowed the City to try and out-compete Docklands in a free-for-all of spatial competition. The consequent competitive overproduction of office space became all-too-apparent after the stockmarket crash on 'Black Monday' of October 1987 had led to all manner of cut-backs in financial services. Potential rents on Canary Wharf fell as a consequence of intense competition from the much better positioned Square Mile. Rents which ran as high as £35 per square foot in 1987 in Docklands fell to as low as £6 per square foot with some potential tenants being allowed in for nothing (and their old leases being bought out in complicated deals by Olympia and York so that net rental may in fact have been negative). Heightened intra-capitalist competition (and in this case inter-territorial competition) in times of slump can produce quite ruinous results. And so it was for Olympia and York. But creating landing strips for highly mobile financial capital presumes a clearing of the land of all previous tenants as a prelude to redevelopment. Such clearance can in part be accomplished as the seeming-

? *The political-economic background of the contemporary architecture you describe should be studied by architects. But, if they actually realised the scope of Canary Wharf for instance, they could not any longer take their profession seriously as a critical instrument. Could you please specify your recommendation to architects, and do you happen to know instances in which architecture was able to operate along the lines of this kind of insights?*

! Architects, precisely because they do not build buildings with their own money, cannot be in the revolutionary vanguard except in the narrow sense of exploring the possibilities inherent in new materials, design systems, production systems and philosophies in the social construction of space. Precisely because of their expertise in these areas, they can sometimes be subversive of their client's intent (e.g. producing office spaces that will be friendly for the homeless needing warmth and shelter) and sometimes make direct proposals for designs that cannot be built under existing social relations. Within the latter, however, they can also produce community forms of architecture, disorganised spaces and micromonumental forms which serve more popular ends than simply working for Olympia and York.

ly 'natural' corollary to capitalism's in-built penchant for what the economist Schumpeter liked to call the 'creative destruction' of capitalism's dynamic. If 'progress' is inevitable, then the wholesale decline of London's once thriving Docklands with its tightknit working class communities, can be viewed as an inevitable byproduct of that progress which brought us far more efficient means of overcoming spatial barriers through containerisation, computerisation, roll-on-roll-off ferries, and jet cargo transport. But this is not all that is involved, for even when the jobs are gone, the communities, however impoverished, often struggle on, refusing to leave the spaces they occupy. It frequently takes a quite savage attack upon them to clear the land so that redevelopment of the Docklands sort can be achieved. Clearance becomes even more imperative when overaccumulated capital with, seemingly, nowhere else to go, is poised to flood indiscriminately into real estate development. The hunger for more and more development sites places a great premium upon taking no prisoners as the land is ruthlessly cleared of its indigent population. The rebuilding of urban space then becomes, as it were, a 'spatial fix' for capitalism's overaccumulated capital. The game of completely re-shaping the interior spaces of cities, shifting its populations around at will, disrupting older and received ways of living and where necessary clearing out whole populations from their preferred terrain, is background accompaniment to that 'hymn to greed' (to use Richard Rogers' phrase) that always emanates from redevelopment projects of the Canary Wharf sort.



Wim Quist, Morgan Bank, Amsterdam.

? *How could you help making people critical, in a world in which the problems of this world are no longer reflected in the lives of the people who could do something about it?*

! I simply disagree that the problems of this world are not reflected in my own life. I encounter more and more homeless people on the streets of Oxford every day, more and more burglar alarms are visible (including fake ones) and the safety with which I and my friends can use the spaces of the city is diminishing. I do not want to live in a fortress society or an unjust society and a lot of people now feel that (including a very Conservative architecture critic for a major right-wing newspaper whom I met the other day). The battle is not so much to make people aware of these problems, as to come up with an articulate programme as to what to do about it all.

So what then should we visualise when we look at Canary Wharf? Architecture, it has been remarked, 'is the one art form that deals with space directly'. 'Painting can depict space, poetry can form an image of it, music can offer an analogy, but only architecture can actually create it.'★ But what sort of space is it that architecture works with and what does the architect-developer do to that space when he or she works to create it? The traditional view, Kern argues, was 'that space was an inert void in which objects existed' but at the turn of the century this began to give way to a view of space as 'active and full'. This meant in turn that architecture began to be viewed as constitutive, not only of spatial organisation but of social life itself. The foreground (positive space) had now to be seen in relation to the background (negative space) and this led, Kern suggests, to a vision of 'positive negative space' in which the 'background itself is a positive element, of equal importance with all the others'.

★ Kern, S., *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, London 1983, p.158.

So what background constitutes this positive element of equal importance to the foreground of Canary Wharf? For the most part, architects would probably interpret that question solely in terms of the kinds of proportionalities required of aesthetic forms as they lie physically in space. But buildings also exist against a background of that moving stream of money, of capital accumulation and overaccumulation, of imperatives to reconstitute urban space to absorb surplus capital, all in ways that bear little or no relation to human need but which submit entirely to the dictates of human greed. Learning to visualise the background space in these terms giving it equal importance (as positive negative space) to the foreground appears to me to be the first step towards a critical architecture, an architectural discourse which opens up the invisible for inspection. ??