Chapter 5

REGIONALIST REINTERPRETATIONS

The other tradition of Modern Architecture - the uncompleted project cover (St. John Wilson, 2007). *Architecture after modernism* cover (Ghirado, 1996). *Critical regionalism: Architecture and identity in a globalised world* cover (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2003). *Architectural Regionalism: Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition* cover (Canizaro, 2007). *Architecture in South Africa* cover (Cumming, 1934).

This chapter contextualises Gabriel Fagan's regionalist responses.

A brief history and definitions of regionalism will be given.

Types of regionalist responses will be illustrated.

A framework for understanding regionalist approaches will be generated.

Approaches to regionalism will be outlined.

5.1. Introduction

> A survey of architectural regionalism spanning the twentieth century yields a heterogeneous collection of motivations and prescriptions – an ongoing theoretical discourse. This may suggest that the variety of regionalist positions are part of the pluralistic attitude considered endemic to postmodern theory, where no singular view is taken to be dominant. All views are competing versions of reality in the postmodernist "sensibility of inclusion." It may also suggest that heterogeneity is intrinsic to regionalist theory, in which there are not one but as many regionalisms as regions, each specific to its locale and historical circumstance. As such, it is a kind of meta-theory that has only local application and meaning. I think it is fair to say that both are the case; in part, this has much to do with the lack of clarity with which regionalism is understood and practiced. It also has to do with tensions inherent to its dialectical structure. Regionalism is never a singular theory or practice but is most often a means by which tensions – such as those between globalization and localism, modernity and tradition – are resolved (Canizaro, 2007:16).

Fagan's childhood experiences and close relationship with nature through his sailing exploits[142] have provided a solid foundation for an architecture that exhibits a synergy with physical place. His appreciation of the inherited local architectural traditions (that have developed over three hundred years) have for him reinforced the importance of socio-cultural practices. These lessons have created a palette for new regional solutions. Not that his architecture is a slave to these concerns. Fagan is selective in his approach, choosing to express and heighten different qualities that exist in each place he works in. This chapter will contextualise Fagan's regionalist influences. Chapter 7 will explain his response to issues of place, but first the meaning of region and regionalism will be explained and a dialectic of regional approaches will be postulated.

5.2. Definitions and clarifications

In physical terms, 'region' means a boundary of space defined by the extremes of culture and nature (Canizaro, 2007:18). The root of the word 'regionalism' is the Latin *regere* meaning 'to rule', and stems from the Roman imperial practices of territorial management (Canizaro, 2007:16). In general terms, regionalism is a geographical term for "socio-political movements which seek to foster or protect an indigenous culture in particular regions" (Bullock & Stallybrass, 1997:532).

It can be argued that to respond regionally in architecture, an intimate understanding and appreciation of the qualities of place and its relationship to socio-cultural practices is necessary. At a more pragmatic level, sound knowledge would be needed of the geographical characteristics of a region (such as climate and topography) and building traditions (available materials and

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— [142] See Chapter 6.

technologies). These approaches can be traced throughout the history of architecture. An early and succinct description was given by Vitruvius (c. 46 B.C.; 1998:170):

> If our designs for private houses are to be correct, we must at the outset take note of the countries and climates in which they are built. One style of house seems appropriate to build in Egypt, another in Spain, a different kind in Pontus, one still different in Rome, and so on with lands and countries of other characteristics.

Regional architecture responds to culture through a reinterpretation of traditional built form. It also responds to social aspects through a reinterpretation of varying ways of living. Tradition acts as the controlling mechanism that orders the other factors.

If indigenous or primitive architecture can be described as a mainly unconscious response to place (building by necessity), then vernacular architecture can be termed as partly conscious, as it expresses habits of thought, and repetitions of building type and ways of living. It promotes the local and is thus regional. Regionalism, then, is a self-conscious response to regional conditions. Architects will choose what to respond to, not out of necessity but because of the options available and, to put it simply, because they can. As Fagan (1982:3) has remarked:

> Whatever you build today, is thus no longer determined by simple tradition – it has become self conscious design. And as soon as design becomes self conscious, it goes beyond the scope of the amateur.

