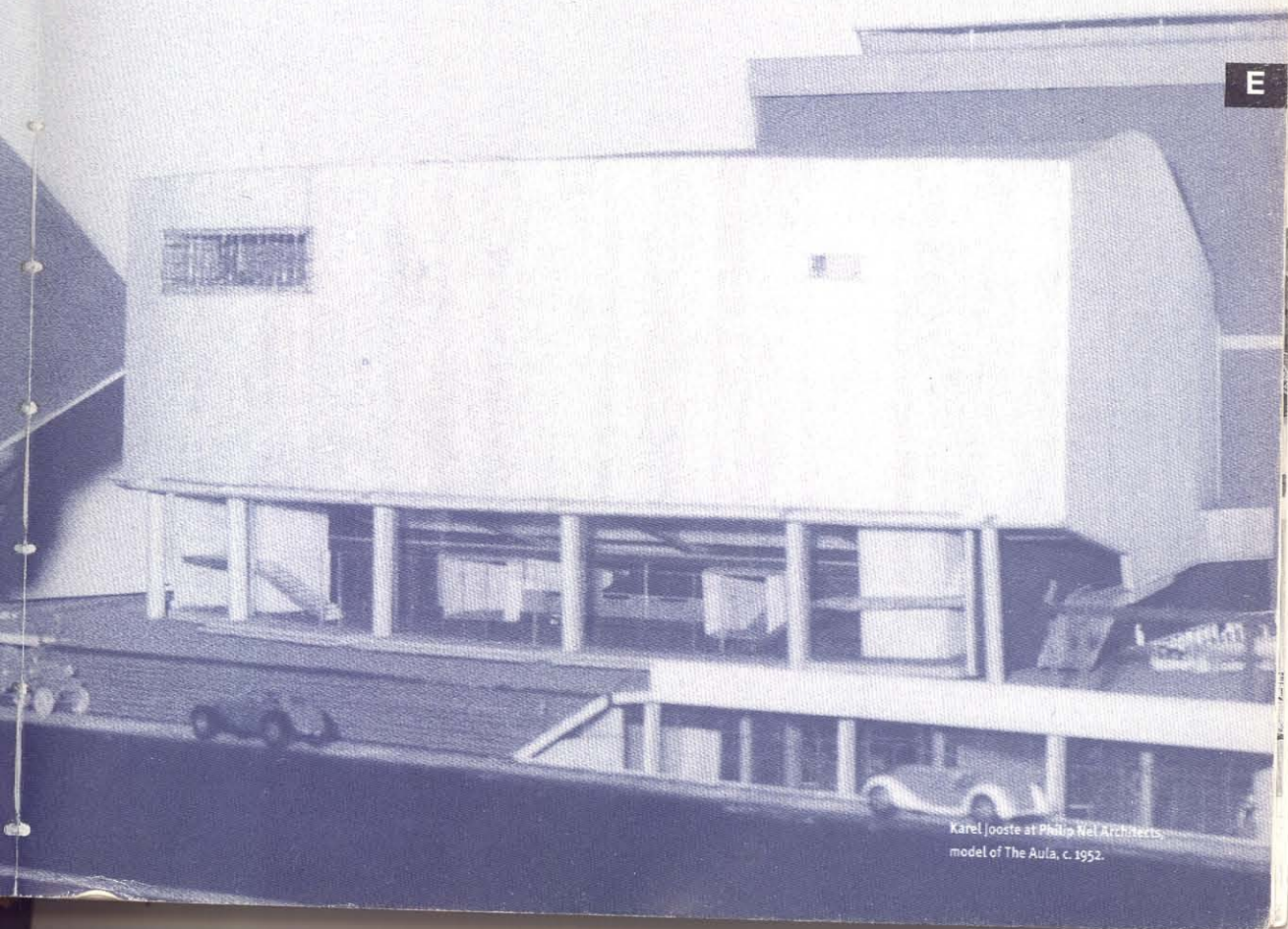




The native heart: The architecture of the University of Pretoria campus
Roger Fisher



Karel Jooste at Philip Nel Architects,
model of The Aula, c. 1952.

The Hill of the Jackal

Mapungubwe, the Place of the Jackal, lies on a hilltop near the confluence of the Limpopo and the Shashi rivers, where the Republic of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana meet. The rediscovery of this ancient citadel is a tale worth retelling.

In 1927 a farmer of the area, a certain E.S.J. van Graan, came to hear about a man called Lottering, who lived the hermit's life on the banks of the Limpopo. Apparently this Lottering had brought down a clay pot off a nearby granite outcrop, a *koppie*, of a style unlike that of any contemporary local earthenware. In 1932 Van Graan, his son and three friends located the *koppie*. The son of a local chief named Mowena revealed the secret path to the summit and there, amongst the potsherds, copper bangles and glass trade beads, the men found a trove of artefacts, including the famed golden rhinoceros. They shared the bounty five ways between them, just like Rhodes' agents when they discovered Great Zimbabwe. But here the story has a happier ending. The Van Graan lad, a student at the University of Pretoria, realizing that the finds were of scientific importance, brought them to the attention of one of the professors of archaeology there. As a result the land was secured by the government, the bounty retrieved by the university's Department of Archaeology, and excavations commenced.

The people who occupied Mapungubwe between AD 950 and 1250, like their successors in Great Zimbabwe, belonged to the Zinzo tradition. Then the Limpopo River was not a political divide, as it is today, but the natural element around which cultures flourished and declined. At its height there were some twenty thousand souls in Mapungubwe. Beads and seashells attest to their status as traders, and gold and other metal artefacts to their skill as smelters and workers of ore.

