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THE MORPHOLOGY OF THE POST-INDUSTRIAL CITY: THE MANCHESTER MILL AS ‘SYMBOLIC FORM’

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Abstract. The contemporary post-industrial city has developed within a system where every square metre of its area might be assessed for its economic productivity and market value. Retail space, leisure space, even public open space, as well as housing and work environments are quantifiable and comparable in financial terms as the ultimate test of their value. This conception of urban space as units of capital has its origins in the industrial development of centres such as Manchester where, largely unencumbered by earlier urban patterns, the idea of the modern city could thrive.

As a ‘shock city’ Manchester, during the peak of its industrial growth in the early nineteenth century was an object of fascination and repulsion to the visitors it attracted. Opinion and rhetoric dominated social economic and political debate but dispassionate spatial analysis was rare. In the view of contemporary authors the town had few significant public spaces, instead being largely comprised of the vast industrial structures that crowded around the roads and canals. The mills were assessed for legal and insurance purposes, however, at a time of rabid competition and the prevalence of industrial accidents. The surveys that have survived provide the first opportunities to assess these examples of new urban space. The image results of a settlement composed of a single type, the mill or warehouse. Ancillary structure, most especially the workers’ housing did not merit recording.

In these products of spatial calculation the Manchester mill can be seen to set the pattern both for the productive spaces of industry and the spatial framework of the contemporary city, where the public space is one of consumption rather than community. The supervised and privatised public space of the contemporary city finds its genius loci in the industrial typology of its commercial origins.

Keywords: *laissez faire*, Manchester, morphology, regeneration.

‘The utopia of Bentham’

(Leon Faucher *Manchester in 1844*)

As someone who has now devoted nearly four decades to the study of architecture and urbanism, it was a salutary experience to observe the relatively low status of the built environment in Manchester’s official repository of record. In 2014, in the newly reopened Central Library, the Local History section’s holdings on architecture in Manchester account for considerably less shelf space than the ghost-written biographies of local television celebrities, even only those associated with one particular long-running soap opera. The plain truth is that Manchester, in general, has little regard for its architecture and is only begrudgingly concerned with it. The literature on the subject of Manchester’s architecture is sparse and, despite some academic interest, reflects a general lack of concern with the

built environment (Parkinson-Bailey 2000; Hartwell 2001). This is something of a paradox since the city is extremely aware of its image, and its architectural character, both historically and contemporaneously, is how the city represents itself to outsiders. It is the contention of this paper that this disinterest shown internally within the city (and outside of the professions in architecture and the built environment) is the result of the history of its industrial development and the economic basis of its recent regeneration.

The history of a city, even merely of the architecture of a city, can never present a definitive picture. When that city is itself in a self-conscious state of transition, with the apparent discarding of many traces of its own history as so much dross, an urban historian can see-

mingly be engaged on a particularly thankless task. Yet the recording and the assessing of such a recent phase as the nearly two decades since 15 June 1996 (when the city of Manchester suffered substantial physical damage to its commercial core) seems worthwhile with memories still relatively fresh, because the effects of the bomb and the strategies adopted in its aftermath were profound. The change in the visual appearance of the city, coinciding with transformations in urban policy which changed other northern English cities as well, represent the greatest rupture in the continuity of Manchester's urban development since the Second World War (Rogers *et al.* 1999). On the near side of such a breach, with all context affected, it is often difficult to recall what it was like on the far side, in a past the circumstances of which have clearly been abandoned forever. But we need to know why we are where we are to be confident that we know where we are going, and that the contemporary architecture of the city presents a sustainable model.

There is doubt in my voice mainly because what we see in Manchester's recent urban regeneration is so difficult to admire, presented through the marketing of the city as a great triumph over adversity, but in the experience of many visitors a completely generic experience providing a good range of international brands but increasingly few unique elements that might define urban quality.