Canizaro (2007:18) argues that at the heart of any regional response is a *resistance* to standard forms, a concern for authenticity and a fostering of a connectedness between people of a specific culture through common associations such as history and ecology. He further indicates (2007:21) that a regional approach (which results in regionalism) can be defined as a

> … concept, strategy, tool, technique, attitude, ideology or habit of thought. Despite its many manifestations, collectively it is a theory that supports *resistance* [143] to various forms of hegemonic, universal or otherwise, standardizing structures that would diminish local differentiation. These theories propose alternatives in the form of methods and criteria for the respect, revitalization, and, if necessary, reconstruction of life along regionally determined lines. It is a self-conscious set of theories, which distinguishes it from the vernacular – the response to local conditions by necessity, not by choice.

Canizaro's supposition that regionalist architectures are inherently resistive is, however, contestable. Regionalist responses will, by the very nature of the difference in regions, be heterogeneous in nature. Some regions will be more susceptible to outside influence than others, due to their location (closer to or farther from universalizing tendencies) or perhaps the lack of an entrenched tradition. It can be argued that regionalist architectures resist *and* accept both

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— [143] My emphasis.

standardizing tendencies (that reduce local differentiation) and revivalist tendencies. The resultant mediation then shifts on a scale from radical to conservative. Acceptance of or resistance to local or global influences would depend on the value the designer ascribes to these influences. Regionalist responses can thus be more accurately described as *reactionary* in nature as they respond to the polarities of universalisation and revivalism[144]. Boussara (1990:123) concurs with the reactionary stance but ignores the influence of the conservative end of the regionalist spectrum:

> A review of the literature which attempts to identify and define regionalism not only demonstrates the divergences of definition, but also reveals the complexity, confusion and subjectivity of this literature. One theme which commonly occurs is that regionalism is seen as a reaction against the universality and uniformity of modern architecture.

Buchanan's statement below (1983:15) contradicts itself in its attempt to position regionalism against universalism. At first he defines regionalism as oppositional but then suggests that rational issues still play an important role:

> Regionalism is the dialectical counter-trend to the rational and universalising force of modern architecture, especially as found in its reductive Rationalist extremes. Like the local cultures themselves Regionalism is less concerned with abstract and rational issues and more with adding sensual physicality, depth and nuance to life's experience.

In the 1980s Frampton (1986:17) extended the idea of a 'critical regionalism' (previously proposed by Lefaivre and Tzonis) as a *resistance* to universal dogmas and an *opposition* to hegemonic power[145]. Frampton relied heavily on the Ricouerian standpoint that universalisation had destroyed traditional cultures and had resulted in the development of a mediocre civilization (Frampton, 1996:314). Frampton also alluded to the development of a hybrid system that could see, for example, the combination of traditional craft and modern technology. But his contradictory statements bias the original definition as espoused by Lefaivre and Tzonis as Frampton speaks, on the one hand, of resistance and in the same breath attempts a process of reconciliation. Lefaivre and Tzonis (2003:10) had added the term 'critical' to the regionalist debate to distinguish it from architectures that were revivalist and more concerned with the identity of the particular rather than the universal. Another reason for the addition of the term 'critical' was the Kantian influence of self- and internal criticism. To be critically regionalist, architecture had to be critical of both universal dogmas and revivalist approaches. But a further, and perhaps more important, intention was Immanuel Kant's 17th century philosophy of *uniting reason with experience*. In the latter sense, the oppositions inherent in the local-global debate were identified almost a hundred and fifty years

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[144] These reflect the extremes of radical and conservative regionalisms. Universalism can result in a sense of placelessness while revivalism can engender a false traditionalism.

[145] These were informed by the writings of Lewis Mumford and first articulated in Tzonis and Le Faivre's essay "The grid and the Pathway".

before they had occurred.

