concerned with larger issues of process it is more concerned with creating stunning individual buildings (with buildings as objects) than with more general problems of architecture and urbanism. It is in the thoroughgoing quality that the essential difference lies. Robbermen of the architecture is also appreciated, as Peter Cook (p58) points out. Its appeal is to a nation for more structural and visual simplicity for the sensuality its culture otherwise lacks, and which in any case tends to prefer the natural or quasi-cultural to the artificial of culture. (Italian design is sex too, but in its voluptuousness promises satisfactions less charged and lasting than those of the thoroughgoing. Nevertheless, it is a Powerful Ferret—or a Porshe—is closer to British-High Tech than any car made here today.) The image of the thoroughgoing is self-consciously superior, refined and efficient, in what resembles High-Tech so attractive to those organizational objectives—after all, efficient is what resembles High-Tech so attractive in professional work to be perceived in similar terms. So whatever else it may have to offer as an approach, High-Tech is the present context for advanced, prestigious new corporate headquaters now under construction, one for Lloyd's of the City of London by Richard Rogers & Partners, the other for Hinching and Shanghai Bank by Foster Associates (AR May 1981). British High-Tech is riding the crest of a wave.

Though the thoroughgoing quality is for the public and corporate appeal of High-Tech it does not sufficiently explain its grip on the imaginations of its architectural practitioners. For them, its fascination is deeper than its formal seductions and rational justifications. It lies in its logic, which because it cannot really be substantiated, must be accounted mythical. The essential myth is that in terms of our contemporary circumstances of human scale, culture, and evolution but also the premises of liberation. Paradoxically, its control and freedom need not be contradictory. Indeed, it is possible that the most inspiring modern architecture was suggestively to define a set of minimal but appropriate constraints that would liberate opportunities for relatively unhampered activity. The High-Tech version of this quest imagines that if environmental conditions are somehow limited, productivity can be increased. At one extreme, the framework is provided, then components are freed to do almost anything—provided they can manipulate and fill the available space. The conceptualization as one would a racing yacht or sailplane.

ARCADE AND UTOPIA

This vision can be pushed to either extreme, of creating something only or of something both. High-Tech's expressed ideal would be a suitable balance, its most questing works tend to one extreme or the other, or both simultaneously. At one extreme, the building evaporates completely leaving its occupants exposed in nature but protected from wind, rain and temperature change. At the other extreme, tampered air, with power and communications delivered, and mariachs kept at bay by force fields. Such an extreme tends to be pushed away, though not at quite this extreme, in Ryeer Bhanan's provocative 1925 essay 'A house in not a house' the extreme is that of the infinitely flexible framework—which in its attempt to get out of the way of its own mediocrity is described as having no spans (often achieved now by suspended structures). The prime example is the Pompidou Centre where the original intention of seamless flexibility to absolve any cultural function has paradoxically resulted in a monument to only the idea of functionalism or urbanism, in which the huge structural elements (some of which were once intended to move) impose their presence on whatever happens inside. And it is in this way of giving a framework work for moment-to-moment change on an electric billboard front. It has acquired a purposely monumental rhetoric—again both mechanical and visual displaying service ducts extrinsically and arm-like.

So there are two further myths behind High-Tech: a sort of Arcadia in which architecture has evaporated in an amusing nature, and a sort of Utopia in which architecture is pure facile, a huge flexible framework. (While Rogers' buildings tend to the latter, of course, Foster sometimes attempt to faze the two as far as IBM Colonn, to some degree at the Smithsonian Centre and even, in its slipperiness, at Window House, France.) But whichever architectural myth they subscribe to, what freedom is offered by these costly uncontrollabilities of control? The freedom to build by hand every 56 High-Tech big dream of a pinching naked in nature uncorrupted by cold, rain or bugs—yet constrained from ambulating the frame or sacras because of the eerie signs of voyeurism? Or freedom to move furniture and partitions in the corporation's dream of an open plan conception which accommodates maximum productivity from a worksite under constant surveillance?

