SHIFTING PARADIGMS & HIGH-TECH: REVISITING CENTENARY BUILDING, SALFORD, WITH SUSTAINABILITY IN MIND.

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Fig. 1: The Centenary Building, Salford.
Source: Maria Yioutani-Iacovides

THE BRIEF & DESIGN CONCEPT

The Centenary Building in Salford was created with the intention to fuse design and technology (Fig. 1), serving as a hub for the University's Departments of Spatial, Graphic, and Industrial Design.
The building's brief required the young architect Stephen Hodder to align its purpose and function, to its location, by bridging the gap between the city and the academic campus.
Hodder's work on the Centenary Building "enabled him to demonstrate commitment to the importance of placemaking", contribute to local identity, and "resolve one of his most overt exercises in structural expressionism", showing "commitment to articulation of craft and materials' (Gregory:2017:144) (Fig 4,5).
Hodder's "close relationship and dialogue with the client allowed for a response to changes, as the client's brief changed significantly during the design of the building' (Walker, 2017:26).
The building has three main parallel elements: a) a four-story rectangular section accommodating flexible studios, seminar spaces, and service towers, b) a three-story section accommodating designated tutorial areas and technology suites, and c) a linear atrium connecting the two sections.
The central linear atrium, or street, acts as the primary organizing element between the studios and the offices (Fig. 2), and with its horizontal circulation pathways, creates a lively atmosphere within the building, encouraging interaction and engagement of staff and students.
"It is a clever, highly articulated, take on 'pure' modernism in glass, stainless steel, and concrete'. It is built to a tough modern aesthetic, with something of a factory feel. The architect has successfully subverted what could have been, in other hands, a very straightforward rectilinear building' having 'wide studio and lecture theatre space with indirect daylighting; breaks up the internal street with galleries and bridges and exposes rooms to this central space to give an air or purpose and animation". "He considers considers the building's three elements separately, layering the composition both horizontally and vertically". "The studio spaces inside are good, light, and simple, some with marvellous outlooks "(Pearman, 1996:6,7) (Fig 3,4,5).
"Internally the building has a very special quality: the tall, narrow internal street is dynamic: top light down one side and is complemented by artificial light" (Chapman, 2017: 93) (Fig 2).

FIRST STIRLING PRIZE WINNER 1996

1996 was a year of honours and accolades: the building was awarded the first ever Stirling Prize, the North West RIBA Award, and the RIBA Award for Education.
The Stirling Prize Jury commented:
"Despite being built quickly and cheaply – the team had to be on site in just twelve weeks after appointment – the building is a dynamic, modern, and sophisticated exercise in steel, glass, and concrete. They have bowed out the main facade to create a wide studio and lecture theatre space with indirect daylighting; breaking the 'internal street' with galleries and bridges and exposing rooms to this central space to give an air of purpose and animation" (Hodder's & Partners, web).

SHIFTING PARADIGMS

The changes in the shifting paradigm surrounding technology and its use in Architecture is exemplified in the Centenary building.
It still stands as an example of an era characterized by a fascination for the visual spectacle of advanced technology seamlessly integrated into design.
This original vision did not prioritize sustainability or environmental performance. Instead, it was a sample of the exuberance and allure associated with high-tech architectural expression.
Yet, since its creation, there has been a gradual shift in priorities in construction. This inadvertently led to the neglect of sustainable considerations which became critical as the building was aging.
The prevailing paradigm began emphasizing a more passive architectural approach, aligned with principles of sustainability. As a result, the once-vivid high-tech expression of the Centenary Building became more subdued, replaced by a renewed focus on functionality and environmental responsibility.
Since the 1990s, the trajectory of the construction industry has undergone a transformation, and the role technology plays in the design of a building has shifted. Once championed as an enabler of sustainability, technology was employed to achieve high sustainability ratings. The shift towards a commitment to combat climate change and reduce carbon footprints, has signalled a profound alteration in architectural values.
The Centenary Building faced not only the challenge of evolving technological expectations but also the challenge of shifting urban dynamics in its location. The ebb and flow of the university's expansion strategized a move towards a different part of the campus, rendering the Centenary Building's original location less strategic over time. This spatial recalibration infused an air of obsolescence, as the building found itself in a juncture misaligned with the institution's evolving plans.

CONCLUSION

We argue that the trajectory of the Centenary Building as a sample of High-Tech architecture of the 90s, has been impacted by the paradigm shift of the role of technology has in architectural discourse: From its early commitment to high-tech aesthetics to its decommissioning on energy consumption reasons and in response to sustainability concerns and energy efficiency goals, the building's story demonstrates how fluid architectural ideals can be. The life and current state of the Centenary Building serves as a testament to the continuous evolution of architectural values and the dynamic currents that inevitably shape a building's destiny.

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Fig 1. Centenary Building in Salford. Source: Maria Yioutani-Iacovides.
Fig 2. Internal street, 2023. Source: Maria Yioutani-Iacovides, 2023.
Fig 3. The building is 'flooded' with natural light, 2023. Source: Maria Yioutani-Iacovides.
Fig 4. 'Structural expressionism'. Source: Maria Yioutani-Iacovides.
Fig 5. Articulation of craft and materials: glass, steel, concrete. Source: Maria Yioutani-Iacovides.

Fig. 2: Internal Street.
Source: Maria Yioutani-Iacovides.

Fig. 4: Structural expressionism.
Source: Maria Yioutani-Iacovides

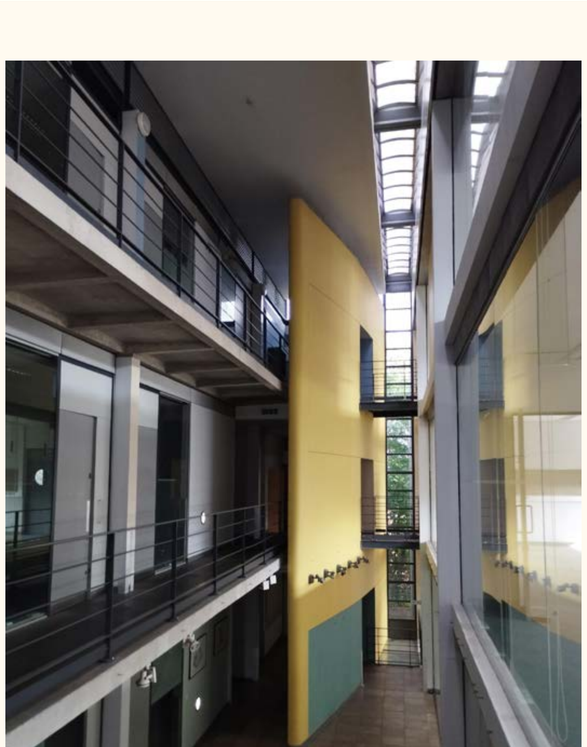

Fig. 3: The Building is flooded with natural light.
Source: maria Yioutani-Iacovides.

Fig. 5: Articulation of craft and materials: glass, steel, concrete.
Source: Maria Yioutani-Iacovides