

Dirk van den Heuvel

**ALISON AND PETER SMITHSON**  
**A BRUTALIST STORY**

involving the house, the city and the everyday  
(plus a couple of other things)



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## 10 PROPOSITIONS

of the dissertation by Dirk van den Heuvel, 'Alison and Peter Smithson: A Brutalist Story, involving the house, the city and the everyday (plus a couple of other things)'

01 No one knows exactly how ideas come into the world. The concepts of a singular author and a linear historical development are most unhelpful to map the origins of ideas. Instead it is more useful to think of a multitude of condensation points, a cloud that starts to rain when saturated or simply blows over when too light.

02 The bridge between our ideas and the outside world is constructed by language, not so much by the 'word-bound concept' but rather the 'image-making or figurative word' (Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*). Hence, our relationship with reality is always a poetic one.

03 In language, one of the media of the architecture discourse (besides drawing, calculating and building), metaphors are always at work. Architecture itself is one of the foundational metaphors employed to conceptualize the world that we design for ourselves to live in. Thus, in our discursive practice architecture serves as the subject of investigation while it simultaneously provides the structure for that investigation.

04 We are in need of an open, speculative historiography – neither an operative criticism, nor a projective theory, but a practice that acknowledges that the historic subject will inevitably be removed from its context and time by the research project, while equally inevitably the research project itself will be displaced and recontextualized by the history under investigation. Such a new relation between design and history will open up latent and overlooked possibilities.

05 Conventionally, the house and the everyday are considered to be idyllic places of innocence and repose. They are not. They are prime battlefields of cultural values.

06 As a source of invention for architecture and its principles of ordering, the everyday is as unifying as it is disruptive.

07 Throughout the modern era the house has been reinvented time and time again. And while there is an equally rich repository of images for the city, the city as the confluence of shifting flows and patterns of use still escapes our grasp.

08 Alison and Peter Smithson redefined the art of inhabitation as a game of associations, ingeniously building on the vast accumulation of past experience, recombining the 'found', while providing space for new, unfolding relations and interactions between the architecture of the house, the order of things and the inhabitants.

09 The truly unresolved paradox of the Smithsons' work concerns the wish (and the task they set themselves) to do justice to both the larger whole and the specific fragment, to find a possible order that brings together the generic and the singular, the collective and the individual. It is an issue that runs like a thread from the post-war reconstruction of our cities up to our postindustrial time of cultural fragmentation. Above all, it is a question most characteristic of open and democratic societies.

10 It would fit the ambitions of our university to trade the T of Technology for the D of Design in order to ensure that the many interrelationships between technology and culture become the natural and socially relevant focus of our research and education.

These propositions are regarded as opposable and defensible, and have been approved as such by the supervisors:

Prof. Ir. D.E. van Gameren

Prof. Dr. Ir. H.M.C. Heynen

## 10 STELLINGEN

horende bij het proefschrift van Dirk van den Heuvel, 'Alison and Peter Smithson: A Brutalist Story, involving the house, the city and the everyday (plus a couple of other things)'

01 Niemand weet precies hoe een idee in de wereld komt. Om de oorsprong van ideeën in kaart te brengen zijn de concepten van een enkelvoudige auteur of een lineaire historische ontwikkeling niet bepaald nuttig. In plaats daarvan is het zinvoller om te denken aan een verzameling van condensatiepunten, als een wolk die leegregent wanneer deze verzadigd is, of die simpelweg overwaait als hij te licht blijft.

02 De taal vormt de brug tussen onze ideeën en de buitenwereld, niet zozeer middels het 'aan woorden gekoppelde begrip', maar veeleer middels het 'verbeeldende woord' (Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*). Onze verhouding tot de werkelijkheid is daarom altijd een dichterlijke.

03 Aangezien de taal een van de media van het architectonisch discours is (naast tekenen, berekenen en bouwen), zijn er altijd metaforen in het spel. Een van de fundamentele metaforen die we gebruiken om de wereld te verbeelden die we voor onszelf ontwerpen om in te wonen, is de architectuur zelf. Dat maakt dat in ons werk de architectuur het onderwerp van onderzoek is en tegelijkertijd de structuur van ditzelfde onderzoek aanreikt.

04 We hebben een open, speculatieve geschiedschrijving nodig – niet een operatieve kritiek, noch een projectieve theorie – maar een praktijk die onderkent dat het onvermijdelijk is dat het historische subject uit zijn eigen context en tijd wordt gelicht in het onderzoeksproject, net zoals het even onvermijdelijk is dat het onderzoek zelf uit de eigen context en tijd zal worden geplaatst door de onderzochte geschiedenis. Een dergelijke nieuwe verhouding tussen ontwerp en geschiedenis zal latente, onvermoede mogelijkheden aan het licht brengen.

05 Het huis en het alledaagse worden gewoonlijk beschouwd als idyllische plekken van onschuld en rust. Maar dat zijn ze niet. Ze vormen een belangrijk strijdveld in het debat over culturele waarden.

06 Het alledaagse als bron van inventie voor de architectuur en haar grondslagen kan zowel tot een nieuwe eenheid leiden als tot ontwrichting.

07 Gedurende de moderne tijd is het huis keer op keer opnieuw uitgevonden. En hoewel er voor de stad een even rijke verzameling aan beelden voorhanden is, als een samenvloeien van wisselende stromen en gebruikspatronen ontsnapt zij nog altijd aan ons begrip.

08 Alison en Peter Smithson hebben de kunst van het wonen gherdefinieerd als een spel van associaties waarbij ze op een vernuftige manier putten uit de historische ervaring om zo nieuwe combinaties uit het 'trouv ' te maken. Tegelijk maken ze zo ruimte voor nieuwe, zich ontwikkelende relaties en interacties tussen de architectuur van het huis, de orde der dingen en de bewoners.

09 De werkelijk onopgeloste paradox in het werk van de Smithsons betreft de wens (en de opdracht die zij zichzelf hebben gesteld) om recht te doen aan zowel het grote geheel als het specifieke fragment, om een mogelijke orde te vinden die het algemene en het bijzondere omvat, het collectieve en het individuele samenbrengt. Die vraag vormt een rode draad die loopt van de naoorlogse reconstructie van onze steden tot aan onze post-industri le tijd van culturele fragmentatie. V or alles betreft het een vraag die kenmerkend is voor open en democratische samenlevingen.

10 Het past binnen de ambities van onze universiteit om de T van Techniek om te ruilen voor de O van Ontwerp om zo te garanderen dat de relatie tussen techniek en cultuur de vanzelfsprekende maatschappelijke focus van ons onderzoek en onderwijs wordt.

Deze stellingen worden opponeerbaar en verdedigbaar geacht en zijn als zodanig goedgekeurd door de promotoren:

Prof. Ir. D.E. van Gameren

Prof. Dr. Ir. H.M.C. Heynen







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## PREFACE

'No book can ever be finished' Karl Popper wrote in his preface to the second edition of his monumental two volumes of *The Open Society*.<sup>1</sup> The thought is disheartening just as it is also consoling. 'While working on it we learn just enough to find it immature the moment we turn away from it', he added. This has to do with the inner logic of writing and research, which inevitably produces new viewpoints that might upset the whole structure of the argument just freshly and neatly constructed by the author. Yet clearly, this problem of an ever shifting perspective is not brought about by the inner logic of the text alone. The work of competing and collaborating colleagues too, continues to offer new viewpoints while working on one's own text, with new questions to look into, doubts to double check.<sup>2</sup> And thus the subject matter under scrutiny transforms while being examined, just as the author's knowledge and instruments change along the way. Such is the reciprocity between text and author.

Doeschka Meijnsing wrote about the curious problem of the author being manipulated and controlled by her own subject matter. She compared writing to a game of chess, the noblest of games with apparently very clear rules and overall strategic control by the players who oversee the pieces on the board, the pawns, rooks, knights and bishops, king and queen. Yet, along the way, the game itself and the pieces' shifting configurations inevitably take over, the players becoming other pieces in a game bigger than they themselves, something that also envelopes the ones who erroneously think they are in control of the pushing and shoving.<sup>3</sup> This can hardly be a surprise when one remembers how Johan Huizinga already described play as an interior that one can enter only by accepting the rules and by its relative isolation from society and its other conventions; play, and by default human culture according to Huizinga, is not a realm that is fully controlled and planned by the ones who play it.<sup>4</sup> Scholarly writing too, cannot escape such game conventions.

Another hurdle to be noted concerns the historic course of events and their disappearance in the past. For any scholar

1 Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, p. xxxiv.

2 For instance, Steve Parnell and Alex Kitnick have recently published very interesting dissertations, while Claire Zimmerman and Mark Crinson edited a challenging anthology of essays on post-war art and architecture in Britain, just as Christine Boyer is working on a book on the writings of Alison Smithson.

3 Doeschka Meijnsing, 'Tegen jezelf. Tegen wie?' in: Doeschka Meijnsing, *Het kauwgomkind. De verhalen*, Querido, Amsterdam / Antwerpen, 2012, pp. 132-142.

4 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 1938.

of a historic subject, or partially historic, this presents an insurmountable problem, especially when it comes to biographical aspects. During my work on the dissertation I was hesitant to go into too much biographical detail and looking back this is the most important bit that I would do differently now. Because I feel that in general the impact of biography on the actual discourse of architecture is underestimated, and sometimes simply denied. Still, there are also many good reasons not to enter into biographical survey – ranging from the impossibility to properly check sources to the inevitable voyeurism and its seductions. At the same time, one wonders what a contemporary Giorgio Vasari might reveal of what remains hidden now.

In his masterful novel *The Stranger's Child* Alan Hollinghurst touches exactly on this problem. The novel tells the story of the survivors of the poet Cecil Valance and his various biographers; Valance being a fictitious figure cleverly based on a very real one.<sup>5</sup> Hollinghurst uses the historical facts and mythical accounts to lure the reader into a tale of love affairs and desires unfulfilled while painting a portrait of English society and its transformation during the twentieth century. In five chapters Hollinghurst weaves a story, which ultimately cannot be unraveled completely (this is not a Dan Brown detective story, but a Henry James portrait of social custom). The impossibility of full historical and biographical transparency stems from all sorts of reasons we learn, often banal ones: contemporaries who cherish their own memories, letters kept secret, poems lost, but also precious finds, authors' own agendas, money, time, opportunity, and so forth and so on. It is a story all too familiar to any historian and all one can do is to enter the labyrinth, play the game and begin to identify and follow some of the threads one comes across. At any rate, whereas biographical detail is not avoided, this thesis is not a biographical exercise as such.

5 The poet Rupert Brooke, who joined the Royal Navy and who died in 1915 in Skyros only 27 years old; see Alan Hollinghurst, *The Stranger's Child*, Picador, London 2011. An excellent review uncovering some of Hollinghurst's tricks with the reader is from Christopher Taylor, 'The Rupert Trunk', in: *London Review of Books*, Vol. 33, No. 15, 28 July 2011, pp. 9-10.

6 See: Dirk van den Heuvel and Max Risselada (eds.), *Alison and Peter Smithson – from the House of the Future to a house of today*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004; and Max Risselada, Dirk van den Heuvel (eds.), *Team 10. In Search of a Utopia of the Present 1953-1981*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2005.

But then – to put the obvious question – why the Smithsons and their work as a topic for a thesis? Why architecture, and why a focus on the city, housing and the domestic? The dissertation naturally fits the longer standing research programme of the Faculty of Architecture, in particular the programme as pursued by my mentor Max Risselada, with whom I undertook the exhibition project on the houses of the Smithsons: 'from the House of the Future to a house of today' that was accompanied by the book of the same title, and the

Team 10 research project 'Team 10 – in search of a Utopia of the present' that also entailed a major exhibition plus book publication.<sup>6</sup> Much of this research programme is continued today with Dick van Gameren as Risselada's successor and chair of the Department of Architecture. Key questions that direct this research, concern the ongoing modernization of our living environment and how architects respond to this in terms of design concepts and strategies. The post-war period and the issues of housing and town planning are regarded as major anchor points to investigate this historical condition that is still current with regard to the questions we are facing today, as architects, designers, theorists and historians alike. Alison and Peter Smithson were a major voice of the post-war period with regard to the fields of modern architecture, housing and town planning, and thus their work a natural subject of further investigation.

Still, the institutional context hardly explains my own personal fascination for the work of Alison and Peter Smithson. Insofar as one can fully understand one's own motivations, I would say that my attraction lies with the critical potential of the Smithsons' rigorous way of thinking, which at the same time accepts, or even embraces ambiguity as part of life and as a generative principle. In the thinking of the Smithsons things are never one-dimensional, which is a source for puzzlement, wonder and pleasure, unrelenting criticism and further enquiry, just as it can be a source for annoyance and perhaps frustration. Despite the often bold statements, which deserved the Smithsons their reputation as 'brutes', this Socratic art of enquiry returns in all their writings and design work, something I learned to appreciate at a younger age at the Stedelijk Gymnasium in Den Bosch, and for which I'm still grateful. As I learned when I enrolled the Delft Faculty of Architecture, architecture is a fantastic vehicle for such Socratic enquiry, since it is capable of bringing together the profoundly conceptual with the mundane realm of the everyday and dwelling.

Amsterdam and Delft, 5 December 2012

Dirk van den Heuvel





## SUMMARY

The dissertation looks into the work of the British architects Alison and Peter Smithson (1928-1993, 1923-2003). Their work is regarded as exemplary for the development of modern architecture in the second half of the twentieth century, specifically with regard to the relation between architecture, welfare state politics and the rise of a new consumer culture in Western Europe. As members of the platforms of Team 10, informal successor to the disbanded CIAM organization, and the Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, Alison and Peter Smithson were leading voices of the architectural debate of the post-war period, not only in Great Britain but globally. Among their many proposals for the future development of modern architecture their idea for 'another architecture': the so-called New Brutalism stands out as one of the most remarkable and important contributions, propagated as such by influential critics as Reyner Banham, Theo Crosby and Robin Middleton, and today, still an inspiration for architectural innovation.

Main questions of the dissertation concern the architecture of the house, housing, and town planning, and how the Smithsons both continued, criticized and transformed modernist concepts of architectural order. The combined notions of form and formlessness, of image and movement, of material and experience, of process, finding processes and the As Found, are key to the aesthetics and aesthetic procedures as proposed by the Smithsons.

The dissertation holds seven chapters. The first one 'The Smithson-ness of the Smithsons' is an almost autonomous piece as an introduction to the various interdependent themes of the research, including the methodological issues of discourse analysis, historiography and writing. The second and third chapter ('"The Simple Life Well Done"' and 'Competing Traditions') are an attempt to recontextualize the work and thinking of the Smithsons, not so much with regard to the CIAM and Team 10 debates of the time, but rather the British

context and the themes of the everyday and dwelling. The fourth chapter ('The New Brutalist Game of Associations') is the central chapter in that it investigates the principles of ordering and the architectural concepts at stake in the work of the Smithsons. The last three chapters ('Another Sensibility', 'The Great Society' and 'At Home') are a further elaboration along the lines of first, modernization, landscape and the issue of context; second, the rise and fall of the post-war welfare state including the issues of mass housing and town planning; and finally, the house as ultimate assignment and demonstration of principle in architecture, and hence as paradigm of the structure of the discourse itself.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of the dissertation can be grouped into various subcategories: methodology in terms of discourse analysis, disciplinary in terms of the relation design and history, the internal development of the modern architecture discourse and the specific position of Alison and Peter Smithson within the discourse.

### Discourse analysis, knowledge and language

Language is one of the most important media by which we communicate ideas in architecture. Language is also a most slippery phenomenon in that the same words may mean different things, just as apparently different terms may be used to describe the same phenomenon. Hence, a crucial part of discourse analysis is to map the various uses of words and their contexts, in order to understand the development of the ideas under investigation, not unlike Adrian Forty's example of *Words and Buildings* of 2000. The dissertation argues and demonstrates how various words and terms are used to structure the actual discourse in terms of affinities and genealogies ('family' and 'our generation'), or exclusion of adversaries and competitors. The same terms are often used in different ways ('Picturesque' or 'context'), just as some can be appropriated by one party in an exclusive manner ('Englishness'). In the Brutalist discourse such slipperiness of language is consciously made operative as a form of wordplay and Surrealist associative thinking. While its aim is to look for new principles of ordering, the New Brutalism resists a systematic approach and objectification in terms of rationalist, scholarly knowledge. The Brutalist discourse is an attempt to incorporate both positivist and irrationalist impulses, its ambition is to be all-inclusive, and as such it is a vitalist project that aims to regenerate the practices of the avant-garde and modern architecture. As a project the New Brutalism can never be final, since it is a regenerative process by nature; its outcome will always differ depending on place, moment in time and the participants involved.

## Design and history

As Mark Wigley has demonstrated (among others in 'The Architectural Cult of Synchronization', 2000), amnesia and suppression of past facts are part and parcel of the workings of the architecture discourse, while at the same time it is impossible to escape from history altogether. Usually, when discarded, history is pejoratively defined as something academic, dead, or redundant; irrelevant for adequately approaching the questions of today. Whereas this position can also be observed within the post-war British debates (although not quite as dominant as in today's debates one might add), one also finds that history and the vast body of historical production hold a critical potential that can be re-activated at will. Also, in the work and thinking of Alison and Peter Smithson we find that the historical production is regarded as a resource of knowledge and attitudes most useful for contemporary practice. Architecture itself is considered as an accumulation of past experience, including conventions, practices, and ideas, which not only offers a repertoire of solutions but also demands an awareness of the way history, historic experience and architecture always work together. A critical aspect of this practice of re-activation is the process of selection, what to include and what not, what to highlight, what to suppress. What stands out in the British discourse, including the example of the Smithsons, is the way dominant histories are challenged by looking at and including supposedly peripheral positions (ranging from Pikionis to Lewerentz to Scharoun to Aalto among others). These peripheral or 'other' positions are used to amend the hegemonic historiographies as well as to change the course of the architecture debate and the design production. A so-called double perspective is developed to criticize established categories, supplanting some of them by new ones (the notion of territory for instance), while at the same time enabling the continuation and transformation of others (the role of technology among others).

## Modern architecture, internal critique and local contexts

Regarding the post-war history of modern architecture, one commonly finds the reproduction of the myth of generation conflict, class struggle and revolting 'angry young men'. This has been refuted by others already, by Peter Bürger in more general

terms of the history of the avant-gardes, and by Anne Massey and Penny Sparke of the history of the Independent Group (as early as 1985). Most of the conflict (or the evolving discourse) happened within the confines of established institutes, such as the CIAM organization in the case of Team 10, or the Institute of Contemporary Arts in the case of the Independent Group. Statements, essays and projects were published in existing journals that pursued inclusive editorial policies sympathetic of new voices, not in newly founded magazines. One is looking at an internal critique rather than a challenge from outsiders, or as Colin St John Wilson put it, the Independent Group was never anything like a *salon des refusées*. In the case of the development of modern architecture, the combination of the specific post-war British context with pre-war Continental invention and ambition seems to have been of a much greater impact – if one might make such generalizing statements. The influence of MARS members (older and younger ones) on the course of events during the late CIAM conferences and the subsequent Team 10 Meetings still seems unrecognized, or at least too little. Especially, the way the legacy of Patrick Geddes started to profoundly redirect modernist town planning ideas (the 'Heart of the City', Hoddesdon 1951, the 'Valley Section', Doorn 1954, Dubrovnik 1956), can only be explained by way of the British contribution. Moreover, context awareness, notions of territory, movement and landscape, are all primed in the profoundly British Picturesque tradition; perhaps not quite as Nikolaus Pevsner likened it in 1955, but his argument was certainly not far off the point, despite the fierce opposition of Reyner Banham in particular.

### Alison and Peter Smithson and the architecture of the house

As writing and building architects Alison and Peter Smithson's body of work remains of a special, lasting interest. It presents a micro-history of its own that coincides with the establishment of the post-war welfare state and its demise from the mid-1970s onward. From today's perspective it situates the Smithsons in between the heroic generation of modern architects who sought to deliver a unified, new style for the *Zeitgeist*, and the postmodernist moderns so to speak, architects such as Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas, who following Charles Jencks seemed to have given up on any socio-utopian ambition for architecture. The house and what they called the

'art of inhabitation' is central to the Smithsons' contribution to the development of the modern architecture discourse. The house is never conceived as a singular object, but always as related to the larger whole of society. The demand for authenticity and an 'architecture of reality' together with their wish to leave behind the Functional City concept and seek an expanded way of living that combines the domestic with labour and other living functions, demonstrates how much the Smithsons owe to the Arts and Crafts movement. The relentless re-invention of the house that we see in the work of the Smithsons, over and over again, and which according to Beatriz Colomina is also the history of the architecture of the twentieth century, is paired with a continuous rethinking of the city. But whereas the idea of the city seems to dissolve in multiple systems with shifting centres, patterns of 'noise' and 'quiet', clusters of 'other' geometries, the idea of the modern house is restored as a safe haven, encapsulated by a protective territory, situated in an idyllic enclave to sustain a working and thinking life.

The dissertation concludes with three unresolved, open questions as embodied by the Smithsons' work. They are related to the house and might direct the further expansion of the language of modern architecture into the 21st century: how the house as a constructed environment is also involved in the construction of memory and its re-activation (as a place of accumulated experience in every sense of the word); how the architecture of the house is a testing-ground for new expansions of the language of architecture itself and how this language brings together the architecture of the house, the order of things, the patterns of use and the meaning for its inhabitants; and finally, how the house because of this constitutes the paradigm of the modern architecture discourse both in terms of its ethical demands and its aesthetic aspiration.







# 1 THE SMITHSON-NESS OF THE SMITHSONS

## On Writing, History and Anecdote

Neither Le Corbusier nor Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, two of the great heroes of modern architecture, would begin their writings by pointing out the limits of their range. Today, it seems impossible not to start with a word of reservation. This is due to the by now normal practice of historiography, a practice of consciously putting into perspective, (re)contextualizing, tracing shifts and translations, while recounting micro-histories.<sup>1</sup> This account of the work of the British architects couple Alison and Peter Smithson (1928-1993 and 1923-2003) must open with some explanatory remarks as well.

The dissertation is an attempt to trace the Smithsons' work and ideas in the fields of the everyday, the city and the home. As such it is neither a monograph, nor a biography. It might be characterized as an exercise in discourse analysis, mapping the formation of the various concepts and trends of thoughts at play throughout their work, their development and elaboration, including the breaks, transformations and continuities.<sup>2</sup> The triangulation of the home, the city and the everyday has been chosen for various reasons. First, it makes it possible to resituate the Smithsons within the larger discourse of the twentieth century, as well as that of modern architecture, since housing, the city and ordinariness are among the most important elements of those discourses. Second, this triangulation of words serves as a 'method' to approach the subject of the dissertation: they set out the main direction, while leaving enough room for intermezzi or reflection when necessary. Language is the main medium of our research practice, yet language is also slippery. The same words never mean quite the same thing, and the same things are often addressed by different words, while all sorts of translation complicate matters further. It already starts with the proposed triangulation: the home, the house, the dwelling, the everyday, the ordinary, the quotidian, the simple life, the city, the metropolis, the town, and onward with: region, landscape, network, mobility, communication, association, identity and so forth and so on. The concatenations of words overlap, they are sometimes interchangeable and sometimes not.

1 By 'normal' historiography I refer to the kind of 'normal', established practices of science as described by Thomas Kuhn in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962, and his 'Postscript' of 1969, pp. 174-210 in the 1996 third edition published by The University of Chicago Press.

2 According to Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt the practice of ideology critique has been superseded by the one of discourse analysis. One may characterize this practice as one that is politically much less charged, yet does not abandon the political dimensions of the historical, cultural formations under scrutiny as well as one's own position as critic. See for an explanation of the practice of discourse analysis: Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2000, in particular their 'Introduction' to their book, pp. 1-19.

3 A very elegant example of this approach one finds with Adrian Forty and his book *Words and Buildings. A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2000.

4 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light. Urban theories 1952-60, and their application in a building project 1963-70*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1970.

5 The manuscript *Maigret's Map*, Smithson Family Archive.

6 The full quote reads:

*'At five o'clock, while the police of the Eighth Arrondissement were keeping an eye on the Mouse's movements, Lognon was ringing on the doorbell of a flat in the Avenue du Parc-Montsouris. It was on the sunny side of the avenue, and he was dazzled, as soon as he entered, by the brightness of the flat, with its white walls, its gaily coloured curtains, and its furniture which was so clean that it looked as if it had come straight from the shop.*

*A little boy of five was playing on the balcony. As for Luciel Boisvin, who was dressed in bright colours too, she no longer recalled the unruly child in the portrait, or the police reports, but suggested rather a model young mother. knitting with green wool.*

*As Lognon walked in without saying anything, with his stubborn look, she gave a start and asked: "Did Edgar send you?" Then frightened by the bushy eyebrows which drew together, she said: "Nothing's happened to him, has it?"*

*"I don't think so ... I found this photograph in the neighbourhood ... I wanted to give it back to you ..."*

*She didn't understand. "How did you know it was me?" Then rather embarrassed, he explained that he lived in the Rue Dareau, that he had already caught sight of her, and that he had thought that this photograph might have sentimental value for her. As for her, nonplussed, she turned the piece of cardboard over and over between her fingers. "It was Edgar, wasn't it, who told you ..."*

*He felt uneasy, for he was not there on official business. He was in a hurry to get away ...*

*"I just don't understand ... This looks like the photo he insisted on keeping in his pocket ... Tell me ... You're sure nothing has happened to him ..."*

*The child was listening to them. While Lucile Boisvin was dark, the boy had silver-blond hair and a milky-white complexion. "Why hasn't he come?" she murmured as if to herself. This visitor intrigued her. She had not asked*

As we will see, the game of words and wordplay were part and parcel of the practice of Alison and Peter Smithson and their peers: to mark their own position, to outwit their adversaries, capture the mood of the day, grasp the problems they faced, or to regenerate the tradition they sought to continue. To unpack the words then, to triangulate them so to speak, to map the different ways they were used, by whom and in what specific situations, is a way to help to understand the formation of the various concepts and trends of thoughts at stake.<sup>3</sup> Many authors have compared this kind of discourse analysis with the work of a detective, an anthropologist or an archaeologist, e.g. by such great writers as Michel Foucault and Manfredo Tafuri, or more recently by Beatriz Colomina. The Smithsons themselves also suggested such parallels, for instance by way of their opening quote to their 1970 anthology *Ordinariness and Light*.<sup>4</sup> It is a passage from a novel by the Belgian detective writer Georges Simenon, one of Alison's favourite authors. All the Penguin paperbacks were on a special shelf in the Smithson house and an unpublished manuscript of hers is completely devoted to Simenon's descriptions of Paris.<sup>5</sup> Yet, since the inserted passage is completely decontextualized, it remains unclear why the quote is there in the first place – it is a riddle presented to the reader, the solution of which could concern the people involved, a man, a mother and a child, or the description of a bright, light-filled flat in the Avenue du Parc-Montsouris, or perhaps the found photograph that is mentioned, or eventually, how the modernist aesthetic of hygiene had become a natural part of a common literature produced for a mass readership. In the final instance, it is up to the reader what to make of it, a cryptic yet strategic aperçu, as open-ended as it is also rhetorical; it is a demonstration of the riddle-like approach which returns in many of the Smithsons' works, in their writings as well as in the exhibitions and designs.<sup>6</sup>

Eventually, the questions at stake revolve around what Rudolf Wittkower and John Summerson called architectural principles or, referring to Alberti, *principia*.<sup>7</sup> The Smithsons usually speak about ordering, and organisation, yet this is at the core of their efforts: to define new principles of ordering for the architecture discipline in an age of unprecedented technological advancement and socio-political modernization. These questions of architectural order hover over the entire dissertation and its related research.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the Smithsons considered those new principles to be a continuation and elaboration of the ones as established by the founding, heroic generation of the modern tradition, while

him to sit down. It was warm, and Lognon reflected that he would have liked a flat as light as this one, without a sible object lying around, without a single speck of dust, a flat which, in fact made him think of a luxury clinic.' in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, pp. 7-8.

Next to the detective, the Smithsons also suggested another model for discourse practice as well as discourse analysis, which surprisingly enough, has found little support in architecture theory until now, namely that of literary analysis. This dissertation is not quite the right place to fully elaborate this question of methodology, but the topic will be touched upon if only superficially, since later on the work of literary critic and cultural theorist Raymond Williams will be used to understand the Smithsons' notion of ordinariness as well as their cultural-political affinities.

7 Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, 1949; John Summerson, 'The Case for a Theory of Modern Architecture', in: *RIBA Journal*, 1957, June, pp. 307-313.

8 Two related research projects exploring the Team 10 discourse and the work of the Smithsons in particular, were the book and exhibition realised together with Max Risselada: *Alison and Peter Smithson – from the House of the Future to a house of today*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004; and *Team 10, 1953-81. In Search of a Utopia of the Present*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2005.

9 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture*, Rizzoli / Idea Editions, New York / Milan, 1981, p. 5; originally published as a special issue of *Architectural Design*, December 1965.

10 Two remarks of methodology and positioning are necessary here. First, this dissertation is not the place to discuss the disciplinary boundaries between architecture theory and historiography – if these fields can be demarcated that clearly at all. It must suffice to state that both fields need to borrow methods and instruments from each other. Any architecture theory that is not able, or even willing to contextualize in the sense of to historicize, cannot produce any reliable knowledge, but rather runs the risk of producing ideology. And vice versa, architecture history that is not aware of the theoretical issues at stake including their discursive functions, will vainly try to grasp the historical production remain-

at the same time being distinctly their own. In the introduction of *The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture*, the Smithsons' homage to their spiritual fathers, they formulated it as follows: '*This Heroic Period of Modern Architecture is the rock on which we stand. Through it we feel the continuity of history and the necessity of achieving our own idea of order.*'<sup>9</sup>

Next to the problem of language, each historiographical exercise has to face the problem of time perspective. This dissertation is written from a contemporary perspective, and I would say, inevitably so. An obvious reason is perhaps that the history of the Smithsons is a recent one, and to a large extent a still living one: through one's own memories, the surviving contemporaries, not to mention the generations who grew up with their teachings and keep furthering their ideas, sometimes as part of a self-conscious practice, but more often more intuitively. Time and its perspective concern a classic dilemma in architecture writing and its theorizing, whether to strictly remain within the boundaries of historiographical orthodoxy or to embark on a more speculative exercise in architecture theory synthesizing historically isolated events.<sup>10</sup> This dilemma of diachronic versus synchronic readings of past history cannot be solved within this piece of writing. To complicate things further, the dilemma is quite naturally also present in the Smithsons' own work and writings. For instance, when they speak of such things as 'the continuity of history' as quoted above. Such continuity is more often than not a fabrication, yet clearly, it is also a precondition to operationalize concepts and ideas in architecture. In order to understand the way those concepts structure the discourse and make it tick, so to speak, while evolving through time, from one place to another, through one generation after another and another, one has to acknowledge such operativity, in the work and writing under investigation, as in our own research. As we know, the architectural discourse is littered with such examples – not just in accounts by architects, but also in the work of the greatest writers such as Pevsner or Tafuri and in the sweeping lines they drew to put order to the discourse: from Morris to Gropius, or from the 1970s all the way back to Piranesi. Next to the material production of designs and buildings, such fabrications make up the very structure of the discourse we are looking at, while building on it ourselves. Such operativity also means a definitive history cannot be written. It is the inherent operativity of our own writing, which makes this impossible. Dutch historian Jan Romein referred to this, when he spoke of the 'revolving aspect of the

incomplete past, because each time it is a different present that illuminates the past'.<sup>11</sup>

In the case of the dissertation, the triangulation of the everyday, the city and the house can be regarded as belonging to such operativity. It might be considered a first, willful gesture to put order to the material under investigation, perhaps not a hundred percent historically correct, yet, it is not an arbitrary one either, nor historically incorrect. The triangulation as a possible framework by which one may demonstrate the order hidden within the Smithsons' work is in the first place suggested by the work of the couple themselves, just as much as it is suggested by the wider discourse in which the Smithsons were operating, by current historiography of twentieth century architecture, as well as by the ongoing debates regarding our own cities which we inhabit.

ning stuck in naive historicism. See for an extensive explanation of the epistemological problems surrounding historiography: Chris Lorenz, *De constructie van het verleden. Een inleiding in de theorie van de geschiedenis*, Uitgeverij Boom, Amsterdam, fifth revised edition, 1998, originally published in 1987. Second, when it comes to the use of such terms as modernity, modernization and modern architecture, I refer to Hilde Heynen's study *Architecture and Modernity. A Critique*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1999, especially the first chapter 'Architecture Facing Modernity', pp. 8-24, which builds on Marshall Berman's argument. When it comes to the use of the term 'pastoral' to define certain tendencies within modern architecture as Heynen does, I will follow the specific English discourse on capitalism, modernity and the Picturesque, most notably Raymond Williams' analyses of British culture. More on this can be found in the chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation, 'The Simple Life, Well Done' and 'Competing Traditions'.

11 Jan Romein, *Het onvoltooid verleden. Kulturhistorische studies*, Em. Querido's Uitgeverijmaatschappij, Amsterdam, 1937, pp. 5-8.

12 For more on this: Max Risselada, Dirk van den Heuvel (eds.), *Team 10. In Search of a Utopia of the Present 1953-1981*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2005; Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2000; *Rassegna*, nr. 52, December 1992, 'The Last CIAMs', special issue edited by Jos Bosman.

### Shifts and Lines of Inheritance

One of the more conspicuous elements of the working life of Alison and Peter Smithson is not only the way they situated themselves within the tradition of modern architecture, but also the perseverance with which they kept carving out a niche for themselves within this larger historical framework. This may have been a natural thing to do in their early years, when they moved within the circles of CIAM and when they were actively involved in the debates regarding the intellectual legacy of CIAM, and out of which Team 10 would emerge as the leading platform for the future development of modern architecture.<sup>12</sup> But throughout the Smithsons' career this would remain a recurrent element structuring their argument. However, looking at the evolution of the Smithsons' designs, especially from the mid-1970s onward, it becomes very hard to consider them as part of the modern tradition. That the work of the Smithsons represents a break with the International Style as originally defined by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson in 1932, could hardly be surprising – the New Brutalist impulse was, among many other things, deliberately tuned against the American appropriation of Continental invention, but the evaporation of the seminal Corbusian or Miesian elements from the pre-war period is much more troublesome. A brief glance at the later work of the 1980s, the university buildings in Bath, or the German house

built for Axel Bruchhäuser for instance, suggests that a moving away from the modern tradition would be a much more fitting description than inheritance.

Such observation that eventually the Smithsons positioned themselves outside of modernist orthodoxy is partly based on the way Hitchcock and Johnson, but also Sigfried Giedion and Pevsner framed the modern tradition – not to mention the anti-modernist accounts of Colin Rowe and Charles Jencks, who both (albeit each in a very different way) produced an erudite, yet also reductive reading of the history of modern architecture, against which they could pit their plea for a post-modern architecture, and whose accounts one might add, still support the paradigm of the current architectural discourse.<sup>13</sup> A closer look at the Smithsons' work and writings reveals they also picked up on different, more peripheral strands of the modern tradition, about which they were much less vocal in comparison to the core of the tradition as embodied by the work of Le Corbusier and Mies, and which was extensively celebrated by the Smithsons. This interest in the more peripheral positions, the so-called 'other moderns',<sup>14</sup> next to the appropriation of the core of the modern tradition, seems to have always been present in the Smithsons' thinking. This double perspective on both centre and periphery is a key characteristic of the development of the larger post-war British discourse and at least partially explains the various revisions of the modern tradition as proposed by British architects and historians of that generation. Perhaps, one could argue that ultimately, Alison and Peter Smithson developed in a similar vein a double, or 'other' position, both inside and outside of modernist orthodoxy.

13 Naturally, Colin Rowe's contribution deserves a much more extensive appreciation than this one cursory statement, also with respect to the notion of postmodernism, yet, the one publication I have in mind at this point is the highly influential *Collage City* book that he wrote together with Fred Koetter, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1978, first published as an extensive essay in *The Architectural Review*, August 1975, pp. 66-90.

14 It's a phrase that has a long history of its own and belongs to the post-war debates. Ken Frampton still uses it in his teachings, as does Max Risselada. It was Colin StJohn Wilson who eventually coined the term with his book *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture. The Uncompleted Project*, Academy Editions, London, 1995.

But still, over the years various core principles of the Modern Movement and their interrelated hierarchies seem to be reformulated by the Smithsons, or even put aside. The ideas of progress through technology and architectural expression of technological invention made room for a much more urbane approach when their Economist project was built (1959-1964). From the mid-1960s onward Peter Smithson started talking about the 'machine-calm' and the 'machine-served' as a re-interpretation of the ideals of Mies van der Rohe as well as Le Corbusier – an ongoing, often implicit polemic with Reyner Banham, who remained throughout his life a fervent apostle of progress by technological development. The idea of transparency made way for a practice of layering as exemplified by their project for St Hilda's College in Oxford (1967-1970). Unadorned volumes

and planes gave way for a new interpretation of decoration, most convincingly demonstrated to the Smithsons by Charles and Ray Eames.<sup>15</sup> Drawing a line from the Hunstanton School to the Bath interventions one observes that clear-cut, geometric volumes made way for 'lumpish' groupings or 'conglomerates'. Ultimately, there was not an attempt to arrive at an architecture of 'magnificent play under the light' as Le Corbusier would have it, but an architecture, which in the words of the Smithsons 'harnesses all the senses' and offers 'pleasures beyond those of the eyes'.<sup>16</sup> Universal space and infinite extension as can be found in the work of Mies and the Dutch avant-garde of *De Stijl*, was substituted by the socio-anthropological idea of cultural specificity, and such existentialist-phenomenological notions as territory, and the awareness of operating within an existing, urban fabric or tissue. Ordering concepts that were proposed as part of this critique of modern orthodoxy, included the charged void, the space between, mat-building and conglomerate order. Earlier concepts such as the doorstep philosophy, cluster, and patterns of associations and of growth and change can also be mentioned here, even though these were still developed within the CIAM discourse whereas the former ones were formulated from the mid-1960s onward.

The proposed changes, breaks or amendments by the Smithsons may be best described as 'shifts' within the larger paradigm of modern architecture – implying both continuity and renewal. Because this is what is ultimately at stake in the Smithsons' work.<sup>17</sup> Their sometimes bold rhetoric suggests the Smithsons strived for a quintessential avant-garde position, a clean break with the past and competing traditions, especially in their younger years. But although avant-garde techniques and concepts were absorbed and reproduced by the couple, eventually the combination of continuity and regeneration while accepting, at times embracing the new, were central to their efforts in design and writing.

The various shifts as proposed by the Smithsons were not only the result of an internal reflection and personal maturing. At all times - and one cannot say this too often I suppose – it should be kept in mind that the Smithsons were operating within a dynamic context of discursive competition. The silliest bits of writing, the most innocent of jokes, even the most cursory of comments, were all in function of this. Concepts and ideas, new and old ones, and not just those of the Smithsons, were consistently contested in the context of what their contemporary Kenneth Frampton called the 'English crucible', which in hindsight was one of the

15 The Smithsons edited a special issue on the Eames's work for *Architectural Design*: 'Eames Celebration', September 1966. Among Independent Group fellows it was Geoffrey Holroyd who first visited the Eames's in 1953, see also his contribution to the 'Eames Celebration': 'Architecture Creating Relaxed Intensity', pp. 27-38. Peter Smithson visited Charles and Ray Eames when he visited the USA in 1958.

16 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The Canon of Conglomerate Ordering', p. 62, in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Italian Thoughts*, Stockholm, 1993.

17 The Smithsons use the term themselves when describing changes in their design attitudes in their publication *The Shift of 1982*; in current research it is often claimed that the post-WWII era presented a paradigm shift, but I would contest this as too big a definition for the discursive exchanges of the period under scrutiny.

most vehement battlegrounds for reconfiguring the modernist canon.<sup>18</sup> Not only the New Brutalism sprang from this crucible, with the Smithsons as its initial, foremost propagators, but one could also point to the typical British inventions and revivals that were characteristic of the post-war decades such as those of neo-Classicism, the Picturesque and Townscape, Pop or Pop Art, High Tech and eventually also the various manifestations of postmodernism.

So, when observing the Smithsons moved away from some of the codified core ideas of the Modern Movement while mining peripheral variants – by what standards then we might ask, could their efforts in writing and designing be regarded as part of the modern tradition? And what standards have they themselves been proposing? What then, are the actual lines of inheritance? Where would we find continuities, and where the breaks? And last but certainly not least, what idea of order did they seek to deliver? To answer such questions, one should also note that a mere moving away is not quite the linear development as could erroneously be suggested. We are looking at simultaneous acts of deconstruction and reconstruction,<sup>19</sup> which explains the apparent contradictions that come to the fore when examining the case of Alison and Peter Smithson. Finally, it may be noted that it is exactly because of these tensions which are to be solved, or at least balanced within each project of the couple why the Smithsons' work is exemplary and may serve to understand the development of modern architecture during the second half of the twentieth century.

18 Kenneth Frampton, 'The English Crucible', in: D'Laine Camp, Dirk van den Heuvel, Gijs de Waal (eds.), *CIAM Team 10, The English Context*, proceedings of the expert meeting November 5, 2001, Delft 2002, also available online: [www.team10online.org](http://www.team10online.org); see also Frampton's chapter 'The New Brutalism and the Welfare State: 1949-59', in his *Modern Architecture a Critical History*, re-published in: Edward Leffingwell, Karen Marta (eds.), *Modern Dreams, The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1988, pp. 46-52.

19 Not unlike the way Thomas Kuhn described the mechanisms by which paradigms among professional groups are contested, established and assimilated.

20 Michel Foucault, 'Des espaces autres', original lecture of 1967, based on two radio talks of 1966 in Tunisia entitled 'Utopies et hétérotopies', republished and translated at many occasions, among others as 'Of Other Spaces, Utopias and Heterotopias', in: Joan Ockman (ed.), *Architecture Culture 1943-1968. A Documentary Anthology*, Rizzoli, New York, 1993, 2005, pp. 420-426.

### Word Games and the Slipperiness of Language

One of the problems of discourse analysis is that it cannot escape discourse itself. We can describe the discourse, the exchange of arguments, the interplay of words, just as we can describe ourselves while we are looking in a mirror – to follow Foucault's famous metaphor, which he used in his famous radio talk 'Des espaces autres'.<sup>20</sup> We also realize that eventually, we cannot exchange places with our mirror image and look at ourselves from an outside position. If the mirror image is such an outside position – as Foucault claims, an u-topia or non-place – it can only be so in a virtual sense. And since one cannot escape discourse and language and stand outside them as some detached observer, the meaning of words and their historic use slip away like sand

through our fingers. It is important to acknowledge this very slipperiness and not to eliminate it, since crucially, it is also part of the operativity at play. It is a productive kind of speculation present in the rhetoric and reasoning that is going on in the discourse under scrutiny, whether we are looking at the New Brutalist word games or the skirmishes in Team 10 circles. All the words and catch phrases that belong to these specific discourses are only effective because of this very slipperiness: as found, image, topology, new brutalism, conglomerate ordering, mat building, cluster, identity, mobility, the space between, the charged void, and so forth and so on – they are tuned to remain imprecise in an ever shifting debate.

Aldo van Eyck exclaimed 'nous avons le droit d'être vague', at the 1956 CIAM conference in Dubrovnik.<sup>21</sup> This vagueness is connected to his idea of meaning in architecture and how it is continuously regenerated. More generally speaking, it can probably be extended to how this idea operated within the wider Team 10 discourse. Van Eyck would most clearly explain it when discussing the architecture of the Dogon and the work of the psycho-analysts Paul Parin and Fritz Morgenthaler, who studied the Dogon. Van Eyck explained that he sought:

*'... still hidden meaning slumbering in what is perceived as well as in what is conceived. To force conception and perception to coincide completely is to contract rather than extend the meaning of either. The poetry lies in the persistence of scope – scope for undefined and latent multimeaning.'*<sup>22</sup>

This 'persistence of scope' is one function of the 'vagueness', or slipperiness that comes with the language used. With reference to Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, one might call this the mythopoetic function, which is aimed at the continuous cultural regeneration of human socio-discursive practices, the language and words used and the game of ever shifting positions of its participants.<sup>23</sup> This mythopoetic function seems to be inherent to our practices of historiography, too, because of the medium of language and because of the inevitable structure of history as a narrative or set of narratives. For instance, when Tafuri called in Sisyphus as a metaphor, or Romein spoke of 'the revolving aspect of the incomplete past', we are firmly on mythopoetic grounds, where metaphors, or the 'figurative word' as Huizinga put it, cover up the inherent incongruities between history as happened and as mapped and theorized, where they bridge the inevitable non-fit and non-equivalence of perception and conception, of signified and signifier.<sup>24</sup>

21 Van Eyck quotes himself in Oscar Newman (ed.), *CIAM '59 in Otterlo*, Uitgeverij G. Van Saane, Hilversum / Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1961, p. 197.

22 Aldo van Eyck, 'A Miracle of Moderation', in: Charles Jencks and George Baird (eds.), *Meaning in Architecture*, George Braziller, New York, 1969, p. 174.

23 For more on mythopoiesis in relation to the Team 10 discourse, see Dirk van den Heuvel, 'Team 10 Riddles. A Few Notes on Mythopoiesis, Discourse and Epistemology', in: Max Risselada, Dirk van den Heuvel and Gijs de Waal (eds.), *Team 10 – Keeping the Language of Modern Architecture Alive*, Delft University of Technology, 2006, pp. 89-108; also available online: [www.team10online.org](http://www.team10online.org).