Lefaivre and Tzonis's writings are suffused with contradictory statements such as Critical Regionalism recognising the value of place rather than the adoption of universal formulaic solutions. They may have argued that critically regionalist architectures are integrative, but the legacy of global solutions were perhaps too dominant at the time for the intrinsic value of their ideas to be truly and sufficiently recognised, hence the radical nature of their statement. Another contradiction is the timing of the statement. Le Faivre and Tzonis (2003:10) note that the original introduction of the term Critical Regionalism in the 1970s was descriptive of those architects who were working towards an alternative to the reductive forms of Post-Modern historicism. But in the same paragraph he and Lefaivre suggest that the debate should be shifted to that between modern and anti-modern to avoid becoming entangled in the fashionable debate of the time. Therefore most of the architects cited by Le Faivre and Tzonis and later Frampton as critically regionalist were responding to the legacy of the Modern and not Post-Modern Movement. Further , as Cassidy (2000; 2007:412) points out

> In its attempt to abate the "apocalyptic thrust of modernization" the genre [of Critical Regionalism] discounts all regional manifestations that celebrate traditional notions of regional identity. It objectifies the notion of a region by seeing it as a collection of autonomous objects with particular characteristics proximate to one another in time and space. It does not recognize the collective experience of a particular landscape - the sense of regional place ... The problem is that it is an approach that treats the concept of region as a collection of self-referential objects instead of a complex contextual cultural web. Individual works of architecture are reduced to a set of formal relationships that can be freely manipulated without regard to the regional context.

Notwithstanding the contradictions inherent in Critical Regionalist theory, its value lies in the recognition that architects were responding to Modern Movement inheritances in more than one way.

Most of the important shifts in architecture that have been documented over time have been polarised reactions, but many more subtle mediations have taken place. It will therefore be argued in this thesis that a true regionalism mediates between the universal and the local, reacting to the vagaries of the intuitive/rational and the learned/experienced. As it treads the line between these concerns in a non polarised manner, a variety of regional architectural responses is formulated.

5.3.   Regionalism in the twentieth century (see Fig. 5.1)

It can be argued that during the twentieth century regional architectural responses have alternated