At the time that excavations began at Mapungubwe, the architect Gerard Moerdyk was serving on the council of the University of Pretoria, having been elected to that body in 1930. The Mapungubwe finds deepened in Moerdyk an interest in African culture, first aroused by a tour to Egypt and the Levant, and from then on he was to pursue the Africanization of his architecture, not only by using indigenous materials, but by employing motifs and symbols with an African origin or association. At this time, when the African origins of Great Zimbabwe were being contested, Moerdyk was adamant, although he did not much admire the workmanship, that it was indeed the product of an indigenous culture.

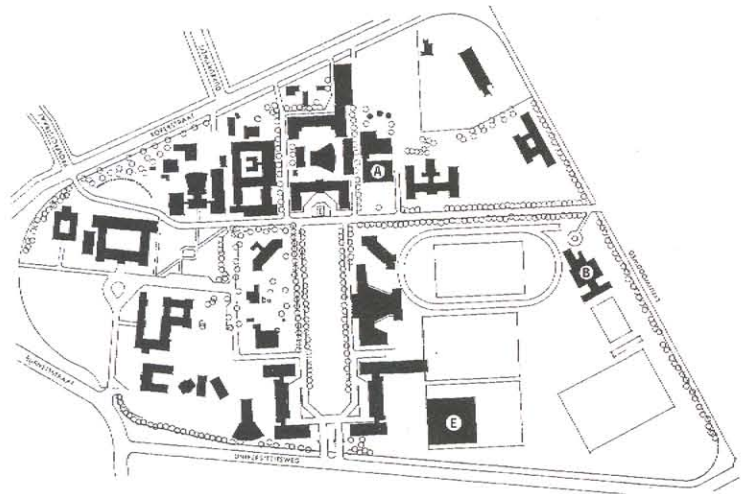
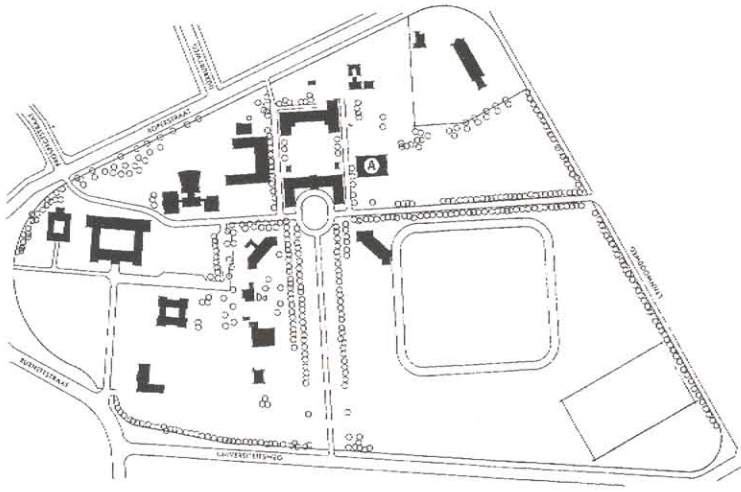
Moerdyk's first involvement with a project which required a degree of symbolic interpretation was the Merensky Library on the campus of the University of Pretoria. Like the symbolism of the later Voortrekker Monument, which Moerdyk would make widely known through his writings in both the English and the Afrikaans press, the symbolism of the Merensky Library was overt and explicit. The granite was of the African soil and symbolized the great age and immensity of the continent, attributes he associated with Great Zimbabwe. The zigzag stonework band was also derived from and linked the building to Africa. The zigzag is an archetypal symbol of water and fertility found in indigenous African culture, and part of its potency stems from the scarcity of water in the subcontinent. For Moerdyk it was also associated with the Voortrekkers as a chosen people whom God had watched over in the African wilderness.

Many of the symbols in bas-relief on the Library walls Moerdyk himself traced to Zimbabwean influences. The architraves of the entrance depict the crocodile and Zimbabwe bird. The crocodile, as spirit of the water, once again suggests a powerful, fertile culture, while the bird, as spirit of the skies, refers to the spiritual inspiration of the creative writers of Afrikaans (and perhaps of the architect as author of the building). The baboons trooping across the lintel of the door remain symbolically obscure. Perhaps it is no more than an architect's humour – after all, he has sheep in the same position on the Reserve Bank he designed in Bloemfontein.

The curving of the walls to the entrance represents the open book, knowledge revealed, especially biblical knowledge. An open Bible was a feature of old Boer homes, and a Bible opened at a particular verse is always placed on a lectern in Afrikaner churches. If we pursue Moerdyk's symbolism to its conclusion, the verse here must be from the Old Testament, God speaking to His People.



Gerard Moerdyk, Merensky Library, 1933-6, bas-relief of main door architrave.



E



University of Pretoria, 1943, 1960, 1970.
 A Merensky Library
 B Physical Education Building
 C The Aula
 D Administration Building
 E Heavy Machinery Building

1 The inheritance¹

Late in 1880, after war with Britain, the Boers of the Transvaal won their independence from the colonial authority and proclaimed the Republic of South Africa once again. It was around this time that Frans Lion Cachet, the Dutch clergyman who became embroiled in the church politics of the Boer Republics, made the observation that Pretoria was so full of foreigners one could barely conceive of its status as capital of an independent territory.² But, by the following year the independence of the South African Republic had been affirmed and the Boers were masters of their own destinies, for the time being at least.

