

October 1991

**Rebirth of the modern:
Michel Kagan's Paris debut
Farrell's concrete vision**

Julian Bicknell on Schinkel

Döllgast at the Architecture Foundation

Ron Herron at Waddesdon

Offices: Munkenbeck & Marshall, BDP,
Rick Mather and others



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Cover: Cité Technique et
Administrative, Paris.
Photo: JM Monthiers.

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- An office in London Docklands by **Rick Mather Architects** brings fresh air and exterior green space into the daily life of the user.
- Three speculative office buildings by **Hawkins Brown** in the Soho conservation area show that sensitivity can pay, says Thom Gorst.
- A new office in west London by **Munkenbeck & Marshall** displays a level of design rare in speculative offices, says Brendan Woods.
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is an unsung masterpiece, says engineer Neil Thomas

answer a questionnaire of about ninety questions, ranging from hypotheses about population growth and technological progress to the share of state-owned land and the degree of computerisation in the year 2020 (many participants felt that these questions should have been answered before the competition!). All the competitors felt that the city should make the most of its geographical position as a crossroads of east-west and north-south transnational trade routes as well as of its natural setting and resources, especially the proximity of the Vitosha mountain and the abundance of water. Proposals included the creation of new international business centres, highways bypassing the city and its central core, cultural heritage conservation programmes, relocation or conversion of environmentally-damaging industries and alternatives for the site of a new airport.

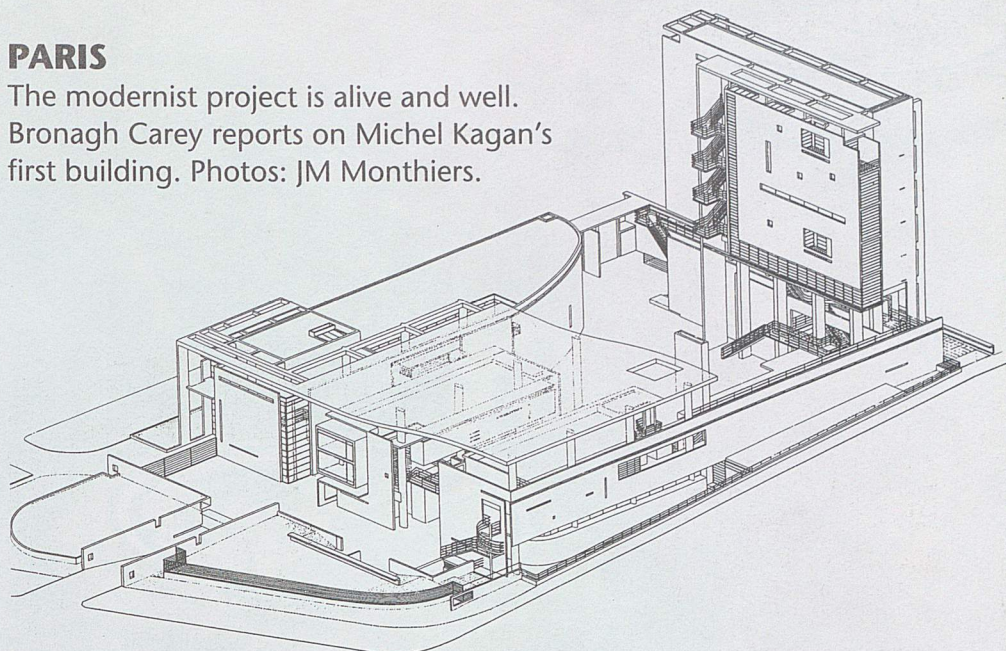
An extravagant, although not a new idea, was the proposal (by Naydenov's team) for a linear development along the far (south) slopes of the Vitosha mountain to cope with an envisaged (but hardly probable or acceptable) doubling of the population.

The main question is how any proposals are to be carried out under the conditions of a transition to market economy and the shortage of funds. The new plan must be a flexible instrument for urban management, providing for the unpredicted and the unexpected, reconciling public and private interest, and finding the balance between the possible and the desirable.

In July the city hosted Interarch 91, the 6th World Biennale of Architecture. Opened by Bulgarian President Dr Zhelyo Zhelev, it was organised by the International Academy of Architecture, the Union of Bulgarian Architects and the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, Sofia, under the auspices of the President, the Bulgarian Culture Ministry and the UIA. Delegates attended from all over the world, including South America, the USA, Japan and Europe. The most lively discussions, predictably, were those on 'Architecture and the Market Economy' and 'Architecture and Democracy'.

PARIS

The modernist project is alive and well. Bronagh Carey reports on Michel Kagan's first building. Photos: JM Monthiers.



