

## Architects' neglect 'responsible for brick-veneer wilderness'

By DEBBIE CAMERON

Phillip Adams walked over the footbridge and into the Academy of Science. It is like entering a flying-saucer — light shines upwards to emptiness through roof portholes. Somewhere inside there could be a rocket-booster.

But no. It is concrete. And stapled as firmly to the ground as any other block of concrete. It has awkward corridors and pie-slice offices, but it is at least one of Canberra's most interesting buildings — and as a place to discuss architecture it has no peer.

"Almost all the buildings that take our breath away have no real function, no solid foundation in human need," Mr Adams said.

Mr Adams, the Commissioner for the Future, advertising executive, filmmaker and journalist, was in Canberra last night to give the Walter Burley Griffin Memorial Lecture to the ACT chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects.

He said architects gave preposterous expressions of power a smidgin of immortality, but when civilisations crumbled there was never any evidence of how ordinary people lived because their buildings were always lesser, weaker and more vulnerable. Not the durable work of architects.

Mr Adams reflected sadly on the "brick

veneereal" suburbs and told architects to take responsibility for changing them. He accused them of building filing cabinets for people, and being the silverfish that chewed at the warp and

being the silverfish that chewed at the warp and weft of society.

"I remember . . . being on the top storey of a block of housing commission flats in Melbourne and seeing an old Italian lady near the top floor living with the graffiti and the broken lifts . . . alone," he said. "They've stopped building them."

He told the architects that as Commissioner for the Future he did not have a solution to the brick-veneer wilderness, but made it clear that he believed it had been created through their neglect and was theirs to fix.

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He said architects seemed short of ideas for the future, and at a Commission for the Future conference in Adelaide, they had had no new visions for cities of the future. If it were up to architects there would be more of the same.

Mr Adams, who finds "good skyscrapers" exhilarating and enjoys a "good pyramid or a romantic ruin", told the architects that they were out of touch. Ordinary people thought they were destructive and inclined to demolish old structures to build the "giant pistons driving the wheels of capitalism". Unlike writers, painters and poets, architects were not regarded with affection. They had forgotten the fantasy of design and ideas. "I think architects frighten people," he said.

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