Architecture is often described as a language, generally by those seeking to codify or predict its use and effects. But how might that metaphor be seen to operate in Manchester? The core of the architectural language of the city is blunt and terse in its vocabulary and syntax (one would not reasonably expect it to be anything else). With those characteristics comes a certain defensiveness that can be construed as rudeness or even crudity by the outsider, yet as with any language, the explicit layers of meaning are dependent on custom and culture that open and define the worlds of language to the insider. It surely is the same for the language of architecture, leading to that sense of incomprehension, bewilderment and alienation people feel in the face of deliberately uncommunicative buildings. This experience is only magnified when the architectural scale is expanded to that of the city, with its myriad compromises between private and public interests.

For Manchester, of course, that issue of language is inevitably tied to the aspect of class that pervades every aspect of British cultural life. The assumption of notionally sophisticated forms of architectural speech, far from overcoming the barriers of class

and inequality leads to claims either of provincial pretentiousness or of unrealistic over ambition and the abandonment of commonsense. This is evidenced by the disconnection between the city centre and its surrounding ring of impoverished areas which have continued to resist successive waves of remediation since the early twentieth century. Barriers exist between the architectural languages that cross this divide, in terms of density of occupation, scale of building, material expression and social factors which the pursuit of trickledown urbanism has failed to overcome.

The purpose of this paper is to explore some details of why the architecture and urbanism of Manchester looks as it does, and how the promotion of the regenerated city seems at odds to the experience of residents and visitors alike. As an academic working in the city I am often asked by visiting colleagues to account for the discrepancy between the generally laudatory literature available and the somewhat disappointing reality that literature claims to represent (RIBA & Manchester City Council 2004). It therefore seems important to provide an alternative account, partial, personal and maybe even provocative, which could help illuminate the puzzling reality of the city. The original growth of the city is still a pervasive cultural influence and the pattern set then still persists. It is my contention that the utilitarian attitude has a major role in that continuity.

Urban morphology too has a role in such persistence. In the morphology of the traditional example of the genre, such as Nolli's plan of Rome (1748) there is, in the eyes of many theorists, an assumed equivalence between the solid and voids of the city, often represented by figure-ground reversal. In the situation of Manchester, however, that balance is entirely missing, the solids are defined, discrete, and autonomous but the voids are just that, absences, fields without boundaries. Joseph Aston was among the first to describe the architecture of the rapidly developing industrial town (Aston 1804). His frame of reference was the Georgian town where an Italianate influence pervaded the planning and design of new planned districts, but he perceived in Manchester nothing of any significance in the provision of public space. In contrast, the buildings of the expanding industrial town offered the prospect of apparently spontaneous growth as structures rose up for manufacturing and warehousing. By the time of the second edition of *The Manchester Guide* in 1817 the updated plan of the town is circled on its outskirts by large rectilinear blocks the new megastructures of the 'shock city'. The rational organisation of internal

processes which building on open land allowed created the characteristic urban morphology of modernity with disconnected monofunctional buildings placed in competitive rivalry to each other in a neglected or at least ill defined void.

The urban morphology that the early phase of industrialisation established was one where production and its requirements took a clear lead over any aspect of life that was non-commercial, be that spiritual, cultural or even defined by concerns over social welfare. The significance of Manchester is less its endlessly rehearsed pre-eminence in industrialisation but rather the typicality of its experience and its rapid imitation by other towns and cities to which its global trade connected it. Despite its provincial location its rivals were, self-consciously, not the other British industrial centres but the cities of the states the symbols of which adorned the pained ceiling of the Great Hall of Alfred Waterhouse's Manchester Town Hall. The scale of Manchester might be outstripped by other industrial centres in the later nineteenth century, but once she had her own global shipping route with the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal (1894) a new phase of expansion presented itself which it took the outbreak of the Great War to arrest. Other cities might prefer to see their own significance as resting on stronger cultural aspirations but Manchester's confidence rested on the firm foundation of its global commercial origins, and that attitude prevails to the present day.