between the conservative (conformist) and the radical (revolutionary)[146]. Various regionalist trends can also be discerned: firstly, the inheritance of regionalist reactions, such as Romantic regionalism[147], which continued to influence architecture until the 1940s (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2003:16); secondly, new responses to the facile use of tradition; and thirdly, thereafter, reactions to the orthodoxy of the Modern Movement or the so-called International Style.
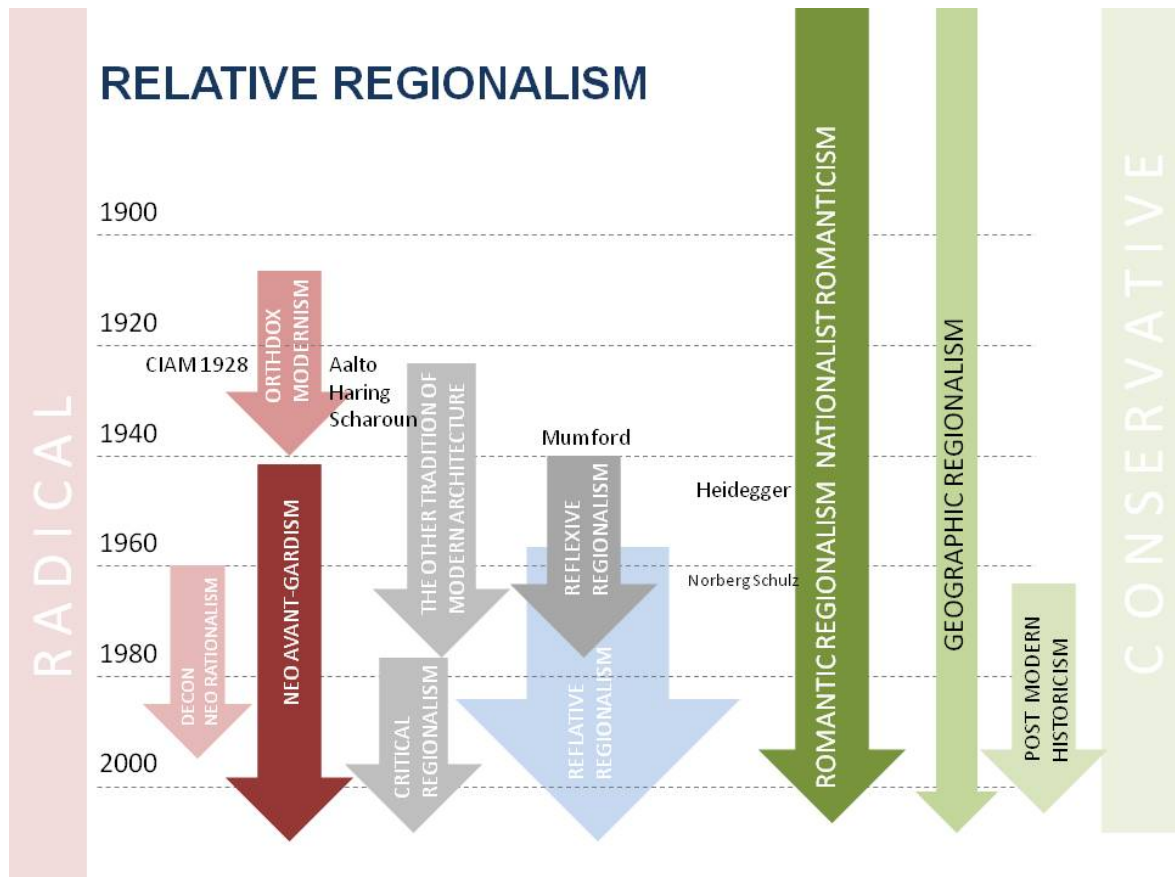
Figure 5.1. Diagram illustrating regionalist approaches in the 20th century, including Fagan's as a Relative regionalism highlighted in blue (Author, 2012).

5.3.1.   Conservative (responsive) regionalism

Conservative regional responses resist standardization and the inherent progressive possibilities of new technologies, and are largely influenced by natural analogies. They advocate an architecture of the experiential by concentrating on the immediacy and situatedness of life. Architectural outcomes are either prosaic interactions with place (impossible in most circumstances unless they are completely isolated) or reversions to revivalist and referential approaches where style

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− [146] It will be argued later (see Chapter 7) that Fagan's regionalist responses mediate these distinct polarities.

− [147] It had its roots in the Picturesque movement in England in the early 18th century, which, influenced by Chinese gardens and the naturally-given qualities of a place, represented an anti-universalist, anti-classical approach to design (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2003:13).

dominates. In this form, a condescending regionalism that privileges the quaint and the eccentric is often generated (Canizaro, 2007:36). Jencks (1985:322) quotes Tange who suggests that this

> … so-called regionalism is always nothing more than the decorative use of traditional elements. This kind of regionalism is always looking backwards … The same should be said of tradition. In my thinking tradition can be developed through challenging its own shortcomings and pursuing the meaning of continuum within it.

Pallasmaa (1988; 2007:130) stresses the problematic aspects of a limited and conservative approach:

> Without continuity of an authentic tradition even a well-intentioned use of surface elements of regional character is doomed to sentimental scenography, to be a shallow architectural souvenir.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Romantic regionalism fostered an anti-universal approach brought on by the problems associated with the processes of industrialization. The resultant Arts and Crafts movement relied heavily on vernacular architectural influences in its attempt to negate machine processes. Politically motivated regionalist nuances were to be seen in the development of nationalistic architecture (such as that of the Nazis) where stylistic elements were used to create a fake regionalism. Later, post-modern historicist architects would take their reaction to standardization to new scenographic heights in their naive search for an architecture of meaning and association.

A less conservative approach was advocated by architects such as Norberg-Schulz who explored Heideggerian concepts of experience. Martin Heidegger's stance was influenced by an anti-machinist viewpoint and an emphasis on cultural identity. This approach was more mediative in nature.

