



**BUILDING IDEAS - MJP ARCHITECTS
MONOGRAPH LAUNCH PARTY SPEECH
Richard MacCormac**

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**Building Ideas – MJP Monograph launch party speech
by Richard MacCormac**

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It is wonderful to see so many friends and supporters here. This party is about the book, but it is also to thank you, to recognise that the monograph is the record of a collective collaboration effort over nearly 40 years of practice. I also particularly want to thank my original partners Peter Jamieson and David Prichard without whom this practice would not have got going.

So, we are finally launching this book. Putting it together has been an extraordinary effort, delving into the MJP archive to recover the drawings, photographs and descriptions of over 150 projects.

It is of course a history of the work of MJP so far, but it also, I think a history of architectural practice in the UK and the way in which architecture and architects have to continually respond to new circumstances with new kinds of creativity and new ideas. I see it as a record of a continuous quest.

Those ideas start before the practice was founded, with the work of Leslie Martin and Lionel March at Cambridge University into the geometric relationships between Land Use and Built Form. And that kind of rationale underpins our most recent research into new kinds of suburbia and new housing types. This approach kickstarted our housing work in the new towns, Milton Keynes and Warrington and its rigour brought the practice into the shortlist for the Robinson College Cambridge Competition in 1974. So, rather surprisingly, in retrospect we moved from public housing into University projects notably for Oxford and Cambridge colleges who have been our most committed clients – the Kendrew Quad, which is the third project for St John's has an open day on the 16th of this month.

It was building in such historic situations for illustrious clients which pitched us into the battle ground of major commercial development in London. Our masterplan for Spitalfields, which I think signalled ways of reconciling large scale, commercial development with small scale local businesses, in what I have called global and local transactions was never realised. Our building in Paternoster Square was successfully achieved. The BBC redevelopment at Portland Place will fulfil its urban intentions of terminating Regent Street and creating a setting for All Souls, even if the architecture of the interior has been lost. Other singular

MJP Architects 9 Heneage Street, Spitalfields, London E1 5LJ
T 020 7377 9262 E mjp@mjparchitects.co.uk W www.mjparchitects.co.uk

projects, thanks to client commitment, were fully realised ; amongst these were Cable and Wireless Training College, the Ruskin Library, the Wellcome Wing of the Science Museum, Jubilee Line Station at Southwark and most recently the British Embassy in Bangkok.

The book is not a conventional chronological account of projects described sequentially, but a series of themes, which engage with geometry, history, conviviality, materiality and so forth each of which enables the projects to be examined in different ways. This doesn't claim to be a comprehensive inventory of architectural meaning but a declaration of the scope of architecture beyond technology and style. This came to me when writing about the Ruskin library for the catalogue of the 1996 Venice Biennale. British Architecture particularly in its 'hi tech' manifestations, what ever its intrinsic quality seemed to me to be deliberately limited and self referential.

So although the book is about the making of architecture as an intellectual discipline it is also about how architecture can be sociable, how it can engage with the legacy of history and recover the capacity for symbolism and finally how the process of crafting buildings and expressing their materiality can involve the serendipitous collaboration of artists.

Thanks to Nico Jackson for working with us to put together such a lively text and Ian Latham for editing and designing a beautiful book, Richard Robinson, Stephen Morey, Peter Kent and Sue Barnes for successfully accomplishing the daunting process of research and coordination which has made the book possible,

We are also grateful to our essayists : Ricky Burdett, Richard Cork, Peter Davey, Frank Duffy, Robert Harbison, Bryan Lawson, Richard Murphy, Margaret Richardson, Richard Sennett and Colin Stansfield Smith

That such a range of people from backgrounds as diverse as philosophy, art criticism, history, museum curation, architecture and architectural education should have contributed, says so much about the cultural standing of the practice.