To capture that phenomenon, both in terms of its urban pattern and its architectural language one might turn to one of the most skilled architects of his day. Karl Friedrich Schinkel's English journey in 1826 brought him into direct contact with the industrial progress of Britain in many sites across the country (Bindman, Riemann 1993). However, his small sketch of the mills of Ancoats, with crude brick mills stacked up like so many boxes by the side of the Ashton Canal brought an abrupt urban scene to the mind and eye of an architect whose oeuvre grew out of a theatrical attitude to the beautification of the Prussian capital of Berlin in which he was then engaged. In the north west of England he was confronted with a shocking urban environment that owed nothing to images of Greece or Rome, or even the medieval period which was deemed quintessentially northern European in spirit. Here was a city in all but name that owed nothing to the real or imagined past but everything to the economic imperatives of the nineteenth century present. The finest architectural mind of his generation was at once fascinated and repelled, repelled enough to note that Manchester's buildings 'made from red brick for the bare necessity only, make a rather gloomy impres-

sion'. However he was fascinated enough to take back to Berlin the germ of an idea which would be synthesised into the design of the *Bauakademie* (1832–1836) and the customs warehouse, *Packhof* (1829–1831) in the city. Against the towering mills and the even taller factory chimneys, dwarfed by these brute examples of mechanical production were the hovels in which the workers existed. Schinkel's pen, with a few strokes, suggested the hazardous nature of the dwellings, poorly built, lacking in weather tightness, barely lean-to against the great sheer walls of the factories, the symbolic form of the industrial town.

A manuscript survey for the period circa 1822 *Plans of all the Spinning Factories in the Township of Manchester* which survives in the collection of the John Rylands Library in Manchester provides an early analytical study in the morphology, with numerous detailed examples (Walter 1976). Take for example the plot owned by Roger Aytoun Esq. and occupied by Mr. Thackery in the neck of land between a bend of the River Medlock. Here a disparate group of one, two, three and four storey buildings illustrate the incremental nature of early industrial development. The presence on the plan of a 'Factory burnt down' adjoining the tallest structure indicates the ever present hazards of industrial development.

In contrast, the site occupied by Richard Rothwell positioned parallel to a canal and a 'New Street' was a single rectangular block the seven storeys of which, plus loft were proof of the rational possibilities of efficient design. What the plates in the manuscript fail to record is the presence of the factory workers, who simply do not figure, apart from the occasional references to a dwelling house, presumably occupied by a manager or overseer. At this date the factory owners were already living off-site, and the workers would have been living where they could, leaving a situation of unplanned zoning between wealthy districts, industrial areas and working class districts that Engels would characterise a couple of decades later as constituting a 'hypocritical plan' (Engels (1844) 1987: 87).

The urban morphology of the industrial environment was, of course, dependent on two distinct pressures, external forces and internal logic. Externally the position of new structures within the town was a product of the availability of land and sources of power, generally at this date water courses for water and steam power in the initial phases of development. Navigable rivers and canals also provided an efficient means of transport. The internal logic was a product of, in the case of mills, the number of looms which could be powered from the energy source and the optimisation with which they could be serviced by their operators.

The constructional limitations of cast iron and brick then came into play in what until the Factory Act of 1833, and other pieces of legislation, was essentially unregulated development.

Notwithstanding the significance of internal industrial processes to the morphological development of Manchester the situations in adjoining areas within the city grew in quite distinct ways as a result of historical origins and circumstantial developments. In a survey carried out by English Heritage in 2001 for example, under the subtitles 'An Outgrowth of Accident' and 'Built According to a Plan' the differing situations of Shudehill and the Northern Quarter areas were contrasted (English Heritage 2001). In discussing the historical development of these districts (the latter only rebranded as such by Manchester City Council in 1993) Shudehill, adjacent to the medieval centre, clearly continues to display the irregular street patterns and narrow plots despite industrial development having occurred there as long ago as 250 years. In contrast there is regular grid planning in the area around Stevenson Square, laid out by the new land owner William Stevenson in 1780 in preparation for the northernwards expansion of the town. That street network has remained largely intact with most blocks occupied by nineteenth and early twentieth century warehouses and manufacturing buildings with grand frontages to major thoroughfares. This building stock would be readily convertible to use by design companies and residential development from the late 1990s to the late 2000s and indeed provide much of the architectural ambience of the fashionable NQ4 area. In contrast a looser patchwork of smaller historical remnants, empty sites and anonymous contemporary residential developments surround significant pieces of transport infrastructure such as the Shudehill Interchange built by the architects Ian Simpson / Jefferson Sheard in 2006. In microcosm the disparity between the survival of elements of the urban fabric in these two areas betray much of the broader situation of Manchester as a whole, that is the larger utilitarian structures provide the basis of the *genius loci*.