The first Act of Parliament in the restored Republic dealt with higher education and recommended the erection of a *normaalschool* or college in Pretoria in order to bring 'eene behoorlijke wetenskaplike opleiding binnen het bereik van het blanke bevolking der Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek' [a proper scientific education within reach of the white population of the South African Republic]. The envisaged teaching fields included Pedagogy, Law, Commerce and State Administration, alongside Military Science and Agricultural Science, while Theology was purposely omitted as church affiliations were in flux at the time. However, this grand idea was stillborn, because of the difficulty of finding staff who would not taint the 'zuivere Afrikaansche geest' [pure Afrikaans spirit]. The only suitably qualified teachers would of necessity be Dutch, and there was a suspicion that they would bring their language prejudices with them to Africa.

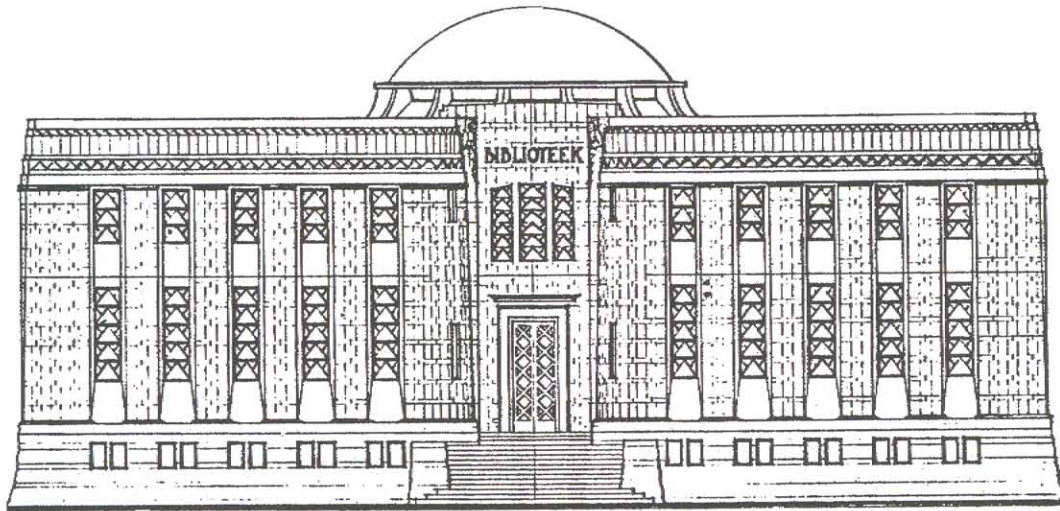
In the 1890s, the gold rush and the rise of the Uitlander population brought a new threat. On the eve of the Anglo-Boer War, *De Express*, a newspaper based in the Orange Free State, made an appeal for the two Boer Republics to establish a 'zuiver Hollands-Afrikaansche' university to counter the 'zuiver Britsche scholen van de Ekstein's, Beit's en hun bewonderaars aan de Rand' [pure British schools of the Eksteins, the Beits and their admirers on the Rand]. The Anglo-Boer War put paid to that scheme for a while, but we can discern in it all the components that would characterize the University of Pretoria – a city-based, white, Afrikaans tertiary institution serving the needs of a farming community.

It was Jan Smuts who decreed in 1907 that a Pretoria campus separate from the Transvaal University College in Johannesburg be established and that the Arts be moved there. His rationale was that Arts subjects in Johannesburg were not drawing students, because the rural students who generally accounted for most of this enrolment did not find the city appealing. Pretoria would be a better setting for the teaching of these subjects.

By this time the Transvaal had become a Crown Colony under Britain, and the Pretoria campus therefore fell under the educational programme of the newly arrived British colonial masters. The architects who came to work in the colony's Department of Public Works followed Herbert Baker so closely that their architectural idiom became known as the 'Baker school'. Among these young architects was Percy Eagle, who designed the Faculty of Arts building (1910), the first on the new campus.

Only in 1930, after agitation from staff and students, and under a council which included Gerard Moerdyk, did the University of Pretoria become an Afrikaans-language institution. From then onwards the new buildings on campus would be authored by Afrikaner architects, all concerned in one way or another with Afrikaner culture and identity. The architecture on the campus thus presents, in a fascinatingly concentrated and representative form, elements of a *volkskultuur* produced in relationship to broader international trends. This has much to tell us about the production of architecture in a provincial setting and about aspects of the style of architecture that has been termed 'Pretoria Regionalism'.

Volk is a word that does not translate easily into English. Neither 'folk' nor 'people' has the connotational depth of the Afrikaans. As a result, the compounds that are so much a part of the language and the culture it expresses – *volkskultuur*, *volksgeskiedenis*, *volksmond*, *volksvreemd* – become obscure in translation and help to keep the Afrikaner psyche a mystery to English-speakers. Perhaps the language of architecture, spoken by champions of Afrikaner culture in an Afrikaans environment,



will be more immediately revealing about the people. Of course, even the term 'Afrikaner' is contentious, but in the setting of the University of Pretoria's early days we will take it to mean those who used Afrikaans as their language of preference and identified themselves with the cause of group identity and Afrikaner advancement in the institutions of state, church and academia.