24 Next to Van Eyck's plea for vagueness, one may also refer to Claude Lévi-Strauss and his Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss, the French anthropologist who influenced Surrealism and Aldo van Eyck, originally published in 1950; in his *Design and Crime. And Other Diatribes*, Hal Foster refers to pp. 60-63 in the 1987 edition of Routledge & Kegan Paul, London; Foster: "'There is always a non-equivalence or 'inadequation'" between signifier and signified, Lévi-Strauss writes, and "every mythic and aesthetic invention" works to cover this "non-fit".'



Another function that renders the used language as problematic in the sense of being not transparent or unambiguous, is the one of control, as opposed to the one of regeneration. The wish and urge to control the discourse is also behind the mythopoetic game, to come up with new words and arguments that outwit existing ones rendering them obsolete. It also leads to the use of terms that are presented and used as if being meta-historical, outside of history itself, words and terms that at first sight seem neutral and objective, but upon closer inspection are crucial in structuring the discourse in action, valuing the participants, distinguishing between opponents and kindred spirits, setting boundaries and drawing the lines of attack. Such terms are for instance those of 'avant-garde', 'movement', 'generation', 'family', 'tradition' et cetera.

Alison and Peter Smithson certainly loved to talk about their adversaries and friends in terms of generations. One comes across the term everywhere in their writings, especially in their many accounts of the history of Team 10 and CIAM. Yet, the figure of a succession of generations and a history unfolding through those generations is riddled with innumerable contradictions, of which the Smithsons actually seem to be aware enough when they point out for instance, that there are cases when the youngsters influence the elders. The generation idea is one of the most persisting and effective rhetorical gestures deployed in discursive, historiographical battles, also in the case of the post-war discourse on modern architecture. The idea of successive generations is used to propose genealogy, origins and heritage, continuation, hierarchy or appropriation, but perhaps more often, conflict and distinction. Hence, the generation idea is a rather versatile one, being linked to both the more notorious concept of *Zeitgeist* and the idea of continuity and tradition. Le Corbusier did so, as did Giedion and the other leading voices of CIAM. Of the younger generation, Reyner Banham in particular, built his myth of the New Brutalism on the model of a generation conflict, thus covering up both the intergenerational continuities and the difference of opinion between contemporaries. As noted, in the case of Team 10 and Alison and Peter Smithson too, the figure of generations was frequently used to structure the argument and to explain either conflict or continuity. However, the trouble with this rhetorical figure is that despite the clear lines it draws (and hence its incredible rhetorical power), it falsely unifies the diverging, individual positions across the generations.

The second, meta-historical term that should be touched upon briefly here, is the one of avant-garde. The predominant portrayal of the post-war groups and individuals, who opposed the then established culture is conventionally as 'avant-garde' or 'neo-avant-garde.' Following current historiography of the period, the Smithsons, too, belong to this meta-historical category, yet this is highly problematic in understanding what was actually going on and what the Smithsons were aiming for. Despite all the references and quotations of recent years, the questions who was this 'avant-garde', in what contexts did they actually work, what coalitions were build and so forth and so on, are too often overlooked or neglected. In architecture discourse, analysis and synthesis generally tends to be geared at an historiography of abstract ideas, concepts and the larger paradigmatic frameworks so to speak, and not so much on the actual practices.<sup>25</sup> Naturally, (some of) the protagonists would often claim an avant-garde position for themselves. Giedion considered CIAM an avant-garde, and Van Eyck likened the whole collection of modern artists and poets to be 'the great gang' whose multiplicitous, yet unified tradition he had set out to continue. However, not only were these so-called post-war avant-garde groups far from unequivocal about their goals and ambitions, the structuring of the history of these groups as a polarisation between a progressive, iconoclastic avant-garde of young turks on the one hand, and conformist mass culture or established high culture elite on the other is most unhelpful in determining the positions and cultural formations at stake, and hence, the value of the historical production, also with regard to both the discourse of the time and the current one. In most cases, the so-called post-war avant-gardes were working within the then recently established infrastructure of art institutes, museums, government organisations and other institutional clients, perhaps more from the periphery of such establishment than from its very centre, but from within nevertheless.<sup>26</sup>

For instance, unpacking the web of exchanges of the second half of the twentieth century, in which the Smithsons operated, one observes the central role of what one might call the professional middle classes, but also the larger political framework of the welfare state and the rise of the so-called post-industrial society. The rethinking of domestic, family life is one of the main, recurring interests of the Smithsons, it is not quite the discursive *trope* for iconoclast radicals. An historiography that departs from the avant-garde assumption categorizing the Smithsons as belonging to the so-called 'angry young men' of the time will completely overlook

25 This is not a new thing to say; when browsing the literature regarding these questions, one generally finds references to Peter Bürger and his classic work *Theory of the Avant-Garde* of 1974 as a new beginning of understanding the various practices of the twentieth century avant-garde, still this remains problematic in the sense that one sometimes implicitly, sometimes expressly keeps assuming there is a unified project of the various avant-gardes. The latest research by Mark Crinson and Claire Zimmerman, who also use 'neo-avant-garde' to conceptually frame the art and design work under investigation is even more confusing I find. Their otherwise well researched anthology of essays *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern, Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, The Yale Center for British Art / The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art / Yale University Press, New Haven / London, 2010, seems to 'antedate' the term 'neo-avant-garde' to the 1950s, whereas in the architecture discourse this term of Bürger was usually reserved for the experiments of the late 1960s and 1970s, especially Aldo Rossi and Tendenza in Italy, and Peter Eisenman and the New York Five in the USA. An illuminating discussion of the reciprocal conceptualizations of the terms avant-garde, modernism and the everyday, in particular vis-à-vis domesticity and bourgeois culture, can be found with Hilde Heynen, 'Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and Contradictions', in: Hilde Heynen, Gülsüm Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity. Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, Routledge, Abingdon / New York, 2005, pp. 1-29.

26 In the case of the Independent Group Anne Massey and Penny Sparke have made this crystal clear, even though their criticism of the received myth of the Independent Group is still hardly referenced: Anne Massey and Penny Sparke, 'The Myth of the Independent Group', in: *Block*, nr. 10, 1985, pp. 48-56.

this aspect. The garden parties and camping trips that one comes across in the Team 10 discourse for instance, are far removed from quintessential avant-garde exchanges between individuals who gather together in bars and studio spaces, plotting socio-aesthetic revolutions.<sup>27</sup>

### Capturing the Everyday

As mentioned, the focus on the triangulation of the everyday, the city and dwelling has been chosen, since it defines a specific field that is constituent of the tradition of modern architecture. As will be demonstrated, this focus is useful in both situating the Smithsons within that tradition and understanding the ways they reconstructed this tradition. The triangulation of the everyday, city and dwelling encompasses such other key issues of the modern tradition as well: technology, mobility, identity, mass culture and consumer society. The everyday – spectre of the condition of modernity – is the central notion within the proposed triangulation, because it is source and inspiration for architectural invention, for the Smithsons, as well as for the larger part of the tradition of modern architecture, while the city and the home are the quintessential sites where the everyday is to be found and observed, and where the interrelations between architecture and the everyday practices are consistently renegotiated. However, putting the everyday central is not without consequences for the writing of architectural theory and history itself, with regard to the work of the Smithsons, but also with the critics who tried to theorize the everyday.

The French cultural theorist Michel de Certeau is one of the foremost writers regarding the unresolved challenge posed to any researcher who attempts to investigate the unwieldy realm of the everyday. In his study *The Practice of Everyday Life* De Certeau opposed any practice of writing that overlooked the inherent complexity and contradiction of the everyday, while smoothing out the accidents and incidents that come with everyday practices. De Certeau's work represents a special example here, reflecting on the two fields of historiography and the everyday. While working on his research project for *The Practice of Everyday Life* De Certeau published *The Writing of History*, in 1975.<sup>28</sup> De Certeau contrasted the 'casual' everyday with modernist functionalism.<sup>29</sup> He defined 'casual' time, which makes up the realm of the everyday, as

27 The one essay I know of, which critically questions the implicit and unspoken assumptions that the avant-garde represents the 'other', what is 'different' and almost by matter of course the politically correct or 'progressive' is by Mary McLeod, 'Everyday and "Other" Spaces', in: Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze and Carol Henderson (eds.), *Architecture and Feminism*, Princeton Architectural Press, 1996, pp. 1-37. Concerning the issue of class, there are other authors who critically mentioned this, either the way class is used to (falsely) portray the discourse (Penny Sparke and Anne Massey), or to criticize the design (Peter Eisenman when discussing Robin Hood Gardens for *Architectural Design and Oppositions*). Recently, Hadas Steiner also pointed out the importance of family life to the Smithsons' ideas on housing and urban design; see 'Life at the Threshold', in: *October* nr. 136, Spring 2011, pp. 133-155.

28 Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, originally published as *L'écriture de l'histoire*, 1975; *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984, originally published as *L'invention du quotidien*, *Arts de faire*, volume 1, 1980 (a first English edition erroneously mentions 1974 as pointed out to me by Ben Highmore); the research project on which the two volumes of *L'invention du quotidien* were based, ran from 1974-1978.

29 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984, especially the last chapter 'Indeterminate' is most lucid, see pp.199-203; if not mentioned otherwise, all quotes are taken from this chapter.

the opaque, 'dark' other of the rationalized, transparent time concept of 'functionalist technocracy'. He opposed a functionalist historiography that would render the 'incongruities of the other' as a 'transparent organicity of a scientific intelligibility' by finding, or rather constructing, 'correlations', 'causes', 'effects', or 'serial continuities'. According to De Certeau, historians should try and resist the demand for a rationalized history, or as he put it the 'requirement of covering up the obscenity of indeterminacy with the production of (fictive) "reason"'. Therefore, De Certeau called against the erasure of the so-called 'darkness' of the casual time. Yet, any scholar knows this is quite an impossible demand. Despite the inherent 'vagueness' of language, academic, scholarly writing remains not only an act of construction and synthesis, by nature it belongs to the project of Enlightenment. No matter what method or procedure one might use to approach the everyday, its accidents, the lacunae and what De Certeau called casual time. Indeterminacy will be mapped, ruptures will be circumscribed, and gaps bridged – no matter how pluralist the epistemology, or how multiplicitous the points of view taken. Still, a writing practice that tries to account for the opacity of the everyday might result in a different kind of history, a historiography that is not a unified narrative any more, and of course, this was what De Certeau was after, a different practice of history writing, through which the 'murmuring voices' of the everyday might be heard, telling the tale of a 'living and "mythical" practice of the city'.<sup>30</sup>

Having this in mind, how then to approach a subject like the Smithsons and their ideas on the everyday, and the city and dwelling as the chief sites of the everyday? The conflict between the everyday and the practice of historiography immediately arises here, and not only as a theoretical issue, for instance how the everyday represented a better or more rational functionalism to the Smithsons than the banal functionalism of post-war CIAM and building practice in the UK. The conflict between the everyday and historiography also concerns methodology in quite a practical way, since as already noted, much of the legacy of Alison and Peter Smithson is still part of living history. The many, often contradictory anecdotes of surviving contemporaries break up any attempt at constructing a coherent account of their work and life. Anecdotes are the nagging irritants of historians and theorists. One could say that they belong to the everyday counter-tactics against the institutionalized, academic practices of writing. Anecdotes are hardly verifiable, they are the small myths with a life of their own. They travel faster than any proper archive-based

30 One might also point to Manfredo Tafuri's work of the same period, who – with regard to the history of modern architecture in particular – would call for the demystification of history, while re-defining historiography itself as criticism geared to the precise rendering of the 'antitheses, the frontal clash of the positions and the accentuation of contradictions.' Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, Harper & Row, New York, 1980, p. 237; original Italian edition 1976.

study, and without leaving traces, they communicate ideas and concepts. They improperly establish reputations and confirm or refute the values at stake. And in so doing, they create invisible complicity and fleeting communities.<sup>31</sup>

It is also in these anecdotes that one finds the various, competing narratives surrounding the legacy of Alison and Peter Smithson, depending on the source and agenda at stake. Some see the Smithsons as champions of an accelerated modernism, as uncompromising avant-gardists, or as forerunners of Pop Art aesthetics, whereas others liken them to be careful and scrupulous thinkers, proto-ecologists with a strong inclination to phenomenological attitudes. There are many stories about their snobbishness, how they would offend their opponents, how ugly their buildings really are, or how awful they behaved toward staff and builders. But at the same time there are also stories how they cherished their employees and saw them as extended family, how thoughtful their approach to detailing and construction, stories about the lack of pretense, about the careful and precise wording of their ideas, and so forth and so on.<sup>32</sup>

31 The anecdote is actually a central component to New Historicism and has been theorised there; see Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, 'Counterhistory and the Anecdote', in: Gallagher and Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism*, 2000, pp. 49-74.

32 On the side it should be noted that 'living history', here, is much more complicated than the sheer phenomenon of the memories of survivors. I myself got acquainted with Peter Smithson while working on the project for the exhibition and book *Alison and Peter Smithson – from the House of the Future to a house of today*. I only met Alison once, when I was a student, and then only briefly, at the presentation of *Team 10 Meetings* at Delft University in 1991. She wore a large, elegant hat, and incredibly high, red heels for the occasion. After Peter Smithson died a new phase of commitment started by getting to know the family, and subsequently, by working together to get projects realized. A final remark illuminating this impossible relation between researcher and his object of study, might concern the uncomfortable feeling one gets when one discovers one's own letters (as unimportant as they are) in the archive one is combing through.

And still, it is only through these anecdotes and personalised stories, the 'indeterminate fables ... articulated on the metaphorical practices and stratified places' as De Certeau put it, that one gets a taste of the specifics of past events and the people involved. In the case of the Smithsons too, it is through these brief narratives, ever shifting, never quite true, sometimes simply fictional, that one starts to grasp the couple's interests, attitudes and ambitions, and the many ways they were, and still are viewed. It is also through such anecdotes that the Smithsons and their work and ideas are re-invented as it were, and once again, become part of contemporary discourse and design practice.

In any account of the Smithsons' history, among those 'stratified places' London would be most prominent, especially the Smithsons' own homes, where they held office as well. Coming from the north of England they chose to pursue their career in the British capital, briefly employed by the school building department of the London County Council before setting up their own firm: first they lived and worked in Doughty Street, rooming with their friend Theo Crosby, and then in the burrough of Chelsea and South Kensington in Limerston Street, in Priory Walk, and finally from 1970 onward, at Cato Lodge in Gilston Road. Crosby, it should be noted, was of crucial importance to the Smithsons' career. He and

Peter struck an immediate friendship when they met in Florence, in Michelangelo's Biblioteca Laurenziana in the summer of 1948 as Crosby recalled.<sup>33</sup> Not only did they share flats, Crosby was a most sociable person, who built quite a network in a very brief period of time and would soon become an editor of *Architectural Design* under Monica Pidgeon from 1953 onward.

Throughout their life the Smithsons worked from their home. Allegedly one reason for this was that Alison didn't like commuting. The office was deliberately kept small, as to be able to handle one big project at a time. Their practice was quite unconventional for an architects' firm; not only was it far removed from any kind of commercial ambition, but even job acquisition when work had halted, never seemed quite the natural thing to do. The Smithsons rather made books or engaged in competitions in such periods of relative quiet.

A special place for the Smithsons was their weekend home in Upper Lawn in the countryside of Wiltshire – as a weekend home not quite a place of the everyday, but as a place for retreat still a *locus* of the 'indeterminate', for reading and writing, reflection and speculation, in short a 'restorative place in nature' as Alison Smithson called it. Although the Smithsons were very strict regarding the separation between private family life and professional life, the Upper Lawn weekend home and their life there became a major point of reference for the couple in their later writings on dwelling and its everyday patterns.<sup>34</sup>

The first, chronologically ordered, overview of the Smithsons' work was compiled by Jeremy Baker in 1966, for *Arena*, then the journal of the AA-school. It gives a succinct biographical summary which has been republished in later books by and about the couple. Alison and Peter Smithson were quite characteristically allowed to insert some retrospective comments, which they also did in the case of this biographical entry to the overview:

'Sep 18 23

*Peter Denham Smithson*

*Born Stockton-on-Tees.*

*Educated at Holy Trinity HG School, Stockton-on-Tees; The Grammar School, Stockton-on-Tees.*

*Began at the Architectural School, University of Durham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 39-42. Interrupted by service, finally as a Lieutenant, for eighteen months in the Royal Engineers and then eighteen months in India and Burma in Queen Victoria's Own Madras Sappers and*

33 Theo Crosby, 'Night Thoughts of a Faded Utopia', in: David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1990, pp. 197-199.

34 In particular the 1986 publication should be mentioned here, which is completely devoted to their weekend home: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Upper Lawn: Solar Pavilion, Folly*, Edicions de la Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Barcelona, 1986.

*Miners. Returned to Newcastle 45-48. Awarded a travel scholarship to study Swedish housing. Acted as a studio assistant during final year at Newcastle when studying town planning, meeting Alison who was in the fourth year. Awarded Diploma with Distinction. Went for a year to Royal Academy Schools, London 48-49. Worked at LCC Schools Division, London, 49-50, designing Hunstanton in the evening.*

*Jun 22 28*

*Alison Margaret Gill*

*Born Sheffield.*

*Educated Church of England School, Sunderland; George Watson's Ladies' College Edinburgh; South Shields High School for Girls.*

*Continued at Architectural School, University of Durham,*

*Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 44-49. Met the aforementioned studio*

*assistant. Awarded Diploma with Distinction. Worked with Peter at LCC Schools Division, 49-50.'*

Then the inserted comments follow, a mix of biographical anecdote, ambition and moral ground:

*'Jan 04 66*

*We both came from street-built towns. Industrial towns.*

*There was no modern architecture around except that new school at Richmond by Dennis Clarke Hall.*

*There were two buildings which we always showed to visitors –*

*Durham Cathedral and the Roman Wall. The Cathedral is amazing:*

*it succeeds on all levels, i.e., I've never met anyone who wasn't impressed by it, however well|badly educated he was.*

*I (PDS) wasn't brought up to be an architect. If I was taken to see churches or museums, [it] was for literary, not visual reasons.*

*There was still this self-improvement atmosphere. But the things*

*people admired they never attempted to get. They never saw a*

*discrepancy between liking a Dutch Interior and ugly knives and*

*forks. You need some sort of integration of education and all normal personal decisions. We're not saying it's easy: we've made it work in*

*Tisbury but not so well in London.*

*(AMS) My father was Principal of South Shields Art School. He had been taught by such people as Letherby [sic] at the Royal College.*

*My background was always that of an art|technical school, touching on architecture and art through the training and background of both*

*my parents; and on building, the printing trades, and shipbuilding*

*(the draughtsmen gave us chance to get on to the main ships in*

*for breaking up on the Tyne or the training-sailing ships). I was an only child, so was Peter.'*<sup>35</sup>

35 Jeremy Baker (ed.), 'A Smithson File', special issue of *Arena, The Architectural Association Journal*, Volume 81, nr. 899, February 1966, p. 180.

36 Other places of education would include the London AA-school, and Bath University. Both schools produced publications commemorating the Smithsons' teachings: Helena Webster (ed.) *Modernism without Rhetoric. Essays on the Work of Alison and Peter Smithson*, Academy Editions, London 1997, and Pamela Johnston (ed.), *'Architecture is not made with the brain': The labour of Alison and Peter Smithson*, Architectural Association, London, 2005. Many other places could be pointed out here, among others the ILAUD Summer Schools, organized by Giancarlo De Carlo, resulting in the publications of *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, *Italienische Gedanken*, 1996, and *Italienische Gedanken weitergedacht*, 2001; UPC Barcelona, resulting in the already referenced publication *Upper Lawn*, 1986 and Delft University of Technology, resulting in *AS in DS*, 1983 and much later *Team 10 Meetings*, 1991.

37 The until now most extensive account of the war experiences of the Smithsons can be found in Beatriz Colomina, 'Friends of the Future: A Conversation with Peter Smithson', in: *October* nr. 94, Fall 2000, pp. 3-30.

38 For an account of the history of the Independent Group, see: David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1990, and Anne Massey, *The Independent Group. Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain 1945-59*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995; for the history of Team 10 see: Max Risselada and Dirk van den Heuvel (eds.), *Team 10. In Search of a Utopia of the Present 1953-81*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2005. The anecdotes naturally come up in the many interviews with the Smithsons and contemporaries. The one who made most extensively use of oral history would be Mark Girouard for his biography of James Stirling, *Big Jim. The Life and Work of James Stirling*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1998, especially the chapter 'London in the 50s' is worth reading.

39 I. Chippendale (Alison Smithson), 'The LCC Was Our Uncle', in: *Architectural Design*, September 1965, p. 428

40 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The "As Found" and the "Found"', in: David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, 1990, p. 201.

Naturally, some of the key 'stratified places' appear in this description: next to those of their places of birth, their weekend home in Tisbury and in London (then in 1966 at 2 Priory Walk, just opposite of the Gilston Road house they moved to in 1971), but also places of war and places of education.<sup>36</sup> Some places might be added here, for instance Alison's stay in Edinburgh during World War II, where she was sent to live with her grandmother, and where she started to collect images and advertisements from the American journals that were sent to her grandmother.<sup>37</sup>

The places around which most of the 'fables' revolve in current historiography – and that are not mentioned here in this 1966 intro text – include those of the Independent Group meetings of artists, critics and architects at the London Institute of Contemporary Arts, which would lay the foundations for the New Brutalism and British Pop Art, and of Team 10, the group of European architects that abandoned CIAM, in order to try and revitalize the discourse of modern architecture.<sup>38</sup> The LCC Architects' Office was another such place: 'a home from home' as Alison described it: 'for the first job of the provincial in London it gave short hours, no real burden, leaving time for floodlit evenings, theatre queues, competitions'.<sup>39</sup>

It is through those 'indeterminate fables' that one might provisionally define the Smithsons' idiosyncracies, or what one could call the Smithson-ness of the Smithsons – may be in a similar vein as the 'woodness of wood' or the 'sandiness of sand' the Smithsons were after when they defined their ideas for the New Brutalism and the As Found-aesthetics in the 1950s.<sup>40</sup>

## Two People Writing, Observing and Reflecting

Part of this Smithson-ness is the couple's extensive writing practice, the way they developed historiography as a means for transforming and controlling the architectural discourse, as well as the way they consciously positioned themselves within the tradition of modern architecture. Early 1970s the Smithsons would reach the zenith of their fame. Peter Eisenman claimed that to him the couple 'represent an intellectual and ideological position, confirmed in a weight of writing, polemic, and criticism which is unparalleled since World War II' and Kenneth Frampton wrote that the Smithsons' book publication *Without Rhetoric* from 1973 was to be classified under that rare kind of essayistic



writing as exemplified by Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture* or Adolf Loos' polemics.<sup>41</sup>

The writings of Alison and Peter Smithson were in service of many things at the same time. Prominent among those were the self-fashioning of their identity as architects, including the consistently explaining and propounding of their work and ideas, as well as their opinions about the role and position of the architect in society-at-large. Next to such discursive functions one should mention the consistent exchange between the practice of writing and the design and building practice of the couple, two practices that not always ran parallel. The writing could either reflect on earlier building and design production, but also speculate on new concepts yet to be tested in the actual building practice.

As a conclusion to the 1993 booklet *Italian Thoughts*, which brings together a first series of texts produced in the context of the summer schools as organized by their Team 10 friend Giancarlo De Carlo, the Smithsons wrote a brief piece on their 'set of mind' explaining the reciprocity between design and writing: *'Our work does not follow an even ideological track; the essays (...) are a necessary, integral, part of any understanding of our activities. The jumps, the re-appearances of earlier ideas often occur for chance reasons (...). This pattern of persistence has been clouded by what appears to be a characteristic of the human brain. The brain seems to have a new insight; but frequently this turns out to be an old insight which has been newly arrived at in an entirely new set of circumstances, and through different thought processes.*

*Then there is the persistence of habit; the habit of writing down one's insights, and the habit of writing ahead, putting down on paper the theoretical underpinning of what one will try to do next. We have continued, in a way, a student existence of alternating essay writing and drawing work ... essays which are consequent of the insights gained during the previous period of construction ... more essays as the work load drops, less essays when the heavy load of construction drawings and the supervision of construction is being carried. Or seen another way, we are entirely traditional to a certain sort of architect where reflection and construction go hand-in-hand: to Francesco di Giorgio Martini; to Le Corbusier above all others.'*<sup>42</sup>

41 Peter Eisenman in: *Architectural Design*, September 1972, p. 592; Kenneth Frampton in *Op-positions*, nr. 6, 1976, pp. 105-107.

42 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Set of Mind', in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Italian Thoughts*, Stockholm, 1993, pp. 100-103.

Such self-conscious and self-explanatory remarks can be found at many places in the Smithsons' publications. In the introductions to *Urban Structuring* they speak of a 'record of

a search', from which they did not:

*'eliminate (...) conclusions and opinions which we do not now regard as completely valid. It is felt to be more important to leave in apparent contradictions than to eliminate steps which are necessary to an understanding of the processes and intentions of the whole.'*<sup>43</sup>

And as part of the opening lines of *Ordinariness and Light* we read: *'It is a tumultuous rag-bag of a text, naive, embarrassingly rhetorical, but stuffed with good things.'*<sup>44</sup>

The Smithsons were uncommonly aware of the function of books and writings as part of the discourse, how ideas travel by way of books, not just in terms of space and culture, but also in terms of time, generations and centuries. Books are like 'wrapped gifts' waiting to be unwrapped and once again inspire students as well as working architects. In his 'Three Generations' essay Peter Smithsons remembered:

*'Our own alignment with the modern movement was (...) instantaneous but not by direct contact; it reached us through books: for P.S. at the end of the nineteen 'thirties, there was a small, almost read-out copy of Gropius' The New Architecture and the Bauhaus in our architecture school's library in Newcastle upon Tyne; for A.S., at the beginning of the nineteen 'forties, the University library's book on Bauhaus graphics, the school library's Cahiers and Oeuvre Complète of Le Corbusier.'*<sup>45</sup>

And Smithson extensively further explained how ideas traveled and how books and writing are crucial in this respect:

*'The architects of the early Renaissance published their books with difficulty: Francesco di Giorgio's were not printed until 1967; Serlio's waited around in Italy and France and Book VI: Domestic Architecture had to wait until 1978. Our own experience from crystalization of an idea, through completion of the written work, to a printed book, has extended to a twenty year span: with this delay, the work when finally published seems curiously inert for its messages had already passed fresh across the generations in the artisan way each generation speaks to the other ... through the single image half understood; the thought half heard; the detail seen in passing on a site or drawing board; the detail seen in a magazine studied and reflected upon. But the published work is only dormant: responses and past speculations when printed become an artifact and as a "wrapped gift", remain to be discovered, unwrapped in wonder, treasured and interpreted again and again by later generations.'*<sup>46</sup>

43 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Urban Structuring. Studies of Alison and Peter Smithson*, Studio Vista, London / Reinhold Publishing Corporation, New York, 1967, p. 8.

44 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 11.

45 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, p. 11.

46 Idem, pp. 14-15.

Clearly, the autobiographical is never far away in the Smithsons' work, especially from the mid-1960s onward the autobiographical seems to become an inevitable element of the writings. It is very hard to pinpoint the exact range of this quality, but it is impossible not to notice this while going through the books, articles and other texts, looking at the competition entries and most importantly, their designs for houses. This might be partly due to the fact that the Smithsons are two people communicating with each other as much as with an audience, as some critics have suggested. In their case, to write is also to negotiate and produce the territory they hold and share together, and within their relationship probably also the territory they held individually.

The couple as author is hardly problematized in architectural historiography. Who did exactly what, where and when? And what would it mean to distinguish between the two persona that make up the one couple? The Smithsons published as much under their own name, as they did as a couple. Their design work and the major book publications, especially the anthologies, however, are always published under the banner of their collaborative efforts: Alison and Peter Smithson, and always in that order, and never Peter and Alison. Spanish-American historian Beatriz Colomina is one of the few, who has put this question of the double author on the table in her essay 'Couplings', discussing the Smithsons work and writing practice. Yet, the inherent methodological issues that come with investigating the work of a double author remain unresolved.<sup>47</sup>

The Smithsons were among the first husband-and-wife collaborations that have become common practice in architectural design during the latter half of the twentieth century. Charles and Ray Eames are probably the most famous partnership in this respect, albeit that they are not exclusively architects but rather designers. Another 'power couple' of an earlier generation was formed by Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry. But it is probably Alison, who was the first female architect to be recognized as a force of her own and to gain an international reputation during her lifetime while being one of two equals in a partnership.<sup>48</sup> Only after Alison's death Peter Smithson remarked a few things about their collaboration. This is what he said in conversation with students of the Arizona State University in Phoenix, responding to the straightforward question 'How would you describe your collaboration with Alison?':

*'It was friendly enmity. We were very reciprocal, each other half. Her talents and mine were completely different. I think it's a normal*

47 Beatriz Colomina, 'Couplings' in: *OASE*, nr. 51, 'Re-arrangements. A Smithsons Celebration', pp. 20-33.

48 Still, it should also be noted this is not undisputed; especially in the oral history, talking with contemporaries and with colleagues, I found that there is a definite desire to question Alison's reputation and her contribution.

*thing with partnerships. Even the family side was not alike, but reciprocal. The books with Monacelli Press are an example of this reciprocity. It is not like the Eames's book, where the complete list of their assistants is running along the top of the page for each job. We don't have a record like that, but every drawing is attributed, and it says whether Alison or I was the lead architect. On a big project we would both work on it, yet someone was making the major contribution; somebody invented the format and became the lead. It is not a conscious act – as you are developing a project, someone takes the lead.*<sup>49</sup>

49 Catherine Spellman and Karl Unglaub (eds.), *Peter Smithson: Conversations with Students. A Space for Our Generation*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2005 p. 29; a couple of pages further in the book, on page 46, Peter Smithson adds: 'The difficult thing is explaining the reciprocal nature of Alison's and my talents. We were totally different, professionally. That's fairly normal in a partnership. In an English public school, the school has the children throughout the day and is imprinting them with things beyond the home. It is the same when you live and work with somebody, you are with them twenty-four hours a day. It becomes a question of looking and reflecting on the notions of the other. You have time for it. With all the social things, like being prepared to do without money and having the children in ordinary schools, we were similar. We did not want to have to do something just to earn money to keep going.'

Another informative example regarding both the writing practice of the Smithsons and the nature of the collaboration between Alison and Peter Smithson is the interview Kester Rattenbury had with Peter: 'Think of it as a farm! Exhibitions, books, buildings. An interview with Peter Smithson', published in: Kester Rattenbury (ed.), *This is not Architecture. Media Constructions*, Routledge, London, 2002, pp. 91-98.

50 The house designs are documented in *The Charged Void: Architecture*, including brief descriptions: see pp. 394-395 and 419-421.

51 There are many more instances one could mention; take the design for the facades of the competition entry for the Lützowstrasse in Berlin of 1980. The north facade was done by Alison in a fairy-tale like fashion with a lively pattern of coloured, window shutters, whereas Peter drew the screen-like south facade, which again reads as a reworking of Miesian repetition with an added flavour of traditional Japanese architecture. The competition was part of the IBA Berlin (Internationale Bau Ausstellung Berlin); eventually Vittorio Gregotti and others would build a housing block on the available site.

After a while, as a researcher one gets familiar with those differences and the reciprocities at play – Peter writing in a more aphoristic way, Alison more narrative, and both with undeniably literary ambition. Also in the design work the handwriting becomes readable. There are a couple of instances where the reciprocity becomes most lucid. For instance, the two entries for the Japanese Shinken-chiku competition of 1977 with Peter Cook as juror. Both Alison and Peter submitted a proposal. Alison presented an urban 'pad' that was intended as 'an appliance apartment for the commuting man' calling it 'Cookie's Nook' while re-inventing once again the fluid form language that she had devised for the House of the Future of 1956, and which was to be so influential for the Archigram members. Peter on the other hand submitted an urban version of his entry of the year before, the suburban 'Yellow House at an Intersection', which was awarded a first prize by the juror of that particular edition of the competition, namely Richard Meier. The 1977 entry by Peter was 'A House with Two Gantries' and is explicitly described as being autobiographical 'intended for a man like myself who sometimes wishes to put things away that he is not at the moment using'.<sup>50</sup> This design is much more Miesian than Alison's submission; it maintains an urbane, neo-classicist outlook, albeit in a transformed language with diagonal braces in the street facade which go back to the facade design of the Smithsons' realised project for the Oxford St Hilda's College of the late 1960s.

Apart from the 'reciprocities' at work between husband and wife, this instance is quite fantastic in the sense that it is also a demonstration of the reciprocities between the generations: Peter Cook having had Peter Smithson as his teacher, and having appropriated and further elaborated Alison's form language of the House of the Future. Yet, in this case, the 'mother' is not quite acknowledged, only the 'father' was awarded with an honourable mention by Cook.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, it should be mentioned that the autobiographical, familiar and personal are also ways to address and integrate in a most natural way the everyday into their work and thinking. Most evidently, in the case of their Upper Lawn weekend home and the book Alison Smithson compiled based on their life there.<sup>52</sup> But this is only one way of attending to the everyday as can be found in the Smithsons' oeuvre. Throughout their texts and projects one finds a consistent reflection on and critique of the way everyday patterns evolve under the influence of the ongoing processes of modernization, and how architects might respond to such transformation. As such, the body of work of the couple represents a rich register of possibilities for attending to the everyday patterns of modern life, both in terms of media and in terms of design strategies. With regard to writing on the everyday, or inserting the everyday into the architectural discourse, one comes across the by now most familiar methods of approaching the topic: the anecdote again, most notably in *Team 10 Meetings* (1991), the diary is used as a format for the Upper Lawn publication, mapping, serial photography and an écriture automatique are tried in *AS in DS* (1983), a 'stream-of-consciousness'-like writing approach in the one published novel by Alison, *A Portrait of the Female Mind as a Young Girl* (1966), collage can be found in *Imprint of India* (1994), and drawing up lists would be one more method used by the Smithsons among others for their 'Criteria for Mass Housing' (1957, 1960), and so forth and so on.

From the abovementioned examples it becomes clear that Alison, in particular, must have been acutely aware of the possibilities and implications of the various methods of writing, also with regard to the limits of capturing the everyday and conveying lived experience. For instance, the brief introduction to her 'record of Team 10 meetings' mentions:

*'In this carrying text I will not be dealing so much with Team 10's ideas, as with people and places ... that is, attempting to make events come alive in the mind of readers: anyone who hates Proust or find the Iliad's list of ships boring, will not enjoy themselves.'*<sup>53</sup>

And in *AS in DS. An Eye on the Road* we read:

*'In the original introduction I tried to describe the recording of the seeing as being – as near as intention could make it – as faithful as the pen of a seismograph. A decade later I stumble on J.J. Rousseau stating in 1776-8: "I shall perform upon myself the sort of operation that physicists conduct upon the*

52 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Upper Lawn*, 1986.

53 Alison Smithson (ed.), *Team 10 Meetings*, Rizzoli, New York, 1991, p. 17. The Proust reference is of course to some of his subtitles of the novels in his series *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*: 'names and places', 'places and names'; apparently Smithson liked to think of her record of the people and places of Team 10 as an analogy to Proust's way of writing and concept of memory – the reference to lists in the *Iliad* is probably clear enough, although much more plain than the one to Proust.

*air in order to discover its daily fluctuations. I shall take the barometer readings of my soul, and by doing this accurately and repeatedly ...*"<sup>54</sup>

For the Smithsons to attend to the everyday is to find ways of registering in the first place. It is in this sense that the writing of the Smithsons can be seen as a form of survey. To attend to the everyday becomes a project of closely watching, documenting and archiving in such a way that the everyday and its evolving patterns and practices may appear. However, this survey might have been seismographic as Smithson suggested – an *écriture automatique* produced from within – the actual publications were cleverly edited books: 'sensitivity primers' as the Smithsons would say. *AS in DS* is a mix of short programmatic statements, comments and long descriptions, serial photographs, sketches and fragments of road maps. This layering of texts and images is a technique that is characteristic of publications by the Smithsons. The documentation of their life in their weekend home *Upper Lawn: Solar Pavilion, Folly* (1986) uses the same techniques. But the *Team 10 Primer* (1962, 1964 and 1968), and lesser known publications such as *The Euston Arch* (1968) or *The Shift* (1982) might serve as perfect examples as well.

These examples as well as others from the Smithsons' writing production highlight the fact that to consistently attend to the everyday is a practice fraught with paradox and contradiction. An insider's perspective is always coupled with an outsider's one. At some point, exoticism and nostalgia inevitably creep in, whilst surveying and mapping the everyday bring up the impossible question of the formal qualities of the everyday. It is this very formalization necessary to describe the everyday and its plural practices, that threatens to erase the very qualities one celebrates and seeks to salvage.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, with De Certeau's remarks on historiography and the everyday in mind, the very functionality of the attending to the everyday should be considered here as well. The first one is the already noted collection of discursive functions including the revitalization of the discourse of modern architecture and the Smithsons' self-fashioning. The second function is more specific to the Smithsons' architectural agenda, to seek what they called the heroic and the poetic, and which will be discussed later in the dissertation. For now, two key quotes might summarize this attitude best. The brief and paradoxical 'things need to

54 Alison Smithson, *AS in DS. An Eye on the Road*, Delft University Press, 1983; reprinted in 2001 by Lars Müller Publishers, Baden, with an afterword by Christian Sumi, p. 16; interestingly enough, as can be deduced from the dates mentioned by Smithson, the reference is to Rousseau's 'Reveries of a Solitary Walker', 1776-78, posthumously published in 1782 (Rousseau died in 1778). One should read this interest in movement next to Peter Smithson's walking guides for Bath, Oxford and Cambridge, written more or less in the vein of Ruskin's 'Mornings in Florence', Geddes' walks in London (in 'Our Social Inheritance'), or Pevsner's exhaustive series of guidebooks to English architecture. They were first published in *Architectural Design*, October 1969 and June 1976; *Bath. Walks within the Walls* was republished in 1971 by Adams & Dart, Bath.

55 See also Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory. An Introduction*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, in particular the chapter on De Certeau 'Michel de Certeau's poetics of everyday life', pp. 145-173.

be heroic and ordinary at the same time' is one of the couple's most appealing statements.<sup>56</sup>

The other key quote comes from the New Brutalist debate of the 1950's: '*Brutalism*,' the Smithsons said, 'tries to face up to a mass-production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work.'<sup>57</sup>

### The Extra-Ordinary Couple

Attending to the everyday as a source for poetic vision and as an impetus for discursive renewal is among the key characteristics of the modern architecture discourse, even while it doesn't belong to the modern tradition exclusively. The case of Adolf Loos presents a great example, just as Le Corbusier. They combined their passionate argument for re-inventing the architectural discipline with an exceptional and polemical attentiveness to those everyday artefacts and phenomena which in their eyes encapsulated key aspects of modern life. Writing about the media, exhibitions, fashion, homes and interiors, they brought up anything they thought to be useful in clarifying their argument – from chairs and chests to tableware and light fixtures, from cars and aeroplanes to sports wear, suitcases and other travel equipment. This peculiar tradition fitted Alison and Peter Smithson like a glove. Writing about Braun product design, Philips light bulbs, children's stories or such mundane things as cupboard doors they sought to penetrate contemporary everyday life and how an architectural order should be responsive to its evolving pattern.

56 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric. An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-1972*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1974, first published by Latimer New Dimensions, London, 1973; p. 92.

57 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The New Brutalism: Alison and Peter Smithson answer the criticisms on the opposite page', in: *Architectural Design*, p. 113. This quote can be read as a paraphrasing of Mies van der Rohe, in particular the 'confused' points to Mies' statement made during his inaugural address as director of architecture at the Chicago Armour Institute of Technology: 'to create order out of the desperate confusion of our time.' Published in: Philip Johnson, *Mies van der Rohe, The Museum of Modern Art*, New York, revised edition 1978, p. 199; first edition in 1947.

It is at this point of polemical attentiveness to the development of the everyday, that one other key characteristic of the Smithson-ness of the Smithsons might be pointed out with regard to the couple's self-fashioning and their public *personae*. Seeking to celebrate the poetic of the everyday they started to interweave their writings with their personal experiences, something not so common within the architectural discourse. It is in this sense that both the design work and the publications attained a strong autobiographical undercurrent from about the early 1970s onward. With respect to this, the importance of the Smithsons' family life at their weekend home in Upper Lawn has already been mentioned. Another aspect of the fusing of the discourse on the everyday with the personal would be the Smithsons' attentiveness to their own

appearance, to wear the appropriate outfit at the right occasion. It is one of the most striking 'metaphorical practices' that keeps emerging in the anecdotal stories about the Smithsons.

From the moment they burst onto the international architecture scene when their Hunstanton School was built in the early 1950s, they developed a reputation for their public appearances. Alison designed and made her own dresses, Peter was famous for wearing intricately patterned shirts and ties, some of those bought at Liberty's in Regent Street, others made by Alison herself. The formal and informal gatherings of the Independent Group served as perfect occasions for the Smithsons to dress up as if they were going to a party. Magda Cordell recalled that Alison was 'a Mary Quant before Mary Quant even thought she was Mary Quant'. And Mary Banham remembered that 'nobody would miss a party that Alison was going to, because they all wanted to see what she was wearing'.<sup>58</sup> Men tended to be less taken by the Smithsons' outfits. Herman Hertzberger mentioned he felt intimidated by Peter Smithson when he showed up in a fancy green leather jacket at the Team 10 meeting in Berlin in 1965.<sup>59</sup> Such irritation was also felt by a young Elia Zenghelis when Alison attended a jury at the AA-school dressed in a mini-skirt made out of newspapers.<sup>60</sup>

Fashion seemed to have always been on the Smithsons' mind. They wrote about 'where to walk and where to ride in our bouncy new clothes and our shiny new cars'.<sup>61</sup> When designing exhibition installations, fashion designers were hired to make a contribution as in the case of the 1956 House of the Future for the Daily Mail Ideal Home exhibition, as well as for the 1968 Milan Triennale. For the latter occasion the Smithsons set up an installation called 'wedding in the city' in celebration of the then new everyday public spaces including those of shopping. To the Smithsons fashion and architecture were part of the same project, since they considered both as being involved in the construction of territories, or as Peter Smithson stated:

*'The act of making territory starts with our clothes, with their style and with our gestures and postures when we wear them.'*<sup>62</sup>

To fully understand the Smithsons' wit with regard to fashion and dressing – of oneself, of architecture and the city – one might keep in mind that their deadly seriousness was always combined with a typical feeling for the ironic and even plain silliness. Peter's flowered shirts are but one example. But there are other anecdotes, such as the one claiming that Peter showed

58 Both quotes are from Mark Girouard, *Big Jim. The Life and Work of James Stirling*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1998, p. 55.

59 In conversation with the author, 2005.

60 Story told to author by Madelon Vriesendorp, 2007. Vriesendorp spoke of a dress, according to Elia Zenghelis it was a mini-skirt; phone conversation with the author, 2007.

61 Original manuscript, first version 28 January 1967, eventually published in: Alison Smithson (ed.), *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, The Architectural Association, London, 1982; almost the same version, but without the catchy title was published as part of the re-edition of the *Team 10 Primer*, 1968, pp. 6 and 8.

62 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, Artemis, London, 1994, p. 144; stated in 1985 according to the Smithsons' reference.



up dressed as Rupert Bear, and Alison clad in a dress made out of a large Union Jack.<sup>63</sup> When Peter died in 2003, Monica Pidgeon remembered Alison and Peter Smithson in an oddly cheerful way: 'The first time I ever saw them was in 1953. We were at a CIAM conference in Aix-en-Provence. We went down to the sea in the evening (...) There in the water were Peter and Alison, and Peter was wearing the most ghastly knitted shorts which Alison had made for him. After that, of course, we published them a lot in AD.'<sup>64</sup>

At the time Pidgeon was the editor of 'AD', or *Architectural Design*, and indeed, she would publish just about anything that the Smithsons wrote.<sup>65</sup> The Smithsons' writing was definitely another way of fashioning their public *personae*. Next to the polemical statements (for instance about the New Brutalism), there are serious historical studies (such as of classical Roman and Greek sites, the city of Bath), discussions of topical and acute issues (among others mobility and consumption culture), special issues such as the one dedicated to the 'The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture' and the 'Eames Celebration', as well as biting and funny columns written under pseudonym.<sup>66</sup> The by now seminal Team 10 publications too, would all be published in the pages of *AD*.

63 George Toynbee-Clarke, 'Lives remembered', *The Times*, Wednesday March 19, 2003.

64 Monica Pidgeon in: 'Peter Smithson remembered', *Architects' Journal*, 20 March 2003, p. 22.

65 Besides Pidgeon one should make mention of the 'technical editors' of *Architectural Design*: Theo Crosby, Kenneth Frampton and Robin Middleton; see for two personal accounts: Kenneth Frampton, 'Homage à Monica Pidgeon: An AD Memoir', and Robin Middleton, 'Working for Monica', both in: *AA Files*, nr. 60, 2010, pp. 22-27; for a history on the magazine and Monica Pidgeon's role, incl. her professional relationship with the Smithsons, see: Steve Parnell, *Architectural Design, 1954-1972*, PhD Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2011.