'Rid the city of the 'image' of grime and obsolescence' (*Manchester Renaissance* 1968)

This utilitarian attitude is apparent even in periods when the industrial legacy was being eschewed. Despite the publication of the 1945 City of Manchester Plan it was only partially implemented due to post-war austerity (Nicholas 1945). It was not until the 1960s that significant changes occurred, and then on a huge scale. The most extraordinary part of this massive re-

configuration was the Shambles Square development, where the historic market place of Manchester was comprehensively redeveloped and updated, with a parking deck separating new retail units, a supermarket, office accommodation and in a linked development across Deansgate, a hotel. As the centre piece of the new square, essentially a pedestrianised precinct or courtyard, two conjoined medieval timber-framed fragments, Sinclair's Oyster Bar and the The Old Wellington Inn were preserved in their original locations but elevated 10 metres up to sit atop the new parking deck. The two buildings would feature again in the reconfiguration following the 1996 bomb, and their visual echo persists in more recent developments.

The most distinguished individual element of these magastuctural projects was on the other side of the retail district overlooking Piccadilly Gardens. Occupying four historic blocks to create a superblock the Piccadilly Plaza development sits on a podium containing retail units and a rooftop parking deck, a smaller office block and a larger office tower and a stylish new hotel, its dining room daringly cantilevered to afford a view of Piccadilly Gardens. This multifunctional complex, sitting adjacent to the public transport hub of the city presented a new confident image to the world, symbolised graphically by the decorative surface of the office tower, redolent of computer circuitry but replicated in reinforced concrete.

Despite the recent growth of interest in the period, Manchester has little of other than local merit in its architecture from the 1960s and 1970s. While post-war reconstruction had presented some opportunities for the belated introduction of international style buildings into the city's skyline, it was the expansion of the road building programme which provided the greatest opportunities but also presented the greatest threat. Large scale demolition was required to clear the path of new roads, notably the route for the Mancunian Way which formed a new boundary to the south of the city centre. Resulting sites would often remain empty for decades due to the sharp economic collapse of the 1970s.

During this period a recurring theme in the small document *Manchester Renaissance* (1968) is the need to group existing ownerships and plots into larger units that could facilitate comprehensive redevelopment. Columnar frame planning strategies continued to be implemented but to accommodate very different types of machines. In this way the nineteenth century scale of the city's grain was coarsened to a new pattern that was necessitated by the need for car parking decks. The separation of pedestrian and vehicular routes was also a provision which influenced the planning decisions. So, to the south of the city centre, the booklet declares

that '... the first real opportunity for a comprehensive approach was given in the redevelopment of Hulme, where an area of more than 300 acres is being cleared and rebuilt. The planning object is to ensure that complete portions of the city are rebuilt not just as housing estates but as real communities (1968: 5).

It is clearly apparent from the booklet that a certain uniformity was being pursued, evidenced by the photographs of the block model employed by the city's Planning Department. This strategy was modified only in situations where individual or significant groups of historic buildings were considered worth preserving. This new attitude represented a compromise which contrasted with the much more extensive rebuilding policies presented in 1945, when very few pre-1914 buildings were deemed worthy of retention. Under the influence of various continental planning models, though, there was the desire to enhance the public realm by the extension of pedestrian areas, although the principal business district centred around upper King Street and Mosley Street were excluded from the plan. In Manchester, outside of the conservation areas pedestrianisation was often also a feature which accompanied comprehensive planning schemes. The possibility of privatising these areas in the future decades was not then on the political or reeneration agenda but, as in the case of Crown Square / Spinningfields it was to be an unforeseen consequence of the creation of larger plots under single ownerships.