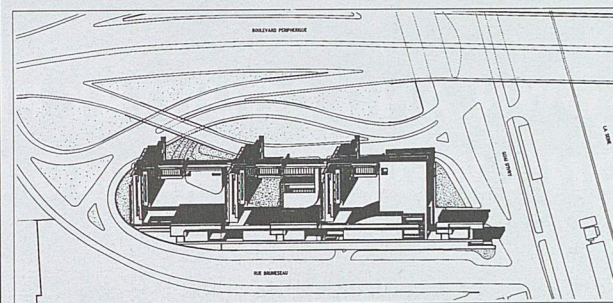
If you take the south-eastern approach to Paris along the quays of the Seine you will be astounded by the recently completed Cité Technique et Administrative. The architect, Michel Kagan (born 1953), trained with Henri Ciriani in the 70s and later taught with Kenneth Frampton at Columbia. Kagan represents a young generation of French architects who are faithful to the purism of Le Corbusier and utterly opposed to the reductive 'object' architecture of Perrault et al which is currently so fashionable in Paris. Already nominated for

the Mies van der Rohe Award for European Architecture, the Cité Technique is novel in its treatment of programme and stunning in its appearance. It is all the more impressive for being Kagan's first completed work.

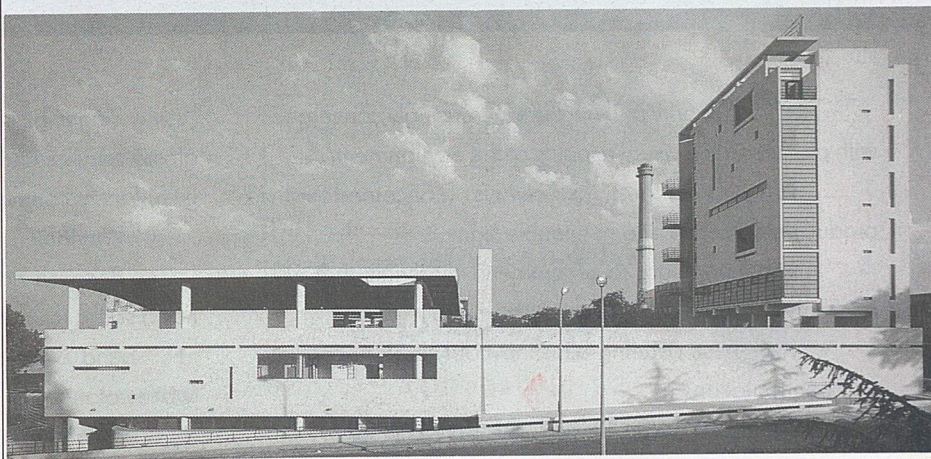
The technical theme of the Cité Technique provides an excellent opportunity to realise the rationalist ideal of a pristine vision of the industrial building type. The programme required the housing of diverse and very fragmentary functions, both administrative and technical, for the south-eastern section of Paris:

workshops for the parks and gardens services; garages, warehouses and maintenance units for the upkeep of the Péripherique; and associated offices, archives and social activities.

The site chosen was a no-man's-land lacking in image and isolated from Paris by the Péripherique. The morphology of the site, severed as it is on two sides by the curving slip road to the Péripherique and enclosed to the third by the rue Bruneseau, lent itself perfectly to Kagan's search for a generic typological base for the modern perimeter



Above Axonometric from north east. Left Site plan showing possible future extension. The Cité Technique comprises the easternmost third of the buildings shown. To the east is the Seine and to the north the Péripherique. Below Facade to the Péripherique.



block. On its longer side the site is parallel to the Péripherique. The northern facade is conceived as a bulwark, separating and protecting the building from the motorway. Responding to the problem of urbanising an urban highway, Kagan proposes a series of industrial premises, perfectly aligned and separated from the péripherique by a green zone. It is a blueprint for a future megapolis, which will incorporate surrounding suburbs into the urban

fabric of Paris by creating a series of coherent urban blocks.

The functional elements are arranged as a set of seemingly disparate objects around the sunny void of the courtyard, held in and unified by the hard rectangular edge of the ramparts.

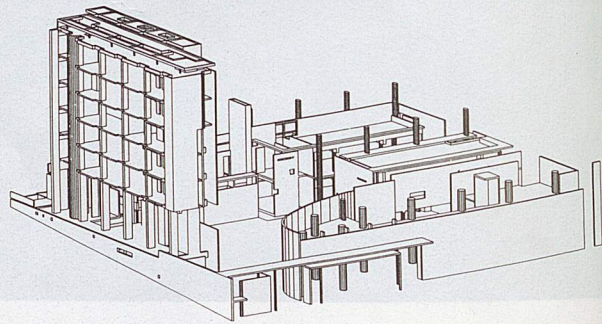
Vehicular traffic is restricted to the courtyard/quay level from which access is gained to the garages in the two longer sides of the enclosure. The workshops are on the upper floors. The central

building to the east accommodates the social activities. These three buildings are covered by a large billowing white wave, receding from the Péripherique in a form recalling that of the virgin site. This wave offers protection to the plant storage and nursery spaces and allows for their natural ventilation. To the west rises the narrow office tower, floating on pilotis and designed as two sliding planes which give the end walls a sleek silhouette. The movement

of the staircase and the canopy give the facades an energy which permeates the entire scheme.

