to be one of indeterminacy, of discomfort with the monumental face of past institutions, revealing the elements of architecture in order... to facilitate their dispersion into the city fabric. Voller is examining here Rowe’s question as to the ’absent face’ of the Stuttgart elevation. He suggests that the ’face’ is absent because the museum is – as Rowe himself appreciated – not an isolated object. With its climbing path across a sloping site amid neighbours, it identifies completely with the city. Yet, for all its contrapasso and distracted face, to a viewer across the Adenauer Strasse, the Stuttgart museum presents definite frontality, fulfilling Rowe’s provocative dialectic.

In cities, one condition alone can offer this simultaneous address and reserve: that is where a port not merely flanks but fronts the water with not one but multiple ‘faces’. A city which can present this countenance to the sea, no matter how compromised or distracted the landward body behind the face, will always inspire ideas of adventitious arrival. Again, the River is the key (the quay) to that recurrent provocation which Liverpool makes, and which makes Liverpool.

**Liverpool located**

In 1957, Stirling wrote ‘Regionalism and Modern Architecture’, observing that while architects had taken, in the wake of Writewax, a ‘neopalladian’ turn, there was renewed interest in vernacular and early modern models which evidenced a return to regional resources. Indeed, Stirling himself was doing so. Yet, if he refrained from a simple call for the ‘regional’, it was because he was also engaged with the unlocal valencies of both technology and high Modernism – he cited Eliot’s *Waste Land*. This ambivalence corresponds to the case of a city like Liverpool, which went from negligible to all-but global without a midway of provinciality; yet now finds itself strangely *delocalised*, surrounded with monumental evidence of a distinctly local identity which, paradoxically, entrained a global scope that seems now beyond its reach.

Architectural ’regionalism’ has a problem with cities, and particularly with ’provincial’ cities, which today means nearly all those not in the magic circle of six or seven ’global cities’. Even Kenneth Frampton’s elaborated idea of ’critical regionalism’ as resistance to corporate forces, relies mostly upon maintenance of historically local – usually preindustrial – teutonic practices. This leaves at a loss cities such as Liverpool and Glasgow, whose architecture was developed by a capitalism which then forced them as executive locations, leaving them to branch-plant and back-office roles. They are not, in the old sense ’provincial’, nor yet can they be said, at present, to compare with the likes of those German and European cities that successfully compete with the magic ’global’ centres. Current revamps of the northern cities are attempts to re-attract executive powers, so that they can, actually, be cities once again, with the real vocation of cities. Whether that can happen in a UK where executive functions are so completely monopolised by London, remains doubtful. We can be certain, however, that mere ’branding’ of location with facile citations of former character won’t conjure the reality anew. Wherever tradition was, and whatever character could be, can come only through what Adorno called a ’comprehensive substantival force’. Which is to say that the real task now is to renew location through new vocation. BRIAN HATTON

**Footnotes**


3. Nicholas Pevsner included Liverpool in his ’69 South Lancashire, but this is now largely superseded as a guide to the centres of Liverpool and Birkenhead by Joseph Sharper’s *Liverpool Guide Liverpool*, Oxford: Osprey, 2004. The outer districts of Greater Liverpool, including the Wirral, will be covered by forthcoming new Pevsner Guides.


6. On Liverpool’s history, the classic work is Ramsey Maley, *History of Liverpool*, 1907. See also the comprehensive *Liverpool Guide Liverpool* of Architecture, ed John Balchin.