66 Peter Smithson would write under the name of Waldo Camini, Alison under the names of Chippendale and Margaret Gil; also the column 'Not Quite Architecture' in the *Architect's Journal* was taken care of by the Smithsons, mostly Alison, for a couple of years.

67 Among others 1916 ASO, the full manuscript of India Imprint including the numerous collages, *Maigret's Map*, and *Paradise Eloigne*.

### Fashioning History and Identity

To think of writing, and in particular writing history, as a way of fashioning one's identity, as dressing up, may be contrived and highly problematic, if not outright improper. Yet, to architects any reconstruction and re-invention of tradition is in function of one's design practice. It is a form of operative criticism which usually raises objection from the more orthodox historians in particular, but to architects it is common practice. Next to past fact and social construction, history is also a treasury of allegory to re-invent the discipline and regenerate architectural practice. Alison and Peter Smithson were quite a special case in this respect. When jobs were halted, or new clients stayed away the Smithsons devoted their time and energy to writing rather than job acquisition. Alison especially, loved making books, something that is immediately clear from the many unpublished manuscripts kept in the archive.<sup>67</sup> To underscore the specifics of the Smithsons' intentions behind their writing it might suffice to reread the opening lines of their final book *The Charged Void*, which displays quite some resentment

at conventional historiography and improper acts of interpretation. Among other things, Alison Smithson stated:

*'We write – and publish – in an attempt to help architects who intend to build to make another "jump" themselves. After the architect is dead, one receives another sort of "catalogue", with every scrap of paper interpreted by historians. But building architects ask of the detritus of a working, thinking life completely different kinds of questions that wish to receive totally different kinds of answers.'*<sup>68</sup>

But it was not just other colleagues that needed help with their questions. Going through the extensive writings of the British couple, it becomes clear that the first goal was to find firm ground for one's own design practice. As they had stated in *The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture*, they needed a 'rock to stand on', a rock through which they felt the continuity of history and the necessity to achieve their own idea of order.<sup>69</sup> This tribute to the first generation of modern architects is a highly visual and essayistic documentation with an emphasis on the four basic sources of modern architecture according to the Smithsons: *De Stijl*, *Bauhaus*, *Esprit Nouveau* and Russian Constructivism, complemented with among others Czech Functionalism, the Dutch *Nieuwe Bouwen*, and various other individual examples such as Hugo Häring and Pierre Chareau. Basically, *The Heroic Period* reads as a cleverly composed scrapbook with inserted comments taken from earlier writings, mostly Peter's.<sup>70</sup> The images included range from Oud's Hoek van Holland housing project to Leonidov's Lenin Institute. They are chronologically ordered from 1910 until 1934, with an emphasis on the 1920s. The scrapbook method is key to the Smithson rhetorical techniques. It is directly related to the way they collected their materials and organised their archive where they kept lists and projects with such headings as 'the 1930s', 'the 1950s', or 'the materials sacred to brutalism': relatively open-ended inventories that were always under scrutiny and continuously subject to editing.

The chronological ordering suggests an 'objective' historiography describing an autonomous development, yet *The Heroic Period* is nothing of the kind. The page layout is manipulated in such a way that an intricate web of real and speculative relations between the images appear: for instance Mies' glass skyscraper on the same page as Rietveld's red-blue chair, a double page completely devoted to Gropius' Bauhaus and the Bauhaus houses, Mies' Barcelona pavilion opposite of the *Salon d'Automne* exhibit of Le Corbusier, Jeanneret and Perriand, or Duiker's Open Air School

68 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, Monacelli Press, New York, 2001, p. 13.

69 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture*, 1981, p. 5.

70 The predominant, visual dimension is important to note, because until then the seminal historiographies of modern architecture, such as Johnson and Hitchcock's, Pevsner's, as well as Giedion's depended on the textual, intellectual argument.

71 I thank Christopher Woodward, at the time employed at the Smithsons office, for his information on the way the publication was compiled. This technique is actually not unlike the way an earlier collection of images was presented to the public by the Smithsons: the 1953 exhibition 'Parallel of Life and Art' that the Smithsons organised together with their Independent Group friends, the visual artists Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi, which will be more extensively discussed in Chapter 4 'The New Brutalist Game of Associations'. The hanging of this exhibition was inspired by among others a scheme for a photographic display by Bauhaus designer

Herbert Bayer, a scheme which one finds also included in *The Heroic Period* as if it were an echo of this earlier experiment, p. 63 of the 1981 re-edition of *The Heroic Period*. An earlier version of my argument was published as: Dirk van den Heuvel, 'As Found: The Metamorphosis of the everyday. On the Work of Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Alison and Peter Smithson (1953-1956)', in: *OASE*, nr. 59, 2002, pp. 52-67.

<sup>72</sup> It should be noted that Giedion already used the figure of three generations. He called György Kepes an artist of the third generation, in a foreword to Kepes' book *Structure in Art and in Science*, George Braziller, New York, 1965 to which the Smithsons also contributed a text. Giedion also called Jørn Utzon an architect of the third generation in the fifth edition of his seminal *Space, Time and Architecture*, 1967; the foreword mentioning 'a new chapter on the Danish architect Jørn Utzon, "Jørn Utzon and the Third Generation"', is dated September 1966. By the early 1970s the phrase 'third generation' had become quite mainstream in Britain, given the 1972 publication of *The Third Generation. The Changing Meaning of Architecture* (London, Pall Mall Press) written and compiled by Philip Drew. Interestingly enough, Alison and Peter Smithson were not included by Drew, although he does mention them in the introductory essay; he documented work of Smithson rivals, among others James Stirling and Robert Venturi. The Smithsons are also missing in Giedion's book.

<sup>73</sup> Smithson's three generations idea was developed through various lectures, and eventually crystallized at the ILAUD summer schools organised by Giancarlo De Carlo. Peter Smithson, 'Three Generations', in: *Annual Report 1980*, ILAUD, 1981; republished in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, pp. 8-15, and *OASE*, nr. 51, 'Re-arrangements. A Smithsons Celebration', 1999, pp. 82-93.

<sup>74</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, Artemis, London, 1994.

<sup>75</sup> There are different variations, for instance for a Delft lecture Smithson drew a line from the first generation of among others Duiker and Stam to Woods and Bakema.

<sup>76</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Conglomerate Ordering', and 'The Canon of Conglomerate Ordering', in: *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, pp. 58-61, and 62-69.

next to works by Melnikov and Van Doesburg, and so forth and so on. The chronology and any possible historical 'telos' is effectively undermined, and the reader is left to his or her own devices.<sup>71</sup>

In hindsight, *The Heroic Period* was only a prelude toward a much more personal kind of historiography. From the 1970s onward the Smithsons developed their idea of three generations of modern architects.<sup>72</sup> At that point, they – once again – re-invented the tradition of modern architecture and now, self-consciously inserted themselves and their own work into that tradition.<sup>73</sup> Ultimately it formed the structure of the 1994 booklet *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, in which the Smithsons presented their reflections on Mies van der Rohe, Charles and Ray Eames as well as their own work in three subsequent chapters.<sup>74</sup> The idea of three generations is as simple as it is also classic. It is a direct reference to Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects* of the 16th century, the first historiography of the Italian artists of the Renaissance, and as might be noted with regard to the web of relations between the everyday and historiography, a history notoriously awash with anecdote, gossip and tales of defamation and celebration. The three generations idea is also part of the ongoing competition between CIAM and Team 10 protagonists and the fight over the legacy of the founding fathers. When Giedion updated his *Space, Time and Architecture* to also include the 'third generation', a term he used before the Smithsons would, he thought of Jørn Utzon as the ultimate representative. The Team 10 architects responsible for putting an end to Giedion's most important project, that of CIAM, were almost completely neglected by him in his seminal history of modern architecture.

In his 'Three Generations' essay, which has been published at various places, and which was based on a lecture given at different schools and institutions, Peter Smithson drew an analogy between three generations of Renaissance architects (Brunelleschi, Alberti, Di Giorgio) and a modern variant. The modern three generations were the founding generation (Le Corbusier, Mies, Gropius), a second, or middle generation (Eames, Prouvé) and the third generation which included the couple itself.<sup>75</sup> But after that clear and rather bold gesture, any simplicity was left behind. The two genealogical lines set a field that enabled the Smithson to completely re-arrange their favourite subjects as well as introduce new ones. Again, new lists were drawn and projects re-assembled to make up what they then started to call a 'canon of conglomerate ordering'.<sup>76</sup> This time the heavy brick structures of

Francesco Di Giorgio and Le Corbusier's late works in *béton brut* figured as the cornerstones of their historiography. These were complemented by the Smithsons' own buildings for the University of Bath from the 1980s alongside projects of their fellow Team 10 members Ralph Erskine and Giancarlo De Carlo.

The various family trees constructed in these historiographies served to distribute several major themes of the Smithsons' work. The Mies-Eames-Smithson chain of identification was mostly concerned with the domestic, technology and finding poetic order in the everyday.<sup>77</sup> The unlikely web connecting Di Giorgio, Le Corbusier and Team 10 evolved around the idea of a project's context as 'fabric', to which any new building belongs, while at the same time the fabric is reconstructed by such new building.

### Church Parents of Modern Architecture

With regard to these issues of identification and fashioning one's identity through historiography, one final example might be mentioned to illuminate what was at stake here. I'm referring to the piece that Alison Smithson wrote about the life of St Jerome and the two alternating habitats of the saint, namely the desert and the study.

The text 'Saint Jerome, the desert – the study' was written by Smithson at the end of her life, and published by Axel Bruchhäuser, one of the Smithsons' most faithful and inspiring clients.<sup>78</sup> The story of Jerome is in the first place a story about inhabitation, as so many others of her and Peter's. The desert stands here for the 'restorative place in nature', the study for the 'energizing cell' in the city. The story that is immediately recognizable underneath the one of Jerome, is the story about the Smithsons' own places: the energizing cell in the city would be their Chelsea home and office in London, Cato Lodge, and the restorative place in nature their idyllic Upper Lawn weekend retreat. The second, implied story is the story of the client and his life in the forests of central Germany, a single man living with a cat more or less similar to St Jerome and his lion. But there's another telling story hidden underneath, and that is the story of writing itself.

On the cover of the private publication we see Jerome depicted in one of Rembrandt's masterful etchings – Jerome at work,

77 Beatriz Colomina has discussed before the Smithsons' historiographic practice in terms of identification and appropriation. In her essay 'Couplings' Colomina analyzed the 'Three Generations' text as well as *The Heroic Period*, mainly focusing on the special bond between the Eames couple and the Smithsons. Following the various genealogical lines drawn by the Smithsons Colomina demonstrates the chains of identification at work, eventually arriving at her own identification as an architect-writer with the couple's work; Beatriz Colomina, 'Couplings', in: *OASE*, nr. 51, 'Re-arrangements. A Smithsons Celebration', pp. 20-33.

78 Alison Smithson, *Saint Jerome. The Desert – the Study*, TECTA, Lauenförde, 1991; republished in: Dirk van den Heuvel and Max Risselada (eds.), *Alison and Peter Smithson – from the House of the Future to a house of today*, 2004, pp. 224-229.

writing. Of all the symbolic items that Rembrandt included in the peaceful scene the piece of spectacles that the saint is wearing seems to be the most surprising as well as hilarious one – quite another example of historic distortion and appropriation by an author. Yet, the most important symbolic accessory is the hat lying beside Jerome in the grass, which is a cardinal's hat of course. As we should remember, St Jerome is among the foremost of the church fathers. The occupation by which he is still known to us, is the canonizing of the early Christian texts and gospels: which ones should be included in the holy book of the bible, and which not. While the lion is guarding his safety, Jerome is translating from original Hebrew sources, as well as writing long letters and reports polemicizing with his competitors and opponents.

This is another way of looking at the Smithsons – as church parents of the gospel of modern architecture. Alison's role in particular should be remembered here, since she made Team 10 part of the history of modern architecture by producing and editing the *Team 10 Primer* of 1962, its two subsequent editions and the *Team 10 Meetings* of 1991 among others.<sup>79</sup> Discussing her own intentions behind her most famous document on Team 10, the *Primer*, Alison Smithson saw part of her job as situating Team 10 within the larger tradition of architectural discourse:

*'The Team 10 Primer, in communicating "Team 10 thinking" was, for working architects, maintaining the tradition in architect's documents running through Vitruvius, Frontinus, Serlio, Palladio ... Adolf Loos, Bruno Taut, Le Corbusier ...'*<sup>80</sup>

It is all in there: the polemics, the competing, the revisiting of sources, deciding what and who comes first, and of course, what and who should be left out – reading, writing and editing. Going through the innumerable documents in the various archives related to the Team 10 history, the correspondences and minutes of meetings, which accompanied the course of events, one gets some idea of the discourse in action, including the appropriations, rejections or outright exclusions of ideas, procedures, people and places.<sup>81</sup> History is muddled and messy here, not very heroic. Take for instance a simple question as to the exact beginnings of Team 10. The stories about it are far from unequivocal, and a singular moment of origin cannot be established. Alison Smithson herself preferred it to be most informally, referring to a dinner event during the CIAM 9 congress at Aix-en-Provence in 1953: *'Georges' (Candilis) outing to eat camel ham in a Moroccan bar*

79 The eight most important publications on the Team 10 discourse as edited by Alison Smithson are the following: 'CIAM – Team 10', special issue for *Architectural Design*, May 1960; 'Team 10 Primer', special issue for *Architectural Design*, December 1962; 'Team 10 Work', special issue for *Architectural Design*, August 1964; *Team 10 Primer*, first re-edition, a reprint of the two combined issues of 1962 and 1964, without a proper colophon, undated; *Team 10 Primer*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1968, second re-edition based on the first, undated re-edition with a new, 20 page preface; 'Team 10 at Royaumont, 1962, a report', in: *Architectural Design*, November 1975; *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, The Architectural Association, London 1982, a selection of documents from Smithson's own archive; *Team 10 Meetings*, Rizzoli, New York, 1991, a chronology of the Team 10 meetings plus reports of the Royaumont meeting as published before in *Architectural Design*, and the meeting in Rotterdam, 1974.

80 Alison Smithson (ed.), *Team 10 Meetings*, 1991, p. 15.

81 There are quite a few examples of this, but perhaps the best known casualty was James Stirling, whose participation had been written out of the Team 10 history by Smithson. Stirling contributed on two occasions to the Team 10 discourse, and both times not unsubstantially. The first was the Dubrovnik congress, at which occasion Stirling himself didn't attend, although he delivered a design scheme of a village infill project based on the new prerequisites as drawn up by the Smithsons. The second occasion was the Royaumont meeting, at which event Stirling was the first speaker presenting his and Jim Gowan's design for the Engineering Building of Leicester University; see for much more on this, and a first reconstruction of the Team 10 history and its meetings our book: Max Risselada and Dirk van den Heuvel (eds.), *Team 10. In Search of a Utopia of the Present 1953-81*, 2005; Stirling's talk in Royaumont has eventually been published by Mark Crinson: *James Stirling. Early Unpublished Writings on Architecture*, Routledge, London, 2010.

was a great success; around that bar table, in the middle of the night, was the first Team 10 meeting.<sup>82</sup>

It is because of her editing of the Team 10 publications and Team 10 history that Alison Smithson compared herself, and has been compared by others – also by Peter – to Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, who would edit the official publications of CIAM of the post-war years. But unlike Tyrwhitt, Alison Smithson was not only a facilitator, the role Tyrwhitt seemed to have taken on, Smithson was also an active player. And this can be traced back in all her writings, as well as in Peter's as one might add.

With this in mind, we might have another look at *The Heroic Period* publication. The Smithsons' work is not there yet as in the case of the 'Three Generations' essay for instance, but I would suggest that they themselves are, right there on the cover. We think we're looking at Le Corbusier and Mies, deeply engaged in conversation during one of their visits of the Weissenhof Siedlung, but actually we are looking at Alison and Peter.<sup>83</sup> If this seems improbable and far-fetched, consider the following two statements.

82 Alison Smithson (ed.), *Team 10 Meetings*, 1991, p. 20; when asked various members define different moments, see the various interviews with Team 10 members by Clelia Tuscano in Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005.

83 In fact, it was Robin Middleton who selected the photo for the cover, letter to the author, 4 January, 2012.

84 Peter Smithson, 'For Mies van der Rohe on his 80th birthday', in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Heroic Period*, 1985, p. 61, originally published in *Bauen & Wohnen*, May 1966, and republished in Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, 1994, p. 14.

85 Alison Smithson as quoted by Charles Jencks in his *Modern Movements in Architecture*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth / Baltimore / Ringwood, 1973, p. 259; taken from: Reyner Banham 'The Last Formgiver', *The Architectural Review*, August 1966.

86 As Peter himself described such moments in 'Three Generations'. For another mythical account of the picture bringing in Mart Stam as a third, repressed element between Mies and Le Corbusier, see: 'Mart Stam's Trousers. A Conversation between Peter Smithson and Wouter Vanstiphout', in: Crimson with Michael Speaks and Gerard Hadders (eds.), *Mart Stam's Trousers: Stories from behind the Scenes of Dutch Moral Modernism*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1999, pp. 121-138.

Peter about Mies:

*'My own debt to Mies van der Rohe is so great that it is difficult for me to disentangle what I hold as my own thoughts, so often have they been the result of insights received from him.'*<sup>84</sup>

And Alison about Le Corbusier:

*'When you open a new volume of the Oeuvre Complète you find that he has had all your best ideas already, has done what you were about to do next.'*<sup>85</sup>

The exact nature of the Smithson-ness of the Smithsons will always escape us; that is part of the workings of those indeterminate fables of the everyday. But look at the picture again: a couple, intimately and totally preoccupied with themselves in this frozen moment, chatting, gossiping, arguing, avowing and disavowing, and everything else that comes with 'two separate design impulses walking together'.<sup>86</sup> You can almost hear their voices.







## 2 'THE SIMPLE LIFE, WELL DONE' Culture, Ordinariness and Domesticity

### In Pursuit of Ordinariness

'Things need to be ordinary and heroic at the same time' is one of the most puzzling of Alison and Peter Smithson's paradoxes.<sup>1</sup> It served as the final conclusion of their argument for an architecture 'without rhetoric' and they used it with reference to Marinetti and Italian Futurism:

*'We have come a long way from Marinetti. We know we are involved in new levels of sadness and destruction and we have a view of things unimaginable fifty years ago.'*<sup>2</sup>

These lines were followed by comments on how the late twentieth century city had become a vulnerable 'mechanism' due to its dependence on technology for its services; a power blackout in New York was mentioned, just as a strike by air-controllers in France dislocating all air-communications across Europe and a strike by London dustmen. But this was not quite the 'new levels of sadness and destruction' the Smithsons had in mind when they stated that the 'fragility' of the 'mechanism-served city' required 'more self-discipline' and 'more thoughtful involvement than ever before'. The new levels of 'sadness and destruction' were a reference to the machines of war that brought so much destruction to Europe and England, and its capital London, where the Smithsons had set up their own practice. When the Smithsons moved to London, at the end of the 1940s, the destruction was there for all to see. The bombed neighbourhoods were a dominant part of the daily décor of the city and living proof of the need for housing, as also a better kind of society.

As a slogan and call for order, 'without rhetoric' was aimed against a continuation of the Futurist infatuation with the machine and technology as a force of disruption, and as such it was also aimed at Reyner Banham's pursuit of an exclusively technology-driven architecture:

*'When the few had cars then was the time for rhetoric about the machine, of violence as an ideal. When all have machine-energy –*

<sup>1</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric. An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-1972*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1974, original edition Latimer New Dimensions, London, 1973; p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*cars, transistor radios and light – to throw about, then the time has come for the lyricism of control, for calm as an ideal: for bringing the Virgilian dream – the peace of the countryside enjoyed with the self-consciousness of the city-dweller – into the notion of the city itself.*<sup>3</sup>

Here, the heroism of the avant-gardes and the ordinariness of modern everyday life are connected with picturesque sensibilities, urban lifestyles, popular culture and technology. The Smithson statement builds on a web of socio-cultural notions that encompass not only modern architecture and humble yet noble simplicity, but also domesticity, the experience of war and Englishness.

This connection between heroism and ordinariness was also part of the Smithsons' framing of the achievements of the modern movement as evident in their 1965 tribute *The Heroic Period*. Heroism and ordinariness summarised to them the well-known aspirations of the modern agenda: to better the life of the common man, the working classes and ordinary citizens by deploying technological innovation and industrial mass production that were all part of bringing about a new, more egalitarian society. Although the Smithsons emphasized both the heroic and the ordinary, eventually the last would receive the most attention when it came to their own work and writings. The heroic, just as the poetic, was to be found in the ordinary. Hence, attending to the ordinary, and the numerous, disparate everyday phenomena that made up this unwieldy realm, became a large part of the Smithsons' lifetime project.

A fine example of this foregrounding of the ordinary would be the short text 'Beatrix Potter's Places' written by Alison Smithson. It was published in 1967 in *Architectural Design*, and was one of those typical short, but revealing pieces of hers. In 'Beatrix Potter's Places' she discussed the unlikely similarities between the cosy interiors as depicted in the famous children stories about Peter Rabbit from the early twentieth century and the interiors of modern architecture, in particular those of Le Corbusier's villas. She writes:

*'Architects might be surprised that there was a connection between the house of Mrs Tittlemouse and that for Mr Shodan in Ahmedabad.'*<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, to compare the avant-gardist Le Corbusier with the English writer of children stories might seem quite an absurd suggestion.

3 Ibid., p. 14; the implicit polemic with Banham also appears in the extensive extracts from Marinetti's manifesto of 1909, taken from Banham's 1960 book *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* and placed next to the concluding remarks of *Without Rhetoric*.

4 Alison Smithson, 'Beatrix Potter's Places', in: *Architectural Design*, December 1967, p. 573; re-published in: Dirk van den Heuvel, Max Risselada (eds.), *Alison and Peter Smithson – from the House of the Future to a house of today*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, pp. 213-214.

But Smithson insisted:

*'the same sort of striving towards good container-spaces, and even the same sort of forms can be found in both the books and in the post-war works of the architects. A similarity of intention is also evident in the attitude to objects and possessions.'*<sup>5</sup>

She further claimed:

*'In Beatrix Potter's interiors, objects and utensils in daily use are conveniently located, often on individual hooks or nails, and are all "decoration" the "simple" spaces need, or in fact can take. Those things in secondary use or needing long term storage are in special storage cubicles whose forms define the house space proper – as well as being pleasant spaces in themselves.'*<sup>6</sup>

And then we arrive at the crucial statement:

*'Here then, we find basic necessities raised to a poetic level: the simple life, well done. This is in essence the precept of the whole Modern Movement in architecture.'*<sup>7</sup>

In its compactness, the statement remains astonishing, if only for the apparent contradiction with other essential features of the modern tradition as proposed by the Smithsons – for instance, their own introduction to *The Heroic Period*, written only two years before 'Beatrix Potter's Places'. This introduction ended with the remark, there is a 'quite definite special sub-category of modern architecture'. Referring to Mies' work in particular, this sub-category was defined as an architecture of the 'enjoyment of luxury materials', of the 'well-made', betraying a 'shameless bankers' luxuriousness about materials and a passion for perfection in detail'.<sup>8</sup> The phrase 'special sub-category' keeps the Smithson argument together, just as the 'well-made' comes close to the 'well done'. Behind both statements lies the appreciation of true craftsmanship and the skillful handling of materials by which qualities of authenticity are brought out. This then keeps Mies firmly within the tradition as conceived by the Smithsons.

Unsurprisingly, there are quite a few other 'sub-categories' of the modern tradition that don't exactly fit this adage of 'the simple life, well done'. One might think of technology or the consumer society – key aspects of modern urban lifestyles of the twentieth century, of which the Smithsons were intensely aware, and which are far removed from the uncomplicated idyll of the rural and Picturesque that is summed up by the notion of the 'simple life'. Such friction, which is at work at all levels of the discourse, is due to the twofold

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture*, Rizzoli / Idea Editions, New York / Milan, 1981, p. 5; originally published as a special issue of *Architectural Design* in 1965.

function of the riddle-like statement. Apart from drawing a clear line to demarcate what belongs to the modern movement and what not, the statement also undermines any kind of formal orthodoxy or dogma, which is probably best illustrated by the Smithsons' own designs, in particular the houses – and of course, Alison Smithson was speaking of houses when she referred to Beatrix Potter and Mr. Shodan.

Take the two examples of the House of the Future and the Sugden House, both from 1956.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that the 'simple life' was a major inspiration to the Smithsons in raising the everyday to the level of poetics – one house being for a client with a relatively small budget and strict aesthetic control by planning authorities, the other for an imagined couple occupying the dream of a 'machine served society'. Formally speaking, the two are of completely different worlds: the House of the Future was an elegant set of freely shaped and smooth interiors around a paradise patio-garden, whereas the Sugden House, a mono-pitched volume, set on a mound, made out of rough brick of second stock quality with a rather awkward looking facade composition the result of the unconventional handling of the prefab Crittal-window frames. It was only the ambition to draw a new, poetic order from the patterns of everyday life that united the designs.<sup>10</sup> The Smithsons would investigate their ideas concerning ordinariness and the 'simple life, well done' throughout life, from the earliest house designs of the 1950s to the later work in Germany, or the many 'idea houses' such as the House with Two Gables of the 1970s and the Put-Away Villa of the late 1990s, all of which dealt with the rearranging of one's furniture, decoration and other domestic objects according to season and need.

9 See for an overview of the Smithson house designs our 2004 publication: Dirk van den Heuvel, Max Risselada (eds.), *Alison and Peter Smithson – from the House of the Future to a house of today*, Rotterdam, 010 Publishers.

10 The very different form language of projects has drawn the attention of critics before, for instance: Sarah Goldhagen in 'Freedom's Domiciles: Three Projects by Alison and Peter Smithson', in: Sarah Williams Goldhagen, Réjean Legault (eds.), *Anxious Modernisms. Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture*, CCA, Montréal / MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2000, pp. 75-95.

11 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, Artemis, London 1994, p. 130; remarks originally published as Peter Smithson, 'Signs of Occupancy' in: *Architectural Design*, February 1972, pp. 97-99.

Ordinariness and simplicity were most thoroughly pursued in their modest and bare weekend home in Tisbury, the Upper Lawn pavillion, which they built between 1959 and 1962. The Smithsons also consistently recognized the qualities of ordinariness and simplicity in the work of their colleagues, for instance when they wrote in admiration about the Kiefhoek housing in Rotterdam by J.J.P. Oud and how the 'ordinary municipal housing estate was built from the bottom up with a love that is still shinningly obvious'. To the Smithsons the Kiefhoek project succeeded in inventing a 'form-language of common use' despite being 'mass-housing on the smallest budget'.<sup>11</sup> Such invention from the limited means available was also the task the Smithsons had set for themselves (rather than the 'shameless bankers' luxuriousness' they recognized and admired in Mies).

The pithy phrase of 'the simple life, well done' was also most effective in communicating the morality and obligation involved that was part of the Smithsons' rejection of formal orthodoxy. Any kind of formal rule or prescription as to form, composition or even planning was deliberately relinquished. In this sense, 'the simple life, well done' was the echo of the earlier, better-known statement of the Smithsons: 'We see architecture as the direct result of a way of life.'<sup>12</sup> Again, no specificities concerning form were communicated, rather a moral call to measure the reciprocities at play between formal configuration and patterns of use.

It was Robin Middleton, then editor of *Architectural Design* and a close friend of the Smithsons, who was the first to discuss the architecture of the couple in the terms as set out by Smithson in her description of the domestic world of Beatrix Potter's stories. He did so in his essay 'The Pursuit of Ordinarity', an extensive review of their project for St Hilda's College in Oxford, a female students' dormitory called the Garden Building (1967-1970).<sup>13</sup> The building is still in use as a dormitory, although a new addition on the premises of the college has distorted the planning of the ensemble of the college buildings as a whole. The four-storey building of 51 units is a small block carefully situated in the college garden between two older buildings. It connects those buildings while at the same time separating the garden from a service alley. Its most striking feature is an oak timber screen that is not structural, yet is wrapped around the building veiling the big windows of the student rooms. The screen predates the Smithsons' later interest in layering and lattice works, which they would develop from the 1970s onward and which would heavily influence their built work for their German patron Axel Bruchhäuser, owner of the Tecta furniture factory.

The story goes that the Smithsons got the job, because Stirling to whom it was offered first, refused to take it on for having too much work already.<sup>14</sup> In his review, Middleton compared the building to other architectural projects by Smithson contemporaries: in particular Howell, Killick, Partridge and Amis, Denys Lasdun and James Stirling, too. He noted that every one of them realized work of the 'fullest display of design talents' seeking to 'make architectural statements of the most spectacular kind', whereas the Smithsons apparently had chosen not to invest in 'iconography' eschewing the kind of 'totem architecture', to which category the Smithsons' earlier Hunstanton school of 1954 also belonged, according to Middleton. The Smithson design for St Hilda's on the other hand

12 Editorial 'The New Brutalism', in: *Architectural Design*, January 1955, p. 1.

13 Robin Middleton, 'The Pursuit of Ordinarity', in: *Architectural Design*, nr. 2, 1971, pp. 77-85; when not mentioned all subsequent quotes and references are from this essay.

14 Mark Girouard, *Big Jim. The Life and Work of James Stirling*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1998, p. 157.

was 'calm and reticent', just as it was 'unpretentious'. According to Middleton, they had developed a fitting, modernist vernacular for the building, full of references to historic and local building traditions with a few touches of exoticism. Speaking of a fusion of inspiration Middleton listed the following references: the Tudor example of sixteenth century Little Moreton Hall in Cheshire, of which Peter Smithson had said it 'represented the last attempt at making "jolly" architecture in England', a nearby decorative timber bridge at Magdalen Boys School and finally a textile, oriental reference, a Tunisian yasmak or women's veil, which the Smithsons' themselves had also used as an explanation for the timber screen. Images from the Smithson archive, photographs by Peter and postcards from Alison's scrapbook served as evidence for Middleton's claims, all neatly included in the article. For the back facade at the service alley-side of the building, the Smithsons had also opted for some sort of recognizable vernacular of a yellow stock-brick. Together with the added one-storey shed-like volume, which housed the heating plant among other things, the back facade emphasized the language and associations with a service alley.

The 'ordinariness' of the project was not just limited to the kind of vernacular as invented by the Smithsons for the garden and back facades, though. Middleton went on to explain how the tight but carefully planned lay-out of the building, its rooms and corridors, the private dressing rooms and common baths and showers, the designers' obsession with sound insulation, cupboards, sinks, draining boards and room to hang dripping tights or knickers, and so on, all referred back to the sound building traditions of late Victorian and Edwardian times, the very times of Beatrix Potter, when 'the skills and judgements of all workmen could be relied upon; even an estate carpenter could be expected to turn out something decent'. The nostalgia for those days and the then assumedly 'ordered and settled society', did not concern the 'pomp and splendour' but the 'working bits of the architecture, the below stairs realm'. It was this attention for the below stairs, epitome of the ordinary, which formed the foremost connection between Beatrix Potter's architecture of 'nooks and cubby holes' and Alison's interest in this well-ordered world.

Middleton concluded his piece by stating that such interest in ordinariness was too often: 'scorned by the architects of the modern movement and has made of their work such a nightmare of discommodiousness'. Perhaps a pun meant for Stirling, whose university buildings were heavily criticised for their disrespect

of considerations of use, the remark highlighted once again the Smithsons' obsessions with ordinariness and simplicity and their search for an architecture of the simple life well done, a form language developed in direct response to patterns of common use. This was not only a theoretical position as should be noted here: the actual requirements for room lay-outs, divisions of cupboards, private or common baths were all decided upon after extensive consultation with the users, most notably the college steward, Marion Taylor, who was even credited as co-designer by Peter Smithson. Taylor for instance, organised the testing of clothes storage and dressing rooms by way of mock-ups.<sup>15</sup>

### 'A New Seeing of the Ordinary'

The recognition of the ordinary as a special source of inspiration or even a force for cultural and moral regeneration was part of the much broader modernist discourse, and certainly not exclusively limited to modern architecture, nor the inventions of the pre-WWII avant-gardes. Once again, one could point to the picturesque tradition, or note how the architecture of inhabitation and its humble origins were an intrinsic and constitutive part of the modernist discourse. One might call to mind the seminal and didactic examples of the primitive hut of abbé Marc-Antoine Laugier, which was also a temple at the same time, or the Caribbean hut of Gottfried Semper famously on display at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. But in all those instances, it might also be recalled that the 'ordinary' is never quite as 'simple' as suggested, but that the terms used were always part of ongoing contestations in a cultural battle over values and identities, in which the rustic, the vernacular and common were construed as pure and authentic versus the mannerisms of an establishment of cultured and educated classes. It is through such seminal cases as the one of the primitive hut that one immediately touches on other key aspects of the modern tradition as well, namely the profoundly intertwined practices and models of anthropology, exoticism and colonialism. In the work of the Smithsons one can retrace the impact of those as well, partly as an inherent element of the intellectual and cultural tradition in which they operated, but also as objects for criticism, auto-critique and further inspection.<sup>16</sup> The Smithsons were among the first to acknowledge the importance of the work of modern architects in the Maghreb, especially of the ATBAT architects in Morocco.<sup>17</sup> Throughout

15 Middleton, 1971, p. 80 and p. 85.

16 A first enquiry into the possible connections between the Smithsons' ideas and the post-colonial situation of the post-war situation is an essay by Mark Crinson, 'From the Rainforest to the Streets', in: Tom Avermaete, Serhat Karakayali, Marion von Osten (eds.), *Colonial Modern. Aesthetics of the Past – Rebellions for the Future*, Black Dog Publishing, London / Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2010, pp. 98-111.

17 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Collective Housing in Morocco. The Work of Atbat-Afrique: Bodiansky, Candilis, Woods', in: *Architectural Design*, January 1955, pp. 2-8.

their writings one finds references to the Far East (the first New Brutalism statements are full of references to Japanese architecture),<sup>18</sup> and India was a consistently recurring reference, as part of Peter Smithson's war experience and in Alison's writings on post-colonial conditions and modern travelling.<sup>19</sup> Their design portfolio too, overlapped with the shifting realities of the post-colonial empire with major projects in Brazil (the British Embassy in Brasilia), Africa and the Middle East, particularly their project for Kuwait City and their winning entry for the Pahlavi Library, Tehran.

The example of the timber screen at St Hilda's being described as a yasmak to protect the girls from overexposure is just one but still telling instance. Middleton did not fail to mention that the Tunisian influence was the outcome of the Smithsons' holiday activity, which involved visits to the vernacular as also the sites of Roman and Greek ruins.<sup>20</sup> Roger Rigby, former business manager with the Ove Arup office and friend of the Smithsons, who owned a weekend home in Ansty Plum close to the Smithsons' Upper Lawn pavillion, described how Alison and Peter Smithson would make such visits into truly archaeological expeditions each armed with two cameras hanging from their shoulders.<sup>21</sup> Yet, this continuation of the tradition of northern interest in the Mediterranean and the reappropriations of its vernacular and ancient history through twentieth century tourism is but the wider, generic cultural framework. With regard to the Smithsons' interest in the ordinary and the 'simple life' there are two biographical aspects that should also be mentioned here: the Smithsons' upbringing and their parents, and the experience of war.

That the notion of the ordinary was intrinsically intertwined with the issue of ethics of architecture was something the Smithsons were acutely aware of. When confronted by the Dutch-Flemish historian Wouter Vanstiphout who held that Smithson and his generation had 'loaded architecture with a lot of social pretense' Peter Smithson responded that this was 'an inheritance', and a 'very deep thing':

*'The architects of the Gothic Revival believed that the Gothic style was pure in a moral and philosophical and religious sense, therefore they were building in the Gothic style. In Oxford you even find ordinary row houses built in Venetian Gothic, under the influence of Ruskin. Architecture was regarded a moral force; people would have better lives with it. The direct influence of Ruskin, through William Morris, was alive in my parents' morality. Therefore, though it began*

18 'The New Brutalism', in: *Architectural Design*, January 1955.

19 Alison Smithson, *Imprint of India*, AA publications, London, 1994.

20 Middleton, 1971, p. 82.

21 In conversation with the author during a visit to Ansty Plum, August 2003.



*in the 1840s, it hadn't died out until probably the thirties or forties of this century. You see the Renaissance was the same; architecture was a force to change society. And certainly, as far as the courts were concerned, it worked. There was more gentle, thoughtful culture. Remember, this is all an exaggeration. You could say that was the beginning of their decline; it was probably the same with the Van der Leeuws. Yes, we continue to load architecture with that notion. But we didn't invent it.'*<sup>22</sup>

Alison's call for the simple life well done perfectly built on this, too. Indeed, her father's education under William Lethaby at the Royal College must have had a tremendous influence, quite comparable to the influence of Peter's parents and their morality, which stemmed from William Morris as remarked by Smithson himself. Lethaby's ideas on design resonate all too clearly in Alison's phrase of the 'well done'. According to Lethaby the source of true art was found in common labour; as he put it in 1917, 'a work of art is a well-made boot, a well-made chair, a well-made picture'.<sup>23</sup> And in 1920 he stated that 'design (...) is simply the arranging how work shall be well done', and that 'high utility and liberal convenience for noble life are enough for architecture'.<sup>24</sup> The Arts and Crafts legacy was not an explicit reference for the Smithsons in their writings, but its moral values regarding design (and not so much its formal inventions), including the view on how architecture was embedded in the production of the domestic and domestic goods, was a strong albeit implicit force in the Smithsons' thinking. Why the indebtedness to Arts and Crafts thinking was suppressed by the Smithsons in their writings is a matter of speculation. Next to the one biographical reference to Alison's father being trained by Lethaby, and the interview of 1999, there is one other remark, between brackets, in the 1972 lecture on 'Architecture as Townbuilding' by Peter referring to William Morris: '(Where others see "News from Nowhere" as about socialism, I see it as about sensibility.)'<sup>25</sup>

A first, obvious suggestion why any reference to the Arts and Crafts was suppressed might be the way William Morris cum suis was already appropriated by Pevsner and the defenders of the New Empiricism, in the pages of the *Review*, but also within the LCC architecture department. Also the association of the Arts and Crafts with the Garden City movement and how the planning of the post-war New Towns were based on its ideology must have made a straightforward discussion of the affinities with Arts and Crafts notions most problematic for the younger architects

22 Wouter Vanstiphout, 'Mart Stam's Trousers. A Conversation between Peter Smithson & Wouter Vanstiphout', in: *Crimson* with Michael Speakes and Gerard Haddes (eds.), *Mart Stam's Trousers: Stories from behind the Scenes of Dutch Moral Modernism*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1999, p. 134.

23 W.R. Lethaby, *Form in Civilization. Collected papers on Art and Labour*, Oxford University Press, 1957, second edition with a Foreword by Lewis Mumford, pp. 171-180; original edition 1922.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 7 and 9.

25 Peter Smithson, 'Architecture as Townbuilding – The Slow Growth of Another Sensibility', typescript of lecture in the Smithson archive, p. 3.

who were vociferous critics of the way the New Towns were planned. Next to Morris, John Ruskin was occasionally mentioned by the Smithsons, but rather as a general cultural reference, not quite as support of one's own argument.<sup>26</sup> Still, Lethaby seems to be the crucial connection, not just because he taught Alison's father but because of his writings, especially the proto-Functionalist argument which he provided in the texts compiled in *Form in Civilization. Collected Papers on Art and Labour*, originally published in 1922, republished in 1957 with a foreword by Lewis Mumford.<sup>27</sup> As a younger representative of the Arts and Crafts Lethaby also held a much more positive appreciation of modernization and industrialization (albeit still ambiguous perhaps) than the older Ruskin and Morris.<sup>28</sup> In a text from 1920, 'Housing and Furnishing', he stated for instance:

*'Housing, of course, is not merely a cottage question; it is an immense national question and also an immediately individual question in which we should all be decidedly interested. (...) Our aim should be to develop a fine tradition of living in houses. It is a matter for experiment, like flying. We should seek to improve in detail point by point. (...) Exquisite living on a small scale is the ideal. "House-like" should express as much as "ship-shape". Our airplanes and motors and even bicycles are in their way perfect. We need to bring this ambition for perfect solutions into housing of all sorts and scales.*

26 For instance, in the same 1972 lecture there is also an appreciative reference to Ruskin and how he looked at Bath, on p. 2.

27 Although there are quite a few of publications on Lethaby available the profound impact of his teachings remain underestimated; see for more: Julius Posener (ed.), *Anfänge des Funktionalismus. Von Arts and Crafts zum Deutschen Werkbund*, Bauwelt Fundamente Vol. 11, Verlag Ullstein, Berlin, 1964; Charlotte Vestal Brown, *W.R. Lethaby: Architecture as Process. Implications for a Methodology of History and Criticism*, Ph.D.-dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1974; Sylvia Backemeyer, Theresa Gronberg (eds.), *WR Lethaby 1857-1931. Architecture, Design and Education*, Lund Humphries, London, 1984; Godfrey Rubens, *William Richard Lethaby. His Life and Work 1857-1931*, The Architectural Press, London, 1986.

28 Lethaby was born in 1857, Ruskin in 1819, Morris in 1834.

29 W.R. Lethaby, 1957, pp. 29-30.

30 Ibid. p. 33.

31 Ibid. p. 30.

32 Ibid. p. 41.

*(...) A motor-car is built with thought for "style", that is finish and elegance, but it is not built to look like a sedan chair or a stage coach.'*<sup>29</sup>

And:

*'We must aim at getting the small house as perfect as the bicycle.'*<sup>30</sup>

The issue of style was called a 'superstition' and a 'chief obstruction' to arrive at 'having better houses'. If style had to be a matter of concern to architects, it should be 'an efficiency style' that was a substitute for the 'trivial, sketchy picturesqueness' of the 'style imitations and what the Americans call period design'.<sup>31</sup> Any sort of formalism was to be rejected, as already stated by Lethaby in 1915 in a talk for the new Design and Industries Association, co-founded by himself and partly modelled on the example of the German Werkbund:

*'Design is not some curious contortion of form, or some super-added atrocity, but it should rather be conceived of as the fitting of means to ends in the production of works which are good each in their own order.'*<sup>32</sup>

This was said when the Great War had just started, and the German-English exchanges between the pre-modernist architects of the Arts and Crafts and the Werkbund were disrupted. Five years later in 1920 – war had ended and revolution scourged the Continent in its aftermath – the moral imperative had become even stronger and Lethaby defined architecture now as: *'a living, progressive structural art, always readjusting itself to changing conditions of time and place. If it is true it must ever be new. This, however, not with a willed novelty, which is as bad as, or worse than, triumphal antiquarianism, but by response to force majeure. The vivid interest and awe with which men look on a ship or an engine, an old cottage or a haystack, come from the sense of their reality.'*<sup>33</sup>

These notions of Lethaby prefigured the Brutalist ethic of the 1950s and the call for an 'architecture of reality' as propounded by the Smithsons. These notions were most radical in a time when a Beaux Arts training for architects was still the norm of course, and they were to have a profound impact on design education in England through Lethaby's teachings at the Royal College and the Central School of Arts and Crafts, which he founded in 1896. The latter in particular, seems crucial, since in the first years after the Second World War the Central School was to become one of the original meeting places of the Independent Group members, next to the Slade School of Art and before they would meet at the ICA from 1952 onward. Lethaby's methodology was aimed at reconnecting the design with the actual production; designers and craftsmen should work together, so that designers better understand the craft behind the making the very things they would design. In his talk for the RIBA, 'Education of the Architect' of 1917, he called a 'real school of architecture' the kind of school where 'the young craftsman, builder, and architect would work together'.<sup>34</sup> Only from this a 'true' and 'living' architecture and art could grow. This is a common art shared and produced by all, an intrinsic part of the everyday life of ordinary people – a popular or even democratic kind of art, although Lethaby would not use such words. He would say:

*'What I mean by art, then, is not the affair of a few but of everybody. It is order, tidiness, the right way of making things and the right way of doing things'*.<sup>35</sup>

And:

*'This common art (...) is concerned with all the routine things of life – laying the breakfast table and cleaning the door-steps of*

33 Ibid. p. 6.

34 Ibid. pp. 103-104.

35 Ibid. p. 15.

*our houses, tidying up our railway stations, and lighting the High Streets of our towns.*<sup>36</sup>

At another occasion Lethaby mentioned how 'common art (...) is concerned with all the ordinary things of life'.<sup>37</sup>

Still, as much as they relied on such Arts and Crafts notions and built on the moral lessons of the spokesmen of the movement, the Smithsons' interest in the ordinary and what they called a 'new seeing of the ordinary' must eventually be situated in its connection with the experience of the Second World War and the subsequent years of scarcity before a new sort of consumer society arrived in England and Western Europe in the mid-1950s. Although others, most notably Beatriz Colomina, have pointed out the importance of the wartime experience as well, until now, this has been most clearly argued for by cultural theorist Ben Highmore.<sup>38</sup> Whereas Colomina highlights the interrelations between new concepts of domesticity and the strategies of total mobilization, Highmore's contribution foregrounds the connection between wartime experience, the interest in the everyday as a source of innovation, and the ethical imperative directing Brutalist aesthetics.