As a free-standing building the Cité Technique recalls the typology of the French fortified farm or perhaps Fourier's phalanstery, sheltering as it does a small

Below East facade towards the Seine.
Bottom left Tower from north west.
Bottom right Cut-away axonometric from south west; interior of service building at lower level.

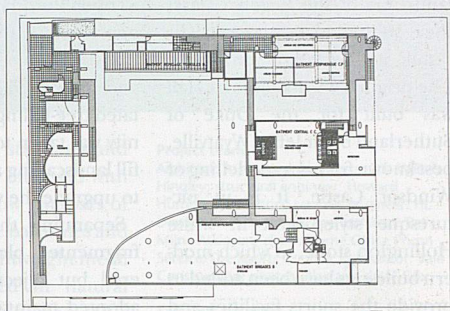
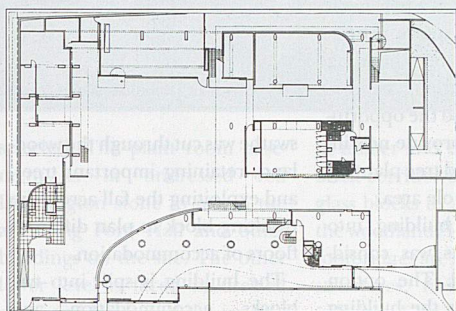
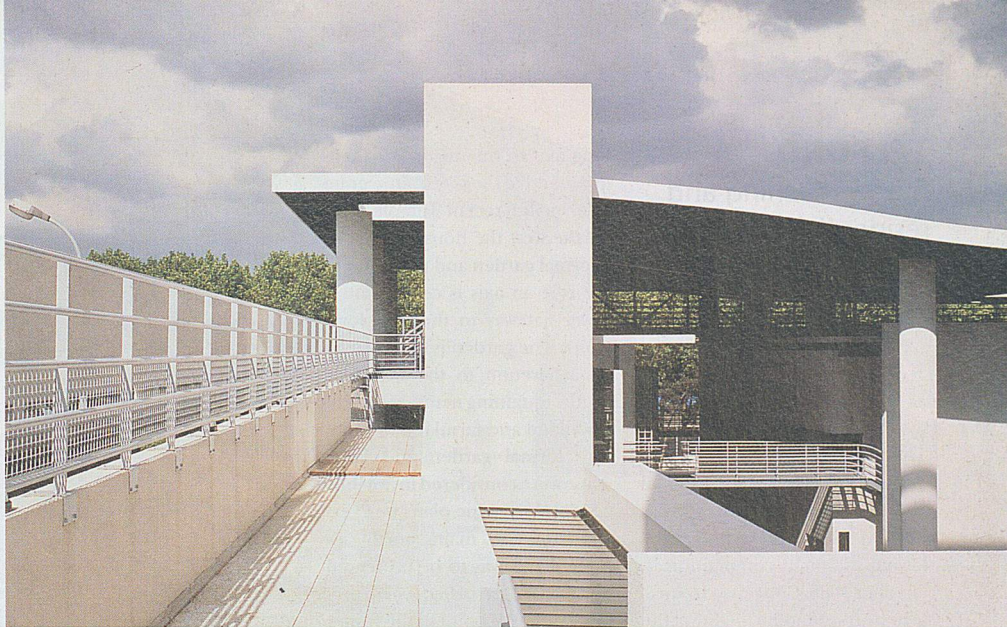


community of varying and autonomous activities. Combined with this is the Corbusian idea of a 'promenade architecturale', providing for interaction between white-collar workers in the tower and blue-collar workers at courtyard level. In plastic terms, the promenade articulates the formal and spatial composition in an elaborate and exciting way in its direct opposition to the vertical volume of the tower.

Kagan offers a contemporary vision of an industrial programme viewed from a purist point of view. The forms are pure: the shapes are simple. Planes slide one behind the other without losing any of their integrity. There is a clear separation both of elements (the column is systematically set back in order to render the wall plane more visible) and of materials (the mass of the wall plane is differentiated from the transparency of the window plane). The plastic nature of concrete is stretched to the limit. The material is folded to envelope space, cutting out pure forms and shaping light, and thereby creating the shadows essential to a white architecture.

An interesting comparison is provided by Perrault's nearby Hotel Industriel. This has the same alignment (perpendicular to the Péripherique) and a similar brief and is subject to the same height lines. The expression and-expression aspirations however are quite different.

The most interesting point of the Cité Technique et Administrative is its exploitation of an existing programme in an unusual and innovative manner. The complex of buildings, after all, is laid out for the circulation of trucks and vans and their ease of manoeuvre. A new and improbable order is set up by totally questioning the banality of an existing and unchallenged order. Kagan has liberated himself from precedent, allowing himself a freedom to master form as he deems appropriate to its use. In this sense, this is a very optimistic project and an encouragement to others to look at architecture anew.



Top right Link across the north side of the courtyard to the service building.

Middle right Plans of ground floor and upper level.

Bottom right East facade of the tower onto the courtyard.