E

2 Early nationalism

The idea for a Voortrekker monument on campus housing a library dedicated to Afrikaans literature had already been mooted in 1920, but lost momentum. The project was revived in 1934, and Moerdyk, who was probably instrumental in this, was given the commission. The Library was built by public subscription, and the main subscriber, the mining and forestry magnate Hans Merensky, lent it his name. The second-biggest donor was Pretoria's Jewish community, a fact Moerdyk acknowledged in the Star-of-David screens around the gallery. Ironically, Moerdyk's brother-in-law, Oswald Pirow, who served as Minister of Defence in the 1930s, was a staunch Nazi supporter and once proposed to buy bombers for the South African Air Force from Hitler.

The Library building foreshadows the Voortrekker Monument in many ways, both in form and materials. The grey granite exterior presents a very stolid appearance. The building is set back from the transverse axis of the campus, allowing for a view of its shallow saucer dome and for a gathering area in a forecourt. The battered walls create an illusion of greater height and lend a remarkable monumentality to a relatively small structure.

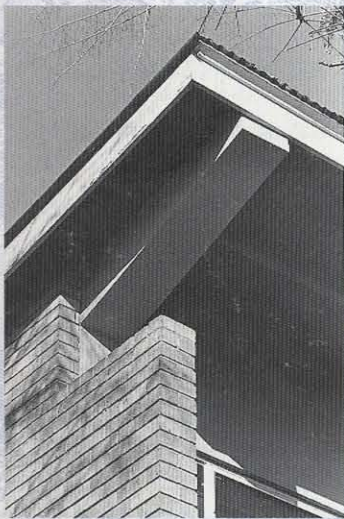
The entrance portico is pinched, more like the stoep of a traditional Boer house, but the interior is one of Moerdyk's more successful secular spaces, bilaterally symmetrical with ancillary rooms off a central domed area. A gallery at first-floor level is concealed behind screens, which fill the windows in the arches beneath the dome. Originally the ground floor had a central circular cut-out to the basement, and a Foucault pendulum swung from the dome and inscribed its path beneath. Like the oculus of the Voortrekker Monument, this gave the local a universal, even cosmic dimension. Unfortunately the pendulum has now been removed and the floor closed over. The invented Corinthian capitals of maize leaves and cobs provide a particularly local flavour. In spirit and motif the

Merensky Library, west elevation.

building relates more to the beaux-arts of art deco than to the modernist buildings then rising in the suburb of Brooklyn just down the road.

Moerdyk had received his first private commission in 1917 to design the Dutch Reformed Church in Bothaville, Orange Free State. More than eighty such commissions would follow, ranging from the Cape to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and from South West Africa (now Namibia) to the Eastern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga). This gave Moerdyk the opportunity to foster an ecclesiastical style for the Afrikaans churches, an ambition reflected as early as 1919 in his privately published booklet on church design, *Kerkbou vir Suid-Afrika*. Interestingly, he eschewed overt symbolism in his churches, whereas his secular shrines to the volk and its accomplishments – the Merensky Library, the Voortrekker Monument, the Reserve Bank in Bloemfontein – are symbolically laden.

Moerdyk has been spurned by South African architectural history, a trend which started even before his death. His obituary in the *South African Architectural Record* was two lines long.³



3 Building in brick

The brick aesthetic has come to characterize the buildings of Pretoria and manifests in all its stylistic variants, from early Public Works Department projects of the South African Republic, through the prevalent modernist work, which shows the expressionist influences of the Amsterdam School, to the current polychromatic postmodern revivals.

For the Boer pioneers, fired-brick dwellings lay at the end of a long progression – from tented wagons and reed *scherm*s (mere screens in the veld copied from indigenous example), to wattle and daub and stone masonry. Brick houses finally proclaimed that the newcomers were permanently settled and in possession of the land.

The Public Works Department originated the brick tradition in Pretoria. The Dutch architects imported by Kruger were well versed in brick architecture, as is demonstrated by such buildings as the *Nederlandsche Bank* on Church Square by Sytze Wopkes Wierda. Looking further back, the tradition and the institution of public works itself owe much to the Prussian state, and specifically to the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel.

In 1826 Schinkel visited Britain, where the novel construction of industrial buildings astonished him, especially the use of brick on a monumental scale. Industrialization had seemed to him to threaten the very existence of architecture as the art of building within society. He had dreamed of

founding a new modern architecture, and now saw that brick was more than a mere aid to regions poor in building-stone. He came to see that, on both aesthetic and structural grounds, it could fulfil the demands of the architecture of the time better than any other building material. By turning to brick, Schinkel showed the way to a modern architecture developed from the direct use of materials, and made brick for public commissions respectable.

John Kirkness, a Scottish immigrant, established himself in Pretoria in 1887 and started his brick-works on the southern side of Muckleneuk Hill. At any one time, the works had a million bricks and half a million decorative elements in production. Buildings as far south as Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town and as far north as the Post Office in Harare (then Salisbury) were built of Kirkness bricks and the name was once synonymous with the product. The diversity of bricks produced encouraged the use of prefabricated elements for embellishment and decorative innovation, and contributed greatly to the evolution of the tradition.

Without being fanciful, we might speculate that the material fitted comfortably within a Protestant ethos. It is plain material and it makes for honest expression. It is inexpensive and easy to come by, and its inherent geometry resonates with a severe, unfussy functionalism. In times of frugality it has served the regionalist practitioner well. In the years after the Second World War, over-fired and malformed bricks, which would otherwise have been discarded as useless, were taken up by cash-strapped builders looking to cut costs and the rough-brick, 'clinker' aesthetic even became fashionable.