36 Ibid. p. 115.

37 Ibid. p. 125.

38 Ben Highmore, 'Rough Poetry: Patio and Pavilion Revisited', in: *Oxford Art Journal*, nr. 2, 2006, pp. 269-290; and Ben Highmore, 'Rescuing Optimism from Oblivion', in: Max Risselada, Dirk van den Heuvel (eds.), *Team 10. In Search of a Utopia of the Present 1953-1981*, NAi Publishers, Rotterdam, 2005, pp. 271-275. For Colomina's investigations into the relations between war and twentieth century domesticity see her *Domesticity at War*, Actar, Barcelona 2006, and Beatriz Colomina, Annmarie Brennan, Jeannie Kim (eds.), *Cold War Hothouses. Inventing Postwar Culture from Cockpit to Playboy*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2004.

39 As is well-known, this has become one of the key tropes of English identity; during the IRA bombings of the 1970s and later, as well as more recently with the Al Qaeda attacks in 2005, the stoicism of the English and the Londoners was once again pointed out in the many news reports. Highmore also demonstrates the more ambiguous view on this notion 'to keep on keeping on' referring to George Orwell and Samuel Beckett, see Ben Highmore, 'Rough Poetry', pp. 275-276.

As noted, in post-war London the bombsites formed an impressive part of the urban fabric, and nagging evidence of the fragility of ordinary, daily life when under consistent attack from a modern war machine. This was also very different from the event of the Great War, the First World War, which was on the Continent and left the island at least physically untouched; not so in the case of the Second World War. The country and its capital had only narrowly escaped complete collapse during the *Blitz* of 1940-1941. In his rereadings of the Independent Group history and the work of the Smithsons and their artist friends Henderson and Paolozzi, Ben Highmore has suggested that wartime experience had profoundly and irreversibly changed the meaning of the ordinary and the everyday. On the one hand the ordinary had lost the comfortable feeling of the things one took for granted, while on the other hand, keeping up daily routines, getting on with life under threat of total annihilation had also become something of an heroic act of resistance, but then without the expressions that normally come with such heroism. 'Keep calm, and carry on' was the famously stoic government war slogan during the bombings of London.<sup>39</sup> From this perspective Highmore speaks of an 'obligation toward the ordinary', and the 'fabrication of a practice

that is simultaneously critical and generative'.<sup>40</sup> Out of the ruins a new optimism was to be rescued. To Highmore the everyday should be regarded as a locus of both trauma and hope.

The Smithsons' collages of the early 1950s, their Golden Lane housing scheme and their Coventry cathedral competition entry, captured this most dramatically.<sup>41</sup> In the Golden Lane collages we see a new, white and transparent city emerge out of the rubble of the devastated city. The exact relationship between the two is suspended. Looking at those collages, it is as if the new architecture is not simply going to replace the old society, it is projected onto the ruins enjoying its own liberated, autonomous geometry, the very distance between the two worlds acting as a generative principle. Looking at the figures pasted into the new post-war landscape of Golden Lane, the inhabitants seem very different from any parochial English character; the first prime minister of independent India, Nehru, appears in the 'streets-in-the-air', just as French and American movie stars, Gérard Philipe and Marilyn Monroe together with Joe DiMaggio, recognition of the new post-war reality of a country that had lost its colonial empire, and that culturally speaking was invaded by both American and Continental sensibilities.

Wartime experience consistently emerges in the work of the Smithsons, as when they explained their interest in the ordinary and the As Found aesthetic they derived from it. Peter Smithson, in an interview with Kester Rattenbury as late as 2002, explained: *'I was thinking yesterday about the war itself. There's a little school on the corner, Bousefield School, where a landmine was dropped on Beatrix Potter's house. How is it that you can train an eighteen-year-old to drop a bomb on Beatrix Potter's house? It's unimaginable. I mean – incredible cruelty propounded as normality. If you can't imagine the condition of that boy who dropped the bomb, you can't also imagine the period of the "as found". It's just as removed, just as difficult to reconstruct.'*<sup>42</sup>

Regarding the As Found, the Smithsons' friendship with fellow Independent Group members Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi were formative, including their wartime experience – Henderson being traumatized as a fighter pilot, Paolozzi through his imprisonment after the death of his father, an Italian migrant, who made the mistake of having a picture of Mussolini in his shop in Edinburgh, for which he was imprisoned on a boat that was subsequently sunk by a German U-boat.<sup>43</sup> Alison and Peter

40 Highmore does so by referring to Michel de Certeau's writings, see: Ben Highmore, 'Obligation to the Ordinary: Michel de Certeau, Ethnography and Ethics', in: *Strategies*, Vol. 14, no. 2, 2001, pp. 253-263.

41 See also Ben Highmore, 'Rough Poetry', p. 283.

42 'Think of It as a Farm! Exhibitions, Books, Buildings. An Interview with Peter Smithson', in: Kester Rattenbury (ed.). *This Is Not Architecture. Media Constructions*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 96.

43 These biographical data can be found at various places; Highmore recounts them for instance in his 'Rough Poetry', for a biography on Henderson see Victoria Walsh, *Nigel Henderson. Parallel of Life and Art*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2001.

Smithson attributed their way of seeing the ordinary and their 'As Found' aesthetic to Henderson in particular, although Paolozzi's collage work and sculpture must have been tremendously influential, too.<sup>44</sup> The Smithsons would go as far as to state that Henderson taught them a whole new way of looking at things around them. He did so with his photographs of street life, his collages and the walks they undertook together in the working class neighbourhoods of East London, where Henderson resided and which had suffered most from the *Blitz*. The Smithsons in 1990 said:

*'In architecture, the "as found" aesthetic was something we thought we named in the early 1950s when we first knew Nigel Henderson and saw in his photographs a perceptive recognition of the actuality around his house in Bethnal Green: children's pavement play-graphics; repetition of "kind" in doors used as site hoardings; the items in the detritus on bombed sites, such as the old boot, heaps of nails, fragments of sack or mesh and so on.'*<sup>45</sup>

And explaining the 'As Found' as both critical and generative, they stated:

*'... the "as found" was a new seeing of the ordinary, an openness as to how prosaic "things" could re-energise our inventive activity.'*<sup>46</sup>

As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, this idea of 're-energising' or regeneration was key to the Smithsons project for modern architecture, the house and the city, where each moment of modern life held the possibility of a new beginning.

### The Everyday in Recent Architectural Criticism

The notions of re-energizing and invention identified by the Smithsons with the ordinary seem to bring them close to the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991), just as Lefebvre's definition of dwelling as appropriation seems akin to the Smithsons' position, in Lefebvre's words: 'For an individual, for a group, to inhabit is to appropriate something (...) making it one's own'.<sup>47</sup> Yet, from a historiographical point of view this observation must be measured against the various discursive contexts at stake.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Lefebvre's definition of appropriation assumed conflict in the first place, whereas the Smithsons' view could be best described as built on an idea of accommodation. Still, Lefebvre's work has enjoyed a revival in architecture theory for quite a couple of years now, and has become the common reference in an

44 Only recently the connections between New Brutalism and Eduardo Paolozzi's work were subject of research, see the special issue of *October*, nr. 136, Spring 2011, edited by Alex Kitnick and Hal Foster, and the PhD Thesis by Kitnick, *Eduardo Paolozzi and Others, 1947-1958*, Princeton University, November 2010; Nigel Henderson's work and its relations to the New Brutalism and Alison and Peter Smithson was the subject of Victoria Walsh's book of 2001.

45 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The "As Found" and the "Found"', in: David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group. Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, MIT press, Cambridge MA, London, 1990, pp. 201-202.

46 Ibid.

47 Henri Lefebvre, 'L'urbanisme aujourd'hui: Mythes et réalités: Débat entre Henri Lefebvre, Jean Balladur et Michel Ecochard' in: Henri Lefebvre, *Du rural à l'urbain*, Anthropos, Paris, 1970, p. 222; as quoted in: Lukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

48 In his *Henri Lefebvre on Space* Lukasz Stanek demonstrates how Lefebvre's ideas were formulated in the French context of a debate that was polarised between the models of the grands ensembles on the one hand, and the 'petit-bourgeois' desire for (semi) detached housing, the so-called pavillon model, on the other hand.

international debate regarding the interrelations of the everyday and architecture. This revival ran parallel – and probably not incidentally – to a renewed interest in the post-war avant-gardes, including the Independent Group and the work of the Smithsons.<sup>49</sup> It was the American art historian Hal Foster who was one of the first, if not the first indeed, to point to what he called the ‘return of the real’ and the ‘ethnographic turn’ in late twentieth century avant-garde practices.<sup>50</sup> The revival of the everyday and the parallel rereadings of the post-war avant-gardes, also in architecture circles, neatly fit this return to the real including the resurgent interest in anthropology and sociology and the concomitant redefinitions of the object, authorship, subjectivity and agency, something that is still very much part of today’s discourse, if not at its heart.<sup>51</sup>

American theorist Mary McLeod has written an insightful essay (published in 1997) on Lefebvre’s notion of the everyday, both (re-)introducing his ideas to an architecture audience and contextualizing his slightly shifting position from the 1920s until his death in 1991. One of the things highlighted by McLeod is how in Lefebvre’s view everyday life ‘harbors the desire that generates transformation. Nature, love, simple domestic pleasures, celebrations, and holidays all erode any prospect of total, static systematization’. According to McLeod the value of Lefebvre’s thinking would lie in his ‘emphasis on the concrete and the real, the humble and the ordinary, as reservoirs of transformation’.<sup>52</sup>

Until the 1990s, in architectural criticism the ‘everyday’ was hardly used as an explicit category. ‘Vernacular’ and ‘popular’ were the more conventional terms. The terms do not cover the same fields, but they do overlap, especially with regard to the identification of practices assumed to be outside of and parallel to modernism, modern architecture and the conditions of modernity. And although pertaining to phenomena outside modernism, the terms themselves are constituents of the larger modernist discourse. Within the discourse, the terms of the everyday, vernacular, and popular are generally used to resituate the conditions of modernity and modernism’s various practices, not unlike the (so worn-out) polarity of tradition and modernity, which still remains a key rhetorical figure in the architectural debate. The everyday, vernacular, and popular are used to try to define what escapes the mechanisms of modernity and capitalist production, the largely anonymous and assumedly spontaneous patterns of community and family life, inhabitation, festive uses of the city, of rural communities or so-called non-western and pre-modern societies.

49 The publications on the Independent Group include: David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group. Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, MIT press, Cambridge MA, London, 1990; Anne Massey, *The Independent Group, Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-59*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995; *Modern Dreams. The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1988; Claude Lichtenstein, Thomas Schreggenberger (eds.), *As Found. The Discovery of the Ordinary*, Lars Müller Publishers, Baden, 2001; my own research also fits this revival with various publications in *OASE*, nr. 51, 1999 (editorial), and in *OASE*, nr. 59, 2002 (‘As Found: The Metamorphosis of the Everyday. On the Work of Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Alison and Peter Smithson (1953-1956)’).

50 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real. The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1996, especially the chapters 5 and 6; Hal Foster, *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)*, Verso, London, 2002.

51 One could think of the work of Bruno Latour, or the journal *Footprint*, nr. 4, ‘Agency in Architecture: Reframing Criticality in Theory and Practice, Spring 2009, TU Delft, [www.footprintjournal.org](http://www.footprintjournal.org).

52 Mary McLeod, ‘Henri Lefebvre’s Critique of Everyday Life: An Introduction’, in: Steven Harris, Deborah Berke (eds.), *Architecture of the Everyday*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1997, pp. 9-29.

Charles Jencks, in his 'Evolutionary Tree to the Year 2000' (of 1969), lumped all these together under the category of 'unself-conscious' (a term borrowed from Claude Lévi-Strauss), which was assumed to encompass 80% of the built environment and, of course most characteristic of Jencks's position, this entailed largely capitalist and so-called state-capitalist production itself, the ultimate modern vernacular if one were to follow the American-English historian of postmodernism in architecture.<sup>53</sup> More commonly understood though, vernacular refers to the collection of practices and production that fell (and fall) outside of modern, capitalist logic, and pertain to pre- or non-modern communities. Popular as a term in the architecture discourse usually refers to the modern age and is rooted in 19th century discussions in Europe on culture and identity in relation to the invention of the nation state vis-à-vis processes of modernization, including the issue of class. Part of the underlying presumption, and why the terms are used to resituate modernism itself, is the assumption that authenticity and authentic meaning and identity are identified with the popular, vernacular, or the everyday – rightly or wrongly. Authentic meaning and identity emerge from the unself-conscious, from the fleeting, yet repetitive and cyclical patterns of life, and not from the artificially fabricated, which comes with capitalist production and the modern consumer society, nor from its educated and cultured lifestyle classes.

When in the late 1990s, the notion of the everyday gained wide currency in architectural circles, the terms of the popular and vernacular were largely abandoned.<sup>54</sup> This was probably for two reasons. First, vernacular and popular more or less lost their critical purposes after the postmodernist debates of the 1970s and 1980s. The everyday offered the possibility of continuing some of the initial social and ideological concerns that were part of those debates. At the same time the everyday was used to depart from the postmodernist turn to disciplinary autonomy under the guises of neo-rationalism, post-structuralism and its various formalist elaborations in favour of a renewed engagement with social concerns. The urge to once again bring up issues of sociology and politics in relation to architecture and planning was encouraged by the publication of the 1991 translation of Henri Lefebvre's well-known *Critique de la Vie Quotidienne* (1947), supported by the much earlier translation of his *La Production de l'Espace* (1974).<sup>55</sup> During the 1990s, Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* would become the main reference for most of the studies into the relation between the everyday and architectural discourse.<sup>56</sup> The book is by now

53 Charles Jencks, *Architecture 2000 and Beyond. Success in the Art of Prediction*, Wiley Academy, London, 2000, pp. 46-47.

54 The term is currently revived through historical, postcolonial studies esp. with regard to the sources of the development of modern architecture, see for instance *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean. Vernacular Dialogues and Contested Identities*, edited by Jean-François Lejeune and Michelangelo Sabatino, Routledge, London, 2010.

55 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, Grasset, Paris, 1947; *La production de l'espace*, Anthropos, Paris, 1974.



relatively well integrated into (parts of) architectural discourse, at first through the American academia, and shortly thereafter through the European as well.<sup>57</sup> Lefebvre's interest in urban space as a site for social and political engagement – embodied by his famous *Le droit à la ville* of 1968 and *La production de l'espace* of 1974 – adds to the firm, central position of his thinking in current architectural debates.<sup>58</sup> Another reason for the renewed interest in Lefebvre's position was and is due to his connections with radical (neo-)avant-garde groups, such as the Surrealists, the *Situationist International* and *Utopie*, and his involvement in the 1968 student revolts. Lefebvre thus represents a very real bridge between the sociological, political discourse and avant-garde architecture production.

Still, despite the central position that is given to Lefebvre's thinking in this discourse on the everyday and architecture, the possible connections between his work and the problematic of architectural practice remain rather elusive, not to mention the risk of the construction of a meta-historical discourse of the everyday and architecture itself. Basically, this troubled connection arises from Lefebvre's dialectic understanding of the everyday. To Lefebvre the everyday held a double potential: it is the realm of continuous alienation of the human subject (through the relentless processes of modernization, capitalist rationalization and commodification resulting in routine and boredom of a mechanized world, and the obliteration of the very everydayness of everyday life), as well as the realm of possible moments of critique, that might become moments of dialectically overcoming this very alienation, such as the moment of the popular *fête*, or festival. Attending to the everyday and its multitude of moments by which it is constituted, then becomes an ethical imperative. By devising ways of attending to everyday life ways of transformation might be opened up.<sup>59</sup> Architectural practice and production and their larger *dispositif* (to use Foucault's term), how these are embedded in power structures and how they reproduce those, are conventionally situated on the side of alienation, not its revolutionary overcoming. Perhaps inherently contradictorily then, within the multifarious interpretations of the Lefebvorean conception of the everyday two different approaches in architecture can be discerned, one concerned with pragmatics and one with poetics, and which seem to be considered under consistent negotiation in the actual architecture project.

56 Besides Lefebvre, mention should be made of Michel de Certeau and his seminal work, *L'invention du quotidien*, Vol. 1, *Arts de faire* (1974), which also regained some attention being already translated into English by 1984 as *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

57 See for instance Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom, and Christian Schmid (eds.), *Space, Difference, Everyday Life. Reading Henri Lefebvre*, Routledge, New York, 2008; latest fruit is Lukasz Stanek's *Henri Lefebvre on Space. Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2011.

58 For a discussion of Lefebvre's ideas regarding dwelling and urban space: Lukasz Stanek, 2011.

59 Next to McLeod's reading of Lefebvre, I largely follow Ben Highmore: see his 'Henri Lefebvre's Dialectics of Everyday Life', in: Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory. An Introduction*, Routledge, London 2002, pp. 113-144.

Publications of the late 1990s that attempted to operationalise the notion of the everyday in such ways were, among others, *Architecture of the Everyday* (1997) by Steven Harris and Deborah Berke, and *Everyday Urbanism* (1999) by Margaret Crawford and John Kaliski.<sup>60</sup> In his introductory text Harris positioned the new interest in the everyday against the 'virtual abandonment of architecture's social and political ambitions and the estrangement of direct experience from architectural discourse'. And he continued: 'Textual "readings" of the architectural project and a tendency toward formal hermeticism exacerbated the alienation of architecture from lived experience'.<sup>61</sup> Crawford, too, equalled the everyday with Lefebvre's concept of 'lived experience' stating that 'lived experience should be more important than physical form in defining the city'. According to her the issue at stake was not 'to make beautiful cities or well-managed cities, it is to make a work of life'.<sup>62</sup> This ethical stance was entirely in line with the champion of everyday city life, the American writer Jane Jacobs, who opposed any (neo-)avant-gardist approach toward the city and its planning. In her seminal *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* of 1961 Jacobs provokingly addressed designers stating that 'a city cannot be a work of art'.<sup>63</sup> Eventually, it is also in contrast with the Lefebvrian project itself, the revolutionary fervour of 1968, and his slogan 'Let everyday life be a work of art!'.<sup>64</sup> Apparently, this part of his legacy is not valid for these specific reactualizations by current theorists.

60 Other publications include: 'The Everyday', a special issue of the German magazine *Daidalos* (nr. 75, 2000); Alan Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking. Practices of Art, Architecture and the Everyday*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000; Lynn Gumpert (ed.), *The Art of the Everyday. The Quotidian in Postwar French Culture*, New York University Press, New York, 1997.

61 Steven Harris, 'Everyday Architecture', in: Harris, Berke (eds.), *Architecture of the Everyday*, p. 2.

62 Margaret Crawford, 'Introduction', in: Chase, Crawford, Kaliski (eds.), p. 10.

63 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 1961, Vintage Books edition, December 1992, p. 372.

64 As quoted in Highmore, p. 130; Mary McLeod deems Lefebvre less revolutionary in comparison with the Situationist International.

65 Claude Lichtenstein, Thomas Schregenberger (eds.), *As Found. The Discovery of the Ordinary*, Lars Müller Publishers, Baden, 2001; Bruno Krucker, *Complex Ordinarity. The Upper Lawn Pavilion by Alison and Peter Smithson*, GTA Verlag, ETH Zürich, 2002. Both publication accompanied exhibitions.

In contrast to these pragmatist American positions one also finds examples that continue the idea of merging everyday life and art through a practice of poetry that is derived from the everyday, although not quite as revolutionary as the early avant-gardes might have wanted it. In this regard two Swiss publications deserve some of our attention here: *As Found. The Discovery of the Ordinary* (2001) edited by Claude Lichtenstein and Thomas Schregenberger, and *Complex Ordinarity* (2002) by Bruno Krucker.<sup>65</sup> Quite remarkably, both studies take the work of the Smithsons as their point of departure, especially their idea of the *As Found*. Krucker looks exclusively at the Smithsons' work, while considering their Upper Lawn weekend home to be the most enigmatic project of the Smithsons' approach toward the ordinary. Lichtenstein and Schregenberger's study include a range of examples from British art and architecture from the 1950s. Both studies don't look into sociological issues, but rather re-investigate the everyday from an ethical-aesthetical design perspective without properly defining what is considered as

'ordinary'. Throughout, the two realms of ethics and aesthetics are consistently intertwined. The scrupulous editorial selections are nothing less than an attempt to revive the Brutalist programme as defined by the Smithsons in the 1950s, yet under very different, historical circumstances, but still with a profound interest for that 'which is', for 'reality', for the 'here and now', 'the real and the ordinary' including all that is considered to be the 'unfit'.<sup>66</sup> By aptly foregrounding the *As Found* as an 'approach' and not so much a method, the editors succeed in updating the *As Found* by inserting the selected black and white photos of 1950s British art with high-class Swiss architecture of the 1990s (Herzog & de Meuron among others), albeit in a most modest way. Although supportive of the whole undertaking, Peter Smithson himself seemed to have been slightly suspicious of this revival, too. At the AA School in London, at a seminar held at the occasion of the publication of the *As Found* book, he explained that at the time of origination the idea of the *As Found* was an important thing, because the *As Found* was also a way to make the most of the very little that was available. The early 1950s were a time of tremendous scarcity, very different from the society of the late twentieth, early twenty-first century, which was characterised by an abundance of possibilities.<sup>67</sup>

### Culture is Ordinary

Whereas current academic discourse holds a preference to construct a connection between Lefebvre and architectural practice regarding the issue of the everyday, the contemporary British discourse seems much more appropriate as well as productive when historicizing the Smithson position, most notably that particular tradition of British cultural Marxism as developed in the disciplinary fields of literary criticism and cultural studies.<sup>68</sup> The work of the writer and critic Raymond Williams, one of the spiritual fathers of British cultural studies and a contemporary of the Smithsons, holds a crucial position here. To understand the concept of ordinariness as developed by Alison and Peter Smithson, as well as the mentality that was behind the pursuit of ordinariness, Williams' writings are as eloquent as they are elucidating, especially the essay 'Culture is Ordinary' (1958) and his more extensive studies *Culture and Society* (1958), *The Long Revolution* (1961) and *The Country and the City* (1973).<sup>69</sup> At the same time, it should be noted that we are again looking at

66 Lichtenstein, Schregenberger, 2001, p. 9.

67 At the AA School in London, 2 November 2001.

68 As yet, I haven't come across any architectural study that looks into the intellectual context of British cultural studies with regard to the discourse on the ordinary and the everyday, not even the Anglo-American publications. One explanation might be that British cultural studies grew out of literary criticism and not sociology, as in the case of the French tradition, or that other well-known referent for architects and planners, the Chicago School.

69 Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', originally published in: Norman Meckenzie (ed.), *Convictions*, MacGibbon and Kee, London, 1958; republished in many later volumes, among others in: Ben Highmore (ed.), *The Everyday Life Reader*, Routledge, London, 2002, pp. 92-100.

parallel projects, even though the Smithsons did refer to Williams, albeit as late as the 1970s.<sup>70</sup>

A first observation would be that the Smithsons themselves just like Williams did not use the term 'everyday', but spoke of the 'ordinary', a first hint that the 'ordinariness' the Smithsons wrote so much about, is part of a tradition different from the French one. With regard to the current discourse on the everyday based on French theory, another observation would be that the Smithsons didn't refer to the French intellectual discourse at all. They made few, sparse references to French novels, film and painting, but none whatsoever to the then so fashionable thinkers, the intellectual heavy-weights such as Sartre or Barthes, let alone Lefebvre. The occasional reference the Smithsons made to the general cultural discourse outside the realm of architecture were usually of English or American origin, and usually these were from mainstream authors, such as Karl Popper and his idea of an open society, the sociologists Michael Young and Peter Wilmott and their famous *Family and Kinship in East London*, Kenneth Galbraith for his *The Affluent Society*, or William Whyte for *The Organization Man*. The Smithsons would almost casually insert these references in their own writings, their function being to point out their intellectual affinities, rather than rigorously reconceptualizing a political-philosophical discourse. It may be noted too, that this was quite in contrast with the way they consistently and precisely rethought the discourse of their own profession, and that of modern architecture in particular.

To situate the Smithsons in the debates on either the everyday or the ordinary then is to speak of affinities indeed, or a sensibility, as they themselves would put it. Here, at this point, British cultural studies of the second half of the twentieth century and Williams' writings in particular, provide the historical and contextual background for a better understanding of the specific Smithsons' sensibility, especially since Williams forged a crucial connection between culture and the ordinary when explaining the English identity of the twentieth century and the condition of modernity. Williams distinguished two meanings that according to him were always simultaneously at work, both the high-brow, 'elitist' meaning, as well as 'a whole way of life', he wrote: *'We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life – the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction.'*<sup>71</sup>

70 Alison Smithson, 'The Violent Consumer, or Waiting for the Goodies', in: *Architectural Design*, May 1974, pp. 274-279.

71 Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', 1958, republished in: Ben Highmore (ed.), *The Everyday Life Reader*, Routledge, London, 2002, pp. 92-100, for quote see p. 93.

The double meaning attached to culture – the common, as well as discovery and creativity, and both of equal importance – was close to the double meaning the Smithsons sought to deliver when they said that things needed to be both ordinary and heroic, both ordinary and poetic. Williams' double meaning also came close to the double meaning the Independent Group deployed in its attempt to reverse hierarchies and seek a new 'continuum' between the popular and the fine arts as formulated by Lawrence Alloway.<sup>72</sup> However, once again, it must be stressed we are not looking at an unified project here. For instance, the almost carefree way of absorbing American culture by Independent Group members differed substantially from the anti-Americanism prevalent in the circles of British cultural studies, in which the general view was that commercial American culture (the Hollywood film industry for instance) perverted authentic British working class culture, most notably in the case of Williams' colleagues Richard Hoggart and E.P. Thompson who entertained a much more orthodox neo-Marxism compared to Williams.

For Williams, to deploy the term 'culture' was a deliberate discursive strategy within the Marxist discourse of British cultural studies; in doing so he succeeded in ridding himself of the category of 'ideology'. His classic *Culture and Society (1780-1950)* of the same year as the essay 'Culture is Ordinary', and which discussed the five terms art, class, democracy, culture and industry and their interrelatedness, was consciously framed to move away from orthodox Marxist doctrine and terminology such as base and superstructure. After all, Williams, who was a member of the Communist party in his younger years, was not a revolutionary, he was a reformist. For this, he would be heavily criticized from within British cultural studies. He was pejoratively called a 'culturalist', and Thompson would state that culture was not a 'whole way of life', but a 'whole way of struggle'. To the neo-Marxist position the 'culturalist' approach of Williams was taking too distant a position when speaking of the 'long revolution', while glossing over the immediate conflict and strife at stake.<sup>73</sup>

Were Alison and Peter Smithson culturalists in the vein of Williams? Yes and no, of course. First, the Smithsons never even flirted with Marxism, at times they would try to maintain a firm a-political stance, but never quite succeeded in doing so, since their consistent emphasis on ethics and the role of the architect in society at large would raise all sorts of ideological issues, too. Also, by the early 1940s, culture as a notion to diagnose

72 Lawrence Alloway, 'The Arts and the Mass Media', in: *Architectural Design*, February 1958, pp. 84-85, and: 'The Long Front of Culture', in: *Cambridge Opinion*, nr. 17, 1959.

73 I follow Dennis Dworkin here, see: Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain. History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1997; E.P. Thompson's quote is from his book review of Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution*, 1961, in: *The New Left Review*, no. 9, May-June 1961, pp. 24-33.

contemporary society had become a widely used concept. For instance, Lewis Mumford published his *Culture of Cities* in 1938, and Ruth Benedict had popularized the term with her *Patterns of Culture* of 1934.

Still, between the intellectual trajectories of the Smithsons and Williams, there are quite a few overlaps to note, starting with Williams' concept of culture as 'a whole way of life', which comes very close to the Smithsons' credo for the New Brutalism: 'We see architecture as the direct result of a way of life'.<sup>74</sup> Some authors have taken this quote as a plea for a surrealist practice of architecture, like an *écriture automatique*, which seems not wholly unjustified looking at the web of artists' connections the Smithsons maintained.<sup>75</sup> However, when thinking of the sensibility or mentality as propounded by the Smithsons, the Brutalist credo must be understood as being in the first place a 'culturalist' one. In the Smithsons' writings the 'whole way of life' re-appears as 'the whole problem of human associations and the relationship that building and community form has to them'.<sup>76</sup>

The American historian Dennis Dworkin gave a lucid and succinct summary of culturalism and culture as a whole way of life. He explained that:

*'(...) lifestyle, "the whole way of life", and culture, (...) was often referred to (...) as "culturalist." There were two dimensions to culturalism. On the one hand, it was a rejection of Marxist economic determinism. Culturalists saw the social process as a complex result of economic, political, and cultural determinations, and they insisted that none of these determinations was primary. On the other hand, they saw culture in broader terms – as a whole way of life. From this point of view, culture was the social process itself, economics and politics constituent parts.'*<sup>77</sup>

74 'The New Brutalism', in: *Architectural Design*, January 1955.

75 Irénée Scalbert did so in his essay 'Toward a Formless Architecture: the House of the Future by A+P Smithson', in: *Archis*, September 1999, pp. 34-47.

76 Alison and Peter Smithson, manuscript 'Brutalism A.D.', 23 February 1957, published as part of 'Thoughts in Progress. The New Brutalism', in: *Architectural Design*, April 1957, p. 113.

77 Dennis Dworkin, 1997, p. 60.

78 John Summerson, 'The Case for a Theory of Modern Architecture', in: *RIBA Journal*, June 1957, pp. 307-313; lecture given at the RIBA, 21 May 1957.

The social as process is key, especially with reference to the Smithson position – and how they would use this notion for their own definition of the modern tradition. The notion of the social as process will return later, when discussing the principles of order at stake in the Smithsons' rethinking of modern architecture, for which they built on John Summerson's propositions for a possible theory of modern architecture, among others his suggestion that 'the source of unity in modern architecture is in the social sphere, in other words in the architect's programme', a programme that was summed up as a 'local fragment of a social pattern' and a 'process in time'.<sup>78</sup> Here, meaning and identity are (re)produced

and transformed in the 'long' or slow unfolding of this process, as consistently pointed out by Williams. While Williams spoke of the 'long revolution' referring to the long term effects of the Industrial Revolution, Peter Smithson would talk of 'the slow growth of another sensibility', arguing for the coming to terms with what he called the 'machine-served society', Smithson's idea for the late twentieth century variant of the early Industrial Revolution.<sup>79</sup>

Between Williams and the Smithsons another handful of rather striking similarities can be pointed out. Williams and the Smithsons viewed modernization as a positive force of progress, despite its many negative sides, such as pollution, exploitation and commodification, something that is most important to note with regard to the postmodern and post-structuralist turn of the 1970s. Both were unequivocally explicit about this; to them positive effects included a higher standard of living and education for all. Both mentioned social mobility as well. This positive appreciation stood in profound contrast with key positions in the French discourse, including the one of Lefebvre, or the Situationists, who regarded modernization as a process of continuous alienation. Partly because of this positive evaluation of the achievements of modernization, the Smithsons were inclined to take on a reformist position, rather than a revolutionary one, again similar to Williams. Incidentally, this also explains why the classic difference between 'culturalism' and a so-called 'progressivism' in the architecture discourse of the 1960s and 70s as introduced by Françoise Choay falls short of the Smithson's position.<sup>80</sup> If one were to follow Choay the Smithsons could paradoxically be categorized within both models, their work and thinking including elements of both a nostalgically regressive existentialism and a forward-looking positivism, to put it in crude terms.

With regard to working class culture they held an ambiguous position, the Smithsons more so than Raymond Williams. On the one hand working class communities were positively held against the *bourgeoisie* for such values of 'neighbourhood, mutual obligation, and common betterment', as listed by Williams.<sup>81</sup> Yet, there was also a deep aversion to the vulgarity and the cultivation of working class attitudes, the vandalism, and the anti-intellectualism. In the case of Alison and Peter Smithson this ambiguous appreciation of working class culture would result in profound disappointment with regard to the whole project of the welfare state. By the late 1960s, early 1970s the Smithsons viewed the initial project of the post-war years as morally perverted and

79 Peter Smithson, lecture given at Cornell University 1972, integrated in *Without Rhetoric*, 1973.

80 Françoise Choay, *L'urbanisme. Utopies et réalités*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1966; see also Françoise Choay, 'Urbanism & Semiology', in: Charles Jencks and George Baird, *Meaning in Architecture*, George Braziller, New York, 1970 (original edition 1969), pp. 26-37.

81 Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', 1958, p. 96.

they would speak most disdainfully of the 'Labour Union Society' and its all-pervasive materialism.<sup>82</sup> It is perhaps also at this point that one might locate the definitive shift of the Smithsons' attention from the street as a trope of the ordinary to the domestic.

### The New Model House

Within the general discourse on the everyday, the house and the street are clearly the preferred sites for observing and intervention. The house and housing design hold a crucial place in the modern architecture discourse, and they are almost always linked to the issue of large scale city planning. Especially, the house is regarded as the paradigm by which new traditions establish themselves. Thus, the house, its planning, notions of domesticity, and its relation to the city constitute a site of consistent contestation.<sup>83</sup> It was Peter Collins who was the first to define the house as the paradigm of the larger modern era. In his classic but not so often referred to *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture* of 1965, the English-Canadian historian put this hypothesis of the home as the site specific to modern architecture in the most eloquent of terms:

*'In each architectural era there is usually one building-type which dominates all others, and which, because of the attention lavished on it by influential patrons, tends to affect the design of buildings contemporary with it. In ancient Greece the dominant building-type was the temple; in mediaeval Europe it was the church; in Renaissance Europe it was the palace. After 1750 the dominant building-type is not so obvious, since the variety of different building-types became suddenly more numerous – a development which in itself was yet another characteristic distinguishing the modern age. But in so far as any one building-type could, more than another, be said to influence the general theory of architecture after 1750, it was the villa, defined by J.C. Loudon, in his Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture, as "a country residence with pleasure garden attached." (...)*

And Collins continued:

*'Villas, because of their multiplicity, their relatively modest dimensions and their unrestricted sites, allowed the current propensity for romanticism to be most fully exploited and expressed, and the importance of their subsequent influence cannot be exaggerated. Not only at the beginning of the modern era, but*

82 For instance in Alison Smithson (ed.), *Team 10 Meetings 1953-1984*, Rizzoli, New York, 1991; the report on the 1974 Rotterdam meeting.

83 To my knowledge the exact relationship between the development of the modern architecture discourse and the house as a paradigm has not been the subject of a comprehensive study, although there is an exhaustive number of publications available that address the topic, mostly through specific case studies (just as this dissertation actually). Examples of a tentative overview are: Hilde Heynen, 'Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and Contradictions', in: Hilde Heynen, Gülsüm Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity. Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, Routledge, London, 2005, pp. 1-29; Beatriz Colomina, 'The Exhibitionist House', in: Russell Ferguson (ed.), *At the End of the Century. One Hundred Years of Architecture*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and Harry N. Abrams Publishers, New York, 1998, pp. 126-165; Helen Searing, 'Case Study Houses. In the Grand Modern Tradition', in: Elizabeth A. T. Smith, *Blueprints for Modern Living. History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1989, pp. 106-129.



*throughout the whole period from 1750 to 1950, architectural theory was dominated by factors more strictly appropriate only to domestic architecture; and it is by no means coincidental that the most influential architectural pioneers of the present century, such as Wright, Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, originally gave expression to their theories by building either villas for wealthy connoisseurs or, after the 1918 war, modest dwellings for artisans or impecunious artists. The romantic suburban villa was not so much a minor building-type characteristic of the early nineteenth century, as a paradigm for the architecture of the whole age.'*<sup>84</sup>

In itself, Collins' hesitance to apply the modernist concept of *Zeitgeist* to the modern era remains interesting to note.<sup>85</sup> Yet apparently the conclusion is inevitable, with the event of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the middle classes, the individual home becomes both the ultimate outcome and the register of the processes of modernization at play.<sup>86</sup>

The Spanish-American historian Beatriz Colomina too, identified the home as the site par excellence for the invention of modern architecture stating 'that the history of the architecture of the [twentieth] century is the history of the search for a house'.<sup>87</sup> Discussing the work of Alison and Peter Smithson and the way their work is embedded within the wider web of the modern architecture discourse, she identified a 'pervasive sense of domesticity' with the Smithsons, and their predecessors: '*Literal domesticity, as when the Smithsons reflect on the Eames' breakfast table, only to go back historically to the Walter and Ise Gropius breakfast table in their house in Lincoln, Massachusetts and we end up with an image of Alison at breakfast, on a snowy day in their country house at Fonthill.*'<sup>88</sup>

And further describing the way the Smithsons practised the writing of history, and how they deployed the concept of three generations, she found:

*'[C]onceptual domesticity, as when the Smithsons organize the history of architecture as that of a family, a small family. (...) The family tree tells the story of a search for the ideal house. The grandfathers Mies and Le Corbusier are evaluated in terms of this search. As Peter put it: "Both Le Corbusier and Mies struggle with the same essential problems over the decades. With the reinvention of the house." What the Smithsons inherited and the Eames inherited is this quest.'*<sup>89</sup>

84 Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture 1750-1950*, Faber and Faber, London, 1965; 1998 reprint, McGill-Queen's University Press, p. 42.

85 Also note the use of the concept of the paradigm at this point, only three years after Thomas Kuhn's seminal publication.

86 The reference to Loudon's publication is key, of course, since the book of 1833 was among the first to address the new patronage of the middle class; John Claudius Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture*, 1833.

87 Beatriz Colomina, 'Couplings', pp. 32-33 in: *OASE*, nr. 51, 'Re-arrangements. A Smithson Celebration', June 1999, pp. 20-33.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 27-28 and p. 32.

The reduction of the modern architecture discourse including the Smithson contribution to the singular site of the house is most effective in reorganizing the narrative of modern architecture, yet it remains remarkable, to say the least, and is in need of some measurement, even though it seems widely accepted. One deviating view on this matter comes from Eric Mumford who defined the history of CIAM as a 'discourse on urbanism', not architecture or housing.<sup>90</sup>

If indeed inhabitation, the house and housing were the main focus of the Smithson effort, the city was always part of it. Since, as they already put it in their 'doorstep philosophy', the house looks both inward and outward:

*'The house, the shell which fits man's back, looks inward to family and outward to society and its organisation should reflect this duality of orientation. The looseness of organisation and ease of communication essential to the largest community should be present in this, the smallest.'*<sup>91</sup>

The Smithsons defined urban planning as an extension of dwelling, stating that 'it all hinges on the housing solution', and that 'the house is the first definable city element'.<sup>92</sup>

Dwelling was the starting point to rethink the organisation of the whole of the city. The examples in the Smithsons' work are countless. For instance, the opening lines to the posthumously published 'Urbanism' volume of *The Charged Void* referred to the various styles of living that came into being with the inventions of the English domestic square and its mews, and the rows of railway cottages with the footpaths along the lines. The first concept explained was the one of 'cluster' which was referred to as the result of the Smithsons' 'search for meaningful groupings in housing'.<sup>93</sup>

90 Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2000.

91 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light. Urban Theories 1952-1960 and their Application in a Building Project 1963-1970*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1970, p. 44.

92 Ibidem, p. 44 and p. 36.

93 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Urbanism*, 2005, p. 13 and 20.

94 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Thirty Years of Thoughts on the House and Housing', in: Denys Lasdun (ed.), *Architecture in an Age of Scepticism. A Practitioner's Anthology*, Heinemann, London, 1984, pp. 172-191.

Another example of the central position of housing in the Smithson's work concerns the Smithsons' contribution to Denys Lasdun's anthology *Architecture in the Age of Scepticism*, of 1984. When the Smithsons were asked by their colleague to reflect on their view on architecture, the possibilities and duties involved, and how these were expressed through their work, the Smithsons contributed twenty pages of 'thirty years of thoughts on the house and housing'.<sup>94</sup> There was no explicit argument made why they limited their contribution to the issue of housing, there was just a chronological list ranging from the smallest and most modest kind of intervention – replacing the upper windows in the Koestler

house in Austrian Alpbach – to the largest, most generic scheme of ‘patio mat-housing’ for Kuwait City. Whereas their fellow Brits used the opportunity to demonstrate their design versatility – Norman Foster for instance, extensively documented his project for the HSBC bank office tower in Hong Kong, while James Stirling came up with one prestigious cultural commission after the other, among others the Stuttgart Staatsgalerie and various American university projects – the Smithsons limited themselves mainly to rough sketches, diagrams and drawings of ideas for dwelling; at the same time, the bigger and realized projects were left out. The Economist was only mentioned by way of the Boodles Club residential rooms (called ‘a classic “appliance cubicle” plan arrangement’), Robin Hood Gardens was shown by way of two collages of individual flats, and St Hilda’s was mentioned only for its ‘tutor’s flat’ in one of the corners of the building.

The interconnections between house, housing design and town planning as we find in the case of the Smithsons quite naturally fit the modernist discourse – not just the strand as represented by CIAM and its celebrated concepts of the *Wohnung für das Existenzminimum* and the Functional City, but the much wider discourse ranging from Ebenezer Howard’s Garden Cities, Tony Garnier’s Cité Industrielle, Berlage’s vast extension schemes for Amsterdam and the public housing enclaves of Red Vienna. After all, it was only through (re)conceptualizing such interconnections between housing and city that building production, housing design and the living environment of the working and lower middle classes could be drastically improved.

When Alison and Peter Smithson became active within CIAM circles they teamed up with kindred younger architects who felt both critical to the CIAM procedures and loyal to what they viewed as the true cause of modern architecture.<sup>95</sup> Together with their MARS friends William (Bill) and Gill Howell they sought to replace the concept of the Functional City with their proposal for an approach to town planning based on ‘human association’. According to them ‘life’ itself fell ‘through the net of the four Functions’, and a ‘more delicate, responsive, net’ was needed.<sup>96</sup> To this end they conceived the famous diagram of a ‘hierarchy of association’ ranging from ‘voluntary’ to ‘involuntary association’ and from ‘house’ via ‘street’ and ‘district’ to ‘city’.<sup>97</sup> The different levels of association were distinguished in a pre-Jane Jacobs vein by such not so rational categories as ‘nodding acquaintance’, ‘one confidant’, or ‘work associates’.

95 For a history of Team 10 see: Alison Smithson (ed.), *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, AAGSTheory and History Papers 1.82, Architectural Association, London, 1982; Alison Smithson (ed.), *Team 10 Meetings 1953-1984*, Rizzoli, New York, 1991, Max Risselada, Dirk van den Heuvel (eds.) *Team 10 – in search of a Utopia of the present 1953-1981*, NAi Publishers, Rotterdam, 2005; see also the special issue of *Rassegna: The Last CIAMs* as compiled by Jos Bosman and others, nr. 52, December 1992; and Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*, 2000.

96 Alison Smithson, *Team 10 Meetings*, 1991, p. 9.

97 As published in Alison Smithson (ed.), *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, 1982, pp. 8-9; much of this argument is republished in various Smithson publications such as *Upper Case, Urban Structuring* and in *Ordinariness and Light*.

The report that the Smithsons and Howells presented together ('Commission Six – Report of the English Group') started with the house and its requirements:

*'There should be a basic programme for the dwelling in terms of the activities of the family, considering them separately and in association with each other. (THE HOUSE).'*'<sup>98</sup>

Second, the immediate outside space of the house was considered:

*'We should then consider the first point of contact outside the dwelling here children learn for the first time of the world outside the home and here are carried on those adult activities which are essential to everyday life, for instance, shopping, making minor repairs, posting letters, cleaning the car, or exercising the dog. (THE STREET).'*'<sup>99</sup>

In *Ordinariness and Light* this was slightly differently put by the Smithsons:

*'The "street" is an extension of the house; in it children learn for the first time of the world outside the family; it is a microcosmic world in which the street games change with the seasons and the hours are reflected in the cycle of street activity.'*<sup>100</sup>

The relationship house-street was crucial to the Smithsons' notion of 'doorstep', especially with regard to their idea of identity. As they put it:

*'In the suburbs and slums the vital relationship between the house and the street survives, children run about (the street is comparatively quiet), people stop and talk, dismantled vehicles are parked. In the back gardens are pigeons and so on, and the shops are round the corner: you know the milkman, you are outside your house in your street.'*<sup>101</sup>

That the house was considered the 'first definable element' shines through all Smithson statements made. Note for instance how the 'street' as an extension of the house is put between quotation marks by the Smithsons, whereas the house is not. When the Smithsons talked about the street they kept emphasizing that it was the 'idea' of the street that was important to them,<sup>102</sup> they would not do so in the case of the house. Regarding the street, or other more traditional public spaces, they stated that: *'Re-identifying man with his environment cannot be achieved by using historical forms of house-groupings: streets, squares, greens, etc., as the social reality they represent no longer exists.'*<sup>103</sup>

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 45.

101 Ibid., p.43; emphasis original.

102 Ibid., p.52.

103 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Urban Structuring*, Studio Vista, London / Reinhold Publishing Corporation, New York, 1967, p. 22.

To define the two higher levels of association turned out to be even more problematic. Hence, the two next steps of district and city received much less attention than the house and the street, since the Smithsons (together with the Howells) found it 'extremely difficult to define the higher levels of association – the street implies a physical contact community; the district an acquaintance community; and the city an intellectual contact community.'<sup>104</sup>

The difficulties encountered when trying to define these larger scale entities were extensively discussed by the Smithsons.