What is now hard to judge is the quality of the schemes proposed in the 1960s, leading to a nostalgic enthusiasm for the claims of the original designers. Some were never completed, falling victim to the economic downturn following the 1973 Oil Crisis, but many of the other projects only outlined in 1968 were constructed but demolished within a quarter of a century, as a result of the failures of the deck access housing model. The city council largely held sway in these areas so the cycle of both building and demolition was relatively swift. But in one other area, the Higher Education Precinct, the institutional power of the university and hospital interests have meant that, with the exception of some of the buildings, the structure laid out in the 1960s has largely survived, albeit with a considerable densification of what was initially planned. A series of grand planning schemes of an often largely undistinguished character were implemented, principally for the well funded higher education sector. Adjacent to the Mancunian Way, however, the new buildings of the UMIST campus presented a strong contemporary image balancing independent tower buildings with courtyard spaces.

The single most substantial development which emerged in this period, notorious for its tiled exterior that was soon called the 'largest public toilet in Europe', was the Arndale Centre. This was Manchester's attempt to create a regional retail centre which transplanted American ideas of the contemporary shopping mall, pioneered by Victor Gruen, to a city centre location, requiring substantial demolition to create a completely enclosed environment. Large anchor stores relocated from other parts of the city, leading to blight in the areas which they left, retail markets were included in the complex along with a multistorey car park, a bus station, an office tower and a small number of houses. The arrival of this modern retail environment had a transformative impact on streets such as Market Street, Corporation Street and Cannon Street, erasing the grain of the Victorian city in favour of a single monumental form which, with the exception of the tower was largely windowless above street level.

'The spirit of materialism and indifference to beauty' (Rowland Nicholas *City of Manchester Plan 1945*)

What are the morphological constraints which might condition the present urbanity of development in Manchester and how might they be compared to the historic situation? Of course the period of the 'shock city' and the recent past are both times when internal migration played a strong part. As has been mentioned earlier the factories of the early industrial revolution essentially were constructed independently from existing populations that grew dramatically to work in them. The living accommodation of the workers did not concern the manufacturers, only their convenient location for labourers to work the machines. The economically defined industrial structure would therefore be accompanied by spontaneous settlements (to adopt today's terminology) which would be unplanned and often remained unrecorded. Engels's description in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* remains a valuable and critical account of conditions though its tone is somewhat unsympathetic to the unfortunate inhabitants. While living conditions have improved beyond compare, the morphological changes in the recent history of Manchester bear some similarity in that they represent a formless accumulation of dwellings which test the limits of acceptability for their inhabitants, either in the meanness of their interior arrangements, or the sheer size and proximity of buildings squeezed on to available plots.

Another unifying factor might be deemed to be that the buildings obey only an internal logic of productive or lucrative space. The external factor of consistent height, which might have been subject to some control in the 1970s and 1980s is now seldom invoked as a cause to determine the exterior. The maximising of building form positioned on the plot represents a return to the spatial model which was employed during the period of the 'shock city' and the 1960s. In those eras the limits of engineering technology might modify the risk but the speculative impulse of current city development provides few such rational limits. If you can borrow the money the building will be built. Whether broader economic circumstances will then allow it to be occupied or let commercially depends on the proliferation of that same mentality on neighbouring plots. This constraint is a phenomenon which is common to both the office and residential sectors in terms of the current market.