The full stylistic range of Pretoria's brick architecture is represented on campus: the Agriculture Faculty building of the 1920s is a Cape Dutch revival by James Bowman Dey, a Baker school architect of the Public Works Department; the Weather Bureau building of the 1930s is a Public Works variant of modernism in red-brick by the Bauhaus-trained émigré, W. H. Fleischmann; Moerdyk's Chemistry and Botany buildings of the late 1940s and early '50s were inspired by Dudok and probably influenced by his employment of Dutch draughtsmen after the Second World War; the Theology Faculty of the early 1950s, the first deliberately retrospective styling of a building on campus, is by Burg and Lodge; and the Economic Sciences Faculty building is a postmodern block by Samuel Pauw.

The Department of Physical Education was established in 1946, when post-war shortages were still imposing restrictions on materials. The architects of the Physical Education building were Meiring and Naudé with Burg Lodge and Burg — the number of consulting architects was indicative of the shortage of commissions at the time — and the designer was Basil South.

Initially the brief included a swimming pool and changing-rooms, but these were omitted from the final contract. What was built was a simple, clearly articulated brown-yellow face-brick shed with an iron roof. Corrugated iron was in short supply because of the war, and its use attests to the prestige of the project. Although it has been insensitively altered, the core of the building is still there in all its simplicity: a monopitch roof cantilevered over high northern lighting, easily articulated junctions, standard steel windows. This architecture was almost idiomatic in the Pretoria of the 1950s and '60s, in domestic, commercial and retail structures. It created on an exaggerated scale a homogeneous place of brick-and-iron buildings with rural temperaments, alas now fast disappearing.

South, who studied with the leading lights of the Transvaal Group, became a studio master and teacher at the Pretoria School of Architecture. He did not have his own practice and worked in association with colleagues. The Hillcrest High School, done under the auspices of Vivian Rees-Poole's office, can be attributed to him. He designed stage sets for local repertory companies, and this made him particularly sensitive to the effects of light in architecture. This can be seen in his articulation of façades, modelled for sun control in emulation of South American architects like Niemeyer. Forms, shapes and groupings were handled in accordance with Hambidge's 'Dynamic Symmetry'.⁴ South impressed these principles upon receptive students such as Karel Jooste and Gawie Fagan.

Basil South for Meiring and Naudé with Burg Lodge and Burg. Old Physical Education Block, 1948, north elevation and detail of north-east corner.



Karet Jaoste / Philip We Architects, The
Amia, south elevation under construction.
© 1957

4 Monumental modernism

In 1929, after it had been decided that the education of architects would in future be entrusted to the universities rather than the technical colleges, courses in Architecture and Quantity Surveying were introduced at the Transvaal University College in Pretoria, with H. Bell-John as head of department. Soon afterwards it was mutually agreed that the Transvaal University College would award qualifications in Quantity Surveying and the University of the Witwatersrand those in Architecture, although the courses were offered on both campuses.

This arrangement was terminated in 1943 with the establishment of the Pretoria School of Architecture at the University of Pretoria. The School's first graduates qualified in 1948, the year the National Party came to power. Wynand Smit was one of the first graduates to become a part-time studio master at the School. Another early graduate who subsequently taught was Karel Jooste, and he was followed by two of his partners, Carl (Gus) Gerneke and Anton du Toit. Other noteworthy early tutors were Gordon McIntosh, Norman Eaton, Helmut Stauch and Robert Cole Bowen. McIntosh was prominent in the Transvaal Group and one of the original protagonists of the Modern Movement with Rex Martienssen and Bernard Cooke.³

Under the tuition of a largely English-speaking teaching corps the Pretoria School developed a strong, pragmatic identity. Two common factors seem to have characterized the teachers: they were all South Africans born and bred, with strong rural ties; and many had felt the formative influence of the Public Works Department.

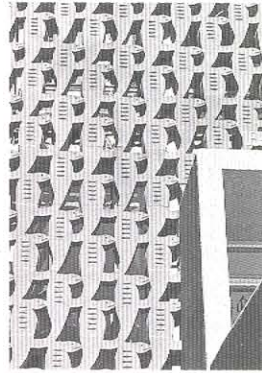
Cole Bowen, for instance, a functionalist but creative designer who worked with a clear and simple rationale, had been employed in the Department, designing a good Dudok-influenced building for the Krugersdorp Post Office. He introduced an adventurous and somewhat less academic strain of thought into the School.⁶ He taught the design of an economical courtyard house, for instance, using excellent examples from his own work, and advocated accuracy based on detailed anthropometric data – sizes for furniture and sanitary fittings, the sizes of folded sheets for linen cupboards, the minimum height required to hang a long evening dress.

In the year the Pretoria School was founded, the Museum of Modern Art in New York staged the 'Brazil Builds' exhibition. This exhibition moved modern architecture out of the preserve of the privileged and into the public realm and established it as an expression of newly independent statehood, exemplified in Brasilia and Chandigarh. The book *Brazil Builds* was to post-war students in Pretoria what *Vers une Architecture* had been to Martienssen's generation in Johannesburg, and in the years to come its influence left an enduring mark on the architecture of Pretoria. Nikolaus Pevsner later called Johannesburg 'a little Brazil',⁷ but the description may have suited Pretoria even better.

The transatlantic influence was soon felt on the campus. The shortage of sheet-iron during the war years had encouraged experimentation with roofs of formed concrete, and this developed a confidence in the use of the material.⁸ The skills of engineers and builders were tested to the limit by daring concrete inventions – ribbon stairs, pioneered by the Roberto brothers in Rio's Santos Dumont Airport (and tried out on penguins in London), along with hyperbolic, folded or saddle-curved canopies and roofs. The first free-standing ribbon stair in South Africa (now demolished) was tacked on to the outside of the Aula on the University of Pretoria campus.