It all boiled down to the observation that:

*'social groups are not created by location alone but by community of interest and physical and psychological interdependence.*

*The family can still be tight-knit and possessive when its members are thousands of miles apart; the "extended family" can be scattered through many districts and classes of a town; and the "assessment group" of the intellectual or artist may be international and non-colligial, yet with more in common than with many neighbours.*

*The assumption that a community can be "created" by geographic isolation is invalid.*

*Real social groups cut across geographical borders, and the principal aid to social cohesion is looseness of grouping and ease of communication rather than the isolation of arbitrary sections of the total community with impossibly difficult communications, which characterise both English neighbourhood planning and the Unité concept of Le Corbusier.'*<sup>105</sup>

The house and the street then were the two 'elements' of city planning which received most attention, and between the two of them, the house was clearly the Smithsons' favourite as the 'first definable element'. Debating the future of CIAM and modern architecture, they came up with a typical *Zeitgeist* definition identifying the home as the key assignment for architects, most notably with the middle class as main patronage, even when indirect through institutional representation as happened in the case of the post-war welfare state. In itself this could be hardly surprising, the tradition of modern architecture including the idea of the house as paradigm was by then already firmly established; what was different though, was how the Smithsons proposed not to look for universal solutions to the question of the house but for a 'type object' of cultural specificity.

During the debates on the issue of Habitat, which divided the CIAM organisation from 1952 onward until its demise in 1959,

104 Alison Smithson (ed.), *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, 1982, p. 9; also in Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 48.

105 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, pp. 42-43; most of this (including the terms extended family and assessment group) was borrowed from the essay 'The Social Basis of Town Planning' by Rattray Taylor, published in *Architects' Year Book*, no. 4, 1952, pp. 27-32; I thank Volker Welter for pointing out the crucial importance of this essay to the Smithsons' thinking on the relations between architecture, town planning and social studies.

the Smithsons wrote in one of the many versions of their Habitat statements:

*'Every culture produces type objects, indeed it is through them that a culture can be defined. From pre-history to contemporary peasant society, each culture has thrown up a limited number of house forms.'*<sup>106</sup>

This formulation was still in a most Corbusian vein, and culture and *Zeitgeist* seemed quite balanced here. Yet, while still insisting on the search for an *objet type* for the house, the Smithsons then proposed a first shift by explicitly introducing the notion of culture, speaking of 'unique' forms and 'each culture group', thus rejecting universalist CIAM ideals:

*'The culture expresses itself through these forms.*

*Today's problem is to define that form unique to each culture group.*

*The search for a universal norm (Charte de l'Habitat) is meaningless, for we patently have not got a universal culture.*

*The following is an attempt to produce a programme for the house form of our own culture.*

**CULTURE GROUP** *United Kingdom*

**DATE** *1954*

**SOCIETY (Contenu)** *Welfare State*

- a) *Levelling down of middle and upper classes – leads to demand for the optimum dwelling. i.e. Easily worked and satisfying our behaviour patterns.*
- b) *Removal of economic limits to working class aspirations leads to same demands as above.*

#### **PROGRAMME FOR THE ARCHITYPAL (UR-typal) HOUSE**

**(Contenant)** *Three bedrooms*

*1 Living room*

*1 Kitchen-dining*

*1 Bath with W.C.*

*1 Separate W.C.'*<sup>107</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, three page manuscript 'Habitat – Every culture produces type objects, (...)', dated 1954, published in: Alison Smithson (ed.), *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, 1982, pp. 14-16.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.; note: 'UR-typal' is wordplay on 'ur' and the Smithsons' Urban Re-identification grid or UR-grid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

This 'house form' was to be 'self evidently architypal', and still according to the Smithsons, it 'crystalised' 'our culture pattern and be as pertinent a symbol as the croft and the Georgian town house before it. Its basis will be organisation not style or space standards.'<sup>108</sup>

This idea of the house as an expression of culture was always behind the Smithsons' designs for individual homes, as well as collective housing schemes, and it would reappear time after time during their career in various guises, whether it concerned the design for their own Brutalist home, the Soho House (1952-1953), the brick Sugden House or the plastic House of the Future, both from 1956, or any of the subsequent designs, such as the Yellow House (1976) or the Put-Away Villa (1993-2000). Also the Valley Section grid of 1955-1956 for the tenth CIAM conference in Dubrovnik, which included five different design proposals for five different situations was a demonstration of this search for 'object types'.<sup>109</sup>

The unbuilt New Model House (1965-1971), a design initially developed as part of the urban redevelopment scheme for the village of Street in Somerset, was also intended as a clear response to this question of the house as a type object.<sup>110</sup> It is also known under the name of Burleigh Lane Houses, and it comprises a set of detached, two-storey houses grouped around a common lawn.<sup>111</sup> It was accompanied by a five page typescript re-stating the Smithsons' convictions on the subject, including a revision of their earlier judgment of the suburb, its qualities and the specific demand for suburban housing: *'One has to face the fact eventually that it is mostly what it looks like, not how it performs that makes the small detached or semi-detached housing estate unacceptable to architects. For we have to accept that speaking in terms of performance the widening of motor-car ownership has validated loose densities. (...) The suburb is what most people want, and there are few valid reasons that can be advanced against it – although it is hard to admit that the wheel has come round to the Garden City boys after all, not because they were right all along, but because circumstances have changed.'*<sup>112</sup>

Further discussing such typical middle class issues as pride of ownership, the cost of living, and privacy they defined 'a "new model" house in which it is possible without social disadvantage to anyone else to eat out-of-doors, let-off fireworks, have children's parties or even kipper barbecues.' Various earlier attempts are mentioned which the Smithsons regarded as almost good, although not quite good enough. Mies van der Rohe's low rise housing for Detroit's Lafayette Park was a key example to them, just as two British examples of their contemporaries: the Chick House designed by Powell & Moya and Span housing

109 These designs are all documented in Van den Heuvel, Risselada, 2004.

110 Jeremy Gould gave an extensive presentation on Street and the various projects that the Smithsons did as consultants for the shoe factory Clark's. This relationship lasted over twenty years (1964-1986); parts of this work are included in the two volumes of *The Charged Void*, Monacelli Press, New York. Smithson study day, organized by the Twentieth Century Society at Bath University, 3 September 2011.

111 For a documentation plus a brief explanation, see: Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, 2001, pp. 336-337, and 'Thirty Years of Thought about Housing', in Denys Lasdun (ed.), *Architecture in the Age of Scepticism*, Heinemann, London, 1984.

112 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'New Model House', unpublished manuscript dated 24 February 1965, pp. 1-2; the last line is a clear indication of a shift away from the 1950s CIAM debates in which the Smithsons, together with others such as John Voelcker, proposed highrise solutions to the housing problem.

('a very powerful near-model') by Eric Lyons and the Span company. With an architecture characterised by 'brick end walls, brick party wall, two strips of windows, end to end gable over' and with 'the spandril between the window strips on the derivate tile-hung on the outside' these two latter designs exemplified a 'present folk-style' to the Smithsons.

The 1960s New Model House as envisaged by the Smithsons for the village of Street is terribly modest and ordinary in its appearance and it is hard to imagine any other project further removed from their early attempts at continuing the heroic avant-garde practices of the pre-war generations, such as the Golden Lane scheme of 1952-1953 and the competition entry for Hauptstadt Berlin of 1957-1958. As noted by Robin Middleton when reviewing the Garden Building for St Hilda's College, after the realization of the Economist's the Smithsons seem to have become much more laconic regarding the image of their architecture, not looking for any kind of iconic or 'totem architecture' any more.

Key to the design of the suburban house are its basic L-shape, the way in which this shape organises the spaces around the house, and how the house and its lot could be aggregated into a larger grouping. The L-shape of the house consists of two wings embracing a terrace space on the private back side of the house. Living room and kitchen occupy the ends of the wings, the garage and hallway occupy the centre, being closest to the street side. On the top floor three bedrooms (one master bedroom, two smaller ones) and ample closets for bathing, laundry, and dressing are situated. The master bedroom and dressing closet occupy one wing, the smaller bedrooms (apparently for the children) occupy the other, thus granting the children and the parents each their own territory and piece of privacy from family life. The oblique positioning on the lot creates two spaces on the street side, one slightly more formal giving access to the front door, the other reserved for odd jobs, car cleaning and storage space, including bins. Overall, the emphasis is on privacy. There are hardly any windows overlooking the street, or vice versa giving by-passers the opportunity to look in. There is only a kitchen window over the sink giving a view on the street. All larger windows look out onto the private terrace garden. The materialisation is described as 'used traditionally' in the village of Street with the size of the masonry being 'in accord with the town's best nineteenth century buildings.' The appearance of round shaped windows is also explained with a reference to the local vernacular.<sup>113</sup>

113 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, 2001, p. 336.



The low mono-pitched roof is clad with metal sheeting, either aluminium or zinc if we follow the New Model House typescript. A perspective shows a typical suburban idyll – about ten detached houses are grouped around a green with some lush trees and shrubs. Some autobiographical elements pop up too, a Citroën DS is parked in front of the house, while a female figure resembling Alison is working in the garden.

### Domestic Violence

As a paradigm of twentieth century modern architecture (Colomina) or even the larger modern era (Collins), the house is also a site of contestation. Among others, this contestation involved bourgeois repression and biopolitical state control and discipline. This is already evident in the history of the nineteenth century reform movements and the first feminist suffragist fights for social and cultural emancipation, as for instance mapped by Dolores Hayden in her ground-breaking study *The Grand Domestic Revolution* of 1981.<sup>114</sup> Certainly, the spirit of contestation and revolution and the idea that the house was a battle zone also rang throughout the avant-gardist phase of modern architecture, the 'heroic period' of the 1920s that Sigfried Giedion captured in his manifesto-like portrait of the new movement and its title of *Befreites Wohnen*.<sup>115</sup> Throughout the post-war period this fight over new notions of domesticity and the planning of the house was only further intensified, through the new welfare policies of government bodies, the new consumer-capitalist media strategies targeting the housewife and family, as well as the continued artistic avant-garde projects of among others the Independent Group exchanges.

Classically, the latter was epitomized by Richard Hamilton's by now iconic image collage *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* of 1956, which was originally made for the poster series of the T.I.T.-show at Whitechapel Gallery. The rather modest piece – a mere 26 × 25 cm – portrayed the new popular lifestyle as futurist as surrealist. An ordinary living room is invaded by new consumer goods and mass media: food products, vacuum cleaners, TV, tape recorders, hollywood movies, trashy strip stories about 'romance'. The inhabitants' bodies have attained an equally uncanny newness displaying the language of pin-ups and body-builders. An image of a new kind of space travel cosmology literally hovers over the domestic *tableau vivant*.

114 Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighbourhoods, and Cities*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1981; another great example that touches on this subject is Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses. The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1995.

115 Sigfried Giedion, *Befreites Wohnen*, Schaubücher, nr. 14, Orell Füssli Verlag, Zürich, 1929.

The only reassuring, characteristically English element seems to be the cup of tea on the table.

To the Independent Group, technology and its miniaturization played a crucial role in understanding the consistent disruptive transformations of the domestic. Banham mentioned it in his foreword to his *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, when explaining the nature of the second machine age which according to him came into being after Second World War. Banham perceptively and ironically stated that the post-war 'housewife alone, often disposes of more horse-power today than an industrial worker did at the beginning of the century'.<sup>116</sup> Banham ultimately proposed that the new micro-technology would render the conventional house obsolete. The new 'home' would become an 'un-house' as he suggested in his essay 'A Home is not a House', published in the journal *Art in America* in 1965, and republished in *Architectural Design* in 1969.<sup>117</sup> Largely building on the ideas and proposals of Archigram and Buckminster Fuller, and illustrated with drawings by François Dallegret, the house was now transformed into a bubble of a 'polythene bag' with a core of the latest gadgetry, mostly American inspired. The new 'domestic revolution' resulted in a 'standard-of-living package' in the middle of nature including 'woodland glade or creek-side rock', which according to Banham aspired to a superior kind of Playboy pad James-Bond-style with an ambiance of 'radiating soft light and Dionne Warwick in heart-warming stereo, with well-aged protein turning in an infra-red glow in the rotisserie, and the ice-maker discreetly coughing cubes into glasses on the swing-out bar'.<sup>118</sup> The all too clear overtones of a sexist masculinity, almost like an over the top parody, were also recognized by Banham himself when he preempted the criticism stating that such a house was even suited for private family life albeit that more sophisticated technology was needed to solve the practicalities at stake, just as one would have to accept a new kind of suburban lifestyle away from the city.<sup>119</sup>

116 Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, The Architectural Press, London, 1960, p. 10.

117 Reyner Banham, 'A Home is not a Home', in: *Architectural Design*, January 1969, pp. 45-48; first published in April 1965 in *Art in America*.

118 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

119 The ironic thing was that Banham presented Philip Johnson's Glass House – a show case house of a gay bachelor – as a realized example of this 'standard-of-living package', pp. 47-48.

120 Lawrence Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', in: *Modern Dreams*, pp. 30-33; originally published in *Cambridge Opinion*, nr. 17, 1959.

Lawrence Alloway also touched on the issue of disruptive technology and media and how they would bring about new notions of domesticity. In his essay 'The Long Front of Culture' he stated: '*The media, whether dealing with war or the home, Mars, or the suburbs, are an inventory of pop technology. The missile and the toaster, the push-button and the repeating revolver, military and kitchen technologies, are the natural possession of the media – a treasury of orientation, a manual of one's occupancy of the twentieth century.*'<sup>120</sup>

How the house embodied this 'occupancy of the twentieth century' remains a key question to contemporary research and criticism of modern culture and design in general. Within current research, especially as pursued within the field of gender studies and cultural studies, one finds a ceaseless curiosity for the development of the various concepts of domesticity. Here, the house once again reappears as a site of contestation and intervention, since the house is understood as an instrument to control both the discourse and the planning of social relations and identities. This interest goes beyond the strictly architectural discourse, and refocuses on the notion of domesticity (and often public space too) and the related formation of new subjectivities and sensibilities of the users and inhabitants involved. Beatriz Colomina's work from the mid-1980s onward is exemplary here; she made it a major field for enquiry through her studies of the work of Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier.<sup>121</sup> Interestingly enough, this kind of research developed a new look on the role of the interior, of decoration, the objects, acts of public and private display, but also the rules of social conduct and construction, and all this in reciprocity with the architectural principles of ordering at work. In this kind of research, the sites of the house and city are not regarded as neutral territories subject to modernization processes and their political-economic suprastructure, but as battle zones where individual and collective agencies as well as identities are being reinvestigated, renegotiated and ultimately, reconstructed.<sup>122</sup>

Still, the exclusive, paradigmatic position attributed to the house and in particular the suburban family house must also be questioned, especially after Michel Foucault's ground-breaking analyses of modern culture and its institutions.<sup>123</sup> Places for work, the office and factory, places of hygiene, hospitals and sanatoriums, places for discipline and education, such as prisons, schools, but also museums and universities, are all moved to periphery of the discourse when following the house paradigm and the reduction of the modern era and modern architecture to a search for the ideal house. All those institutions of technology, discipline, production and education belong as much to the core of the tradition of modern architecture as does the house. Just as there are model homes in the history of modern architecture, there are model factories, model prisons and model schools, and so forth and so on. The Smithsons too, of course, were involved in designing and building such institutional places (apart from prisons one might add). Moreover, the project that made their reputation was a school, the Hunstanton Secondary Modern School.

121 Beatriz Colomina, *Publicity and Privacy. Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1994.

122 The research field is too vast to properly summarize here, but one could begin with the work of Beatriz Colomina, even though it is under dispute within gender studies, such as her book *Privacy and Publicity*, 1994, and her essay on Eileen Gray 'Battle Lines E.1027', in: Francesca Hughes (ed.), *The Architect Reconstructing her Practice*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1996. More recent research in relation to the domestic can be found in the anthology *Negotiating Domesticity. Spatial Production of Gender in Modern Architecture*, edited by Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar, 2005.

123 Most notably his writings on prisons, and psychiatric homes.

Therefore, to single out the home as paradigmatic is a willful gesture to put order to the discourse and the course of historical events, to which Peter Collins as we have seen more or less admitted when he defined the house as paradigm. To assign the house as paradigm does not concern a neutral observation, it is also part of the larger *dispositif* at stake, how hegemonic culture (including the academia and the world of critique) defines itself, what it aspires to and how it changes. Hence, and perhaps paradoxically so, there are also quite a few reasons to maintain the home and its reciprocal relation with the city as the key site for the development of the modern tradition in general, and for the work of Alison and Peter Smithson in particular, and I will briefly mention them here in addition to the already discussed above.

In the first place, there is (rightly or wrongly) the way the house was presented and thus constructed as paradigm within the discourse itself and how it was, and often still is, deployed as a major vehicle for broadcasting the modern lifestyles as well as modern architecture and its wider tradition. One cannot retroactively 'correct' the historical discourse nor displace the words and concepts used. Colomina extensively demonstrated this in her studies, especially in the essay 'The Exhibitionist House', in which she combined the history of the house with its place and role in modern architectural media, ranging from photography, film and exhibitions to the sites of public display and propaganda, among those magazines, gallery spaces, museums, fairs and department stores.<sup>124</sup> Colomina mentioned as seminal examples the 1925 'Exposition des arts décoratifs', where Le Corbusier presented his Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau, the 1927 Weissenhof Siedlung as part of the larger manifestation 'Die Wohnung', or the Berlin Bauen exhibition of 1931, where visitors could enter full scale models of houses designed by Lilly Reich, Mies van der Rohe, the Luckhardt brothers, or Hugo Häring. The Ideal Home Show, at which occasion the Smithsons House of the Future was on display also belongs to this tradition.

A very early example of the way the house was proposed as the key site for architectural discourse and invention we find in the northern Italian region of Vicenza with Andrea Palladio. Rudolf Wittkower pointed this out most accurately, even though his actual aim was to revise this proposition. In his 1949 *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* Wittkower wrote the following with regard to Palladio's false representation of the history of the house:

124 Beatriz Colomina, 'The Exhibitionist House', 1998.

*'Façades of ancient domestic buildings were unknown, but with the application of the temple front to the house Palladio believed that he had re-created them in form and spirit; (...). His conclusion was founded on two fallacies, an erroneous theory of the development of society, and an erroneous theory of the genesis of architecture. He thought "that man formerly lived by himself; but afterwards, seeing he required assistance of other men to obtain those things that might make him happy (if any happiness is to be found here below) naturally sought and loved the company of other men; whereupon of several houses, villages were formed, and then of many villages, cities and in these, public places and edifices were built." Therefore, he concludes, private houses were the nuclei of public buildings; in other words, temples reflect the appearance of the ancient house.'*<sup>125</sup>

Clearly, Wittkower sought to reinstate the temple and church as the key site for the demonstration of the cosmological 'architectural principles', something which he once again insisted upon in the retrospective introduction to the 1971 re-edition of his book. Nevertheless, and despite the justified remark on historiographical error on Palladio's behalf, the shift from temple to house is among the most remarkable ones in the architecture discourse, announcing the event of the larger modern era as pointed out by Collins.<sup>126</sup>

Peter Smithson consciously continued to build on this, when he remarked in *Changing the Art of Inhabitation* that 'the house of Le Corbusier at Garches ... or his truly named Maison des Heures Claires at Poissy ... Mies' staggeringly opulent Barcelona Pavilion ... or his Tugendhat House at Brno ... were the Villa Rotondas of their time.'<sup>127</sup>

Additionally, it could be argued that in the home itself as a site of contestation and appropriation all the abovementioned aspects of modernization were operationalized and eventually internalized. However, next to the aspects of discipline, control, normality, efficiency, and hygiene as highlighted by Foucault and others as being intrinsically part of Functionalism and modern planning, one should also make mention of the new concepts of comfort and women's emancipation being introduced here.<sup>128</sup> The Smithsons were critical of modernization processes, but also recognized the idea of social and technological progress. This idea of progress, or at least the possibility of it, is one of the fine but clear-cut lines between the modern architecture discourse and the postmodernist

<sup>125</sup> Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, Academy Editions, London, 1988, fourth edition, p. 70; original edition 1949.

<sup>126</sup> Historiographically speaking, it is one of those moments that history is overtaken by myth, and myth starts to redirect the course of history.

<sup>127</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, Artemis, London, 1994, p. 24; taken from *Without Rhetoric*, 1973, and annotated as being written by Peter Smithson in 1968-1969.

<sup>128</sup> Whether modernization brought women liberation or new oppression is open for debate. Le Corbusier's contribution is a case of its own, with some fiercely attacking him for sexism while others defend him as a feminist, for opposing views see among others: Peter Adam, *Eileen Gray, Architect Designer. A Biography*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1987; and Flora Samuel, *Le Corbusier: Architect and Feminist*, Academy Press, London, 2004.

one. In particular the special space of the kitchen in the modern house is of importance here, as has already been acknowledged before by many other authors with regard to the examples of the Frankfurter kitchen by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, the kitchens in the Weissenhoff Siedlung houses as designed by J.J.P. Oud, or the kitchens in the Marseille Unité d'Habitation by Charlotte Perriand, Le Corbusier and Jean Prouvé. Being a major site for spatial and architectural invention within the modern architecture discourse, the kitchen and the individual home, would become a vast field for cultural and aesthetic investigations also within Independent Group circles, ranging from the food advertisements and the new appliances that changed daily routines for good such as refrigerators and TV-sets. Here, the new consumer lifestyles and its impact on aesthetic values were probed, with the Smithsons' House of the Future for the 1956 Ideal Home exhibition as perhaps one of the foremost demonstrations of Independent Group fascinations. The kitchen design was thoroughly elaborated by Alison Smithson, who was responsible for the overall design of the House of the Future. It functioned in the first place as a backdrop for the strategies of product placement as immediately becomes clear from all the photos with food products on display for instance.<sup>129</sup> Yet, it also included various, inventive conveniences for the housewife, among those the ovens that were placed at eye-level, a moveable trolley with heating devices to serve food in the living room while keeping it warm, but also an extended worktop for sewing and mending one's own clothes – something which was a saving necessity in many post-war households just as it entailed another autobiographical element related to Smithson's own delight in designing her and Peter's outfits.

### A Car of One's Own

The Smithsons' positive stance regarding post-war modernization becomes most evident from their interest in car mobility as the new foundation for a new, democratic and egalitarian way of life. Their 1958 essay 'Mobility. Road Systems' communicated this position most eloquently. City design, even when difficult to grasp in terms of form and pattern, should involve the new ways of life made possible by mass car ownership resulting in a new 'aesthetic of change' according to the Smithsons. The first page opens with two images, a diagram showing a network model, and an advertisement for Plymouth automobiles. Crucially, this advert

<sup>129</sup> In the Alison and Peter Smithson Archive at the Harvard Graduate School of Design there are lists of items to be included in the design.

targeted women, although not free from sexism, it still emphasized the new freedom which a car of one's own would bring to the modern-day woman, it read among others:

*'Don't be dependent on your husband's free time or your neighbor's good nature. Go where you want, when you want in a beautiful Plymouth that's yours and nobody else's.'*<sup>130</sup>

The things this independent woman supposedly undertook included: 'Giving your kids the fun and advantages you want for them. Taking them places and helping them do things', 'taking the part that's expected of you in church and community affairs', and enjoying pottery classes 'developing your talents as you'll be more interesting.'<sup>131</sup> Despite the prescribed role model for females that spoke from this, the Smithsons recognized a new freedom here, stating that:

*'Mobility has become the characteristic of our period. Social and physical mobility, the feeling of a certain sort of freedom, is one of the things that keeps our society together, and the symbol of this freedom is the individually owned motor-car.'*<sup>132</sup>

Clearly, Alison and Peter Smithson did not regard family life and women's emancipation as mutually exclusive. On the contrary, to properly organize family life was also a way to ensure a satisfying lifestyle, to Alison in particular. With regard to the importance of family life and the focus of the Smithsons on the accommodation of the nuclear family, one might note that the Smithsons were very much family people themselves and Alison in particular a 'family-woman' so to speak. This may be evident from the way she characterized the Team 10 meetings as family meetings, but it also shines through in the few written pieces that touch on the role of Alison as a working woman.<sup>133</sup> In a typescript report 'Home Based Leisure' she subscribed to the view that working mothers could contribute to a more balanced family life.<sup>134</sup> It also becomes clear from their life and the accounts of contemporaries that Alison and Peter Smithson highly valued a well-organised family life with strict routines such as the trips to their weekend home in Upper Lawn, or Christmas celebrations. And again Alison in particular seemed to have taken pride in making it an art to combine the duties of work and family life.

Family life in relation to the organization of the house and of society was a persistent and recurrent consideration in the Smithsons' work – most famously so in their Urban Re-identification grid for the 1953 CIAM conference in Aix, with

130 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Mobility. Road Systems', in: *Architectural Design*, October 1958, pp. 385-388; emphasis as in original advertisement.

131 *Ibid.*, p. 385.

132 *Ibid.*

133 Alison Smithson, 'Home-Based Leisure: its facilitation by the form of the home and the home's relation to an immediate environment', typescript, 1979, Smithson Family Archive; other texts that deal with feminine identity: of course Alison Smithson's novel of 1966, *A Portrait of the Female Mind as a Young Girl*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1966; biographical portrayals in: Lynne Walker (ed.), *Women Architects: Their Work*, catalogue RIBA, London, 1984; Valerie Grove, *The Compleat Woman, Marriage, Motherhood, Career: Can She Have It All?*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1987; Liz McQuiston, *Women in Design: A Contemporary View*, Trefoil Publications, London, 1988.

134 Alison Smithson, 'Home-Based Leisure', typescript, 1979, p. 40.

the photographs of playing children by Nigel Henderson. In all their schemes for housing groups due attention was paid to the place of children in and around the house. The immediate environment of the house and the street were conceived as to serve the well-being of children, almost in a pedagogical way, since it was in these everyday surroundings the child learns how to behave, to feel secure, trust its skills and develop the nerve to move around in the world. Take the scheme for the Portico Row houses, a rough sketch design as part of the appliance house series that investigated the lay-out of the house in relation to the new consumer lifestyle of the late 1950s in the same vein as the House of the Future did. The Portico Row houses scheme was also based on these family life ideas and its urban lay-out revolved around a set of outdoor spaces suited to the various age groups, with outdoor spaces for the zero to four years olds directly overlooked by the parents, a safe, collective back garden for the two to six years old, just outside the house, and a less controlled piece of land but still nearby the home for the six to fourteen years old to play unhindered by parental gazes.

Family life and the planning of the nuclear family lifestyle were central constituents of welfare state politics of the post-war period.<sup>135</sup> While the Smithsons' work does not escape from this larger politico-cultural framework, they even aimed to come up with the ultimate house type for the welfare state 'culture' as we saw, it would also be an exaggeration to regard their body of work as a seamless translation of such biopolitical rationalization to the field of architecture. Still, one might ask the question, where does the Smithsons' work align with welfare state discipline and where does it formulate new freedoms indeed? The following ambiguities can be observed.

'The basic group is obviously the family', the Smithsons stated in their Urban Re-identification texts as published in *Ordinariness and Light*.<sup>136</sup> And as we saw in the case of the 'architypal (UR typl) house' for the middle class welfare state society, just as in the design for the New Model House, the three bedroom family house, well-suited for a couple with two children was clearly regarded as the proper paradigm. And although there was a consideration with house jobs and the dirt from gardening and car washing, the 'organisation' of the three bedroom house did not provide the option for a separate working space, but implicitly still built on the separation of functions of the Functional City including the ones of work and living. At the same time the Smithsons would

135 Many authors have touched on this subject, for an introduction to the British context see David Jeremiah, *Architecture and Design for the Family in Britain, 1900-70*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000.

136 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 43.



also state that the design for a house should also ‘take account not only of the family but also those additional responsibilities that vary in all countries and with all families – this additional activity gives identity to the dwelling and its inhabitants.’<sup>137</sup>

Generally speaking one can distinguish between two kinds of ‘programmes’ that direct the various proposed solutions within the Smithson housing designs. There are the houses and housing schemes designed as an answer to the larger context of the welfare state and the mid-twentieth century, middle class way of life, and there are the houses designed for private clients, usually friends or acquaintances, who – just like the Smithsons themselves – belong to the professional classes, for whom work and living are much more integrated than for any common blue- or white collar worker, who usually has to commute to work.

The former type of programme usually follows the mono-functional programme of living. Yet, the lay-out of the plan is conceived in such a way that to some extent individual appropriation is enabled, also for the walks and ways of life other than the happy, nuclear family. The 1952 competition entry for Golden Lane remains the most lucid demonstration. The typological invention as introduced by the Smithsons is the space of the so-called yard-garden: an outdoor space between the wide gallery space of the collective ‘deck’, and the individual flat, which negotiates the relation between the collective space and the private domain of the house, and which can be used for various, unforeseen uses by the inhabitants, in particular because there are two front doors provided.

The basic lay-out of the deck and the yard-gardens once again, follow the rules of family life:

*‘These yard-gardens, which can be seen from the deck, bring the out-of-doors life of a normal house – gardening, bicycle cleaning, joinery, pigeons, children’s play, etc., on to the deck, identifying the families with their “house” on their deck. The arrangements at deck level are “detached”. “semi-detached” or “terraced” (each deck differs). The piece of the dwelling at deck level is small and unintimidating to the playing child, and the passing stranger’s view is enriched by glimpses, through the open yard-gardens, of the city and river.’<sup>138</sup>*

This standard is the basis for variation ‘to suit local needs.’  
The Smithsons explained:

137 Alison Smithson (ed.), *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, 1982, p. 8; and Alison and Peter Smithson, *Urban Structuring*, 1967, p. 22.

138 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 56.

*'The use of the houses as house-shops and house-workshops will not interfere with the normal working of the plan, as there is always the possibility of two "front doors". The yard-garden can be used as an alternative means of access, or for a market-stall.'*<sup>139</sup>

In their early years the Smithsons already acknowledged the redundancy of the separation of work and living, criticising the 'diagrammatic development' of the functional city: *'Living and working are not so incompatible: they should not be separated so laboriously in the future except in extreme circumstances. The attitude of segregation is a relic; not a little a relic of reaction to the overcrowded sewerless and smokey days when few people in London can ever have felt entirely well.'*<sup>140</sup>

Whereas the welfare state programme for collective housing and suburban development did not allow for such overcoming of the separation between living and working, the commissions for private houses seemed to have offered opportunity for the integration of family life and work, or other ways of living together.<sup>141</sup> The houses the Smithsons designed for themselves are certainly examples of this. But also the modest houses for Independent Group friends, such as the Eduardo Paolozzi house and the Cordell Studio House. The rough sketch for the latter of 1957 shows the house is basically two houses, one for Magda Cordell and one for Frank, and between them the entrance to the large, communal kitchen and dining space.<sup>142</sup>

Typologically speaking, the main difference between the private houses for professionals and the ones for families in collective and suburban housing consists of the addition of an extra, large space, the possibility of two, independent accesses to the house, and the absence of, or at least lesser functional hierarchy between living spaces and bedroom spaces. Again, the yard garden inserted in the Golden Lane scheme is an example of an added extra space, a functionally undefined buffer which lends more versatility to family life in collective housing. At Robin Hood Gardens, built under a strict welfare state regime, the yard-garden could only be realized for some of the largest dwellings at the estate. Still, the overall housing typology offered a variety of flats for different households, from 'old people' flats on the ground floor to flats for 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 person households. Just over half of the 268 flats were reserved for the nuclear family of 3 to 5 persons (140), a quarter to the smaller households (64) and a quarter to the bigger families (64).<sup>143</sup>

139 Ibidem, p. 57.

140 Ibidem, p. 24.

141 The Smithsons themselves were aware of this distinction, see their 'Criteria for Mass Housing', which opens with the acknowledgment: 'The term Mass Housing applies to all dwellings not built to the special order of an individual, etc.', first published in 1957, revised in 1959; republished in *Architectural Design*, September 1960 and in the 1964 edition of the *Team 10 Primer*.

142 The Cordells had what one calls a 'complicated' household situation; for a couple of years there was a ménage-à-trois lifestyle with John McHale.

143 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970.

## Socio-plastics

Looking at the historical design production and the parallel discourse, the search for the ideal house and how the house would be the 'direct result of a way of life' remains elusive within the whole modernist discourse in terms of form language. Partly because of the elusiveness of everyday life itself and how it resists being fixed into formalized patterns, partly because of the ever shifting balance between the 'forces' that shape everyday life: among others technology and consumerism and how they interact with the cycles of family life, its modern-day variants and the organisation of work, not to mention the cultural values that shift under the impact of fashion and ideology. The exact relationship between architectural invention and patterns of common use remains an open one also within the Smithsons' search for an architecture of the simple life well done, in particular with regard to the issue of form and form-language. No formal guidelines or pattern book solutions were proposed as to how to translate the everyday and the ordinary into architecture, and probably necessarily so, since any new orthodoxy would also imply a new academicism incapable of regeneration. To attend to the everyday was not to discover universal rule but rather specificity, which would inevitably change over time and under pressure of the condition of an unrelenting modernization.

To graft architecture on the 'patterns' of a 'whole way of life' suggests that the fields of anthropology and sociology were to be of a special, if not decisive importance to the Smithsons. Yet, their appreciation of these two fields was ambiguous, to say the least. In the 1950s, Peter Smithson coined the term 'socio-plastics' to bridge the gap between the social sciences and the form-giving disciplines of architecture and urban design. Among the many exchanges between the younger CIAM members of Team 10 Smithson stated the following:

*'We have to satisfy our need for a sense of "a place of our own", not in a "universalist" way, but in a free way that allows for change and for everyone to be himself.*

*The architects' job is to make this individualism into a thing which can be read, can be understood for what it is – an ordered complex of active relationships between men and things.*

*Architecture does not simply "provide a background" to existing relationship, it can create them. It is an active force in life itself. It is no longer enough to simply "make buildings", we must make them in such a way that they give meaning to the space around*

*them in the context of the whole community.*  
*This is what Bakema call "urbanism through architecture"*  
*and what I call "socio-plastics".<sup>144</sup>*

The idea of a 'socio-plastics' recurred one more time in the Smithsons' writings and was then abandoned.<sup>145</sup> Its proposition was probably the most positive remark one could find among the Smithsons' writings regarding the merits of sociology and its usefulness for architects. More often one comes across ambiguous, distrustful and at times outright negative characterizations. This ambiguity toward sociology and anthropology may be surprising since by now it is a widely shared observation how these disciplines rose to new prominence within architecture and urban planning circles in the post-war decades, in particular with regard to the post-war CIAM debates on habitat. Some authors have argued that the shift toward anthropology and sociology encompassed a paradigm shift, set in motion by the younger CIAM members, in particular by Team 10.<sup>146</sup> Leaving aside whether it is justified to speak of such a tremendously grand phenomenon as a paradigm shift (and if so, what kind of paradigm shift exactly), it should be noted that the issue is far more complicated as suggested by such a reductive phrase as the one of 'paradigm shift'. To start to understand the complexities at stake, one might note that Alison and Peter Smithson were actually fierce critics of anthropology or sociology as a solution to the questions that architects were facing. They pejoratively described their contemporaries Michael Young and Peter Wilmott, who studied the area of Bethnal Green for their book *Family and Kinship in East London* of 1957, and which is conventionally and erroneously credited as a source for the Smithsons' interest in working class lifestyles, as 'johnny-come-lately's'.<sup>147</sup> One might argue, that the Smithsons already challenged the assumed paradigm shift, rather than set it in motion.

Another obvious example comes from the debates going on between the Dutch and British members of Team 10 in 1954: the famous Doorn Manifesto, which is considered one of the founding texts of the Team 10 agenda for modern architecture. In their version the Smithsons distanced themselves from too much reliance on sociology, they stated as the eighth and concluding point:  
*'The appropriateness of any solution may lie in the field of architectural invention rather than social anthropology.'*<sup>148</sup>

144 'CIAM-RE-ORGANISATION', typescript dated 28-29 August 1957, in: Alison Smithson (ed.), *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, AAGS Theory and History Papers 1.82, Architectural Association, London, 1982, pp. 82-83; I thank Karin Theunissen for bringing the term of 'socio-plastics' to my attention. She herself made the term a central one of her own research into the work of Denise Scott-Brown and Robert Venturi, for instance in her paper 'Socio-plastics Revisited', which she presented at the 2007 conference 'Density Inside Out' at the University of Edinburgh.

145 In 'Letter to America' originally published in 1958.

146 Both Tom Avermaete and Annie Pedret make this claim in their dissertations: Tom Avermaete, *Acculturating the Modern: Candilis-Josic-Woods and the Epistemological Shift in Post-war Architecture and Urbanism*, KU Leuven, February 2004; Annie Pedret, *CIAM and the Emergence of Team 10 Thinking, 1945-1959*, MIT, 2001.

147 In their review of Banham's book *The New Brutalism* of 1966.

148 As published in the *Team 10 Primer*, p. 75.

And from their 'Draft Framework', version 4, which was made in preparation for the Dubrovnik conference of 1956 we read: *'Particular stress is laid on the word project which implies architectural solutions, for the heart of the problem is FORM (...) This is what we want to see at the Congress, not diagrams or explanations of social structure or surveys. (...) Accepting the responsibility for the creation of order through form, form not as a passive result of forces but a force in itself. A force for which the architect is uniquely responsible.'*<sup>149</sup>

In a published conversation with planners William Holford and Arthur Ling, dedicated to the future of CIAM after the 1956 Dubrovnik congress, Peter Smithson demonstrated his aversion to anthropology most unequivocally:

*'(...) architects have become, quite understandably, suspicious of sociologists, particularly because the techniques of social anthropology with regard to society in change, as far as I can see, are practically negligible. Anthropology has, in the past, been able to study a society in a state of stasis and establish what its culture pattern is, what motivates the pattern of that society; why they have certain taboos and so on; why people get married at thirteen; why they move from one village to another; why their huts are round; but it has always dealt with societies that are primitive, and relatively, if not actually, underdeveloped, where there was no major technological change, no clash of cultures. But in our society we have a major clash of culture.*

*(...) in such a society, in flux and change, (...) the value of social anthropology study seems to me to be pretty low as far as being able to use it creatively. Social anthropology will never be able to tell you what to do. It will be able to say the pattern in the past was such and such because they had certain drives, but what the pattern is to be now seems to be more a matter of social magic rather than social anthropology.'*<sup>150</sup>

149 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Draft Framework 4, 1956' typoscript, in: Team 10 archive, part of Bakema archive, NAI Rotterdam, published in: Max Risselada, Dirk van den Heuvel (eds.) *Team 10 – in search of a Utopia of the present 1953-1981*, 2005, pp. 48-49.

150 William Holford, Arthur Ling and Peter Smithson, 'Planning Today', in: *Architectural Design*, June 1957, pp. 185-189.

151 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Upper Case*, nr. 3, 1960, unpaginated and *Urban Structuring*, 1967, p. 22, caption to the top diagram.

The ambiguity at stake becomes evident when the sociologists and anthropologists are called in for support. Despite the fact that Young and Wilmott were 'johnny-come-lately's', they were also quoted approvingly in the Smithsons' *Upper Case* and *Urban Structuring* with regard to their ideas about street life.<sup>151</sup>

We see the same with Patrick Geddes as a referent. Geddes' Valley Section is famously appropriated by the Smithsons to become a most prominent part of the 1954 Doorn manifesto and programme for the 1956 CIAM conference in Dubrovnik. Yet, the Smithsons also stated in their 'Urban Re-identification'

manuscript, published as the first part of *Ordinariness and Light: 'Survey! preached Geddes.*

*Alas! the master never explained what happened next, or what you did with the survey once you had it.'*<sup>152</sup>

Still, the Smithsons had departed on a lifelong journey trying to understand the cultural patterns at work, and how to work with them as architects. They might have rejected sociology as medicine or recipe, at the same time they were acutely aware of it, most notably through Judith Stephen, Nigel Henderson's first wife who had studied anthropology and economics, among others in the United States under Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead.<sup>153</sup> Back in England she worked for the research programme 'Discover Your Neighbour' organized by the sociologist J.L. Peterson, a programme similar to the one of Mass Observation of the same period. Among other things, it meant she had to live next door to the family she was studying and was writing reports about each day.<sup>154</sup> Hence, she and Nigel Henderson moved to Chisenhale Road, Bethnal Green, hence Nigel's more or less parallel project of documenting the working class district, from playing children, street life to shop window displays, and hence the walks he and the Smithsons undertook there through the bombed streets of East London and the ruins of everyday life.

The confusion around the exact role of sociology and anthropology vis-à-vis architecture was probably inevitable, since the former two concern a basically deductive research practice, while the latter is inductive (or what some now call 'projective'). At any rate, Smithson contemporaries and Team 10 fellows, in particular the offices of Candilis Woods and Josic, of Van den Broek and Bakema, as well as Aldo van Eyck, would each operationalize the rather blurred relationship in very different ways. The Smithsons' ambiguous, at times antagonistic attitude towards sociology was already expressed by them in their various statements on the New Brutalism. When invited by Theo Crosby to deliver a statement of clarification as an editorial to the January 1955 issue of *Architectural Design*, Alison and Peter Smithson presented a riddle-like manifesto. Four of its eight points referred to Japanese architecture; two spelled out the issue of 'form' in capitals; the importance of materials and the handling of materials was mentioned; their Hunstanton school was referred to, just as Le Corbusier, Mies, Frank Lloyd Wright, Garnier and Behrens; and finally some sort of anthropology crept in when 'peasant dwelling

152 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 22.

153 The earlier quote of Peter Smithson (note 136) is only one demonstration of this, certainly when he spoke of 'culture pattern'; Benedict's 1934 book *Patterns of Culture* was already mentioned.

154 Victoria Walsh, *Nigel Henderson. Parallel of Life and Art*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2001, p. 17; the family in question didn't know this, despite the friendly relationship that was to grow between the two households.

forms' were mentioned as 'closest affinities' to the New Brutalism as a movement; these peasant dwelling forms had 'nothing to do with craft' according to the Smithsons, but with how they saw 'architecture as the direct result of a way of life'.<sup>155</sup>

This idea of architecture as 'the direct result of a way of life' was the closest the Smithsons got when it came to a definition of the relation between architecture and sociology; yet again, it should be noted not as some universalist truth but as cultural and local specificity. To translate cultural pattern into architectural form was then part of the poetics of the architect, the issue at stake to 'drag a rough poetry out of the forces at work' as the Smithsons further explained less than two years later.<sup>156</sup> The 1955 statement on the New Brutalism ended therefore as characteristically as provokingly in the way it avoided exact definition, while playfully alluding to the forces that shaped the modern way of life and their sites of operation as recognized by the Smithsons, from advertizing to car design to the repainting of a house:

*'1954 has been a key year. It has seen American advertising equal Dada in its impact of overlaid imagery; that automotive masterpiece, the Cadillac convertible, parallel-with-the-ground (four elevations) classic box on wheels; the start of a new way of thinking by CIAM; the revaluation of the work of Gropius; the repainting of the Villa at Garches?'*<sup>157</sup>

155 'The New Brutalism', in: *Architectural Design*, January 1955; again, authors are not mentioned as such.

156 This is a summary of the Smithsons' second statement on New Brutalism published as comments on 'Thoughts in Progress. The New Brutalism' in: *Architectural Design*, April 1957, p. 113; the full quote reads 'Brutalism tries to face up to a mass-production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work.'

157 Editorial statement, *Architectural Design*, January 1955.





### 3 COMPETING TRADITIONS

#### Englishness and the Post-war Debate on Modern Architecture in Britain

##### A Chain of Re-inventions

In the late 1980s, early 1990s renewed interest in the work of the members of the Independent Group led to several exhibitions and publications, among others *This is Tomorrow Today* at the New York Clocktower Gallery, and the retrospective exhibition *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* which opened at the ICA in London in 1990, after which it traveled to Valencia and the USA.<sup>1</sup> It was in the context of the former exhibition that Kenneth Frampton republished his comments on the Smithsons' House of the Future. To him it marked a shift in the couple's attitude moving away from the 'Brutalist spirit of resistance' toward an 'incipient consumerism' under the 'rising star of the Pax Americana'. In particular the Smithsons' embracing of the new consumer lifestyle based on mass car ownership was to Frampton evidence of the Smithsons' surrender to Americanism. Referring to the iconic collage of Richard Hamilton – 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?', which Hamilton had initially produced for the poster series of the 1956 'This is Tomorrow' exhibition in the Whitechapel Gallery, Frampton claimed that the sleek, curved interior spaces of the House of the Future on display at the Daily Mail Ideal Home show of the same year, were 'evidently intended as the ideal home for Hamilton's muscle-bound, "punch-bag" natural man and his curvaceous companion'.<sup>2</sup>

1 See *Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1988; David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group. Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1990.

2 Kenneth Frampton, 'The New Brutalism and the Welfare State: 1949-59', in: *Modern Dreams*, 1988, pp. 46-51; the essay is an edited version of the earlier published 'New Brutalism and the Architecture of the Welfare State: England: 1949-1959', chapter to Frampton's seminal *Modern Architecture. A Critical History*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1980, revised and extended edition 1985.

Frampton's comments printed in the *This is Tomorrow Today* anthology of essays and interviews prompted the Smithsons to write a response in the catalogue that accompanied the Independent Group retrospective of 1990. The organizers had requested some of the former participants to look back on their experiences with the Independent Group meetings. Alison and Peter Smithson produced two short statements. One is the better known 'The "As Found" and the "Found"' – the only text in which they attempted to retrospectively theorize their idea of the As Found, whereas the other is an untitled statement,

even shorter than the already quite succinct As Found text.