However the issue of external appearance is more clearly the subject of differences between the present city and the developing town. The typology of cast-iron structure and brick skins with regular openings, creating a uniform if monstrous townscape has given way to an almost heedless variety of façade treatments. The notion of authenticity in architecture, perhaps always dubious but followed in the 1960s, has been superseded by an apparently random form of pattern making using façade systems which often bear no relation to internal use and everything to abstract external appearance. The freeing up of façade conventions which indicated positions of floor levels, which represented lines of structure or communicated anything other than wrapping, led in recent years to the ubiquity of the barcode façade and the frantic expression of individuality which appeared to have become a key component in urban design. Double and triple skins of sealed units serve to divorce the occupiers from their contexts, especially in office environments. Conversely in the residential sector the ubiquitous motif is the balcony providing some space for external individual expression, but often because of their limited size reduced to little more than storage for the cramped apartments. Their existence, while providing some mark of individual inhabitation externally serves to emphasise the tentative nature of city centre dwellings, represented by statement balcony furniture, the use as an overcrowded storage area, or the abandoned balcony of the 'buy to leave' i.e. unoccupied property bought by remote investors. The morphology of these small spaces reveal much about the nature of occupation in the hyped residential market in central Manchester.

Taking an imaginative leap from Schinkel's 1837 allegorical drawing dedicated to his fellow Manchester visitor Christian Peter Beuth, were Schinkel's Pegasus to land today in Manchester what would be seen in Manchester that could hold his attention? Yes the mills of Ancoats, preserved now as monuments to vanished enterprise, Schinkel's own part in the evaluation and appreciation of the industrial structures being a component in the heritage impact narrative. But he might draw instead a low and ramshackle hovel, sheltering beneath anonymous office buildings with no sense of connection but instead a strange co-dependency of purpose. The industrial workers have been replaced by office workers who live in the suburbs but require diversion and distraction which can be provided in a fake agricultural barn in an environment where no building is older than 1957.

Schinkel's imagined sketch would depict The Oast House, a piece of fictional heritage created in 2011 on an empty site in a new business district in the city, Spinningfields (Canniffe 2014) It is curious to speculate, given the narrative I have outlined, whether this represents a falsification of urban history or its continuity in another guise. The mill owners of the early industrial period used to dole out wages in public houses, which they also often owned, ensuring the dependence of the workforce whose wages would return the paymaster. Today the urban economy is perhaps more complex but developments like Spinningfields make up the shortfall in return on investment by providing more and more places for drinking in what was planned as a work environment.

Having endured a very deep recession in the period since the new business district's buildings began to be completed in 2005, the success of the development must be viewed as questionable. The residential component, the substantial wall of the Left Bank apartments, contains an unanticipated mixture of permanent residents, tenants of buy-to-let landlords, students and apartments let only at weekends for the stag and hen party trade. Some remain unoccupied having been bought as investments that, depending on the point in the economic cycle at which they were purchased, may or may not provide a good return. Several buildings were designed with the financial and banking sector in mind, which was particularly badly affected during the economic crisis. The speculative office buildings proved difficult to let in depressed conditions., and the retail offer, intended to animate the largely pedestrianised groundscape has not proved lucrative, individual shops suffering and some closing, as have some restaurants. The one point of success has been bars, some in permanent locations, others in pop-up structures which

draw crowds in the evenings and weekends, periods which might reasonably be expected to be the dead times of a business district.

In this economic process issues of identity in the built environment have become very confused. The growth in heritage activity which occurred in Great Britain following the Second World War was accelerated in reaction to the threat posed in particular to urban historic environments by comprehensive redevelopment projects from the 1960s and 1970s. In the period of continued austerity which Europe has endured since 2008, it may seem unlikely that urban heritage might continue to be under threat. However it might be asserted that the current period presents a particularly dangerous time to preserve traces of the past, when the pressure to encourage almost any economic activity is at its greatest. In the case of Manchester, the skyline of which has changed more in the last two decades than in the previous half century, opposition from fragmented heritage groups to specific projects is routinely dismissed as threatening to a bureaucratically driven and development friendly urban vision. The nebulosity of that proposed vision, and the generally desperate attempts by the city authorities to appear contemporary and by implication progressive, have led to a constant need to identify a succession of potential development areas which has produced an oversupply of generally poorly designed and often cheaply built commercial and residential properties. To point this out, as for example Owen Hatherley did in *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* is to invite anathema from the forces of civic orthodoxy (Hatherley 2010: 115–156).