The idea of building a hall to celebrate the 1938 centenary of the Great Trek, like the idea for the Merensky Library, was first mooted in 1920. The 'gedenksaal', or memorial hall, was back on the agenda in 1929, and there was talk of a 'Hall of One Thousand' on the campus in 1935, but the Library was the only project that came to fruition. However, a Voortrekker Hall designed by Eaton's mentor Gordon Leith was built in the city. It is appropriate that Karel Jooste, who continued the Leith-Eaton lineage, should have designed the Aula.

Although the project was initiated in 1951, the hall was finally built between 1956 and 1958. Had it been built immediately, the Aula might well have been the first monumental modernist building in the country, ahead of Stauch's Meat Board Building. The university authorities certainly succeeded



Meiring and Naucé, Heavy Machinery Building, 1953.

E



The Aula, main entrance and south-east elevation.

in creating a prestigious cultural centre, and the Aula remained the major venue in the city until the State Theatre was completed in the early 1980s.

The auditorium remains the type of the Moderns, adhering to the 'form follows function' injunction and yet showing great structural daring, with the precarious balancing of large masses on slender pilotis. The huge mass of the Aula hovers above the Rautenbach Student Hall below, an effect emphasized by the transparency of large sliding glass doors on the western and eastern walls.

The concrete is *béton brut*, and its use in the main foyer was novel and adventurous for its time. Finish and structure are articulated as distinct, with the waved ceilings floating between exposed concrete ribs. Stairs are cut free of the supporting floors to emphasize their structural independence. In the Student Hall the young architect took his greatest liberties – the sculpted free-form cut-out concrete screen, the concrete lectern, the wedge-shaped ancillary screen to the dais. The sliding doors are part of the repertoire which distinguished the Pretoria School – an innovative exploitation of ordinary off-the-shelf industrial materials. In a remote corner is the most offbeat device, Georgian wire glass set directly into the jagged edge of a random-rubble wall.

The Aula is a building in the round, showing its structural muscle, clearly identifying its functional spaces. It has weathered both the elements and the vagaries of architectural taste well; its worst enemy has been the university itself with insensitive demolitions and additions.

Jooste was one of the early students of the Pretoria School, obtaining his diploma in 1947 and his degree in 1953. He undertook various study tours to Europe and briefly met Le Corbusier in the year before his death. As a student Jooste worked in the office of his mentor Norman Eaton, and this relationship made him the natural heir to that strain of architecture that could be termed Pretoria Regionalism, whose major proponent was Eaton.

Jooste established a practice in Pretoria in 1957, and his associates and partners included Gus Gerneke, Willem Steyn, Francois Viljoen, Anton du Toit, George Wilsenach and Johan Malherbe. His oeuvre comprises private houses, hospitals, banks and public buildings, but much of it remains relatively unknown because of its remoteness – some of his largest commissions were rural hospitals – and because the firm eschewed publication of their work or the use of architect's board, believing that good architecture is its own advertisement. The Aula was his earliest work, produced under the auspices of the architectural firm Philip Nel even before he graduated, and remains his crowning achievement.

5 New Brutalism

While the Smithsons and Paul Rudolph visited South Africa and left their mark on its architecture, New Brutalism arrived at the University of Pretoria through Brian Sandrock. Sandrock had been active on the campus since 1956, when he added a wing to the second Mathematics and Sciences building, using face brick in a reserved Dutch Modern style. Eventually he would dominate the campus, just as he dominated the southern gateway to the city with his building for the University of South Africa, with projects that were ever larger and more stolid, culminating in the New Humanities tower block of 1973, which bestrides Roper Street between the old and new campuses.

As chief architect to the university, Sandrock's idiom prevailed even when other firms were commissioned, for instance, the New Merensky Library on the old campus and the Faculty of Law on the new campus, west and east of Sandrock's tower block, which are both by Tectura, the heirs to Norman Eaton's practice. Sandrock's involvement in the Atomic Energy Board complex at Pelindaba seems to have nurtured a fascination with the plasticity of concrete and a confidence about its engineering, which he explored on the campus even when it was not a functional requirement. His buildings are daringly engineered: the concrete façade of the Administration Building is suspended on rubber hangers, the floors of the Engineering tower are suspended from central service towers on cables, the New Humanities building rises off an enormous concrete bridge podium. Yet the planning is uninspired and often bad, and spatial qualities are ignored – except in the Administration Building.

It was Sandrock who recommended that the new Administration Building be located in the far south-western corner of the campus, in an area known to students as 'Die Gat' ('The Hole'). It was thought at first that the Loftus Versveld rugby stadium would be relocated and the campus expanded to the west, which would have placed the new building at the centre of the enlarged campus, but later it became clear that expansion would happen to the east instead. Nevertheless, the site was retained, on the grounds that it would make the building readily accessible to the public.

The site elicited a delta-form plan, with a windowless 'prow' projecting out towards the junctions of Lynnwood and University Roads. Through the heart of the delta a double-volume hall rises, where students conduct their administrative affairs. This is light, with finely-detailed counters and fittings, and rough-hewn quartzite floor tiling – one of Sandrock's more successful spatial inventions (and possibly a tribute to Alwyn Burger, then head of the School of Architecture, who was project architect). A spiral stair coils up at the prow, grandly conceived but lost in the tight space, leading up into the remote and sombre halls of the rectorate. The whole speaks of another time and another order.