The untitled statement opened with an explicit refutation of Frampton's account of the Smithsons' position toward consumerism and American culture:

*'We always considered ourselves very English and – contrary to what Frampton infers – we have always been oriented towards Europe and never deviated, reacting to aspirations beamed out from America that we saw would be irresistible, but also, recognising these as part of a wider threat to Europe's cultural identity.'*<sup>3</sup>

The Smithsons continued their text by defining the Independent Group as they saw it, touching on the not so obvious connections between Englishness and English avant-garde. To them, this concerned 'convivial evenings with friends', some sort of private get-togethers of like-minded, young people marking their own territory, very much aware of earlier groups but equally self-conscious taking a position of their own, setting themselves apart from those predecessors. The Smithsons mentioned the Camden Road Group, Bloomsbury Group, Vorticists and the Omega Workshops, only of which the Bloomsbury Group probably holds a reputation beyond the immediate English context. A second mentioning of Englishness once again emphasized the two aspects of continuation and the creation a space of one's own:

*'... It was vital to us personally as an energising "togetherness," to feel we were not alone in needing to think quite differently, not out in the creative wilderness; that our sense of difference was supportably real by there being other, equally strong senses of difference to the previous generation's Englishness-as-appendage-to-Europe ...'*<sup>4</sup>

Much of the Independent Group history is a matter of retro-active definition, if not all, but to describe the Independent Group and its activities in terms of Englishness is most remarkable, to say the least. Most accounts follow the connection between American and British Pop Art as forged by various of the other group members, such as Lawrence Alloway, Reyner Banham and John McHale. It is probably against this background that Frampton makes his assertion using the facile opposition between Brutalist 'resistance' and American consumer culture, as if there is no playful irony or double message implicated in both Hamilton's collage and the Smithsons' House of the Future, nor any kind of critical engagement. At any rate, Frampton's reading of the events snugly fitted the first historiographical revival of the Independent Group as staged by *This is Tomorrow Today*, which largely focused on cross-Atlantic exchanges between the US and Britain rather

3 Alison and Peter Smithson, untitled statement, in: David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group. Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, 1990, pp. 194-195; the text is signed by the couple, but probably mainly by Alison, in the latter part the text falls back to the singular ('my own instincts').

4 Ibid.

than between Britain and the Continent, or internal British developments.

So how to view the Smithson claim then, the assumed Englishness of the Independent Group? Although not commonly supported or reproduced in the existing literature of the group, there seems to be a case for this claim if one were to set the group's fascinations against the larger context of international art and (neo-)avant-gardist practices. One could point for instance to the specific notions of landscape and the domestic that seem to be present in most of the group's work, be it the 1953 *Parallel of Life and Art* installation or McHale's collages, to name just two instances. Yet, at the same time it should be remembered too, that many of the group's participants fiercely contested any notion of so-called Englishness during the 1950s as part of their ongoing provocations of the institutional and cultural establishment. Reyner Banham in particular was adamant about this, and would continue questioning any sort of association between British nationalist sentiment and the efforts to pursue and revitalize the project of modern architecture and design well into the 1970s. The Smithsons, too, would step in occasionally, for instance, when they felt it was necessary to dismiss the 1951 Festival of Britain. Referring to the *Black Eye and Lemonade* show by Barbara Jones in the Whitechapel Gallery, which was part of the whole range of Festival exhibitions and which was dedicated to contemporary popular British culture, Alison Smithson spoke of the 'horrors of the Festival'.<sup>5</sup> Smithson's remarks were made in the context of her appreciation of the work of Charles and Ray Eames, their chairs, collections, films and photography, and how the Eameses represented the kind of American culture she was interested in, in order to escape the sort of Englishness she associated with the 'peculiar front-parlour-collection chill' of the Jones exhibition. Calling the Eames chair a 'message of hope from another planet' in those days, she also mentioned that 'our generation were as children reborn from post-war Britain to love objects of a particular international flavour'.<sup>6</sup>

5 Alison Smithson, 'And now Dhamas Are Dying out in Japan', in: *Architectural Design*, September 1966, pp. 447-448; reprinted in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, Artemis, London, 1994, pp. 77-78; in the reprint the Barbara Jones's show is erroneously dated of the 1940s, it was 1951.

6 Ibid.

So if we were to follow the Smithson claim, that they always considered themselves 'very English', very different notions of Englishness are at work here and being played off against each other. And not just between the fringe scene of the Independent Group and the architecture establishment, but also among the Group members themselves. The latter aspect is important to note and keep in the back of one's mind, since one finds that the various

7 Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, The Architectural Press, London, 1956.

8 Banham's biography by Nigel Whiteley is a case in this respect, *Reyner Banham. Historian of the Immediate Future*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2002; Anthony Vidler gives a much more measured account of Banham's writings although his is limited to a strictly personal reading of Banham's writings rather than a comprehensive one, for instance Banham's ongoing criticism of the Festival of Britain and the policies of the *Architectural Review* are missing from Vidler's account, just as his various attempts to reframe the Independent Group events as belonging to either Brutalism or Pop: Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present. Inventing Architectural Modernism*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2008.

9 Reyner Banham, 'Machine Aesthetes', in: Reyner Banham, *A Critic Writes. Essays by Reyner Banham*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, p. 26; originally published in *New Statesman*, no. 55, 16 August 1958, pp. 192-193.

10 As is well-known 'angry young men' is an epithet given to a new generation of authors (novels and plays) writing about lower class, everyday life, so-called kitchen sink drama, foremost among those being Alan Sillitoe and John Osborne, whose 1956 play 'Look back in Anger' generated the term.

11 Reyner Banham, 'Machine Aesthetes', 1958. As said, despite Banham's appreciation, the reference to these English 'Angry Young literaries' returns in all major studies on Brutalism and Team 10; even Banham's biographer Nigel Whiteley displayed no hesitation in applying the term, while paradoxically acknowledging Banham's own criticism on the use of the term (Chapter 2, footnote 119). Stephen Kite most recently revived the reference in his account of Colin St John Wilson's contributions to the British debates of the 1950s, see: 'Softs and Hards: Colin St John Wilson and the Contested Visions of 1950s London', in: Mark Crinson, Claire Zimmerman (eds.), *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern. Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, Studies in British Art, nr. 21, The Yale Center for British Art and The Paul Mellon Centre of Studies in British Art, New Haven, 2010, pp. 55-77. Lawrence Alloway too, resisted the angry young men analogy:

historical accounts, by Banham for instance, but also Alloway's, are an attempt to homogenize the discussions within the Group while ignoring dissenting voices.

There are two quite clear moments in this history when the protagonists in this debate feel forced to make a stand and construct an anti-Englishness position: the already mentioned 1951 Festival of Britain and the BBC Reith lectures by Nikolaus Pevsner of 1955, published in 1956 as *The Englishness of English Art*.<sup>7</sup>

The account by Reyner Banham is the most familiar one and is usually uncritically reproduced in most current historiographies.<sup>8</sup> Although Banham's reports of the ICA events are quite broad and apparently comprehensive (and certainly not a schematic representation of positions as one sometimes finds with his famous and most influential student Charles Jencks), there are some generalisations as well as omissions of his portrayal of the group and its internal dynamics that should caution any reader of his work, not to mention Banham's clever and effective rhetoric, which was based on simultaneous acts of definition and dismissal.

Take for instance, one of Banham's shorter pieces which he wrote for the *New Statesman*, 'Machine Aesthetes' of 1958.<sup>9</sup> At that particular moment the Independent Group was not a brand name used by Banham or any other historian, or any other group member for that matter. Banham preferred to talk about New Brutalists, also in this text, while painting the Brutalists' efforts to recover the pre-war avant-garde project as a generation conflict, which is actually one of the most consistently recurring figures to explain the events of the early 1950s, both by the protagonists themselves and historians. Calling them a 'junior avant-garde', Banham linked them to Team 10 and the so-called Angry Young Men, the group of younger writers who had just made their fame in Britain.<sup>10</sup> From thereon one finds in almost every account of the New Brutalism history, the Independent Group or Team 10, this analogy with the literary group, including the undertones of generation conflict and class struggle, despite the fact that this comparison falls short on many aspects. The remarkable thing remains that Banham himself introduced the analogy while at the same time dismissing it. This is what he wrote:

*'You don't have to be very clever to find a link between the New Brutalists and the Angry Young literaries, but you don't do yourself much good in the process. Unlike Angries Unanimous, who are as English and as dated as last week's pool coupons, the Brutalists are not parochial.'*<sup>11</sup>

Such condensed writing, both engaging and polemical is most characteristic of Banham and partly explains its attractiveness. The double movement or simultaneous act of definition and dismissal can be found in much of Banham's writing, in particular in those cases where he presents himself as a witness and participant, for instance the classic 1966 book on New Brutalism, or the 1976 book on megastructures. Also, in the case of the debates on Englishness one finds definition as well as dismissal. When in 1976, Banham's wife Mary together with Bevis Hillier published the book commemorating the 1951 Festival of Britain, *A Tonic to the Nation*, Banham produced the most critical essay 'The Style: "Flimsy ... Effeminate"?', in which he once again ridiculed the so-called Festival style and the British appropriation of modernist, Continental invention.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time and despite his criticism of complacent, inappropriate nationalism, one cannot deny that in Banham's writings too, a certain national consciousness was present and at times directed his argument. For instance in his 1966 book on the New Brutalism he erroneously defined Team 10 as 'predominantly British', which according to him demonstrated that 'British architects had a special contribution to make', after which Banham immediately continued, much more on the spot, that 'to write a predominantly British account of New Brutalism is not necessarily to be parochial or chauvinistic. The origins of Brutalism "as a movement" were British (...) It was, in short, the first consequential British contribution to the living body of architecture since the collapse of the "English Free Building" of Voysey and Lethaby around 1910', and so forth and so on.<sup>13</sup>

The whole English discourse on modern architecture is thoroughly imbued with the issues of national identity and cultural heritage. They cannot be uncoupled, and paradoxically perhaps, this predicament is one of the ultimate characteristics of English architecture of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup>

Americanism then, to briefly go back to the introduction and the exchanges between Frampton and the Smithsons, is but one of the sites of contestation here, and surely a very sensitive one with regard to the specific post-war situation with the impoverished British colonial empire breaking up and the USA now the leading economic and military world power, together with the USSR. The Independent Group meetings of the early 1950s hold a very specific and unique position here as a post-

'The pleasurable filling of a role in urban life (instead of protesting or looking for more favourable circumstances) separated London artists from the working-class bias of Richard Hoggart and from the angry young men.', from: Lawrence Alloway, 'The Development of British Pop', in: Lucy Lippard, *Pop Art*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1966. Still, the analogy is tenacious and wide-spread, it recurs in the best of scholarly work, for instance in Francis Strauven's seminal biography of Aldo van Eyck who also labels the Team 10 architects as 'angry young men'.

12 Reyner Banham, 'The Style: "Flimsy ... Effeminate"?', in: Mary Banham, Bevis Hillier (eds.), *A Tonic to the Nation. The Festival of Britain 1951*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1976, pp. 190-198.

13 Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism*, 1966, p. 134.

14 A fantastic demonstration of this problematic is of course delivered by the Prince of Wales and his various interventions regarding some major London projects such as the extension of the National Gallery and of more recent date, the development of Chelsea Barracks by Richard Rogers.

war or neo-avantgarde group of individuals, since America was until then hardly considered a credible source for avant-garde experimentation, except perhaps for jazz music and grain elevators.<sup>15</sup> To view American consumer culture and leisure as sources for new image systems as the Independent Group members did, marked a new moment in the avant-garde discourse of the twentieth century, a moment which was substantially earlier than the more academic, and largely anti-American investigations into this realm of fabricated popular culture and its industry as undertaken by cultural theorists in particular. Roland Barthes *Mythologies* comes close being published in 1957. The first bulletin of the *Internationale Situationniste* appeared in June 1958, while Guy Debord's *La société du spectacle* is published only in 1967. Within British cultural studies Americanism remained a delicate issue, as well; William Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* of 1957 famously attacked 'mass culture', including the Hollywood film industry, for destroying authentic popular working class culture.<sup>16</sup> The one exemption came from North America itself and formed actual input to Independent Group meetings: namely the Canadian Marshall McLuhan and his writings, in particular *The Mechanical Bride. Folklore of Industrial Man* of 1951, of which Banham had mentioned that it reached a 'semi-legendary' status when Group members discovered it, but according to him this happened not before 1956.<sup>17</sup>

The inclusion of American mass culture by Independent Group members was perhaps only natural since many of the earlier pre-war avant-garde had moved to the United States continuing their work and teaching there, among those the former *Bauhäusler* László Moholy Nagy and Herbert Bayer, whose work was to be phenomenally influential in Independent Group circles. When Alison and Peter Smithson wrote about the new leading role of the 'ad-man' regarding the production of new cultural values in their seminal statement 'But Today We Collect Ads', they were referring to among others Bayer's work in advertising and information design, and to Alexander Dorner's *The Way Beyond Art* of 1947, which was completely devoted to Bayer's achievements and which tried to open up new ways for art and design after the pre-war experiments, including commercial mass culture, a profoundly different position from Clement Greenberg's of course, who in his famous essay of 1939 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' coupled the mechanisms of fabricated popular taste and mass culture with kitsch, and ultimately with the rise of German and Italian fascism and Stalinist state communism.

15 See also Whiteley, the sub-chapter 'The Fear of Americanization', p. 98-101.

16 Many other examples of Marxist-based, cultural critique could be mentioned, most prominently the German *Frankfurter Schule* which would consistently criticize American mass consumer culture.

17 Whiteley, *Reyner Banham*, 2002, p. 324.

Englishness then, as well as Americanism are not so much essentialist categories, but rather the *trope* that accommodates the discursive battle, for drawing lines of definition and selection, for downplaying while highlighting, for including a select chosen ones while excluding others. Raymond Williams eloquently demonstrated the workings of such rhetorical constructions throughout his body of writing. In his introduction to one of his major studies into English culture, literature and capitalist development, *The Country and the City* of 1973, Williams explained the relation between the early beginnings of the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century and the specific English experience and identity:

*'... the English experience is especially significant, in that one of the decisive transformations, in the relations between country and city, occurred there very early and with a thoroughness which is still in some ways unapproached. The Industrial Revolution not only transformed both city and country; it was based on a highly developed agrarian capitalism, with a very early disappearance of the traditional peasantry.'*

*And: 'The English experience remains exceptionally important: not only symptomatic but in some ways diagnostic; in its intensity still memorable, whatever may succeed. For it is a critical fact that in and through these transforming experiences English attitudes to the country, and to ideas of rural life, persisted with extraordinary power, so that even after the society was predominantly urban its literature, for a generation, was still, predominantly rural; and even in the twentieth century, in an urban and industrial land, forms of the older ideas and experiences still remarkably persists. All this gives the English experience and interpretation of the country and the city a permanent though not exclusive importance.'*<sup>18</sup>

As Williams' book title already indicated, the reciprocal relation between country and city was one of the main keys by which the consequences of the Industrial Revolution was read by him. Part of the historical dialectics between city and country is the consistent re-invention of the pastoral tradition in British culture, in the arts and literature, but also in politics. The Picturesque is part and parcel of this re-invention, or rather chain of re-inventions as Williams explained in his chapter 'A Problem of Perspective'.<sup>19</sup> Through the ages the pastoral and Picturesque appear and re-appear in various forms and fashions. There is the nostalgic deploring of the loss of pre-industrial, pre-capitalist, agricultural England, despite the obvious political shortcomings of the old

18 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, p. 2.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 9-12; Williams' account of the pastoral is different from the way Heynen uses the term in her *Modern Architecture. A Critique*. For Williams it is a historical category that changes over time and is relative to the context in which the term is used, at the same time it represents a cultural and literary tradition. Heynen uses it as a parameter of ideological intention to distinguish between various practices of modern architecture in the twentieth century.

feudal system. At times it was, and even still is, used to cover up the real, social structure behind early agricultural capitalism. This ideological tendency is paralleled by a formal and academic one in aesthetics, that lost touch with the original meanings of agricultural life, or the society described in ancient Virgilian poetry – the common reference in British pastoral literature. And finally, there is the utopian tendency that used the pastoral and Picturesque to evoke prospects of a better life and society.

Williams did not include architecture in his broad discussions of country and city, not even once he mentioned the Garden City movement for instance, although William Morris and his *News from Nowhere* are.<sup>20</sup> Although a discourse parallel to architecture perhaps, Williams' description of the Picturesque tradition as a chain of re-inventions perfectly fits the debates within architecture circles and the way Englishness was connected with the Picturesque, with technological industrial development and other forces of modernization. In the Smithsons' writing and thinking too, one finds an endless variety of such re-inventions, already so in the case of their Hunstanton school building. In response to Philip Johnson's comments on the building in the pages of the *Architectural Review*, who compared it to Mies' American work, the proper project description starts first and foremost by connecting the project to so-called 'English precedent', namely the widely divergent examples of Hardwick Hall by Robert Smythson and All Saints', Margaret Street by William Butterfield.<sup>21</sup> As we will see the coupling of Hunstanton with such seemingly disparate 'precedents' as Hardwick Hall and All Saints' is part of the Brutalist game. At this point, it serves primarily as an example of how the issue of Englishness is indeed always present in Alison and Peter Smithson's work. Englishness and English identity would remain a topic for reflection throughout their career, almost as a meta-historical category, as demonstrated by a passage from Alison Smithson's essay 'In Pursuit of Lyrical Appropriateness' written mid-1970s at a time very different from the Independent Group years. 'In Pursuit of Lyrical Appropriateness' was published in *AA Quarterly*, the AA-School periodical, as well as in Giancarlo De Carlo's magazine *Spazio e Società* and it is one of the many appearances of the Picturesque in the Smithsons' thinking; it is also an example of their view of the web of relations between Englishness, literature, landscape and urbanism: *'England bears many marks on its landscape, nearly everywhere is an overlaid tracery of patterns of work and movement, from 1900 BC – supposed start of Stonehenge – to the present time.*

20 Ibid. pp. 272-274.

21 'School at Hunstanton', in: *The Architectural Review*, September 1954, pp. 148-162, comment on p. 152; the piece is anonymous, Tony Vidler ascribes it to Reyner Banham in his *Histories of the Immediate Present*, but it is most likely a collective effort, since so much of the information contained is most specific, esp. technical detail. Max Risselada even suggests that the Smithsons themselves were the author.



*Therefore, we can be fairly confident that the trick of giving form to patterns supportive of life can be performed here again. The spark can be in many ways unexpected; those paintings by Claude or Poussin brought back by the English from the Grand Tour somehow made it visible to all, their national sensibility to the landscape; the paintings becoming enabling images in the development of the English Landscape Garden, a genre virile enough to be re-exported. That this sensibility became universal within Britain, and extended from the garden into all aspects of life, is the especial nature of English urbanism – vide Newcastle, Edinburgh – finally buildings as landscape: a whole sensibility neatly and palatably communicated in the writings of Jane Austen... for, apart from the land, the other internal communication of conviction is for the English through literature: the English being fairly unmoved by form; but if something can be walked on, or read, it can be accepted as worthwhile.’<sup>22</sup>*

The key term to understand the Smithsons' love for the Picturesque and the specific tradition of the Landscape Garden is perhaps the one of 'enabling images', which brings them close to the utopian tendencies which appropriate the 18th century sensibilities to evoke the prospects of a better life and society. An early example of this is the seminal 'Cluster City' essay of 1957, published in *The Architectural Review*, the journal which famously campaigned for a revival of the Picturesque as 'Townscape' from 1949 onward, while redefining the English landscape tradition as proto-modernist. 'Cluster City' opened and closed with two key images: both fragments of a painting by Poussin, 'Landscape with the Ashes of Phocion' (1648).

The Smithsons had this to say about it:

*'Poussin's vision of the classical city is an image of a consistent hierarchy of building forms, that runs from the high temple of the hill to the local temple and the profane buildings around it. Can modern architects create an equally convincing image of the city, without being caught in some similar closed hierarchy?'*<sup>23</sup>

In the case of the two reprints of the essay, one in the Smithsons' *Ordinariness and Light* anthology and the other in Banham's 1966 book on the New Brutalism, the Poussin images are gone.

Yet, on another occasion Banham would remind his readers of the use of this particular image as evidence of the crypto-Picturesque sentiments of the Smithsons.<sup>24</sup> Still, as also noted by Banham, the kind of Englishness as proposed by the Smithsons was not the 'parochial' kind as one would find for instance with James Richards' eulogy of the English suburb, his Castles on the

22 Alison Smithson, 'In pursuit of lyrical appropriateness', manuscript 1975-1976; published in *Spazio e Società*, and *AA Quarterly*.

23 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Cluster City', in: *The Architectural Review*, November 1957, pp. 333-336; it should be noted that London and the Courtauld institute were a centre of Poussin studies mid-twentieth century, with Anthony Blunt as the most distinguished expert, and Rudolph Wittkower also involved. I thank Neil Bingham for pointing this out to me.

24 Reyner Banham in his 'Revenge of the Picturesque', p. 270; 'Cluster City' was reprinted in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, pp. 128-134, and in: Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism*, 1966, pp. 72-73.

Ground, or the illustrations by John Piper that one found in this particular book as well as in the pages of the *Review*.<sup>25</sup> Almost invariably, the Smithsons' notion of Englishness would involve some sort of contestation of established definition, just as it would involve personal history and experience. The most outspoken and combative example of this can be found in their 1968 pamphlet against the demolition of the entrance building to Euston Station, the Euston Arch. To the Smithsons, being themselves from the north, the bold, Paestum-inspired architecture by Philip Hardwick with its overzealous Doric columns represented the new era of steel technology and steam powered machines. The Arch was demolished as part of the reconstruction of Euston Station by developers with the approval of London authorities, something that was taken as a deliberate insult to the culture of the north of England by the Smithsons. They claimed:

*'The Arch was a monument to the Railway Age, to an age when for the first time for centuries the power which the court and the south control suddenly came to depend on the industrial energy of the north. It was a monument to the Stephenson, to the new man. The Arch was a nag, a reminder, that what was the Empire was based on men working in the dirt up north.'*

Demolition of the Arch was nothing but 'an act of revenge by the south against the north.'<sup>26</sup>

Nikolaus Pevsner wrote the foreword to the Smithsons' homage to Victorian entrepreneurship, while the 1962 *Architectural Review* essay by Richards decrying the 'Euston Murder' was completely included as well. *The Euston Arch* then forms another example of cross-generational collaboration between Brutalists and Townscape advocates contrary to the endlessly repeated Banham myth of fierce opposition.

In *The Euston Arch* one finds many more of those aspects of English culture and identity as both contested and redefined by the Smithsons and which were part of a much wider ongoing debate. British cultural studies of the latter half of the twentieth century may be mentioned as a reference once again here, and Williams' culturalism in particular, with as key aspect the Industrial Revolution, its developing technology and economy, and the long term effects on cultural formations such as the class system, mass culture and mass media, democracy and a mobile society, which were establishing the new, modern English identity.

<sup>25</sup> J.M. Richards, *The Castles on the Ground. The Anatomy of Suburbia*, The Architectural Press, London, 1946.

<sup>26</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Euston Arch. and the Growth of the London, Midland & Scottish Railway*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1968, no paging (by own counting pp. 21-23).

## The Battle for Modern Architecture in Britain

That Raymond Williams not once discussed architecture in *The Country and the City* may be only natural for a literary critic, but it can also be viewed as symptomatic for the value attached to the architecture discipline in Britain in general. The much lamented lack of avant-garde experimentation in British architecture stands in stark contrast with developments in British literature, which made it such a fantastic register for Williams' cultural investigations into the condition of modernity. Alison Smithson's account of the Picturesque sensibilities as quoted above also points to this when she foregrounded landscape and literature as the two most important modes of English culture, while regretting the English disinterest in the issue of architectural form. To complain about the difficult situation for architects in Britain, not to mention the prejudice modern architects had to face, was (and again perhaps still is) common practice among architects.<sup>27</sup> To be both modern and English was considered a predicament which presented an awkward yet distinct characteristic of British architecture of the twentieth century. When Reyner Banham was invited to give a lecture at the RIBA in January 1957, entitled 'Futurism and Modern Architecture', in which he demonstrated the profound, yet until then neglected impact of Futurist concepts and rhetoric on the development of modern architecture, Peter Smithson commented on the presupposedly still marginal status of modern architecture in Britain:

27 Quite regularly publications come out lamenting the state of the art in British architecture. It's a tradition of its own right, not just the Prince of Wales who likes to express discontent; for instance the 1980 book by Nathan Silver, Jos Boys (eds.), *Why Is British Architecture So Lousy?*.

28 Peter Smithson as quoted at the end of: Reyner Banham, 'Futurism and Modern Architecture', in: *RIBA Journal*, February 1957, pp. 129-135, p. 137. The lecture, and the discussion afterward, are funny and telling at the same time. For instance, Banham demonstrated how Futurist rhetoric could even be retraced in Pevsner's glorifying description of the architecture of Gropius. The more cautious, and conservative attitude toward modern architecture and futurism was represented by Ian Leslie, editor of *The Builder*.

29 In his so-called 'Black Notebook', published in: Mark Crinson (ed.), *James Stirling. Early Unpublished Writings on Architecture*, Routledge, London, 2010, p. 34.

*'I feel it is slightly like a dream to hear Mr. Banham lecturing at the R.I.B.A., and myself speaking at the R.I.B.A. – rather like finding Jelly Roll Morton in the Library of Congress. If it is not a dream, if it is real, perhaps it indicates the new situation. If modern architecture can be discussed at the R.I.B.A., then architecture in England might at least get off the ground.'*<sup>28</sup>

And with a tone of desperation James Stirling noted in his journal: *'Frequently I awake in the morning and wonder how is it that I can be an architect and an Englishman at the same time, particularly a modern architect. Since the crystallisation of the modern movement around about 1920, Britain has not produced one single masterpiece and it must be practically the only European country which has not produced a "great man" or a single building.'*<sup>29</sup>

The exasperation about the state of modern architecture on the island is always combined with references to the Continent.

Despite a handful of belated, yet respectable modern projects in Britain as built in the 1930s by Lubetkin, his office Tecton, and others such as Wells Coates and Connel, Ward and Lucas, the island had been mostly out of touch with the revolutionary events in Europe during the interbellum years.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps because of the shared feeling of missing out and remaining in the margins, the British post-war discourse meant fierce debate on the limits and future scope of modern architecture, more than anywhere else in Europe one might say. The tone of the debates was full of reference to the war, up to the point that the cause of the war was linked to the cause of modern architecture. For sure, Reyner Banham represented the most polemical voice. He boldly talked about betrayal and abandonment while construing a generation conflict between the advocates of modern architecture in Britain. In his belligerent essay 'Revenge of the Picturesque: English Architectural Polemics, 1945-1965', which was his contribution to the 1968 *Liber Amicorum* presented to Nikolaus Pevsner on the occasion of his 65th birthday, Banham spilled his beans and spared nobody. It famously opened with the following statement:

*'Those of my generation who interrupted their architectural training in order to fight a war to make the world safe for the Modern Movement, tended to resume their studies after demobilization with sentiments of betrayal and abandonment. Two of the leading oracles of Modern Architecture appeared to have thrown principle to the wind and espoused the most debased English habits of compromise and sentimentality.*

*J.M. Richards, author of the highly persuasive Introduction to Modern Architecture at the beginning of the war, celebrated its end with The Castles on the Ground, an apotheosis of English suburbia for which some have never forgiven him. Similarly, Nikolaus Pevsner, whose Pioneers of the Modern Movement had given modern architecture a comfortably secure historical ancestry, was now publishing (either as author, or as editor of the Architectural Review) articles giving equally secure historical justifications for a revival of the Picturesque.'*<sup>31</sup>

According to Banham then, 'combat was joined between a barely middle-aged architectural "Establishment" armed with a major magazine [*Architectural Review*], and a generation of battle-hardened and unusually mature students.'<sup>32</sup>

However, after having first dismissed the older editors of the *Architectural Review*, Banham then aimed his arrows at his

30 The history of modern architecture and modernism in Great Britain has regained quite some new interest, see among others: John R. Gold, *The Experience of Modernism. Modern Architects and the Future City 1928-1953*, E & FN Spon, London, 1997; and its sequel: John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism, Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954-1972*, Routledge, London, 2007; Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-war World. Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain*, Routledge, London, 2002; Alan Powers, *Modern. The Modern Movement in Britain*, Merrell Publishers, London and New York, 2005; Alan Powers, *Britain. Modern Architectures in History*, Reaktion Books, London, 2007; Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain. Narratives of Modernity before Reconstruction*, Routledge, London, 2007; Andrew Higgott, *Mediating Modernism. Architectural Cultures in Britain*, Routledge, London, 2007. The Twentieth Century Society and its journal too, have significantly contributed to the research of modern architecture in Britain.

31 Reyner Banham, 'Revenge of the Picturesque: English Architectural Polemics, 1945-1965', in: John Summerson (ed.), *Essays on Architectural Writers and Writing*, Allen Lane the Penguin Press, London, 1968, pp. 265-273.

32 Ibid.

contemporaries, 'those of my generation', with whom he had organised the ICA events of the Independent Group in order to come up with some sort of alternative agenda to the policies of the *Review*. Banham's partners-in-crime were well aware of his disappointment; apparently, Alison Smithson had once remarked that 'poor Peter [Banham]' was 'forever condemned to be disappointed'.<sup>33</sup> And of course, despite the firm lines drawn by Banham, it should not be forgotten that he himself held a most ambiguous position here as well, having held himself the position of so-called 'assistant literary editor' on the *Architectural Review* board while working on his dissertation under the supervision of Pevsner during those same years. Any oppositional account of the events should thus be measured most carefully.

The by now established myth of the Independent Group and the New Brutalism is grounded on such oppositions, despite several attempts to more critically contextualize the historical events.<sup>34</sup> It should be briefly recaptured here, since it must be contested. The classic myth runs as follows: there was a younger generation, eager to catch up with both Continental avant-garde and American consumer culture; they gathered at the ICA, were anti-establishment and polemicized against the policies of the *Architectural Review* of the time; to this end they devised the New Brutalism against what they called the 'New Sentimentality', a pun on the *Review* editors propaganda of a New Empiricism and New Humanism as derived from the example of the Swedish welfare state; *Architectural Design* (with the younger Theo Crosby as 'technical editor') would act as the *Review*'s counterpart and be the new generation's mouthpiece. An exciting story then unfolds involving iconoclastic 'bloody-mindedness' against the cultured tastes of a figure like Herbert Read, the 'Pope of modern art'; it's about 'hards' against 'softs', and 'angry young men' who sought honest architectural expression, not the kind of 'compromise' as suggested by Pevsner in his Reith lectures for BBC radio on the Englishness of English art.

Other ingredients of the crucible included competing student factions at the Architectural Association and the LCC as a place of confrontation between the socialist minded architects who preached 'people's detailing' and the young architects with a predilection for Corbusian *béton brut*; a battle fought at the Alton estate of Roehampton, where eventually the young team

33 As quoted by Whiteley in his Banham biography, 2002, p. 133.

34 By far the most critical is Anne Massey and Penny Sparke, 'The Myth of the Independent Group', in: *Block*, nr. 10, 1985, pp. 48-56. The article was a fierce attack on a piece by Dick Hebdige, 'In Poor Taste', published in: *Block*, nr. 8 of the same year which according to Massey and Sparke uncritically reproduced the myth of the Independent Group as constructed over the years. However, Hebdige's article was reproduced in the catalogue of the first Independent Group retrospective, the MIT Press publication *Modern Dreams* of 1988. Massey and Sparke's critique went largely unnoticed. It should be noted here, that Penny Sparke was involved in the production of the BBC documentary 'Fathers of Pop' just as she edited Reyner Banham's anthology *Design by Choice*, Academy Editions, London, 1981. Anne Massey published her dissertation of 1985 in 1995 as *The Independent Group. Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-59*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

of Howell, Killick, Partridge and Amis built five 'Marseille cubs' based on the earlier experiment of StJohn Wilson, Colquhoun and Peter Carter at the Bentham Road estate. The 1951 Festival of Britain, the so-called 'contemporary' style that was invented for the occasion, Townscape, the neo-Picturesque and New Town planning are all then casually interwoven in the story. In the more recent historiography from the 1990s onward the Independent Group is eventually added and cherished as the ultimate place of resistance and neo-avantgarde experiment with the 1956 exhibition 'This is Tomorrow' at the Whitechapel Gallery as something of a cumulation of the events. Ultimately, the moment unravelled in the early 1960s when the Smithsons built the Economist in London and Stirling the Engineering Building at Leicester University. A disappointed Banham declared it was all over: in his 1966 book on the New Brutalism he concluded that ultimately, the younger generation of architects had not been capable of developing a coherent alternative, had fallen out with each other, while Brutalist ethic had given way to Picturesque revival after all, and most glaringly so in the case of the 'bell-wethers of the young throughout the middle fifties', Alison and Peter Smithson.

But when one looks just a bit closer at the web of exchanges, nothing of this account actually holds up. At the same time, it is not completely untrue either, all of the abovementioned was part of the 'English crucible' as Kenneth Frampton so aptly defined the situation.<sup>35</sup> The polemics that were part and parcel of the crucible and accompanied the events often prevent a clear understanding of the issues at stake. Lethaby already complained about the eagerness for dissent between his fellow countrymen. Talking about a 'culture war' (in 1917) Lethaby observed how 'it has become a delightful amusement to us to differ in words' and that one was 'so eager for word arguments that if our very own opinions are uttered by some one else we are tempted to contradict them, or we raise confusing other questions in philosophy or politics'.<sup>36</sup> Jencks too, noted in his *Modern Movements in Architecture* how the 'scene' of British architecture could be captured by the 'single metaphor' of the 'battlefield', a "'scarred battlefield" at that, for it is saturated with the shellholes of polemic', and 'each label (or insult according to the enemy) marks the place and time where a battle was fought or where a flag was stuck marking out new territory'.<sup>37</sup>

35 Paper delivered by Kenneth Frampton at the occasion of a TU Delft seminar on CIAM, Team 10 and the English Context, 5 November 2001; the account is personal and impressionistic, a slightly different version from someone just a few years younger than the Smithsons and their contemporaries, even though one could count Frampton also as a contemporary, he and Alison differ only two years in age.

36 W.R. Lethaby, *Form in Civilization. Collected papers on Art and Labour*, Oxford University Press, London, 1957, p. 87.

37 Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 239.

## The Construction of Opposition or Closing the Circle?

Between the 1955 New Brutalism essay and Banham's 1976 critique of the Festival of Britain and the 'Festival style' the various accounts of the events in the 1950s as produced by the 'historian of the immediate future' keep slightly shifting over the years. The construction of opposition remains the most important element, however, with class struggle and the generation gap among the basic ingredients. The second element, which became a recurring element ever since Banham's 1966 book on the New Brutalism came out, is how the opposition between the parties was ultimately reversed and overcome. Looking back, Banham spoke of a 'closing of the circle in about one decade' dating this as follows:

*'Symbolically, the gap between the Brutalists and the Picturesque Townscape movement may be said to close in 1962, when the Smithsons employed Gordon Cullen, greatest of the Architectural Review's "Townscape" draughtsmen to prepare the perspectives of their Economist building.'*<sup>38</sup>

But if one could truly speak of such a big opposition as suggested by Banham, then arguably, this 'closing of the circle' had happened as early as 1952 when the Independent Group was installed and he himself joined the *Architectural Review* board. The very moment the protagonists of the new generation asked for a space of their own, this request was granted. This happened also in the case of CIAM and MARS, just as it happened at the ICA and in the pages of the *Architectural Review*. Unlike the early, pre-war avant-gardes, the Brutalists never had a magazine of their own comparable to say *G*, *De Stijl*, or *Esprit Nouveau*. It always concerned a critical practice from within the more or less established media and institutes.

As noted, the various historiographies that reproduce the Banham myth of straightforward opposition are mostly a matter of highlighting and suppressing, particularly so in the case of the generation conflict. There is hardly a voice contesting this, even though there is plenty of evidence of mutual interest and interaction bridging the generation gap, just as there is evidence of fierce rivalry between the contemporaries – as in the case of the Smithsons and Stirling for instance, or Banham and Rowe.

Additionally, one might also point to lesser known contemporary younger architects who worked parallel to the Independent Group members and who were equally, or even more successful in

<sup>38</sup> Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism*, 1966, p. 75.

winning competitions and setting up their own businesses: Philip Powell and Hidalgo Moya in the first place perhaps, who won the competition for Churchill Gardens as early as 1946, as well as the 1949 competition for the so-called vertical feature at the Festival of Britain, built 1951, and which the Smithsons lost; Peter (or Joe) Chamberlin, Geoffry Powell and Christoph Bon built the Golden Lane estate after Powell won the competition, and again lost by the Smithsons. Not much later the threesome were to be involved in the development of the monumental Barbican estate just south of Golden Lane. As for 'elders' following, at times surpassing the young turks in terms of 'bloody-minded' radicalism in architecture one could point to Denys Lasdun, his Cluster Block in the East End of London and the University of East Anglia dormitory buildings in particular, or Ernö Goldfinger and his building projects for Elephant & Castle, the Balfron Tower and Trellick Tower, all set in London and of a most eloquent concrete architecture.

A rare, dissent yet perceptive observation regarding the construction of a generation conflict comes from Percy Johnson-Marshall, British modern architect and planner, about ten years older than Stirling and Smithson. Talking about the debates of the 1950s, he said:

*'The Festival of Britain absorbed modern architecture into the show. It was a very British way to behave, but it did not suit everyone. There were already others, of whom the Smithsons are the best known, who wanted to regain a harder edge. I stress the word regain. They were not mere iconoclasts. They believed in the importance of history and were passionately keen to rekindle that spark that the masters like Corb and Mies had ignited. To a real extent, they were reaching back to move forwards. Certainly they were young, but there were older people who agreed with them and also younger people who didn't.'*<sup>39</sup>

To complicate matters, Banham himself too, would retrospectively note examples of intergenerational collaboration, stating that the 'committed young as Colin Rowe, James Stirling and the Smithsons' 'found it difficult to maintain consistent hostility to the *Review*', instead they started working with the *Architectural Review* editors soon enough, publishing major articles by their hand in the magazine.<sup>40</sup> James Stirling would publish his reviews of the Ronchamp chapel and the Maisons Jaoul by Le Corbusier, while Colin Rowe published his seminal essay 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa' as early as 1947. The 'Cluster City' essay by the Smithsons was already mentioned, just as the generous coverage of the Smithsons' Hunstanton school by the *Review* with comments

39 Interview in: John R. Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, 1997, pp. 220-221.

40 Reyner Banham, 'The Revenge of the Picturesque', 1968, pp. 266-267.



from such an authoritative critic as Philip Johnson, even though at the same time the Smithsons were introduced as 'two of the most controversial young designers in England'.<sup>41</sup>

Banham, wisely but regrettably, did not include himself in the retrospective assessment of the exchanges. As is well-known of course (sometimes it feels one is only repeating what has been said a long time ago) his ground-breaking New Brutalism essay was published in the *Review*, not in *Architectural Design*, the alleged mouthpiece of the younger generation; interestingly enough, it was published in the December issue of 1955, so it must have been written simultaneously to Pevsner's radio talks on the Englishness of English art. Perhaps then, it is not by accident that the two defining concepts of Banham's explanation of the New Brutalism, the ones of so-called 'Image' and 'topology', seem to be so tuned as to substitute the key Picturesque notions with the Image for the painterly and topology for the organization of movement; a most clever rhetorical construct by Banham that may also lead to confuse the Brutalist project with yet another example of Picturesque revival, even though the New Brutalism essay itself clearly attempts to steer away from the rules as set out by the elder editors of the *Review*.<sup>42</sup>

The relationship between Banham and Pevsner must have been quite a special one and remains hard to fathom.<sup>43</sup> Banham's profound respect for Pevsner is well documented, yet simultaneously he would seek confrontation, for instance in the case of his dissertation, which was also a partial criticism of Pevsner's own work who acted as the supervisor to the doctoral work: Banham's classic study *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, on which he worked between the years 1952 and 1958, and which was eventually published in 1960.<sup>44</sup> But as said, following Banham's own early career one cannot but conclude that integration between the two 'combat' parties was firmly secured as early as 1952 when he himself started to work as a literary editor for the *Architectural Review*, just as he would start to convene the gatherings of the 'Young Group' at the ICA that same year. His official capacity was that of 'secretary of the Independent Group'; Banham's appointment to the ICA Management Committee followed a year later in the summer of 1953.<sup>45</sup>

In a sense, the figure of Banham and the relation Banham-Pevsner, the protégé respecting while contesting his own mentor, seem to represent much of the interactions within the various platforms for modern architecture and art, not only with respect to the ICA

41 *The Architectural Review*, September 1954, contents page.

42 Such confusion seems to be the case in the book by John Macarthur, *The Picturesque. Architecture, Disgust and Other Irregularities*, Routledge, London, 2007, pp. 103-109, where the author either erroneously concludes, or perhaps attempts to ironically provoke, when he states that 'Banham was correct to think that Brutalism was picturesque'. Banham never proposed such a thing.

43 For more on this see Whiteley's biography of 2002; Susie Harries in her biography of Pevsner (*Nikolaus Pevsner, The Life*, Chatto & Windus, London, 2011), largely follows Whiteley on this aspect.

44 Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, The Architectural Press, London, 1960; Robin Middleton notes that 'the vital, final chapter of *Theory & Design* was not part of the original dissertation, Buckminster Fuller was introduced at the suggestion of John McHale', correspondence with the author.

45 From Robbins, 1990, chronology by Graham Whitham; the date of 1952 as Banham's start at the *Architectural Review* is not a 100% clear though, in his dissertation on the editorial policies of *The Architectural Review*, Erdem Erten lists March 1953 as the first inclusion of Banham in the journal's colophon as assistant literary editor: Erdem Erten, 'Shaping "The Second Half Century": *The Architectural Review 1947-1971*', MIT, February 2004; Whiteley mentions 1952, p. 9 of his biography, just as Robbins, p. 18.

and the Independent Group, but also the MARS group, CIAM and Team 10. It would certainly explain much of the anger some of the elders felt for the actions of the junior members (though Pevsner was never angered by Banham's actions it must be noted). A frustrated Jane Drew, second generation British modern architect, complained for instance about the dissolution of the MARS group in 1957, and CIAM in 1959:

*'My chief objection to them, and not just them, was the way that they jumped on to the CIAM bandwagon, having done nothing and setting up what was called [Team] Ten ... I thought that it was colossal cheek.'*<sup>46</sup>

The so-called 'combat' between the two generations then turns out to be a much more complicated affair, but how can one be surprised? When we are looking at the exchanges between the two camps as outlined by Banham, the *Review* editors versus the younger architects and writers, it is more like looking at a web of interactions between highly ambitious individuals, overlapping loyalties and shifting coalitions, surely not a clearcut dividing frontline between generational parties. Nor did it concern a rivalry between two magazines one might add at this point, namely between the *Review* versus *Architectural Design*. The special position of the 'trade rag' *The Architects' Journal* for instance, has remained underexposed in existing historiographies.<sup>47</sup> Published by the Architectural Press and De Cronin Hastings (just as the more prestigious *Review*) the rhetorics frequently spilled over to the pages of the *Journal* as well. The Smithsons contributed regularly, also under pseudonym, the construction photographs of Hunstanton were lavishly published first by the *Journal* in September 1953, just as their critical review of 'Banham's bumper book' on the New Brutalism was published there. Other media with very different readerships that also covered the ICA related events (albeit on an incidental basis) were the *Observer*, the *New Statesman*, *Listener*, *Encounter*, and *ARK, the Journal of the Royal College of Art*.

The discursive web we are looking at holds competing views on the future of modern architecture and planning, yet they very much operate within the same modernist paradigm. There are differences, there is contradiction, disagreement, even opposition of course, there is exaggeration and definition by opposition, but the positions are not mutually exclusive, there are overlappings, shared interests and shared ambitions, probably much more than the parties would have liked to admit.

46 Interviewed by John Gold, quoted in: John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism. Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954-1972*, Routledge, London, 2007, p. 236.

47 To construct a controversy between the *Review* and *Architectural Design* as the 'axis' of the architectural debate in Britain is continued in contemporary research by Christine Boyer in her 'An Encounter with History: the Post-war Debate between the English Journals of *Architectural Review* and *Architectural Design* (1945-1960)', in: Dirk van den Heuvel, Gijs de Waal (eds.), *Team 10 between Modernity and the Everyday*, conference proceedings, Delft University of Technology, 2003; but also by Steve Parnell, *Architectural Design 1954-1972: The Contribution of the Architectural Magazine to the Writing of Architectural History*, PhD Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2012.

Next to the generation conflict the issue of class also serves as too easy an explanation for assumed oppositions, in order to clarify the history of the post-war years and the Independent Group events. Despite denouncing the 'angry young men' analogy, Reyner Banham did try to cast the Independent Group events, including both the Brutalist and Pop tendencies within the group, as belonging to or at least feeling sympathetic toward working class attitudes. In the 1970s BBC documentary on the Independent Group 'Fathers of Pop' Banham – himself of working class origins – tried to portray the whole group as such, but almost every other participant interviewed resisted such general characterization. Design historians Anne Massey and Penny Sparke provided an early refutation of this classic Independent Group myth with their piece 'The Myth of the Independent Group', published already in 1985 in the journal *Block*, in which they carefully dismantled any definition of the group by such schematic opposition.<sup>48</sup>

Yet, the myth is tenacious. Beatriz Colomina tried to have the claim of class opposition confirmed in her interview with Peter Smithson in *October*, but Smithson mentioned that among others Alison, but also Nigel Henderson and Colin St John Wilson were all from very middle class to upper middle class backgrounds.<sup>49</sup> In a recent piece Colomina, following Banham, rephrased the connection with working class, anti-academic sentiment by referring to the so-called red brick universities, the nineteenth century counterparts of old elite universities, the implication being that the architects of the Independent Group went to these red brick universities instead of following an elite sort of education.<sup>50</sup> Again, although not untrue, the generalizing tone results in myth making. A few of the young Turks were from Liverpool, the classic red brick university, like Stirling, Bob Maxwell and Brian Richards for instance, just as the Smithsons went to Newcastle University (then Durham). However, many of the protagonists received their training at the classic architecture schools, most notably the AA-School, where Voelcker went for instance, or Cambridge, Sandy Wilson went there, or even the Royal Academy Schools, which Peter Smithson himself enrolled after having finished his architectural training at Durham University in Newcastle.