In this context, though, it might be possible to frame a definition of Manchester architecture. The 'symbolic form' has less the physical characteristic of the multi-storey brick structure with frame construction than the concept of the optimised building largely bereft of expression, maximising its relationship to its plot and self-sufficient in its relationship to its neighbours. These characteristics are an inherent factor in Manchester's *genius loci* and are typical of later development, which have abandoned the imitation of historic industrial building popular during postmodernism.

For example in 2014, with a limited amount of economic confidence returning, plans were announced by the developer Allied London for further building at Spinningfields, with buildings planned for the empty site adjacent to the Civil Justice Centre, and the announcement that Quay House, a 1970s block adjacent to The Opera House on Quay Street was to be replaced by a new office building by Ian Simpson, although at this point assurances were made about the maintenance

of the privately owned publicly accessible space used temporarily for film showings, the viewing of televised summer sporting events and Christmas ice-skating. The appropriation of seasonal leisure provision by corporate providers, their temporary adoption and factoring into future plans is indicative of a fair degree of fragility in economic prospects, although covered by the terms 'flexible' and 'responsive to growth'.

One might wearily predict that there will be more of this type of development to come in the extension of Allied London's land holdings across Quay Street on the former Granada Studios site. The St. John's Quarter in central Manchester is perhaps indicative of the drift of urban design practice in the city after nearly two decades of market-led urbanism. The departure of Granada Studios to MediaCity:UK in 2013 made thirteen acres of land available between Castlefield and Spinningfields (it is a paradoxical situation that when many other regional cities are pinning their economic hopes on the attraction of media companies the City of Manchester has lost the presence and activity of both the BBC and one of the largest independent companies to neighbouring boroughs). The developers purchased the site and announced that the newly designated St. John's Quarter would be a residential led development complementing their existing office development in Spinningfields.

In early 2014 the developers unveiled a series of masterplan proposals for the site by ten design practices and also hosted a community consultation event inviting 'stakeholders' to contribute ideas. Having been an effectively closed site during Granada TV's tenure since the 1950s the local residential community are essential to engage in the process, those in the existing apartments who might be expected to want more green open space and other social amenities, and local businesses concerned about the impact of new development. The number of empty retail units and office spaces for pop-up bars and seasonal events raises some questions about the long-term viability of the commercial model employed for those who have already invested and therefore might have quite strong views.

In the proposals published in August 2014 a series of towers which maximise occupation of the site, sit over lower rise blocks forming a more enclosed network of spaces, many pedestrianised, and promising the creation of 'ginnels' which would create a more intimate scale at ground level. The combination of the two elements, however, bears comparison at an early stage of development, to the planning models promoted in the 1960s as providing comprehensive redevelopment opportunities. The recurrence of this type of strategy suggests that the causes of the demolition of that earlier

generation of tower and matte developments has lapsed from the professional memory, or that the cycle of erasure and rebuilding is rooted in the commercial and hence utilitarian ethos of the city's built environment.

Under pressure from rising land prices, the former Gaythorn gasworks site, a large area previously branded as 'Grand Island', featuring the former British Council building (Building Design Partnership 1991), and subsequently occupied by British Telecom, attracted renewed attention. A 'Southern Gateway' strategy was developed in the early 2000s that saw the land as plots suitable for a variety of uses, to in effect create yet another 'city quarter'. The original building was stripped back to its frame and extended as a new office building, the dominant element of the new development that was rebranded as 'First Street'. In complete contrast to the previous design of the site, in this iteration a diversity of occupation was defined leaving an awkward triangular space wedged net to the railway viaduct for the cultural building, branded as Home, to rehouse and unite the Library Theatre Company and the cinemas and galleries of the Cornerhouse together in a building designed by the Dutch architects Mecanoo (due to open in Spring 2015). The building's scarcity of space, compactly planned by the architects, is indicative of the instrumentalisation of culture in a city like Manchester, subservient to corporate demands and priorities, and valued not for its cultural worth *per se*, but as a part of an economic strategy which gives its prizes to popular culture and has little comprehension of any other sort.