5.3.2. Radical (resistive) regionalism

Radical regionalist responses are politically, socially and ideologically motivated. They are more accepting of the 'machine' and the possibilities of progress through new technologies. They are critical of 'primitive' and sentimental relationships with place and tend to rely on doctrines or canons. It can be argued that the first radical regionalism of the 20th century arose when the project of modernity was in its infancy. Its initial reaction to the facile use of tradition resulted in many architects reassessing tradition and extracting non-aesthetic principles for the development of a new and age-appropriate architecture. Unfortunately their rational inclinations led to an abstraction of traditional influences and through this process severed the link between context,

architecture and the inhabitant. The historian, critic and writer Lewis Mumford[148] (Lefaivre &Tzonis, 2003:6) believes

> … that the modern movement in architecture was regionalist at heart, but was high-jacked by the dogmatic International Style approach – the solipsistic and chauvinistic expression of 'authenticity'.

But, as has also been shown in Chapter 4, the Modern Movement was not a homogenous grouping of approaches. Le Corbusier's 'regionalist' leanings and Mediterranean associations combined the new modern language with aspects of place and can thus be said to lie to the right of the radical extreme.

Critical Regionalist approaches operate more politically and ideologically as they attempt to deal with the main paradox facing humanity – how to resolve the conflict of becoming modern and at the same time returning to sources. Eggener (2002; 2007:460) notes that Tzonis and Lefaivre "revisited the topic of critical regionalism in 1991 and defended it as 'a reaction to a global problem ... most urgent in superdeveloped parts of the world and not an expression of identity for so-called 'peripheral' regions'". Critical Regionalism is also political in the sense that it is tied to a post-colonialist debate on the relationships between East and West, nature and culture, and so on.

Frampton (1986:17-24) defines Critical Regionalist responses as a series of oppositions[149], namely space-place, typology-topography, architectonic-scenographic, artificial-natural and visual-tactile. However, the descriptions of these approaches, and the argument developed around them, tend to privilege the anti Post-Modern historicist position. The hierarchical nature of Frampton's oppositions also negates the intentions of his stated polarities, resulting in a formalist approach to the making of architecture. The original intention of Critical Regionalism as a process and not product is thus ultimately negated.

5.3.3.   Mediated (reactionary) regionalisms

> Most regionalists were realist enough, historicist-minded enough (distinguishing past and present), to know that certain values, behaviours, and practices appropriate to a small-scale, rural, insular, homogeneous, low-technology political economy could not ... find applicability in the qualitatively different and exponentially more complex world of contemporary life. Conversely, regionalists were realistic enough ... to acknowledge that modernity could have its advantages in the realm of living standards and quality of life ... which depended largely on technological advances (electrification, sanitation, medicine) (Canizaro, 2007:24).

— [148] See Appendix J.

— [149] These alliterate so well that one struggles to believe their authenticity as strategies of 'resistance'.

Mediated regionalist responses straddle the line between the polarities of machine and nature. They accept *and* resist the extremes of local and global influences, preferring to synthesise the positive aspects of both with a view to allowing the inhabitant to progress technologically but still attain an experiential connection with their surroundings and a concrete association with tradition. Here a mutually beneficial relationship between tradition and modernity is achieved.

> What has been rejected by most of the regionalist architects is not Modernism but internationalism. Modernism demands a respect for inherent qualities of building materials, expressiveness for structure, and functional justifications for forms that constitute buildings. These abstract demands do not contradict much, in essence, with anything done by an architect who wishes to adopt a regionalist approach (Ozkan, 1985; 2007:107).