The one underlying topic, which is actually a most interesting one, yet hardly looked into until now, although Colomina touches on this, is the one of education in relation to social mobility, a key characteristic of the post-war era and the freshly established welfare state policies. Especially so, because many of the

48 Massey, Sparke, 1985.

49 Beatriz Colomina, 'Friends of the Future: A Conversation with Peter Smithson', in: *October*, nr. 94, Fall 2000, pp. 16-17; Alan Colquhoun called the whole class issue a 'red-herring' stating that it should be about the positions and the principles of ordering, in conversation with the author, 23 June 2007.

50 Beatriz Colomina, 'Foreword' to Mark Crinson and Claire Zimmerman (eds.), *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern*, 2010, p. 2; see also Banham, *The New Brutalism*, 1966, p 13-14.

returning soldiers, including Independent Group members such as Nigel Henderson were provided with scholarships to re-integrate into society. Denise Scott-Brown, at the time (the early 1950s) a student at the AA School, mentioned how the school was a melting pot of lower class students with scholarships and students from the upper middle classes with public school backgrounds.<sup>51</sup> She also talked about how some of those of upper middle class descent would 'rebel' in the 'angry young men' kind of way. But aspirations also worked the other way in the English crucible of the post-war years, and this is overlooked too often. Working and lower middle class students adopted upper class attitudes, the Whiggish Colin Rowe perhaps most notably.<sup>52</sup> Peter Smithson and John McHale too, would talk about how English 'snobbishness' was something of a cultivated attitude in and outside of Independent Group circles.<sup>53</sup>

51 Lecture at the AA School, 2009: <http://www.aaschool.ac.uk//VIDEO/lecture.php?ID=85>.

52 Being from working-class Yorkshire and a fellow student of Stirling and Maxwell at Liverpool university, Rowe is said to have adopted the upper-class accent to better himself; Braden R. Engel paints a fantastic portrait of Colin Rowe and his fellow students from Liverpool in his essay 'The Badger of Muck and Brass', in: *AA-files*, nr. 62, 2011, pp. 95-103; for instance, he describes how Rowe and Stirling received the necessary domestic etiquette from their friend Sam Stevens' mother, 'like leaving the bath in a good condition after use'.

53 Among others in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Smithson Time. Peter Smithson & Hans Ulrich Obrist. A Dialogue*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2004, p. 25; Colomina, 'Friends of the Future', 2000, p. 5; David Robbins, *The Independent Group*, 1990, p. 29.

54 See the chronology of Independent Group events by Whitham in Robbins, 1990; to unravel the history of the schools falls unfortunately beyond the scope of this research, still it should be mentioned; for an attempt to such a history of the Central School see: Sylvia Backemeyer (ed.), *Making their Mark. Art, Craft and Design at the Central School 1896-1966*, A & C Black, 2000.

55 'Townscape', in: *The Architectural Review*, December 1949, pp. 355-362; see for more on this Erten's dissertation (2004); Mathew Aitchinson has written on the topic, and edited the posthumous publication of Nikolaus Pevsner, *Visual Planning and the Picturesque*, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2012; Aitchinson also organized the symposium on Townscape, 22-23 July 2011, University College London.

Next to Liverpool, the AA School, or the Bartlett School of Architecture, the other key London institutes that should be mentioned here are the Central School of Arts and Crafts and the Slade School of Art. The latter was the place where Richard Hamilton, William Turnbull and Eduardo Paolozzi met when students. The former was also important, since it was founded by Lethaby, and thus an immediate connection with early anti-classicist and pre-modernist notions from the Arts and Crafts. Theo Crosby for instance went to the Central School to take classes in sculpture, while many others would teach there, including Paolozzi, Henderson, Peter Smithson, Victor Pasmore, Turnbull, Edward Wright and Hamilton.<sup>54</sup> The Central School thus served as the first meeting place during the years 1948-1951, before the ICA would open its doors in Dover Street in December 1950, and before the actual Independent Group gatherings would start in 1952. In fact, if it ever was a real phenomenon, the whole generation opposition and the drive behind the so-called New Brutalist 'bloody-mindedness' might be referred to those pre-ICA years when one considers that the New Empiricism as proposed by the *Review* editors and against which the Brutalists would rail, belonged to the 1940s. From December 1949 onward Townscape was launched and would supersede the New Empiricism as the major and most influential campaign of the *Review*.<sup>55</sup> The Festival year 1951, also the first year of the new premises of the ICA, marked both the opposition and the integration of the younger artists and architects by the establishment, after which the whole Independent Group affair took place within the confines of the ICA.

Early integration can also be observed in the pages of the *Architectural Review*. Even before the Independent Group meetings and the event of the New Brutalism, the *Architectural Review* had already published Nigel Henderson photographs in the February issue of 1952. Next to a text called 'Italian Scrapbook', a report on post-war developments at the peninsula, we find a so-called 'stressed photograph' by him of Eduardo Paolozzi visiting his family village.<sup>56</sup> And when the Growth and Form exhibition by Richard Hamilton was on show in 1951, the cover of the *Review* featured an image taken from the exhibition, while inside two pages with Henderson photographs showed an impression of the installation.<sup>57</sup> At the 1951 Festival of Britain too, Paolozzi's work was part of the official exhibitions, just as Pasmore and Turnbull's, both future Independent Group members; and to mention it once again, Richard Hamilton put together the Growth and Form installation for the ICA, even though the exact status with regard to the Festival programme became a subject of dispute.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly enough, after the Festival had closed in October 1951 the *Review* also published commentaries critical of key parts of its programme. In the December issue two highly critical pieces appeared, the main article that discussed the design products as selected by the Council of Industrial Design (CoID), and a review of the achievements of the Lansbury estate by Richards who didn't hide his profound disappointment with the 'live architecture exhibition' of the Festival.<sup>59</sup> And later, in 1953, Richards would attack the first results of the New Town policies in his essay 'The Failure of the New Towns', two years before the Smithsons would publish their critique in *Architectural Design* with their 1955 essay 'The Built World: Urban Re-identification' and the 1956 essay 'Alternative to the Garden City Idea.'<sup>60</sup> And famously, the *Review* produced the 'Outrage' issue, June 1955, edited by the activist-journalist Ian Nairn, once more attacking the assumed mediocrity of British planning policies, which produced a new cityscape that Nairn had coined 'Subtopia'.<sup>61</sup> The Smithsons would seize upon this latest campaign of the *Review* when they compiled their demonstration grid for CIAM 1956 in Dubrovnik. For one of the five examples of settlement development based on the Geddes Valley Section they used the very phrase of 'OUTRAGE', pasting it on one of the boards of the grid, plus a photograph taken from the *Review*'s 'Outrage' issue depicting a generic suburban development, although its origins and the connection to the *Review* campaign were initially made invisible.<sup>62</sup>

As a final observation regarding the dynamics of the exchanges between middle-aged establishment and younger opposition

56 *The Architectural Review*, February 1952, p. 82; the text itself is authored by Alan Ballantyne.

57 *The Architectural Review*, October 1951, plus photos by Nigel Henderson on p. 216 and 273.

58 Anne Massey discusses the difficulties around the 'Growth and Form' exhibition and how it eventually fell outside of the official Festival agenda, Massey, 1995, p. 42-45.

59 J.M. Richards, 'Lansbury', in: *The Architectural Review*, December 1951, pp. 361-367; two pieces without author discussed design at the Festival: 'COID: Progress Report', pp. 349-352, and 'COID: Progress Report', pp. 353-359.

60 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The Built World: Urban Re-identification' in: *Architectural Design*, June 1955, pp. 185-188; Alison and Peter Smithson, 'An Alternative to the Garden City Idea', in: *Architectural Design*, July 1956, pp. 229-231 (first typewritten is dated 1954).

61 *The Architectural Review*, June 1955, also published as a book by the Architectural Press in the same year.

62 From the Smithson archive, published in Dirk van den Heuvel, Max Risselada (eds.), *Alison and Peter Smithson – from the House of the Future to a House of Today*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, p. 70; and Max Risselada, Dirk van den Heuvel (eds.), *Team 10. In Search of a Utopia of the Present 1953-1981*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2005, p. 51.

one could point to the two issues of the *Review* devoted to developments in the United States, and in which quite naturally the reciprocal issues of (anti-)Americanism and Englishness were consistently played off against each other, the 1950 issue 'Man Made America' and the 1957 issue of 'Machine Made America' with a collage of John McHale on the cover. In addition to the suggestion by Banham that the younger generation had moved in the direction of the establishment giving up resistance and reproducing Picturesque sensibilities, we also see the establishment absorbing the interest in America as an at least partially positive force.<sup>63</sup>

The other platform of exchange that is usually left out of the historiography of the 1940s and 50s, sometimes simply overlooked, or at best assigned with a minor role only, is the one of the MARS Group, the British section of CIAM established in 1933.<sup>64</sup> MARS is conspicuously absent from Banham's account of the debates of the 1950s for instance. Perhaps because he himself was not a member, perhaps because MARS in its last years played no real part in the debates on the New Brutalism. Yet, at the same time the MARS network had multiple overlappings with the ICA and the two major British magazines, the *Architectural Review* and *Architectural Design*. MARS members controlled the exchanges, the issues at stake and who was allowed to speak and who not, starting with James Richards, editor of the *Review* of course, who would also serve as chair of the British CIAM group. But Monica Pidgeon, chief editor of *Architectural Design*, was a member of the MARS Group as well, just as her younger technical editor Theo Crosby. MARS then brought together many of the competitors in the English crucible, and the Group had secured key positions in the architecture media. MARS members, younger and older, also controlled the architecture of the Festival of Britain; Hugh Casson, Leslie Martin, Ralph Tubbs, James Cadbury Brown, Powell and Moya, all were involved in building on the South Bank, all were MARS members.

And although not officially part of the group's activities, the *Architects' Year Book* series, a prestigious hardcover published by Paul Elek, was fully controlled by prominent MARS members with Jane Drew and Trevor Dannatt as editors. The *Architects' Year Book* series ran fourteen editions, starting in 1945 after which it came out irregularly until 1974.<sup>65</sup> Especially from 1953 onward it would bring major pieces by leading international voices, among those Ernst May, Le Corbusier, Ernesto Rogers, Jacqueline Tyrwhitt,

63 'Man Made America', *The Architectural Review*, December 1950, and 'Machine Made America', *The Architectural Review*, May 1957; this observation was already made by Charles Jencks in his *Modern Movements in Architecture* of 1973, p. 280.

64 Unfortunately, there is no separate history of the British CIAM group written until now, but in recent publications one finds a handful of references, in particular the work of John Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, 1997, and *The Practice of Modernism*, 2007; Nicholas Bullock, 2002; Alan Powers 2005 and 2007; Darling, 2007; in Mumford's history on CIAM (2000) there are also a couple of references to MARS, esp. in relation to the 1947 and 1951 conferences.

65 Paul Elek published the hardcover book series called *Architects' Year Book* between 1945 and 1974 with various editors: nr. 1 as published in 1945, edited by Jane Drew, completely devoted to practical issues related to the immediate reconstruction; nr. 2 published in 1947, edited by Jane Drew; nrs. 3-4, 1949 and 1952, jointly edited by Drew and Trevor Dannatt; nrs. 5-10, between 1953 and 1962, edited by Trevor Dannatt; nrs. 11-13 edited by David Lewis as thematic issues: nr. 11, 'The Pedestrian in the City', 1965; nr. 12, 'Urban Structure', 1968; nr. 13, 'The Growth of Cities', 1971; nr. 14 and last volume, 'The Inner City', 1974, edited by Declan and Margaret Kennedy.

Giulio Argan, Edgar Kaufmann Jr., and Julius Posener. But also many of the younger generation were represented: the Smithsons, John Voelcker, James Stirling, Peter Moro and Theo Crosby. Other contributing MARS members were Maxwell Fry, Jane Drew, Ove Arup, Denys Lasdun and Ernö Goldfinger. From abroad too, younger voices were given a platform, most notably from CIAM circles: Jaap Bakema, Aldo van Eyck, Giancarlo De Carlo, but also Tomás Maldonado, Max Bill, and Edvard Ravnikar. Even the distinguished Herbert Read, one of the founders of the ICA and favourite target of Independent Group members, sat on the editorial board from the series' inception and would contribute regularly.

When MARS was abandoned, a special volume came out giving an overview of the events and developments from 1933 until 1957, most notably by Maxwell Fry.<sup>66</sup> Paul Elek continued the series with Dannatt, who edited his last issue in 1962, after which another four volumes would be published by intervals of three years. It meant a continuation of a post-MARS and post-CIAM discourse well into the 1970s combining familiar and new positions that overlapped with or ran parallel to the Team 10 discourse. Authors included in this second part of the series were among many others: from Team 10 and its wider circles: Daniel van Ginkel and Blanche Lemco, Van Eyck, Candilis Josic Woods, Herman Haan, Doxiadis, Christopher Alexander, Yona Friedman; early post-modernist voices: Denise Scott-Brown, and Charles Moore; from Archigram: Peter Cook, David Greene and Michael Webb; also Gunter Nitschke, Peter Carter and Brian Richards; and younger critics such as Tony Vidler and Kenneth Frampton; and of the by then 'older' more mature ICA guard: Theo Crosby, Eduardo Paolozzi, Richard Llewelyn-Davies, Anthony Hill, Victor Pasmore, and William Turnbull. The Smithsons would also contribute up until issue nr. 12 of 1968, with Peter's essay 'Density, Interval and Measure' as a final one.<sup>67</sup>

Regarding the English situation, MARS and the *Architects' Year Book* series thus represented a network bringing together the ICA establishment, Independent Group members and the magazines of the *Architectural Review* and *Architectural Design*. It was also through MARS that the young members, William Howell, Alison and Peter Smithson and John Voelcker in particular, could meet with key players in the field.<sup>68</sup> MARS membership offered them the opportunity to become active as official representatives within CIAM circles, eventually leading to the organization of Team 10.

66 Maxwell Fry, 'English Architecture from the 'Thirties', in: Trevor Dannatt (ed.), *Architects' Year Book*, nr. 8, Elek Books, London, 1957, pp. 53-56; (immediately followed by an overview of events between 1953-1957 by Denys Lasdun, Voelcker wrote a report on the Dubrovnik CIAM conference and Team 10).

67 Peter Smithson, 'Density, Measure and Interval', *Architects' Year Book*, nr. 12, Elek Books, London, 1968; first published in *Landscape*, Spring 1967, also in *Architectural Design*, September 1967.

68 In 1953 it was decided to open up MARS membership for a limited number of young members to form 'junior groups', in particular the ones mentioned here, see Denys Lasdun, 'MARS GROUP 1953-1957' in *Architects' Year Book*, nr. 8, 1957, p. 57.

The complaints of Smithson and Stirling that there was no such thing as modern architecture in Britain before them should thus be held critically against this context. By 1957, when MARS was to be disbanded and Smithson expressed his surprise that modern architecture was being discussed at an RIBA function, modern architecture had indeed established itself as the new paradigm, also in Britain. In 1957 Alvar Aalto was awarded with the RIBA Gold Medal, after Gropius had received the honours the year before, and Le Corbusier in 1953. It seemed MARS had operated quite successfully in the so-called battle for modern architecture, preparing the ground for the younger generation, even though some of whom felt such urge to distance themselves from their elders.

### Designing Histories

In analogy with the figure of the young members and the former military back from the war being integrated into society and its institutions along the lines of custody and contestation – with the ICA actually surviving the process and MARS and CIAM going under – we see a similar figure with regard to the devising of the larger theoretical and historiographical frameworks during the period. Mid-twentieth century was the period when knowledge and its disciplinary development were conceived as structured through the by now established concepts of epistemology (Foucault and Bachelard) and paradigm (Kuhn), just as it saw the emergence of a vast patchwork of counter-constructs that tried to mobilize the so-called human, the socio-cultural, the irrational or analogical, the artistic-psychological, even cosmological such as *poesis* (again Bachelard, but also Heidegger and Huizinga), but also phenomenology, existentialism, all sorts of ‘practices’ including bricolage and hybridisation, the very broad category of hermeneutics, and so forth and so on. In architecture too, we see in the second quarter of the twentieth century the devising of historiographical frameworks, which aimed to explain, systematize as well as legitimize the ‘new architecture’ as represented by the modern movement, and which defined new relationships between knowledge, technology, society and architecture. This early period was quickly followed by a critical, yet equally operative evaluation of those first ‘paradigms’ during the 1950s and 60s.<sup>69</sup> It was in this first period of evaluation and reconceptualization of modern architecture and its achievements that Alison and Peter Smithson

69 A handful of relatively recent studies have been published about the subject of the historiography of modern architecture and its specific epistemological structure. The most extensive study until now is by Panayotis Tournikiotis, *The Historiography of Modern Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1999; other studies include: Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present. Inventing Architectural Modernism*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2008; Gevark Hartoonian, *The Mental Life of the Architectural Historian: Re-opening the Early Historiography of Modern Architecture*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2011.



and their contemporaries of the Independent Group and Team 10 intellectually grew up and matured so to speak. As already mentioned in the introductory chapter, they defined themselves as 'simple inheritors' with the achievements of the 'first generation' of modern architects as the 'rock' on which they planned to ground their 'own idea of order.'<sup>70</sup> Notions of continuity, difference and regeneration are at work here. And rather than a simplistic rejection of competitor's positions, one sees a strategy of absorption, critique and appropriation. All sorts of aspects of the contested campaigns by the *Review*, the ICA founders, or the CIAM establishment, most notably Le Corbusier of course, but also Ernesto Rogers, can be retraced in the debates between the younger members in general, and in the work and thinking of Alison and Peter Smithson in particular. Classicist principle is but one yet very clear example. Peter Smithson explained why he went to the Royal Academy Schools in London in 1948 as follows: '(...) because the professor [Sir Albert Richardson] was good in the study of classicism. I thought if one was an enemy of eclecticism, then one had to know more about it than they did. In a sense this was a wartime idea – the general of one side had a picture of the general on the other side in his caravan; he wanted to know as much as possible of the history of the opponent.'<sup>71</sup>

In line with the wartime rhetoric one might argue that in the battle for modern architecture in Britain as in other modernist contexts around the globe, the writing and rewriting of the history of architecture was a key weapon, not just in Britain. The design of larger, historiographical frameworks ran parallel to avant-garde and modernist invention, although admittedly word followed action here. Sigfried Giedion's *Bauen in Frankreich* of 1928 came out almost forty years after the realization of the 1889 Eiffel tower, his 1929 manifesto *Befreites Wohnen*, two years after the Stuttgarter Weissenhof Siedlung opened, was already much closer to the date of executed key works of the modern movement. When Giedion published his *Space, Time and Architecture. The Growth of a New Tradition* in 1941, various competing histories of the modern movement were already circulating, establishing some sort of general paradigm for the new architecture: most notably, *The International Style* by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson of 1932, which followed Hitchcock's slightly earlier yet of a lesser impact, *Modern Architecture* of 1929; Emil Kaufmann's *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier* came out in 1933, an early example of a historian forging the connection between the architecture of the French enlightenment, the idea of autonomy and the ideas of the

70 'Simple Inheritors' is the first chapter of the Smithsons' retrospective monograph *The Charged Void: Architecture*; the other quote comes from their *Architectural Design* issue devoted to 'The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture', 1965.

71 Catherine Spellman, Karl Unglaub (eds.), *Peter Smithson: Conversations with Students. A Space for our Generation*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2005, p. 17; a similar quote appears in the monograph of Sir Albert Richardson: Alan Powers, 'Albert Richardson: A Critical Survey', in: Simon Houfe, Alan Powers, John Wilton-Ely, *Sir Albert Richardson 1880-1964*, Heinz Gallery, London, 1999, p. 65; that the relationships between the combatant 'generals' was most courtly was testified by Richardson giving a set of silver tea spoons to Peter and Alison Smithson when they married the same year.

early twentieth century avant-garde; and finally, Nikolaus Pevsner who published his *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* in 1936, in which he emphasized the tradition of Functionalist design as quite another genealogical line as captured by its subtitle *From William Morris to Walter Gropius*.

*Space, Time and Architecture* had a very different objective from Giedion's earlier publications, or the others mentioned. It had the ambition to establish modern architecture as what Giedion called 'the new tradition'.<sup>72</sup> Rather than proposing a break with the past in true avant-garde spirit, Giedion now designed a comprehensive historical-theoretical framework for the new, growing tradition of modern architecture, which according to him revolved around the development of the concept of space and which reached back as far as the Renaissance.<sup>73</sup> Giedion explained the need for such large time-frames as 'the demand for continuity' referring to the chaos of his time without explicitly mentioning the outbreak of World War II.<sup>74</sup> The 'total war' as proclaimed by the Nazis had only just started when Giedion published his book, neither the ending of war, nor victory over Nazi Germany were evident at the time. Giedion understood the devising of a larger, universal framework as in function of the overcoming of the then disastrous state of affairs; he stated that the 'destructive confusion of events in the world at large today is so great that the movement toward universality is clearly visible in the field of science and scholarship'. And quite in contrast with his iconoclastic *Befreites Wohnen*, which in an exalted, Nietzschean way had called for the replacement of the older 'race' with a new one,<sup>75</sup> now according to Giedion, 'a connection with the past is a prerequisite for the appearance of a new and self-confident tradition'.<sup>76</sup>

72 See also: Werner Oechslin et al., *Sigfried Giedion 1888-1968. Der Entwurf einer modernen Tradition*, Ammann, Zürich, 1989.

73 Giedion would ultimately expand his historiographical construct with his last book *Architektur und das Phänomen des Wandels. Die Drei Raumkonzeptionene in der Architektur* (Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, Tübingen, 1969), in which he distinguishes three concepts of space (prehistoric architecture as sculpture (ancient Greece as example), architecture as interior (ancient Rome as example) and architecture as both sculpture and interior (modern architecture of the twentieth century)).

74 Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture. The Growth of a New Tradition*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1982, p. 7, first edition 1941.

75 Giedion opened his *Befreites Wohnen* with a quote from the Belgian Jobard, journalist and director of the Industrial Museum: 'Wie bei Pflanzen und Tieren, so erscheint auch in der Architektur eine neue Rasse erst nach dem Verschwinden der alten. Die Rasse der Hohenpriester der Steinarchitektur wird, wie die vorsündflutlichen Tiere, verschwinden müssen, um einem neuen konstruktiven Geschlecht Platz zu machen.', on p. 3.

76 *Ibid.*, respectively p. 8 and p. 30.

The two national contexts in which such construction of historico-theoretical frameworks were most critically and productively reviewed were Britain and Italy. The first three post-war CIAM congresses would also take place here, Bridgwater in 1947, Bergamo in 1949, and Hoddesdon in 1951. In both countries a magazine would play a dominant role, *Casabella Continuità* in Milan, with Ernesto Rogers as chief editor, and the *Architectural Review* in London, with James Richards and Nikolaus Pevsner as foremost editors as well as Hubert de Croning Hastings active behind the scenes as owner, publisher, editor and anonymous author. Both magazines would reconsider the cause of modern architecture and city planning vis-à-vis history, avant-garde

experiment, the popular arts and the existing city albeit with very different outcomes. Rogers' revisionary approach is generally considered to prepare for the moment of *Tendenza* in the 1970s with Rogers' protégé Aldo Rossi as its most prominent representative. Yet it should be noted too, that this is only possible by suppressing the contributions of Giancarlo De Carlo, first of the protégés of Rogers, co-editor to the magazine, companion to the CIAM congresses and future member of Team 10 throughout the 1960s and 70s. The *Architectural Review* was behind various, most influential campaigns, the New Empiricism and Townscape as already mentioned, but – even though conventional wisdom likes it otherwise – it also served as the launch platform for the New Brutalism by way of Reyner Banham's essay, and the extensive, authoritative publication of the Hunstanton school with Philip Johnson's critique. Considering the strong and self-conscious publishing policies of the leading journal this was only possible due to the tolerance of the elder editors toward the young *agents provocateurs*, the recognition of their specific role and how it would somehow contribute to shared ambitions.

The *Architectural Review* had made the cause of modern architecture part of its central policies from the 1930s onward as a result of the activist stance of its co-owner and chief editor Hubert de Cronin Hastings (1902-1986) who took on editorship from 1927 onward. De Cronin Hastings was a son of one of the founders of the Architectural Press, the company that published the distinguished, intellectual *Review*, just as the professional *Architects' Journal*, which was also led by him from the same year on. He remained on the board of the *Review* until 1973 and thus firmly put his mark on the debates on modern architecture in Britain, even though he rather worked from behind the scenes appointing influential editors as James Maude Richards (on the board from 1937 until 1971 with a break during the war years) and Nikolaus Pevsner (editor from 1942 until 1971), and himself publishing under the pen name of Ivor de Wolfe.<sup>77</sup>

When the *Review* celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1947, the editors compiled a special section looking back as well as forward. Documenting the first half of the twentieth century and what they called the 'revolution' that culminated in the modern movement, they concluded that now a new post-revolutionary phase had begun, now was the time for consolidation 'to build up a tradition.'<sup>78</sup> Unsurprisingly, the argument of the *Architectural Review* largely followed that of its co-editor Pevsner and his

77 See for a history of the post-war decades of *The Architectural Review* the PhD Thesis by Erdem Erten, 'Shaping "The Second Half Century": *The Architectural Review* 1947-1971', MIT, February 2004; for a biographical overview of Hubert de Cronin Hastings, see: Susan Lasdun, 'H. de C. reviewed', in: *The Architectural Review*, September 1996, available online: [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m3575/is\\_n1195\\_v200/ai\\_19007181/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3575/is_n1195_v200/ai_19007181/)

78 J.M. Richards, Nikolaus Pevsner, Osbert Lancaster, H. de C. Hastings, 'The Second Half Century', and 'The First Half Century', in: *Architectural Review*, January 1947, pp. 21-36.

*Pioneers of the Modern Movement*. In contrast to Giedion's universalism, or Kaufmann's interest in French rationalism, Pevsner had constructed a functionalist tradition with special roles for the English Arts and Crafts movement, its aligned socialist thinkers and ultimately the Picturesque tradition too, as forerunners of the aesthetic revolution after the First World War. The Picturesque tradition was not a constitutive element of Pevsner's *Pioneers*, only after 1936 when he had migrated to the UK and had become an editor for the *Review* he would make it a most prominent part of his idea of a modern tradition.<sup>79</sup> Ultimately, Pevsner's *anglophilia* culminated in the 1955 Reith lecture series for the BBC radio on the 'Englishness of English Art', which also included some memorable statements on the then current state of British modern architecture, the functionalist tradition and town planning. The book still reads as a sincere and sometimes moving homage of a migrant to his newly adopted country, but it also holds some awkward references to national qualities.<sup>80</sup> Pevsner himself already knew he was treading dangerous grounds here, with his attempt for a geography of art instead of a history and he admitted in his conclusion that:

*'National character is not a procrustean bed. There is nothing stagnant in national qualities, they are in a perpetual flux. New possibilities may at any moment be thrown up and force us to revise our categories.'*<sup>81</sup>

79 In his 'Revenge of the Picturesque' Reyner Banham listed the following articles by Pevsner in the *Review* to delineate his involvement: 'Heritage of Compromise', February 1942; 'Genesis of the Picturesque', November 1944; 'Humphrey Repton – a Florilegium', February 1948; with S. Lang 'Sir William Temple and Sharawaggi', December 1949; surprisingly enough Banham did not include 'Twentieth Century Picturesque, An Answer to Basil Taylor's Broadcast', in: *The Architectural Review*, April 1954, pp. 227-229, which marked the beginnings of the 'Englishness of English Art' controversies.

80 The lectures were broadcast in October and November 1955, and published in 1956 by The Architectural Press, London; for much more on Pevsner's biography see the most insightful biography by Susie Harries, *Nikolaus Pevsner, The Life*, Chatto & Windus, London 2011.

81 Nikolaus Pevsner, *Englishness of English Art*, The Architectural Press, London, 1956, p. 182.

Yet, as sensible a statement this might read, it also seemed to act as an apology for his own bias for the stereotyped Englishman, who presumably favoured rational judgement, common sense, moderation, fairplay and compromise over revolution and uncultured brutality. Pevsner also thought of the English as disliking violence – one wonders what the former colonies would think of such a qualification – and the 'boisterous' behaviour of the 'so-called' lower classes as "continental" to this day' as if hooliganism were a French import.

More importantly though, with regard to the debates of the 1940s and early 1950s, the inclusion of British sources in the history of modern architecture remains one of the most conspicuous elements of Pevsner's argument and the editorial position of the *Architectural Review*. Here, we once again touch upon the sensitive issue of Englishness and national identity. To cast modern architecture as at least partially originating on the island, after which British invention was appropriated by the Germans in particular, cannot be uncoupled from the larger geopolitical

situation and implied ideological associations. This was not unlike the propagation of the example of Sweden as a democratic version of modern architecture. That the social democracy of Sweden was able to continue planning and building during the war years was also a most convenient circumstance, which made the Scandinavian kingdom an almost natural example to the British while planning for the future post-war reconstruction.<sup>82</sup> It should be kept in mind that the interest in the Swedish example was also in service of depoliticizing the hardcore socialist experiments in Weimar Germany, or Stalinist Russia during the collectivization of agriculture and before the great purges there. With new opportunities for modern architecture after the victory over Germany and the beginnings of the Cold War, this depoliticization remained a crucial ingredient to the *Review* campaigns, especially when one considered that the British post-war welfare state was tuned as an alternative mediating between Communist dictate as a very real threat to post-war Europe and capitalist *laissez-faire* exploitation of the pre-war period, while raising living standards for lower and middle classes. Radical, socialist modern architecture from the Continent had to be domesticated so to speak, if it were to be accommodated by British institution.<sup>83</sup> This was part of the project of the *Review* editors, who were all Labour supporters.

The joining of the international discourse on modern architecture after the end of the Second World War, was perhaps most clearly signalled by the two gatherings of CIAM in the UK. MARS, headed by Richards, was responsible for organizing two of the six post-war CIAM conferences. The first post-war, so-called reunion congress of CIAM was held in Bridgwater in September 1947. In July 1951, CIAM 8 took place in Hoddesdon, again organized by MARS, which was according to the then president of CIAM José Luis Sert and Giedion 'the best and most active group in the Congress today'.<sup>84</sup> Its general theme was that of the 'Heart of the City' as proposed by MARS and supported by Sert. Within CIAM circles, the heart of the city, or the idea of 'core', was regarded as the fifth function in addition to the quartet of work, housing, circulation and recreation of the Functional City as defined by the Athens Charter. The theme was a convergence of Giedion and Sert's interest in the possibilities of a new monumentality – as expressed by them in the 'Nine Points on Monumentality' they had written in 1943 together with Fernand Léger – and Richards' agenda to conceive of a modern architecture that would also appeal to the larger audience, the 'man in the street' or the 'common man'.<sup>85</sup>

82 Just as Brazil would be an example for the United States one might add, and why MoMA put up the ground-breaking exhibitions *Brazil Builds* and *Sweden Builds*, with Kidder-Smith as chronicler.

83 There is a special role for migrants from the Continent, which one sees re-appearing in the various recent historiographies of British modern architecture; Pevsner himself, but also Lubetkin, Goldfinger, Gropius, Breuer and Mendelsohn – had helped sowing the seeds of the new tradition in Great Britain. Elizabeth Darling has argued that there is also a case for a British grown modernism, pointing to the work of Wells Coates, Maxwell Fry and Connell and Ward; see Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain. Narratives of Modernity before Reconstruction*, Routledge, London, 2007.

84 As quoted by Eric Mumford in *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*, 2000, p. 201, from a letter by Sert to Giedion, 21 December 1949, in the CIAM archive, gta-ETH Zürich 42-SG-34-52, and in Special Collections, Harvard Graduate School of Design, Josep Lluís Sert Archive, folder C6.

85 Richards already wrote about the 'common man' in 1940. For a summary of these debates and the contributions by Richards and the MARS group see Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*, 2002, the sub-chapters 'The New Monumentality', pp. 150-152, 'The New Empiricism', pp. 163-168, 'CIAM 6, Bridgwater, England, 1947', pp. 168-179, and 'CIAM 8, Hoddesdon, England, 1951: The Heart of the City', pp. 201-215.

The theme also happily coincided with Geddesian theory as taught and propounded by Jaqueline Tyrwhit, in particular Geddes' concept of a city acropolis as the spiritual centre of a society, an idea which had seemingly materialized in the South Bank exhibition of the Festival of Britain and its centrepiece, the Royal Festival Hall.<sup>86</sup> Together with the first results of New Town planning in Stevenage and Harlow, both destinations of CIAM delegates, Britain had apparently finally succeeded in catching up with the international avant-garde, while synthesizing core British values with modernist planning and architecture.<sup>87</sup>

However, on closer inspection Richards' proposition of a 'next step' to arrive at a modern tradition as disseminated in the pages of the Review fundamentally differed from the CIAM leadership.<sup>88</sup> Speaking in general terms, CIAM still subscribed to an international and universal outlook of modern architecture whilst naturally integrating the various 'regional' groups and their achievements as derivatives of this universal outlook. Richards on the other hand was looking for a 'functionalism of the particular', and not 'of the general.' Using wordings that still echoed the rhetorics of the war, Richards explained, that 'particular' was here to be understood as both the popular and the patriotic: *'... the problem is to retain, in a highly industrialized, scientifically conceived, architecture a content that will make it intelligible to everyone, and will therefore allow architecture to take its place naturally as one of the popular arts and one of the vehicles of patriotic sentiment. There can be no quarrel with such an objective.'*<sup>89</sup>

This 'patriotic sentiment' was already predominant in Richards' eulogy of suburbia and the specific British way of life, the already mentioned *Castles on the Ground*, written during his wartime exile in Cairo, and which Banham later stigmatized as an act of betrayal of the revolutionary cause of modern architecture. This testimony of patriotism rather than international solidarity points to the dominant nationalist tendencies within post-war Britain, also among some of the protagonists of modernism and which were regarded as stifling and most regressive by many of the young architects who felt attracted to ICA and MARS circles.

Various authors have described the predominantly conservative, nationalist character of both the Festival and the general atmosphere of austerity of the period in Britain, which stood in stark contrast with the visual dominance of the cheerful colour

<sup>86</sup> The Geddesian concept of the city acropolis quite literally returned in the theme of the CIAM conference: namely the heart of the city, including its civic function. Various publications have been devoted to the Festival: Mary Banham, Bevis Hillier (eds.), *A Tonic to the Nation. The Festival of Britain 1951*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1976, among others including an essay by Reyner Banham, 'The Style: "Flimsy ... Effeminate"?'; Elaine Harwood, Alan Powers (eds.) 'Festival of Britain', *Twentieth Century Architecture nr. 5, The Journal of the Twentieth Century Society*, London, 2001. It should be noted that there were numerous other Festival events next to the South Bank exhibition, which is always privileged in accounts of modern architecture history, there were among others the Battersea Park Pleasure Gardens, the Exhibition of Science in South Kensington, exhibitions in Glasgow and Belfast as well as two travelling exhibitions. For a history of the South Bank redevelopment, see: Christoph Grafe, *People's Palaces. Architecture, Culture and Democracy in Two Cultural Centres in Post-war Europe*, PhD Thesis TU Delft, March 2010.

<sup>87</sup> Throughout 1951 *The Architectural Review* reported on the Festival and its architectural achievements, reviews were largely laudatory as in the case of the South Bank exhibition and its picturesque planning (special issue of August) and the Royal Festival Hall (special issue of June), but also in critical terms with regard to Lansbury and the COID (December issue).

<sup>88</sup> J.M. Richards, 'The Next Step?', in: *The Architectural Review*, March 1950, pp. 165-181.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

applications and light-hearted patterning that would become the hallmark of the so-called Festival style. Anne Massey in her 1995 study of the Independent Group has pointed out how the expressionist, prize winning painting 'Autumn Landscape' by William Gear although by now largely forgotten, then triggered strong responses from the popular press and the public, and how more traditional and established painters voiced their concern by forming a committee that complained that the Arts Council who had sponsored the contemporary arts competition was 'leaning too far to the left.' The incident eventually led to questions in the House of Commons. According to Massey it was the 'international, modern nature of the work which so many found objectionable'.<sup>90</sup> Adrian Forty in his essay 'Festival Politics' of 1976 extensively discussed the Festival as the outcome of culture politics of the time. He called the nationalist character of the Festival 'its most embarrassing aspect', not because he denied the 'need to recover national morale in the late 1940s,' but because of the 'studious censorship of everything foreign' that accompanied the Festival. An example highlighted by Forty was the 'decision to ban foreign foodstuffs from the South Bank restaurants and cafeterias'.<sup>91</sup> Also according to Forty, the Festival covered up the real shortcomings of the time. Its image of a Britain of full employment and a welfare state was 'illusory and partly false'. Notwithstanding popular success – eight and a half million people visited the South Bank exhibition – the Festival was first and foremost part of the 'chimera' as sustained by the British government, a political fantasy misleading the people that a 'world of plenty' was within reach, and even worse, a fantasy that 'persuaded people not only that if times were rough they would soon be better, but also that happiness could be found through material possessions and plenty of shiny paint'.<sup>92</sup>

Robin Middleton had called the Festival a 'world of make-believe' against which the later New Brutalism was a reaction.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the Smithsons opened the first of their series of statements on the New Brutalism, in the *Review* of all places, that it was 'necessary to create an architecture of reality'.<sup>94</sup> But, if such an 'architecture of reality' was not to be found through a modern architecture based on Picturesque planning or Townscape 'make-believe' as supported by the *Review* and its editors Pevsner and Richards, what did the young turks propose instead?

90 Massey, 1995, pp. 12-17.

91 Adrian Forty, 'Festival Politics', in: Banham, Hillier (eds.), *A Tonic to the Nation*, pp. 26-38.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

93 Robin Middleton, *Architectural Design*, January 1967, p. 7.

94 Alison and Peter Smithson, comments printed as part of an anonymous (Reyner Banham?) editorial piece on 'The New Brutalism', in: *The Architectural Review* April 1954, p. 274-275.

## The Other Moderns

When in 1954 the New Brutalism started to be debated in the correspondence columns of the *Architectural Review*, in particular by Independent Group friends Richard Llewelyn Davies and John Weeks who contested the laudatory appreciation for the Smithsons as expressed in the April issue, there was also a letter from Alan Colquhoun, criticizing an essay by Pevsner, 'Twentieth Century Picturesque'.<sup>95</sup> In his turn, Pevsner's essay was a response to criticism of the editorial policies of the *Review* as vented by the art historian Basil Taylor in three radio broadcasts, which he did for the BBC Third Programme. Taylor did not think much of English modernism, certainly not in comparison to the Continent, a familiar diatribe for many. Taylor specifically blamed the Picturesque, highly regarded by Pevsner. Taylor also named the *Review* as a source for the poor quality of British art production. Pevsner felt compelled to defend and focused on how the English Picturesque provided nothing less but an 'aesthetic theory' that fitted 'the demands of modern architecture and planning'.<sup>96</sup> Gropius' Bauhaus and Le Corbusier's Stuttgart houses and his Moscow Centrosoyuz, he claimed, could share the same theoretical premisses as expressed by Uvedale Price and Payne Knight when they worked on their lay-outs for the English landscape gardens. This was clearly too much to bear for the then 33 years old Alan Colquhoun, who also attended Independent Group meetings but never considered himself a member, he wrote:

*'Dr. Pevsner is surely overstating his case when he says that "the modern revolution of the twentieth century and the Picturesque movement of a hundred years before had all their essentials in common."'*<sup>97</sup>

Colquhoun questioned how the 'historicism' inherent to the Picturesque, could be aligned with the search for a 'Style' as pursued by the heroes of the modern movement; a 'Style' that would supersede the relativism of the 18th and 19th century debates and establish a set of principles equally strong and universal as those of the Classicist kind. Colquhoun concluded that 'so much of Post War British architecture is effete and superficial' because there was no 'visual "theory" basing itself on the universal validity of forms independent of structure and function'.<sup>98</sup>

In his 'letter to the editor' Colquhoun also referred to a friend of his, Colin Rowe and his extensive book review in the *Art Bulletin* June 1953 of *Forms and Functions of Twentieth*

<sup>95</sup> Alan Colquhoun, letter to the editors, in: *The Architectural Review*, July 1954, p. 2; Pevsner's essay 'C20 Picturesque. An Answer to Basil Taylor's Broadcast' appeared in the April issue of 1954 pp. 227-229.

<sup>96</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, 'C20 Picturesque', in: *The Architectural Review*, April 1954, p. 229.

<sup>97</sup> Colquhoun, 1954.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.



*Century Architecture*,<sup>99</sup> in which Rowe had explained that 'the explicit aim of the modern movement was to find sources of a style proper to the twentieth century'.<sup>100</sup> Rowe also quoted Le Corbusier who had defined style as 'a unity of principles animating the works of an epoch, the result of a state of mind which has its own special character.'<sup>101</sup>

This search for a 'unity of principles' was a very different project from Pevsner's idea of an 'aesthetic theory' derived from the Picturesque. From the architectural point of view as defined by Colquhoun and Rowe, the Picturesque could never deliver such a unity, the historical Picturesque is anecdotal and narrative in terms of organization and principles of ordering. With the introduction of the Picturesque, style became something relative, for the first time the (neo-)Classicist could be mixed with the (neo-)Gothic and the exoticism of orientalism or chinoiserie as if equally valid. The Picturesque was born from the pastime of the leisured classes and did certainly not entail the kind of rigour any new unity of principles required. Pevsner's admiration for 'compromise', 'leisurely mellowness' and the acceptance of the 'fancy dress ball' of Victorian architecture as something benignly English as he would express during his BBC radio talks the next year could only elicit more furious responses from the younger voices.<sup>102</sup>

The project of the Independent Group comprised exactly such a search for 'sources of a style proper to the twentieth century' in the sense of a new 'unity of principles' as defined by Colquhoun and Rowe. The Smithsons also talked in these terms about their Independent Group years: the *Parallel of Life and Art* installation of 1953 was initially even called 'Sources'.<sup>103</sup> The talks of the Independent Group, their meetings and presentations, the debates and exhibitions, the inclusion of the most disparate of disciplines and cultural phenomena, were all in function of this. Any subject matter seemed to have been of interest to the group as long as it was in function of coming to terms with the 'mass produced society' and its 'confused' yet 'powerful forces' as the Smithsons would state, just as Lawrence Alloway would talk about the 'long front of culture' and the 'popular art-high art continuum', and so forth.

Colquhoun's letter to the editors and the early writings of Rowe can be regarded as part of the beginnings of an intense discourse opening up new directions regarding the definition of any 'unity of

99 Colin Rowe, review of 'Forms and Functions of Twentieth Century Architecture' by Talbot Hamlin, originally published in: *The Art Bulletin*, 1953, reprinted in: Colin Rowe, *As I Was Saying*, vol. 1, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1996, pp. 107-121.

100 Colquhoun, 1954.

101 Rowe, 1953, reprinted in: Rowe, *As I Was Saying*, vol. 1, 1996, p. 116.

102 The BBC Reith Lecture Series broadcast in October and November 1955 and published as *The Englishness of English Art*, The Architectural Press, London, 1956; the publication was dedicated to Hubert de Cronin Hastings.

103 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Texts Documenting the Development of *Parallel of Life and Art*', in: Robbins, 1990, p. 129.

principles' that might guide modern architecture into the post-war era of the second half of the twentieth century. The Smithsons had joined this debate soon enough – again by way of a letter to the editors, their famous letter defending the Rudolf Wittkower book of 1949, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, and which was published in the *RIBA Journal* of February 1952.<sup>104</sup> The focus on 'principles' explains why the Smithsons would defend a historical investigation into the architecture of Andrea Palladio; it was not so much the Classicist tendency that the Smithsons were defending but the exact definition of a coherent set of principles that structured Palladio's work.

As is well-known, many of the young ICA members felt compelled to contribute to the correspondence columns of the *Review*, but also to the pages of *Architectural Design* and other journals, Reyner Banham most profusely of course, the already mentioned Llewellyn-Davies and Weeks, but also John Voelcker, Colin St John Wilson and James Stirling. Theo Crosby should be mentioned here too, not an acknowledged Independent Group member though, but most crucial as mediator, for instance as co-organizer of the 'This is Tomorrow' show of 1956 and editor of *Architectural Design* from 1953 onward, the *Upper Case* series as well as the Studio Vista paperback series of the 1960s.

With regard to the contribution of the Independent Group members to the post-war debates on the future of modern architecture (and the arts) the following two aspects of methodology might be noted as well. One concerns the idea of history as something all-inclusive, a 'total recall' as Banham declared in his 'Stocktaking' essay of 1960 while referring to Malraux's idea of a *musée imaginaire*.<sup>105</sup> Banham's statement was a criticism of the historians of modern architecture who had produced histories that had proven to be too narrow and selective.<sup>106</sup> This had been part of Banham's own doctoral work to critically revise Pevsner's *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* among others and to do justice to the Italian Futurists, Dutch and German Expressionism and *De Stijl*, who were overlooked by Pevsner. This inclusion of hitherto overlooked, forgotten or suppressed positions brings us to the second aspect of historiographical method: the interest in peripheral positions to question, amend and ultimately shift the direction of established history. With regard to the revising of the historiography of modern architecture the key phrases here are 'the other moderns', or the 'silent architects'.