BUILDING AS EQUIPMENT

Utopia is High-Tech's promise of freedom and seduction. It is writing what is truly and fixed. Or more precisely the traditional fass of spatial subdivision and functional designation (which inevitably imply size and shape) and the complex of symbolic meaning are reduced to more fixed of structure and structure are--implying an architecture of precise order and design. (Of course, in reality High-Tech structure is very much shaped by an anchor of looking functional and sophisticated engineering that it is in itself highly symbolic. The Renault Centre would have been much fairier to classicists, and with probably little more steel, if it were not for High-Tech. High-Tech tends to erase all monographs, all human and cultural references from building—structures are notoriously difficult to find. Workspaces planning places on the sub-level (cultural) hierarchies, and human scale and function are never an abstract, roll out of furnishings, furniture and equipment. Indeed the buildings themselves are equipment rather than architecture which is why it is easily taken in some schools of High-Tech city to too conceptions of High-Tech urbanism or evileven. So the freedom High-Tech promises is much more utopian than complete functional flexibility. HighTech is nothing less than modern architecture's most extreme attempt to transcend history, to escape from cultural and imaginative constructions, its time-wasting formalities. The goals of buildings that do not shape or even reflect--life so to be willing to give up on the trinkets and the trinkets and the strips of tissue to an other urbanism, a fresh one. In that sense are different configurations and adjusted for optimal conditions. Here life can be re-invented as from scratches and streamlined in maximal productivity. Even leisure is provided with a cool efficiency, a new kind of work hard, play hard, play hard, stills of the American executive, But as we have learned from the failures of modern architecture, trying to escape history and traditional culture for an entirely 'rationalized' modern lifestyle is a shallowly conceived and deeply alienating project. Life culture, architecture must be explored to a new rationale, the most essential function of both is to encompass life and move into manageable chunks of experience to give a reassuring psychic security and allievate the need for a continuous defensive alienation. Then such chunk of experience can be savoured, explored and elaborated in reverse, scientific investigation and art. This is how we have created our marvellously complex world, our understanding of it and our sense of being at home in it. Yet High-Tech, whether the vision in scardan or utopian, tends to explode these compartments, and strip away the traditional articulations and boundaries of culture and architecture. We are left, like the pre-historic or post-apocalyptic nomads of Aragones, exposed and overwhelmed in a forest of dreams and machines. It is a setting for a certain kind of Modern Man—the psychically driven and compulsively busy kind whose industry and intensity of focus is sufficient both to tune-out its distractions and justify the vast amounts of energy being consumed. Psychologically this vision, if not naive, must surely be pathological.

TECHNOLOGY AS ART

It is not technology that is at fault but the idiosyncratic use of it. Technology offers much more sympathetic alternative than today's High-Tech if it is again properly seen as a means and not an end in itself. Throughout history mankind has tried to surround and control nature with technology. High-Tech is the climax of this drive. But now with the miniaturization of technology, where a hand-bound computer driven by anly batteries can do many of man's work in seconds, and communications travel by airwaves, then this project can be inverted and technology can nestle into and be surrounded by nature. Such an arcadian vision is beautifully captured by one of the few architects who in some of his designs uses technology to truly work and the utoian designs for houses and agri-tech communities are currently enfolded in the earth using a technology no more complicated than that used for building suburban swimming pools. Yet it is also powerfully the evileths that are at the heart of any supportive culture (1981 January). Technology if understood as a tool rather than in terms of products can easily co-exist with, and indeed revive, craft and local tradition. This is an aspirant technology being explored by Renzo Piano whose continuing emphasis on technology as process and craft coexists with the best of High-Tech's original intentions.

If it is to Ambass we must look for a poetic utopia and the High-Tech formations of the workplace, then it is to Piano that we must look for the use of technology to preserve and enhance tradition and culture. And what to make of British High-Tech? Though an enterprise with serious limitations, it undoubtedly produces some of the most exciting buildings today. They are potent probes and research tools extending the boundaries of the possible. From this and from the sheer expertise with which they are accomplished are as rich—perhaps with an appropriate sense of awe. For these buildings are like thoroughgoing mess news, as tends to be the case when an architectural trend is neglected, productivity, even leisure is provided with a cool efficiency, a new kind of work hard, play hard, stills to the American executive. But as we have learned from the failures of modern architecture, trying to escape history and traditional culture for an entirely 'rationalized' modern lifestyle is a shallowly conceived and deeply alienating project. Life culture, architecture on the other hand, is our richly complex world, our understanding of the art in itself, and our sense of being at home in it.