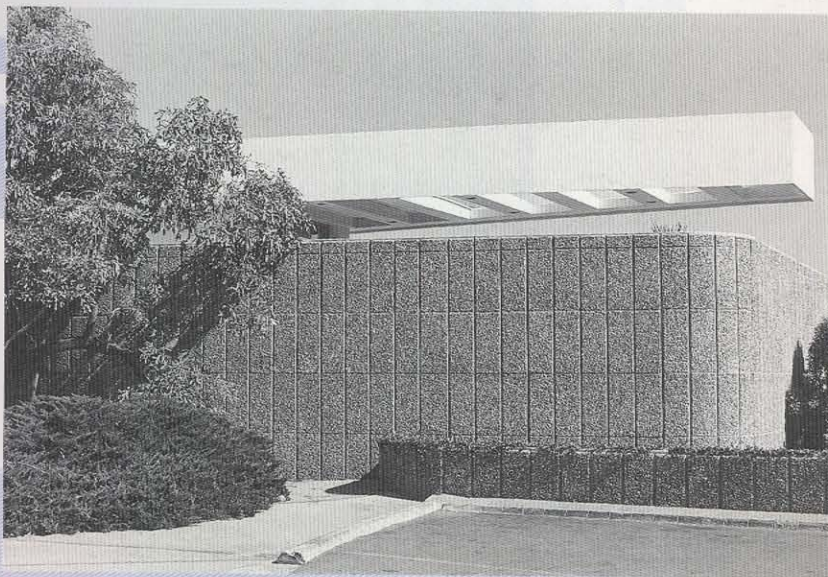
The office accommodation soon proved inadequate as the bureaucracy burgeoned, and the office wing was extended to the east, compounding the labyrinthine extent of passages. The northern façade shows the concern with sun penetration, which is a trade mark of Pretoria architecture: deep-set windows with *brise-soleil* devices, in this case a set of suspended horizontal louvres. In the south the banded windows are flush with the façade and take the corner to emphasize the structural daring of suspended concrete spandrel bands.

As with most buildings in this climate conducive to lush growth, the starkness of the block has been softened by trees, shrubs and creepers. But it still declares its status, announcing that design and control have captured even a remote corner of the campus that was once little more than a dumping site.

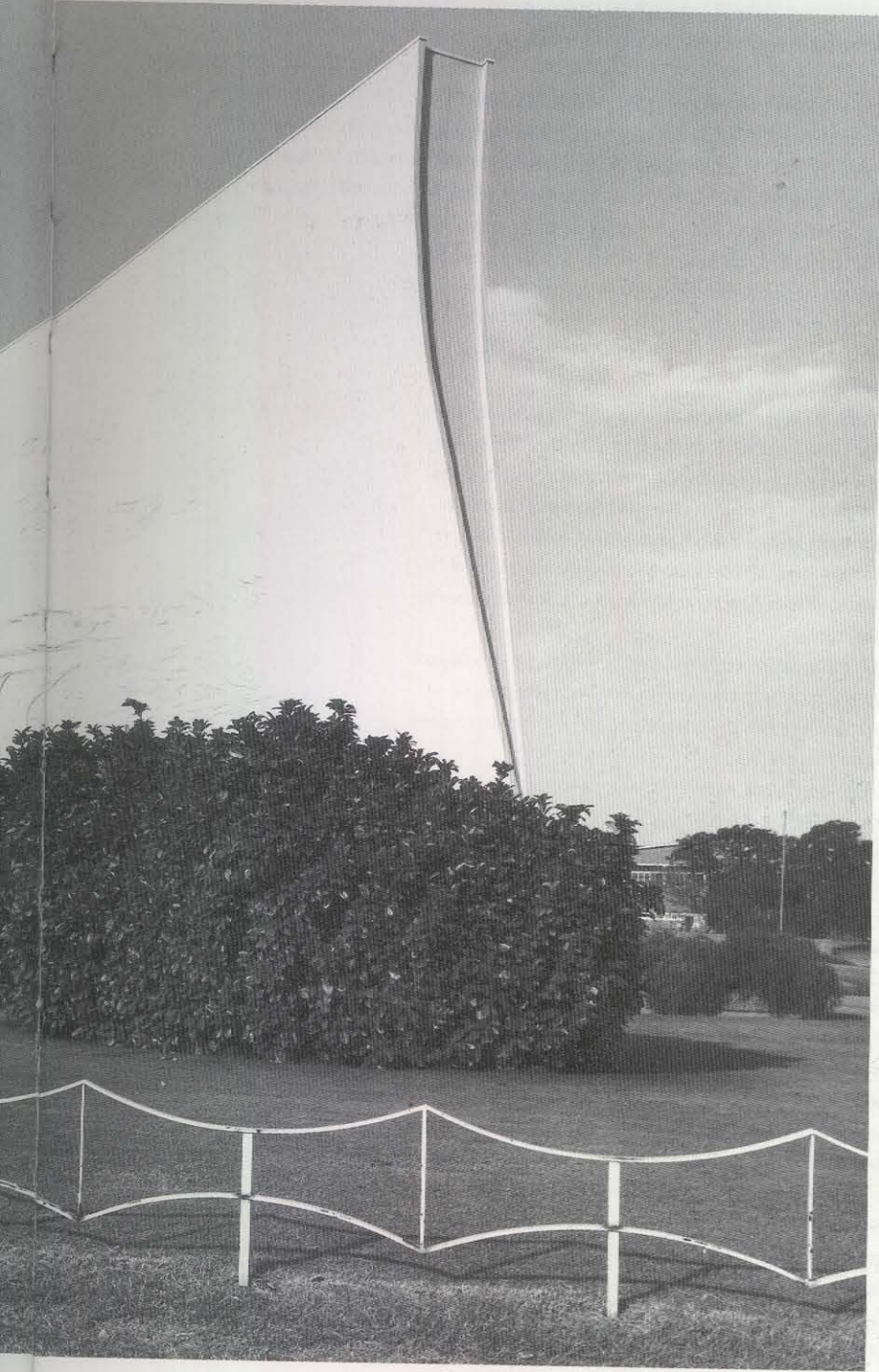
Sandrock was a pragmatic man not given to symbolism, as his bas-relief in the Administration Building demonstrates. Although a competition had already been arranged to find an artist for this work, the architect eventually designed a decorative device himself. The story goes that he arrived at the design late one night while trying to retrieve an insect from the plaster-of-Paris presentation model. The massive concrete wall on the western side, structurally suspended on rubber brackets, forms an acoustic shield for noise from the railway line across the road: functionality on a monumental scale.