Mediated regionalist responses have developed in three ways: firstly, as a continuation of the romantic regionalist movements such as National Romanticism in the Scandinavian regions; and secondly, through counter trends to universalisation and standardization of space and form that resulted during the height of orthodox modernism. Colin St. John Wilson (2007:28) notes that architects such as Hugo Haring had formed 'another tradition of modern architecture' after the CIAM meeting in 1928. This was a response that reconnected with tradition and place in a more tangible manner than the abstracted approach of pastoral modernity. Although, according to Curtis (1996:29), Aalto pleaded that nature should dictate architectural form rather than the machine, Aalto did not negate modernization. His architecture mediates between man and technology to support social and cultural integration (Pallasmaa, 1998; 2007:133), creating a synthesis between Internationalism and National Romanticism.

Thirdly, a modern-regionalism arose in countries (such as the Americas and more importantly for this study, South Africa) removed from the mainstream effects of the orthodox Modern Movement. Lewis Mumford, a North American, was the first person to articulate a position on regionalism that was critical of both universalism and revivalism. Lefaivre and Tzonis (2003) have based much of their development of the tenets of Critical Regionalism on his writings. Mumford had initially advocated a regionalist architecture in opposition to the Beaux-Arts tradition that he referred to as 'icing on a birthday cake' (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2003:19). But later articles brought together the main polarities of the regionalist debate, the local and the global. Regional architecture was for Mumford neither a return to a romantic regionalism, nor was it in opposition to the universal. He saw dogma in the structures of society, and not in science or technology, as the problem with the Modern Movement (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2003:19). He proposed a regionalist response that accepted, but was also critical of, both the universal and the traditional. As will be argued later, Fagan's approach to issues of regionalism bears a close relationship with that of Mumford, not only due to their similar attitudes but also to the fact that their philosophies were formed as reactions to an already mediated and removed Modern Movement and occurred at similar times.

5.4. The mediative regionalist approach

Regionalism has been defined as a reactionary 'process' that mediates a series of dialectical oppositions. The 'process' can be described as consisting of the polarities to be mediated, the method of mediation and the resultant outcome. Canizaro (2007:21-22) identifies that regionalist approaches to architecture are inconsistent and suffused with inherent tensions, but that three oppositional themes tend to form the core of a regional reaction. These are tradition and modernity, imitation and invention, and resistance and response. But these are not merely themes. They are the constituents of a reactionary process. The highlighted themes will now be transcribed to explain the process of a regional mediation that acts in a reactionary manner.

5.4.1. The dialectical opposition: tradition and modernity

At the core of a reactionary regional dialectic is the struggle between cultural continuity and the need for progress. Architecture is seen to be progressive as it seeks to give form to contemporary ways of living and new spatial ideas. On the other hand, an architecture of continuity seeks the maintenance of the old (Curtis, 1996:303) or, as Heynen (1999a:16) explains, "a traditional framework of reference" which gives certainty and meaning.

5.4.2. The mediative processes: resistance and response

Resistant responses against centralising and generalising forces that seek to negate tradition can range from the representational to the political, but in all cases they seek to maintain personal or local identity through recognisable form. On the one hand, a normative regionalist response assumes social, economic and political relations to be stable. Under such circumstances the architecture would respond to local climatic, topographical and material conditions in a representational manner.

5.4.3. The mediative outcome: imitation and invention

Normative and resistant regionalist responses result in imitative and inventive architectures respectively. This echoes the understanding developed in the previous chapter on the vernacular in which conservative and interpretative strategies were outlined. The imitative regionalist approach seeks to retain cultural continuity through recognition, while the inventive approach seeks evocation through experience and interpretation, the latter being a more subtle approach. True regionalisms will mediate these dialectics in line with Harris's statement (1958; 2997:80) that "a region promotes ideas. A region accepts ideas. Imagination and intelligence are needed for both."

5.5. Regionalism in South Africa

Chapter 4 has briefly touched on some regional architectural responses (as reactions to universalizing tendencies) prior to and after the advent of the Modern Movement in South Africa. This section will highlight regionalist responses in South Africa with a view to locating Fagan's position within this milieu.