Developments such as these will further change the city's appearance. The challenge which faces architecture and urban design in Manchester are common to many British cities. The increasing competitiveness between world cities, and the much trumpeted pre-eminence of London as a global brand inevitably leaves Manchester looking very peripheral in terms of ideas, image and infrastructure. A reassertion of independent thinking, however, rather than the boosterism of recent decades, could create a new identity which might be more resilient to the economic and demographic issues which will inevitably arise. One can identify three aspects that could be addressed: equity, environment and design all of which can be seen to have suffered in the decades when trickledown urbanism has held sway in Manchester. Given the location and impact of the IRA's bomb the city centre was bound to garner the most attention in its aftermath. But the somewhat exclusive nature of what followed has reinforced the gulf between 'town' and the easting residential areas that suffer from significant levels of deprivation. Little imagination, let alone investment have been expended in the inner and outer suburbs to

help improve social conditions leading in some ways to the perception that the city centre is alien territory. The city council seems quite passive in this situation, but the universities can be seen to have a more discernable impact with Manchester Metropolitan University's new Hulme campus an easily identifiable example. The societal benefits of an institution of higher education reorienting itself along a new axis might, however, take decades to assess, but blurring the boundaries between enclaves, economic, social or educational and their surrounding city districts can only be positive.

Environmental aspects of urban design would also appear to have been neglected since Manchester hosted the Global Forum in 1994. Having been in quite a prolonged economic depression with relatively little activity which was not publicly funded the growing environmental agenda loomed large only for it to be neglected when rapid redevelopment was required after the 1996 bomb. In the subsequent decades the commercial development, and the increasing amount of city centre residential development took place largely without any convincing application of good environmental principles. The market determined everything and there was no (or perceived to be no) market demand for sustainable buildings. No.1 Angel Square, only completed in 2013 by 3dReid Architects would be the first substantial building in Manchester that could unequivocally be identified as having substantial environmental credentials. So there is much work with regards to sustainability that the current crop of new buildings and developments does little to address. A comprehensive environmental masterplan is required, but it is arguable that this scale of thinking has not been attempted in relation to Manchester since the City of Manchester Plan in 1945.

And lastly, there is the issue of design. The standard of building and urban design is generally too low. New urban quarters such as Spinningfields and First Street would give no indication to the uninitiated that these were the result of single campaigns of planning, design and development. The complete lack of consistency between the buildings, the haphazard nature of the public realm and the general perception of overdevelopment suggest that 'the Utopia of Bentham' ethos still holds true. It is indicative that the historic areas do not suffer from such an identity crisis even in former industrial areas when 'design' often was somewhat restricted. In looking at contemporary areas it is difficult to find any quality, an issue which will have, eventually, to be addressed by the city authorities, but which I hope I have demonstrated can be seen to have very deep roots.

The general topographic situation of Manchester has offered little opportunity for the creation of dra-

matic urban ensembles and indeed the study of its history might suggest that such aesthetic sensibilities are alien to the *genius loci*. The city does contain notable individual works of architecture, but often placed in unsympathetic settings which have diminished their apparent impact. However it is not beyond the collective imagination of the city to develop it with more of a sense of ambition and concern for its appearance. The city would have to adopt a physical plan that could be implemented over several decades. It is, of course, an irony of history that the *laissez-faire* attitudes synonymous with Manchester liberalism in the nineteenth century are exactly at the root of the haphazard decisions regarding city planning which currently hold sway in Manchester. In developing the three aspects of equity, environment and design one can envisage three steps that could be undertaken to improve matters. One would be encouraging more transparency in the way decisions are made. The second would be adherence to some kind of standards for building height and volumetric expression that could impose a discipline on the more wayward proposals. And lastly an urban code could be developed over a five year period covering the whole of the city centre and treating it in a consistent manner derived from a close study of its morphology.

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