Brian Sandrock, Administration Building,
1968, main entrance and rectorate with
cantilevered pergola.

E







E

Brian Sandrock, Administration Building,
University of Pretoria, 1968.
Photograph by David Goldblatt.

Despite Sandrock's distinct lack of iconographic intent, his buildings attract nicknames. The Administration Building is 'Die Skip' because of its distinctive ship-like prow. The New Humanities tower is 'Die Konsertina' and the student hostels are 'Die Kaasraspers' ('The Cheese-graters'). The University of South Africa building, dramatically cantilevered from Muckleneuk ridge on a single foot, is called 'The Singer Sewing Machine'.

Sandrock was a large, shy man. He worked as a part-time lecturer in his younger days, when the School was still in the city centre, and some recall that he would cross the street if he saw a student approaching. Yet he inspired confidence in his clients, especially those relatively anonymous corporate bodies of universities and boards, with his efficient management of projects and budgets. The obituaries described him as enigmatic, and the reason why he received so many enormous commissions remains obscure. We do know how he first came to work with the Pretoria University authorities: Samuel Pauw, a young architectural student in his office, whose father was then rector of the University of South Africa, made the introductions.

6 Postmodernism and the Romanesque revival

What was the first postmodern project in Pretoria? Was it Bannie Britz's Sterland cinema complex? Louis Peens's De Bruyn's Park? Perhaps that garish roadhouse by the Frame brothers called The Crack? The question is still open to debate. But there is no doubt that postmodernism was given official sanction by the new headquarters building of the Human Sciences Research Council in Schoeman Street in central Pretoria. The project architect was Samuel Pauw, who had earlier designed the innovative Volkskas headquarters tower. It was Pauw, and young associates like Piet de Beer, freshly returned from postgraduate studies in New York, who brought postmodernism to the University of Pretoria campus in the late 1980s.

In those years the university approached Pauw to design a new building for the Faculty of Economic Sciences, then the fastest-growing and largest faculty on campus. The brief was simple: give us another assertive humanities building in the Sandrock mould. Style and size had been predetermined, all that was needed was some fine-tuning on the specifics.

It took Pauw three months to persuade the faculty, and another nine the university, that what was needed was a building that would create a feeling of unity and campus life. By scaling down an imposing tower to a three-storey office block, placed along the walkway that traverses the eastern campus, Pauw created a background building with three courts, each belonging to one of the divisions of the faculty.

The building reverts to the brick tradition, although the bricks are of cement rather than clay and are used polychromatically; the windows are standard steel sections regularly arranged, the only peculiarity being the staggered square configuration taken through the inner corners of the forecourts. In true postmodern style, elements are exaggerated and mannered – the squat, round-arched arcade on the ground floor seems sunken beneath the weight of the architecture. The scale – the human, the elements to the whole, the whole to its surroundings – is excellently judged. The building has created an atmosphere of campus life on a once isolated extension. It has even managed to enliven the dead space between the new Humanities building and the Law Faculty.

In the lecture hall concrete is used more prominently, while the conference facility, planned as a baptistry with a monastic loggia, is a light-hearted indulgence.

Pauw graduated from the Pretoria School in 1961. His Masters thesis was a critical reappraisal of Le Corbusier. Pauw approaches the postmodern as a liberation from modernist functionalism and an opportunity to recover the humanizing aspects of style, especially those manifest in eclectic pre-modern buildings. His design for the Economic Sciences Complex was a chance to concretize these thoughts on postmodernism. He turned a blind eye to the New Brutalism which dominates the campus and, instead, sought inspiration in those buildings where aspects of a Romanesque revival find a precedent – the old Arts building, Moerdyk's club building on the central campus, and the monastery which adjoins the site and now belongs to the university.

Ancient echoes

In his writings on church style, Moerdyk argued against the neo-Gothic as an appropriate style for the Afrikaans church. He associated this style with the cold northern countries, and found the architecture of southern Europe more suitable to South Africa's climate. He thus made a case for a Romanesque revival to suit the requirements of Afrikaner Calvinism. Something in the Afrikaner psyche seems drawn to early Christian culture. While Romanesque architecture may appear remote from the African present, strangely even more removed from us than the time of classical Rome, it is contemporary with the culture of Mapungubwe, which too seems more ancient than it really is. For some, perhaps, an association with distant times and ancient traditions holds out the promise of permanence.

E