5.5.1. Conservative regional responses

Early Colonial influences in South Africa were described in Chapter 3 as a series of developing vernaculars. If regionalism is defined in this thesis as a reaction to universalizing tendencies, inherited colonialist architectures cannot be described as regionalist. The closest approach to regionalism was that of the English occupation in the early 1800s which superseded Dutch and Portuguese influences. But as Lewcock (1963:IX) suggests, colonial architecture generally reflects a conglomeration of influences so that "one cannot confidently pronounce a fine building as belonging to either a Cape or a British tradition, but must declare it the product of a new, 'South African' culture".

Although Herbert Baker's Arts and Crafts manipulations of the Cape Dutch tradition are closer to a regional architecture through its conscious response to the making of place, and was a reaction to the "eclectic, often vulgar, but always vigorous architecture of High Victorianism" (Herbert, 1975:1), the response was, in the main, the product of a European tradition. Baker did however respond to climatic conditions by introducing "cool loggias and open courts" (Pearse, 1960:18) in his planning. Similarly, the architecture of De Zwaan"[150] (1867-1948), who modified existing pyramid type forms to suit local circumstances, could be seen as a limited attempt to manipulate inherited and standardized Victorian forms. His marked the beginnings of an architecture that was responsive to climate and materials, a movement which gained impetus after the demise of the mediated Modern Movement in the 1930s.

The first real regionalist reaction was that of the architect Moerdjik, who resisted Imperialist tendencies by arguing for an "Afrikaner (African) architecture" (Fisher, 1998:124). Moerdijk was supported by artists such as Pierneef and Van Wouw and writers such as Preller. The climax of this architectural reaction was the Art Deco inspired Voortrekker Monument of 1938.

5.5.2. Radical regional reactions

The radical regionalism of the Transvaal Group in the 1930s attempted to dispel the "eclectic,

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— [150] See Appendix J.

reiterative and tired" (Herbert, 1975:1) neo-Renaissance (Cooke, 1960:21) inspired architecture of the period through the importation of a Corbusian and Bauhaus motivated Modern Movement. Tzonis (2007:216) explains:

> There are important precedents in the creation of a regionalistic architecture in South Africa. I do not refer to the picturesque 'Cape Dutch' houses, intruding African or the whitewashed thatched vernacular that followed it, but rather to the earlier efforts to create a modern architecture, which as much as it was 'western internationalist', also demonstrated serious efforts to design within the framework of the region, as the concept 'region' was defined at that moment

Through Martienssen's editorship of the SAAR and the 1933 publication of *zero hour* (sic), new ways of living and the advantages of new technologies were disseminated. But it was to be a short-lived period, as the emphasis soon shifted from Johannesburg to Pretoria.

5.5.3.   Mediative regional responses

A strong mediative regionalism arose in the Pretoria region as a reaction to the failures of the architecture of the Transvaal Group. The development of this architecture was, in large part, a reaction to the 'coldness' of cubist domestic architecture proposed by Martienssen and his followers, but also continued the trend of earlier regional works that reflected the exigencies of climate and available materials. A true mediation had occurred, one which synthesised modern living requirements, flexible planning, modern technologies, and economies of space and materials brought on by war shortages and a limited economy with the need for a truly 'South African' architecture that responded to its climate and setting. McTeague suggests (1983:47) that the work of Norman Eaton is an exemplary example of a South African regionalism through its synthesis of the planar nature of the International Style, the physical influences of site and the "heritage of Cape Dutch houses".

5.6.   Summary

Regionalism has been defined as a conscious architectural choice that reacts to universal and revivalist standardizing tendencies. It has been argued, in a Mumfordian sense, that mediative approaches seek to resist *and* accept standardizing tendencies to form a regionalism that straddles the boundaries of tradition and modernity in both imitative and inventive ways. The legacy of a strong mediative regionalism in Pretoria formed the basis of Fagan's architectural approach. The third part of Chapter 7 will outline how Fagan has responded in his own way to the regional shifts taking place in the then Transvaal during his tenure there, his regional-modern architectural education, the work that he did in small towns through his association with Volkskas Bank and his later conservation work. All of these influences led to the development of a *relative* regionalism.