104 Alison and Peter Smithson, in: 'Correspondence', in: *RIBA Journal*, February 1952, pp. 140-141; Voelcker, still a student at the AA School, also had his letter to the editor published next to the one of the Smithsons, and also in response to the Wittkower book review. Both pointed out the importance of Le Corbusier's *Modulor* publication with regard to Wittkower's study.

105 Reyner Banham, '1960 - Stocktaking', in: *A Critic Writes. Essays by Reyner Banham*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, pp. 49-63, originally published in *The Architectural Review*, February 1960, pp. 93-100.

106 Since Banham was from the Courtauld Institute and generally considered to be part of the iconographic school in art history as developed by Erwin Panofsky among others, there is an immediate relation with Aby Warburg's *mnesosyne* atlas project, a strand that runs right through to such Independent Group installations as 'Parallel of Life and Art' and the various personal image collections as built up by Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi and Alison Smithson; to my knowledge this has not been properly investigated yet, in terms of historical and theoretical implication. Recent work by Alex Kitnick and Claire Zimmerman starts to look into this; Claire Zimmerman, 'From Legible Form to Memorable Image: Architectural Knowledge from Rudolf Wittkower to Reyner Banham', in: *Candide*, nr. 5, 2012, pp. 93-107, and Kitnick edited the special issue of *October*, nr. 136, Spring 2011, on the New Brutalism, his Princeton dissertation *Paolozzi and Others 1947-1958* focused on Paolozzi and his position within the Independent Group exchanges.

107 According to various accounts (among others Kenneth Frampton and Max Risselada) the phrase the 'Other Moderns', or the 'Other Tradition' has circulated for decades within the British discourse. Eventually, as late as 1995, it was Colin St John Wilson, who published *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture. The Uncompleted Project*, Academy Editions, London; re-published under the same title by Black Dog Publishing, London, in 2007. Another example of the history of this 'other' tradition was written by a critic of a younger generation, Peter Blundell Jones, *Modern Architecture through Case Studies*, Architectural Press, Oxford, 2002. Although the origins of the two terms are intraceable, usually St John Wilson is credited. Next to Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, the key figures of this other tradition according to Wilson and Blundell Jones are Hans Scharoun and Alvar Aalto, others mentioned include Gunnar Asplund, Eileen Gray, Hugo Häring and Jan Duiker.

108 Another example is the book published by Pevsner and Richards: *The Anti-Rationalists*, Architectural Press, London, 1973, mostly looking into Art Nouveau.

109 There is a whole cohort of British architects who picked up their pens to rewrite the history of modern architecture; next to the already mentioned Colquhoun and Rowe, one should think of Robert Maxwell, Robin Middleton (from South Africa but trained at Cambridge), Joseph Rykwert and Kenneth Frampton, who interestingly enough would all migrate to the United States.

110 Usually the references are quite cursory, just a small note, esp. in the later writings in *The Charged Void*, as well as in the texts for the ILA&UD summer schools; for more explicit examples see: Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The Silent Architects', in: *Sigurd Lewerentz, 1885-1975. The Dilemma of Classicism*, Architectural Association, London, 1988; and Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Dimitri Pikionis', in: *Dimitri Pikionis, Architect 1887-1968. A Sentimental Topography*, Architectural Association, London, 1989.

111 Michel Tapié, *Un art autre, où il s'agit de nouveaux dévidages du réel*, Gabriel-Giraud et fils, Paris, 1952.

112 Cees Boekraad has suggested that the terminology of the Smithsons is completely analogous to Merleau-Ponty's, Sarah

Eventually, it was Colin St John Wilson who coined the collection of these peripheral positions as the 'other tradition'.<sup>107</sup>

The interest in this so-called other tradition is another characteristic of the British post-war discourse, not just with respect to those who belonged to a younger generation, but also to the *Review* editors for instance who would deploy this discursive figure, too. The whole interest in Swedish modernism and its selective appropriation can be mentioned here, just as the much disputed coupling of the Picturesque with Continental avant-gardism.<sup>108</sup> Yet, while the *Review* editors aimed for a domesticated, British modernism, the younger writers deployed the 'other moderns' as a way to challenge the then dominant historiography of modern architecture and construct a whole set of counter-histories so to speak.<sup>109</sup> This interest in the more peripheral positions was always present in the Smithsons' writings and design work, too. Alvar Aalto, Hugo Häring, Jan Duiker, Gerrit Rietveld and Eileen Gray, key figures of the 'other tradition' and who remained largely absent from the early canonical histories of modern architecture, were all included in *The Heroic Period* of 1965. The impact of it becomes most evident in the later projects though, in which the achievements of such different designers as Sigurd Lewerentz, Max Bill, but also Dimitris Pikionis among others were integrated and elaborated.<sup>110</sup>

The notion of 'otherness' was also already present in Banham's Brutalist call for *une architecture autre* in his 1955 essay, a reference to Michel Tapié's *Un Art Autre* of 1952, which was an early attempt to identify new trends in post-war modern art including works by Dubuffet and Pollock, but also one by Paolozzi.<sup>111</sup> Tapié, Dubuffet and Pollock are mentioned by Banham as sources for the new anti-academic 'cult of ugliness' that belonged to the Brutalist programme for an 'architecture of reality'. Some authors have suggested that the notion of otherness forms a linkage between the English proposition of *une architecture autre* and the philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology, yet this remains most implicit in the debates between the British protagonists.<sup>112</sup>

To go back to the specific issue of revising the historiography of modern architecture: it seems plausible to conclude that the coupling of the notion of the 'other' with the dominant paradigm was in service of the creation of a double perspective, which ultimately was aimed at the production of a third element. The notion of the 'other' was not a mere vindication of lost voices

and overlooked positions. It was also part of a regenerative project, a radical attempt at developing another perspective on and understanding of the concept of the modern movement itself, rescuing it from academicism, bringing it up-to-date so to speak while establishing the younger Brutalists' 'own idea of order'. This vitalist principle of regeneration we find everywhere in the writings of the Smithsons and their contemporaries, the whole discourse is simply drenched with it. Literally one speaks of the necessity of 'continuity and regeneration', while such classic concepts from the Team 10 discourse like 'cluster', 'mat-building' and 'the space between' are all at the service of producing a new, third element. Colomina and Max Risselada among others have pointed out the importance of this aspect of 'coupling' in the work of the Smithsons; Colomina in relation to the aspect of collaboration and the construction of historiography, Risselada in relation to the concept of 'the space between' as a discursive tactic as well as design strategy of productive recombination.<sup>113</sup> The competitive model that the English crucible presents to us can be said to have been highly productive, indeed, in terms of rethinking modernist concepts. When looking at the web of exchanges of the post-war British discourse, we find a whole set of competing views, which in hindsight carry many of the seeds of the later tendencies now known as the New Brutalism, Pop Art, High-Tech and even postmodernism. As said, we are not following the 'generation conflict' model here, but rather Frampton's suggestion of a 'crucible' of individuals, institutions and overlapping, dynamic coalitions.<sup>114</sup>

Goldhagen tried to forge a connection between the Smithsons' notion of authenticity and Jean Paul Sartre's ideas (which Peter Smithson angrily refuted according to Robin Middleton), Ignasi de Sola-Morales suggested that Team 10 and Van Eyck were 'existentialist' and Tony Vidler confusingly referred to an extensive essay by Nigel Whiteley on Banham's 'Otherness' as proof of existentialist tendencies at work here, but this essay is nothing of the kind. In the writings of the Smithsons one finds references to the following French authors: Georges Simenon and Albert Camus.

113 Max Risselada, 'The Space Between', in: *OASE*, nr. 51, 'Re-arrangements. A Smithsons Celebration', 1999, pp. 46-53; one might relate this once again to the issue of poetic 'vagueness' as proposed by Van Eyck and discussed in the first chapter that is the actualisation of the 'undefined and latent multi-meaning'.

114 Frampton, 'The English Crucible', in: D'Laine Camp, Dirk van den Heuvel, Gijs de Waal (eds.), *CIAM Team 10. The English Context*, conference proceedings, Delft University of Technology, 2002, pp. 113-129. Alan Colquhoun made a similar observation, stating that within the Independent Group there were no 'factions', only individuals, in conversation with the author, 23 June 2007. In Colomina's interview with Peter Smithson we see this once again confirmed, when it is stated that both in Team 10 and the Independent group one was part of the group but never spoke for the group, nor represented the group as a whole, in: Beatriz Colomina, 'Friends of the Future: A Conversation with Peter Smithson', in: *October*, nr. 94, Fall 2000, pp. 28-30.

115 Whiteley, 2002, p. 89.

Whiteley, in his biography of Banham, already remarked how one could distinguish between certain groupings within the Independent Group, or 'tendencies' as he put it: *'There were some discernible tendencies in the Group, based around individuals. The Smithsons, Henderson, and Paolozzi were especially sympathetic to any art brut and "outsider" tendencies; and McHale, del Renzio, Hamilton, and Alloway, augmented by the Cordells, favored communication studies. However, the movement between groupings was fluid, and another grouping around popular culture and advertisements included Peter Smithson, Alloway, Hamilton, McHale, del Renzio, and Banham. A further grouping was those interested in cultural theory – Alloway, Banham, McHale, and Hamilton – whom Alison Smithson termed the "grey men," implying the groupings were not without an element of suspicion and even friction.'*<sup>115</sup>

The latter remark is an understatement, competition was fierce and ruthless in the English crucible. Next to the abovementioned groupings quite a few others can be distinguished within the wider ICA circle. Famous places to get together were the Banham home in Primrose Hill and the French Pub in Soho, which are most often referred to in the historiography. Robin Middleton also remembers an all 'girls' club' that was convened by Mary Banham when she returned from the States, which included Alison Smithson and Sandra Lousada among others, just as 'evenings with slides' at the Smithson home in Chelsea, at Bob Maxwell's and at Brian Richard and Sandra Lousada's.<sup>116</sup> Bruno's diner in Soho was also a favourite for the Smithsons, to combine weekly shopping for groceries at the market with entertaining visitors from abroad.

Regarding the quest for a new unity of principles one can distinguish quite another set of groupings, albeit of an equally fluid composition as the ones distinguished by Whiteley: there are the 'classicizing party' as Banham put it in his retrospective 'Revenge of the Picturesque', the New Brutalists, Pop and Pop Art, Cybernetics, media theory and communication, and neo-Constructivism as a fringe party perhaps, but still influential.

The 'classicizing party' was a rephrasing of the 'neo-Palladians' as identified by Reyner Banham in his 'New Brutalism' essay of 1955. In 1968, in his essay 'Revenge of the Picturesque', Banham now mentioned the 'classicizing party' as the one moment of clear opposition against the Picturesque revival of Pevsner and the *Architectural Review*. 'Classicizing' and 'neo-Palladians' were of course references to the tremendous influence as exercised by Rudolf Wittkower's study into Andrea Palladio's work, in which he most eloquently explained the set of cosmological principles of ordering behind the designs. Palladio's work thus represented a fantastic example of an architecture based on an 'unity of principles'. Colin Rowe's essay on the organizing principles behind the villa's of Le Corbusier and how Palladian schemas could be retraced as ordering devices in the plans of the Purist, so-called 'white villas' added to the conviction that Classicist, Palladian principle represented the strongest example of the possibility of a body of autonomous principles proper to the architecture discipline. Rowe's analysis gave legitimacy to a powerful mix of Corbusianism and Palladianism which had quite an impact on British modern architecture of the post-war decades. 'Members' of this 'classicizing party' were then Rowe, Colquhoun, Sandy Wilson, Sam Stevens, Big Jim

116 In conversation with the author.

Stirling, Joseph Rykwert; according to the surviving stories the French pub was their main meeting place. But this 'classicizing' influence can be also found in the wider Independent Group circle, most notably in the case of the Smithsons and their early designs for Hunstanton and the Coventry Cathedral competition, the latter of which was designated as the most important example according to Banham.

The 'classicizing party' can be regarded as the precursor of some of the later postmodernist tendencies, such as autonomy, historicism and Modernist mannerism, although also invariably accompanied by the most rigorous kind of critique from Colquhoun and Rowe.<sup>117</sup> Also with regard to these proto-postmodernist aspects, it is hard to completely disconnect the Smithsons from the 'classicizing party'. For instance, on the aspect of architectural autonomy there is certainly a case to include the Smithsons, especially in the case of Hunstanton of course, of which they would state that there is a 'secret life' of architecture parallel to the everyday business of school life.<sup>118</sup> Regarding the history of the ICA events it is important to note that this 'classicizing party' was mostly an architectural affair.

The New Brutalism then can be accorded the second clearest moment with the collaborations between the foursome of Alison and Peter Smithson, Henderson and Paolozzi forming the core group; Banham was part of it as well of course, but also John Voelcker, William and Gill Howell, creating a strong proto-Team 10 input here. Sandy Wilson and Stirling's work too, were ranked under the banner of New Brutalism by Banham, and they too, would visit Team 10 meetings. The Ove Arup engineer Ronald Jenkins must be mentioned as well, since he was involved in *Parallel of Life and Art*,<sup>119</sup> his office interior was a Brutalist installation with Paolozzi wallpaper on the ceiling, and he was involved in the Smithsons' designs for Hunstanton and the Coventry Cathedral competition. Richard Hamilton also tried to appropriate the New Brutalism, among others by his installation for a 'House for a Collector of Brutalist and Tachiste Art' at the Ideal Home show, 1958,<sup>120</sup> and John McHale was also involved among others through a mural for a John Voelcker house for the jazz trumpeter Humphrey Lyttleton. Frank Cordell produced the music of the New Brutalism, jazz and *musique concrète*, in particular for the movie made of the Smithson design for the Hauptstadt Berlin competition.

117 Peter Eisenman and Tony Vidler were instilled with this tendency when they were at Cambridge as students.

118 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, Monacelli Press, New York, 2001, p. 42.

119 His status is not quite clear, incidentally he is mentioned as co-curator next to the foursome of Henderson, Paolozzi and the Smithsons, in an interview with Graham Whitham the Smithsons mention he (co-)sponsored the event.

120 Ben Highmore made a point of this in his lecture at TU Delft, 28 February 2008.

The 'as found' and 'finding processes' were among the key artistic concepts deployed to mine the achievements of the earlier avant-gardes ranging from an interest in Surrealism, Dada and Schwitters, Van Doesburg and I.K. Bonset, but also Laszlo Moholy Nagy, Herbert Bayer's advertising, Paul Klee's drawings and Bertolt Brecht's theatre revolution. Despite the crucial involvement of artists and art theory, the cause of Brutalism seemed to be aimed more at the architecture discourse than at the one of the visual arts.<sup>121</sup>

121 Robin Middleton suggests another interesting background to the New Brutalism. In his review of Banham's book he asserts that the New Brutalism is a concoction of northerners. Next to Alison and Peter Smithson he mentions Gordon Ryder, David Witham, Ronald Simpson, Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith. See 'The New Brutalism, or a Clean, Well-lighted Place', in: *Architectural Design*, January, 1967, pp. 7-8.

122 There is a general acceptance that the term was coined around 1954 between McHale and Hamilton, but still part of a word game, which was also a characteristic of the New Brutalist discourse. Still, the term is limited to private exchanges, it is not quite a public affair as yet. Only when a new generation of young artists seems to appropriate the term pop – in the film 'Pop Goes the Easel' by Ken Russell, BBC broadcast 25 March 1962, on the work of Peter Blake, Derek Boshier, Pauline Boty and Peter Phillips – the writers of the Independent Group, Banham and Alloway, reclaimed the term for themselves, as suggested by Massey and Sparke, 1985, p. 49; Reyner Banham in 'Who is this Pop?', in: *Motif*, Winter 1962, and Lawrence Alloway in "'Pop Art" since 1949', in: *The Listener*, December, 1962.

123 For more on this history see my essay 'Picking up, Turning over and Putting with ...', in: Dirk van den Heuvel, Max Risselada (eds.), *Alison and Peter Smithson – from the House of the Future to a house of today*, 2004, pp. 13-28; extensively discussed in my paper 'Caught between Pop and Glut. The Case of Alison and Peter Smithson' for the 60th Annual Meeting of the SAH, Pittsburgh 2007.

124 John McHale, 'The Expendable Ikon 1' in: *Architectural Design*, February 1959, pp. 82-83, and 'The Expendable Ikon 2', in: *Architectural Design*, March 1959, pp. 116-117; 'The Plastic Parthenon' in: *Macatre*, Winter 1966, republished at different places among others in: *Dotzero Magazine*, Spring 1967, and: Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, Bell, New York, 1969.

Pop and Pop Art were the third clearest moment emerging within the Independent Group discourse, albeit perhaps in its afterlife so to speak. Again, demarcation lines remain fluid. The core of this tendency was formed by Hamilton and McHale who would fight over the origins of the term, just as Banham and Alloway.<sup>122</sup> Voelcker was also involved through his alliance with Hamilton and McHale for their ground breaking installation at the T.I.T.-show. Fashion and advertisement were key issues, brought in by Toni del Renzio for instance, but also eagerly discussed by the Smithsons and integrated in their work and writings. As is well-known, in the fight over words the Smithsons would later distance themselves from any alliance with Pop.<sup>123</sup> At the same time, Banham's idea of 'Image' as a key concept of Brutalism seems an anticipation of the Pop Art interest in signs and communication. For sure, the interest in advertising and commercial graphic design was a common denominator here across the various tendencies within the Independent Group. Pop was also partly building on Dada and Surrealism here, just like the New Brutalism, in the sense of the coupling of the incompatible, and the high and low; another overlap with Brutalist sensibilities concerned an interest in the ephemeral aspect of the *trouvé*, in the case of Pop the idea of the 'expendable' as expressed for instance by McHale in his essays 'The Plastic Parthenon' and 'The Expendable Ikon'.<sup>124</sup> There was a strong relationship between Britain and the USA here, especially with Alloway and Banham moving to the States in their later careers.

Two final key 'tendencies' within the Group but which never lead to a very clear-cut label as Pop Art or New Brutalism concerned cybernetics, media theory and communication, and neo-Constructivism. The latter is the least known, or certainly the least recognized tendency. Yet, with the event of the T.I.T.-show we see a strong presence of neo-Constructivism as represented by Mary and Kenneth Martin (group 9), and Ernő Goldfinger (group 7).

Russian Constructivism was a strong influence in the early work of Stirling and remained a strand within the Smithsons' thinking throughout their career as well. Patrick Hodgkinson, famous for his Brunswick Centre in London, may be mentioned here as well. And finally, the formerly mentioned fields of cybernetics and information theory that were just burgeoning but nevertheless represented a major area of investigation for some Independent Group members. There was a large overlapping with the Pop tendency of course, especially when it came to sci-fi and space technology, typical Independent Group fascinations. But looking for instance at the T.I.T.-installation by Holroyd, Del Renzio and Alloway (group 12), one finds an interest in communication theory and systems thinking, all very different from the semantics of Pop. The members' interest in McLuhan and Eames's communication primer and films fit in here; the positions of Weeks and Llewellyn Davies could be situated here, too, because of their interest in the modular and the scientific-rationalist in building production and organisation. Banham and Alloway, just as McHale and Del Renzio made several contributions, mining the new domain of interactive loops and nascent computer technology. The Smithsons for their part hooked up with a proposal for an 'extensions of man' exhibition. McLuhan's phrase was taken by Banham as a title for a show that – as late as 1962 – was 'intended to eliminate the bad taste the Festival of Britain exhibition had left' and which was (among others) discussed at the house of Roland Penrose, co-founder of the ICA of course, and one more example of intergenerational encounter and consistent acts of 'closing the circle'.<sup>125</sup> Perhaps superfluous to note, but here we also find overlappings with the later Archigram group, students of the Smithsons who would praise their work, the House of the Future as well as their design for Coventry Cathedral, and who would combine the Pop and cybernetics to further develop the language of High-Tech architecture along with Cedric Price.<sup>126</sup>

As becomes clear from the above listing actors moved between the groupings, just as ideas one might add. For example the Smithson Hunstanton school design, it could be classified with the neo-Palladian, the Brutalist, but also the proto-High-Tech. It might be kept in mind therefore that the groupings of people and ideas in the English crucible were fluid, and any attempt at clearcut definition (for instance by opposition) is a matter of retro-active interpretation inevitably implying reduction and exclusion, whereas we saw that within the Independent Group discourse there is also an ambition to be all-inclusive, to develop a double or perhaps even

<sup>125</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, Monacelli Press, New York, 2001, p. 326; this must have been Farmley Farm in East Sussex, acquired by Penrose in 1949.

<sup>126</sup> Perhaps British High-Tech is one of the moments where one should rather talk about overlappings than origins with regard to the English crucible, especially when one thinks of the impact of such a monumental figure as Buckminster Fuller.



multiplicitous kind of perspective, and from all that, an ambition to arrive at some sort of new 'unity of principles' in the post-war era. How did that work for the Smithsons with regard to the debates on Englishness and modern architecture?

### 'A Secret Life'

As noted much of the debates of the English crucible was structured around the creation of oppositions, and not just by the younger generation; in his *Englishness of English Art* Pevsner would make this an explicit methodology deploying the rhetorical figures of 'polarities', and 'pairs of apparently contradictory qualities'.<sup>127</sup> But as demonstrated, more often than not, there exists a fluidity between such apparently oppositional positions and groupings. Partly because we are dealing with ideas under formation, but also because of such a Protean aspiration for a 'Style', the ambition to come to an 'unity of principles' that might encompass the totality or universality of human culture, and yet, still seeks to also acknowledge the specificity of the architectural project in terms of local conditions and historical precedent.

The most prominent case of definition by opposition might be exemplified by Reyner Banham when he defined the New Brutalism in his 1955 essay, as being opposed to both the Picturesque and the neo-Palladian. The Smithsons seemed to have accepted this, at least they never openly opposed this particular suggestion of Banham's. Yet, at the same time, we see a consistent classicist leaning present in the Smithson projects, not only in Hunstanton, but throughout their career. Banham notoriously hypothesized in his Brutalism essay that the 'formal axiality' of Hunstanton was not 'integral' to Brutalist architecture, 'Miesian or Wittkowerian geometry was only an *ad hoc* device' he said.<sup>128</sup> This was the only acceptable way to present the interrelations between the New Brutalism and neo-Palladian principle as thoroughly oppositional and mutually exclusive. Perhaps this was necessary then, to save the Brutalist impulse from appropriation by Philip Johnson as an updated version of the International Style. But in 1956, at the occasion of the second manifesto of the New Brutalism which was the Patio and Pavilion installation, this installation was nothing but a small temple disguised as a back-yard shed; Kenneth Frampton was actually the only one who recognized this when he called the installation a 'temenos', a sacred place,

<sup>127</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, 1956, p. 18.

<sup>128</sup> Reyner Banham, 'The New Brutalism', in: *The Architectural Review*, December 1955, p. 361.

fenced and secluded. The Economist too, as a contemporary 'acropolis' holds clear classicist overtones, while Robin Hood Gardens was modelled on the use of repetition as found in (neo-) Classicist architecture, and we see it also return in the follies for Axel Bruchhäuser, for instance the rustic, yet perfectly symmetrical tea hut with a thatched roof overlooking the garden.

If one were to construct an oppositional axis from the ICA debates, the one most appropriate to situate the Smithsons would probably be the one of form versus process, formalism versus the 'as found'. Eventually, when the Smithsons criticized a certain strand of routine Functionalism, when they distanced themselves from the Pop tendency within and outside the Independent Group, from Picturesque sentimentality or neo-Classicist revivals, this was always the ultimate argument: the rejection of any sort of pre-given formal apparatus or system, of architectural design as the application of a 'pattern book'.

In *Without Rhetoric* of 1973, we find the most extensive summary of the Smithson position, with both the Picturesque and Classicist prominently present throughout their argument for a 'non-demonstrative' language of architecture. The opening statement of their 1982 publication of *The Shift* might serve as another, most elegant example of their way of distinguishing between tendencies, while also keeping them balanced and interrelated. In 1982, historicist postmodernism was at its peak of course, and this is reflected in the Smithson statement as well. They distinguished two main trends of thought. Using the tree, roots, branches, seeds and fruit as metaphors, they spoke of the tree of 'classicism' and of the tree of 'enquiry' as representing the tradition of modern architecture and functionalism. First of all, they restated their belief in the interconnection of past and future, after which they would explain their own interest:

*'Concerning the future, only one thing is certain: that the tree of enquiry has well-established roots reaching into new ground with each turn of the seasons, the trunk sturdy enough to support much new growth at its head.'*

*The tree of enquiry started rooting strongly in the European garden in the seventeenth century, for by then it was not only moral to enquire but it was felt that understanding of the curiosities of nature carries with it an obligation to bring to a quality of flowering the nodes of growth revealed by understanding.*

*The flowering of this tree in terms of architecture was*

*spectacular for enquiry had led to a capacity to change the seeming nature of materials and to anticipate their performance in new forms. This happened at a time when a much older tree, but one of related species, the tree of classicism, was enjoying a late flowering. The first crop came during the last good years of the older tree. The old tree had suddenly produced outstanding fruit with a dry, lucid taste (...). This fruit was neo-classical architecture.*

*The first fruits from the new tree were the iron bridges and it is along the same branch, nourished by the still-searching roots, that architecture continues to grow.<sup>129</sup>*

Note the way morality and obligation are connected with the pursuit of knowledge and the deployment of technology. Also note the idea that architecture and its form-language unfold over time, or as the Smithsons put it, how they 'grow'. And also note how they viewed the architecture that came after the last blooming of the tree of classicism; in a footnote the couple mentioned the Altes Museum of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, and his Neue Pavillon in Charlottenburg as the last fruits of that tree, concluding 'it was the clear, clean end of unquestioned classicism, of classicism spoken not quoted.'<sup>130</sup>

This emphasis on a lived language of architecture, not a mannerist one was a pointed swipe at the postmodernist fashion of the early 1980s, which they further elaborated talking about the 'fallen giant of classicism' still 'resting in the orchard' and how 'some' were 'stealing' its dry seeds. The Smithsons concluded by shifting attention to the 'younger tree' and how it would need more work, more attention and care:

*'... the cultivation of the younger tree is arduous. It demands effort and the crop sometimes fails. But in good years, well-husbanded, the new fruit is wonderful and the best years are still to come.'<sup>131</sup>*

But if too rigid an opposition could be overcome and some measure of fluidity maintained by using metaphors, talking about trees in an orchard in need of proper husbandry, how did this work out in actual design practice?

The Hunstanton school remains an astonishing case here in every respect.<sup>132</sup> It has often been said that the school presents a contradiction as the first built example of the New Brutalism, since its design stemmed from the pre-ICA-years and Independent Group exchanges from which the New Brutalism was born. Banham

129 David Dunster (ed.), *Alison and Peter Smithson. The Shift*, Architectural Monographs nr. 7, Academy Editions, London, 1982, p. 8.

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid.

132 The history of the Hunstanton Secondary Modern School has been extensively documented and described at various places, among others how it was proposed by the Smithsons as an alternative to the kind of modern architecture of Maxwell Fry (Impington Village College in particular) and the modular system of the Hertfordshire schools; a good summary is given by Peter Smithson himself in a conversation with Peter Carolin, published as 'Reflections on Hunstanton', in: *ARQ*, Vol. 2, Summer 1997, pp. 32-43; ; see also Christoph Grafe, 'Finite Orders and the Art of Everyday Inhabitation. The Hunstanton School by Alison and Peter Smithson', in: *OASE*, nrs. 49-50, 'Convention', 1998, pp. 66-85..

acknowledged this too, when launching the New Brutalism. Yet, as pointed out, much of the ingredients of later events were already present in the late 1940s, including the antagonistic attitudes toward the New Empiricism and the Festival. There is no real ground to not regard the building as Brutalist in this respect. Nor should one excuse the supposedly 'ad hoc' decision regarding the Miesian or Wittkowerian geometry, as Banham did. Since arguably, the Smithson design embodied the most eloquent example of the outcome of a quest for an 'unity of principles' that would establish a language of modern architecture that not only built on the achievements of the founding generation but also on 'English precedent' as the Smithsons mentioned (Hardwick Hall, and Butterfield churches). At Hunstanton the Smithsons succeeded, as young as they were, to establish their proposition for a language of modern architecture, while integrating the Picturesque and neo-Classicism. Thus Hunstanton shows too, how the New Brutalism is inextricably linked to the debates on Englishness. Any 'oppositional' reading of the school building inevitably leads to a reduced understanding of the design. Banham's reading is a case, but Philip Johnson's equally so.

Whereas Banham aimed to uncouple Brutalism and neo-Palladianism, with the Hunstanton school firmly embedded in the former, Johnson insisted on the 'formal' qualities of the school and hence as not belonging to the 'Adolf Loos type of Anti-Design which they [Alison and Peter Smithson] call the New Brutalism'.<sup>133</sup> Johnson didn't link the design with the neo-Palladian directly, but discussed the building's qualities exclusively in terms of 'not only radical but good Mies van der Rohe', slightly condescending as 'Mies vernacular', and much more critically as 'Mies on the cheap'.<sup>134</sup> The basic characteristics of this Miesian manner were in his view 'the exposed steel-glass-and-brick-filled-frame grammar' and the 'formal pattern' into which the programme was successfully 'shoe-horned'. Johnson's remark that the 'gymnasium facade, the most formal, is also the most successful part of the building', summarized his assessment of the building. Only by referring to Mies, he highlighted the neo-Classical tendencies present in the design. Anything a-symmetrical just 'disturbed' the whole 'formal composition, which is so clear from the rear', including the raised Braithwaite water tank, the chimney and the projecting volumes of kitchens and other facilities.<sup>135</sup>

Why wouldn't Johnson recognize the overtly Picturesque elements here? Was it because of his own embarking upon the neo-

133 Philip Johnson, in: *The Architectural Review*, September 1954, p. 152; an added footnote explicitly mentioned the architects' disagreement with this particular remark by Johnson.

134 *Ibid.*, p. 148.

135 *Ibid.*

Classicist fashion of the time, following Rowe and his analyses of Le Corbusier, and post-war 'modern mannerism' as Rowe called it – not pejoratively but as a possible escape from banal, routine Functionalism. Paradoxically of course, Johnson's house at Canaan equally contained Picturesque principle – it even displayed a Poussin painting in its famous interior as some sort of cultural trophy, ostentatiously present in publicity photographs. Banham too, studiously avoided to mention any Picturesque principle present at Hunstanton, the clearly visible ha-ha was not explained, nor any other element of the Smithsons' 'language of connective landscape forms' as they themselves called it, and of which they stated as having begun with Hunstanton.<sup>136</sup> In their own description of the outdoor spaces of the school the almost seamless connection between the 'English landscape garden' tradition and their own idea of a tradition appear once again:

*'The school's approach side had the indented verge to the ha-ha, by which the school territory was separated from the road (as at Vanbrugh's Seaton Delaval); making clear which was public ground and which was the school. The walking surfaces were gravel, as befitted a country school, but slightly formal, echoing the walks of nearby Sandringham. By being raised up, the gravel walk on the playing fields' side mastered the field's surface; its grass fore-slope took up the difference in the crossfall, forming a softer edge to the podium on which the school stood.'*<sup>137</sup>

The Picturesque sensibility is simply all-pervasive at Hunstanton. Tony Vidler, in his recent assessment of modernist histories, noticed this too, when he described the published photographs of the school in the pages of the *Review* as a 'walk around the house', just as he almost too casually mentioned that Banham grafted the New Brutalism on Pevsner's 'mixture of picturesque visual criteria and a critique of functional pretense'.<sup>138</sup> The oblique angles under which the building was photographed – the canonical modernist photographic perspective since the stairs at Fagus and the Bauhaus corner – unequivocally brought out the Picturesque sensibility, qualities of informality, asymmetries, dynamic movement, the gymnasium building as the counterpoint folly and so forth and so on.

Indeed, the a-symmetrical composition or the free planning of the whole building ensemble with the main volume itself being quite symmetrical as a contrast is in function of a proper contextualizing of the building volumes and its programme. The first thing one notices is how the street condition and access to the school building are treated very differently from the side that overlooks the green

136 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Shift*, 1982, p. 40

137 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

138 Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present*, 2008, p. 100, and p. 114; the page in question is page 150 in the *Architectural Review* documentation of the Hunstanton school, September 1954, with photographs by John Maltby and De Burgh Galwey.

playing grounds. Whereas on the street side the building is a composition of accident and variation built up from such ordinary, common and industrial elements as the kitchen and workshop annexes, and the raised water tank, on the rear side the building appears as a glorious, aristocratic estate commanding the vast horizontal fields of Hunstanton; Classicist and Picturesque at the same time, just as the raised water tank is both proto-Pop and proto-High-Tech one might add.

If one doesn't need to be a very acute observer to see that the building, just as Brutalism itself, is riddled with Picturesque aspects, why has this been repressed from historiography for so long? The most straightforward answer would be that the Banham version of opposition (Brutalism versus the 'New Sentimentality', Brutalism versus the neo-Palladian, a younger generation versus the elders and so forth) is still the most dominant one. The other would be that the Smithsons also may have leaned too much on Banham's interventions, at times joining him in dismissing the Picturesque as well. Peter Cook was probably the first to uncover the profound Englishness of the Smithsons, including the role of the Picturesque tradition in their thinking. He did so in his 1980 homage to his intellectual parents: 'Regarding the Smithsons' published in the *Architectural Review*. While defining the quality of their work he stated:

*'... in the end it is their congruity with those especially English characteristics of contemplation and gentle assembly of the ambiguous that remains uppermost. In their own words their aesthetic is created "without rhetoric", but what emerges also is a perceptible taste for the picturesque that they might never admit to, but which also exposes their characteristic Englishness.'*<sup>139</sup>

Still, just as the Englishness of the Smithsons was very different from Pevsner's Englishness, the Smithsons' Picturesque was very different from Pevsner's proposition. It is as if a second, more secretive discourse is played off here. My conclusion would be that to fully understand the Brutalist agenda of the Smithsons, and not so much the one of Banham (and there is a major difference as we will see in the next chapter), one should put aside the opposition between the Picturesque and Brutalism, as well as between the neo-Palladian and Brutalism. Just as one cannot uncouple the historical Picturesque of the eighteenth century from the historical neo-Palladian of the same period, one cannot uncouple the twentieth century revivals of the Picturesque and of Palladianism, and the invention of the New Brutalism.

139 Peter Cook, 'Regarding the Smithsons' in: *The Architectural Review*, July 1982, pp. 36-43; it is only very recently that the reinvestigations of the post-war debates make it possible to discuss the ambiguities at play, Jonathan Hughes and Simon Sadler's *Non-Plan* of 2000 being an early instance.

The quest for an unity of principles – as the assumed proper foundation for any architecture – should be regarded as the central issue. It is in that sense that Alison and Peter Smithson were looking for a new, coherent language of architecture, fit for a mobile society, a consumer culture curbed by welfare state institutes.

About their ambition for Hunstanton they said:

*'The idea behind this school was to try and prove that in every programme there exists an inherent order which once discovered appears static, immutable, and entirely lucid. In other words, we were determined that we would, from the requirements of the client and the recommendations of the educationalists, create architecture.'*<sup>140</sup>

It is a paraphrasing of their Brutalist credo to 'drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work'.<sup>141</sup>

Several things should be noted at this point. First of all, that it was the very ambition to achieve an unity of principles which proved to be highly problematic throughout the post-war debates, not so much because of the latter part of the term (the principles), but because of the former: the notion of unitification. The fluidity of the Independent Group discourse, the broadness of its scope, and the resultant multiplicity of positions already point to an almost endless process of consistent negotiations between the 'forces which are at work' and which were to be synthesized, reconciled, or at least kept in balance through some sort of poetic intervention. This idea of an architectural unity seemed at first to coincide with the project for the welfare state, the project of re-building Great Britain after the war, of making the country 'safe for modern architecture'. Perhaps this idea had already faltered with the event of the Festival in 1951, as Forty has suggested, but it wouldn't be until the 1970s when this marriage fully and irrevocably broke down in a most traumatical way regarding the interrelationships between modern architecture and the avant-garde vis-à-vis planning policies and political agendas. The two notions of fragment and enclave move to the foreground then in the further development of the work of the Smithsons, just as one might observe this in the general architecture discourse.

140 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, 2001, p. 41.

141 Alison and Peter Smithson, untitled comments in as part of 'Thoughts in Progress. The New Brutalism', in: *Architectural Design*, April 1957, p. 113.

In the meantime, the idea of a possible unity of principles was salvaged by a set of conceptual shifts. First of all, there is the notion that a coherent language of modern architecture was an undertaking which could only be established within each project anew. We find this with all positions, there is a fantastic

genealogical line of historians to draw here: Pevsner would highlight the Picturesque 'every case on its own merit', Banham would alternately scorn and embrace this and ultimately talk of 'the style for the job' when explaining Stirling and Gowan's architecture in particular, a phrase that Jencks would later use to prop up his plea for postmodernist whimsicality. Another phrase used in this respect was the one of 'Ad-Hoc-ism'.<sup>142</sup> With the Smithsons we see this – albeit in a very different way of course – emerge in their Brutalist definition of poetry as the outcome of the 'as found', and their idea of design as a finding process.

Secondly, the notion of time itself was rethought in a structuralist way, something which ironically seems to be overlooked by most historians. If recognized at all, it is usually criticized since it is not in accordance with the neo-Marxist understanding of the historicity of design and culture production, which dominates the historiographical discipline. The rethinking of time and its workings seemed necessary at the time, since it was only through the synchronizing of traditions that an all-inclusive new unity could be proposed. The seminal example would be Aldo van Eyck and his proposition to bring together what he saw as the three major traditions of the vernacular, the avant-gardes and ancient culture as he did in 1959 at the Otterlo congress, and as exemplified in his famous diagram of the Otterlo Circles.<sup>143</sup> But we see it too, in the British post-war discourse, for example with the writings of Colin Rowe, his proposition for a Collage City, in which he also referred to Claude Levi-Strauss' work and idea of 'bricolage', or even much earlier in his ground-breaking rereading of Le Corbusier's design production of the 1920s. His demonstration of neo-Classicist principle at work in the modernist, free plan and free facade compositions of the so-called white villas of the master remains a hinge point in the first critique of the modern tradition as formulated in the post-war period.<sup>144</sup> Obviously, in a similar vein one can reread the Smithsons' work at Hunstanton and see the Picturesque and neo-Palladian principles at work, while at the same time – and this is crucial – a new language of architecture is being developed. At Hunstanton this language is a rough and ready appropriation of the Miesian IIT buildings, based on the latest steel technology, using industrial products 'as found' in Britain, applying the then new and advanced concept of plastic theory regarding the stability of structures as developed by Ronald Jenkins of the Ove Arup office, and most acutely represented by the Surrealist photography of Henderson, and the building under construction.<sup>145</sup>

142 Nikolaus Pevsner, among others in *The Englishness of English Art*, for instance p. 55 and 168; Reyner Banham, 'The Style for the Job', in: *A Critic Writes. Essays by Reyner Banham*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, pp. 96-99, originally published in *New Statesman*, nr. 67, 14 February 1964, p. 261. The phrase 'ad-hoc-ism' is also used by Archigram and Peter Cook, Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver made it a book: *Ad-hocism, The Case for Improvisation*, Doubleday, New York, 1972.

143 Oscar Newman (ed.), *CIAM '59 in Otterlo*, Uitgeverij G. Van Saane, Hilversum / Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1961, pp. 26-35.

144 Colin Rowe, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa', in: *The Architectural Review*, vol. 101, nr. 603, 1947, pp. 101-104.

145 There is much more to point out here – but this may be too extensive a subject to dwell on. Two things that may be mentioned perhaps include how the Smithsons think of major examples of architecture as 'outside time': [the Unité] is the most significant building of our time, existing in space but outside time, like the Temple of Poseidon at Paestum,' in: *Ordinariness and Light*, p. 89; and regarding ideas and the 'transmitting' of ideas they would consistently keep pointing out how books are like 'cultural parcels' that enable ideas to travel, not just through space but also through time and history.



A third and final shift concerns a rethinking of the relation part and whole – which is in itself a seminal (neo-)Classicist trope. This is perhaps the most difficult one to pin down in theoretical terms, also because it keeps being reformulated time and time again. In their 'Urban Re-identification' manuscript as published in *Ordinariness and Light* the Smithsons would say for instance this: *'In the twenties a work of art or a piece of architecture was a finite composition of simple elements, elements which have no separate identity but exist only in relation to the whole; the problem of the fifties is to retain the clarity of intention of the whole but to give the parts their own internal disciplines and complexities. This kind of ordering, as opposed to geometric ordering, must be the basis of all creative endeavour from the city to the object.'*<sup>146</sup>

The reference to 'geometric ordering' is quite naturally to the kind of neo-Palladianism that was inspired by Wittkower's studies, and to the debate in England whether some sort of dimensional coordination based on the Golden Section or Modulor may contribute to guarantee an aesthetic quality of all generic architecture production.<sup>147</sup> Next to this passage we find a photograph of Jackson Pollock included, busy with his action painting, and the following pages display images of Paolozzi's work (two sculptures), Dubuffet ('Dématisation', ink drawing) and Victor Pasmore (his mural for the Festival of Britain). With regard to this shifting relation of part and whole they claimed it was Pollock in the first place who showed them the way forward: *'In 1949 at Peggy Guggenheim's palazzo in Venice we saw the first manifestation of the new ordering, in the painting of Jackson Pollock.'*<sup>148</sup>

146 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 84.

147 This idea was even put to a vote at the RIBA, see 'Report of a Debate', in: *RIBA Journal*, vol. 64, nr. 11, September 1957, pp. 460-461; the Smithsons dismissed of this proposition. Henry Millon wrote an excellent essay on this debate in post-war Britain and the impact of Wittkower's studies on architects: 'Rudolf Wittkower, "Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism". Its Influence on the Development and Interpretation of Modern Architecture', in: *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, nr. 31, 1972, pp. 83-91; see also Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, pp. 93-94.

148 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

149 *Ibid.*

And they further explained:

*'The painting of Jackson Pollock is a different sort from any that we had ever seen before. It is more like a natural phenomenon, a manifestation rather than an artifact; complex, timeless, n-dimensional and multi-vocative.'*

*Comparable developments have taken place in structural design, in which the actual behaviour and the properties of the materials are more accurately accounted for. This has led, as in art, to the consideration of the parts not as simply acting, but as things in themselves with their own internal disciplines complexly acting in a total system of forces.'*<sup>149</sup>

This is the Smithsons' connection between Jenkins' plastic theory and the new aesthetic models as debated with their artist

friends from the Central School and ICA. How things (or people for that matter) come together, how they make up a larger whole, lies behind the quest for a unity of principles, and the Smithsons would continue to propose various concepts or models to capture this 'complexly acting in a total system of forces' be it their 'select and arrange'-technique, 'space between', 'mat-building', 'conglomerate order' and so forth and so on.

Another example of this is the so-called 'Play Brubeck'-diagram. It may explain how Alison and Peter Smithson envisaged the translation of the 'complex, timeless, n-dimensional and multi-vocative' into architectural order. They have published the diagram at several occasions, in their *Charged Void: Architecture* volume to explain the 'Extensions of Man' exhibition, in the *Team 10 Primer*, and with their essay 'Mobility', published in *Architectural Design* in 1958. The latter holds the most extensive explanation with regard to the issue of 'form' and 'relations'. The essay, which discusses 'road systems' as a new way of town building with Louis Kahn's scheme for Philadelphia and their own proposal for Berlin as demonstrations of this, opens with a clear statement on this aspect: *'The form of the city must correspond to the net of human relations as we now see them.*

*The changing arrangements of this net are caused by constantly changing standards of value operating on a field of communications.*

*The architect can act directly in this situation. He can control systems of physical communication and he can offer new concepts which change standards of value. And, in fact, the two things are wrapped up with each other, for putting increased emphasis on physical communications involves throwing over traditional aesthetic values which were mostly concerned with fixed relationships; and, on the other hand, rejection of Cartesian aesthetics, since they are incapable of carrying the cultural loading of our time, inevitably leads to an "aesthetic of change" – the plastic resolution of the problems of mobility.'*<sup>150</sup>

This is perhaps the closest the Smithsons will ever come to a neo-Futurist position as propagated by Banham in those years. And just as Peter Smithson would refer to jazz in his comments on Banham's exposition on Futurism at the RIBA, here again, jazz music is proposed as an analogy to explain the way Brutalist poetry is dragged from the forces at work. The 'Play Brubeck'-diagram – a rough sketch that shows a web of lines randomly connecting a series of scattered dots – is positioned next to the opening statement. Its caption reads:

150 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Mobility. Road Systems', in: *Architectural Design*, October 1958, pp. 385-388.

*'the diagram illustrates that the net of human relations is more like a constellation with different values given to different parts in an immensely complicated web crossing and recrossing the system. The implication of "Brubeck" is that the pattern can emerge in spite of complexity. When Brubeck plays it seems as if it is impossible to hold the musical structure together, but at the end he always manages to gather up the threads and knot them.'*<sup>151</sup>

The 'plastic resolution of mobility' as an 'emergent pattern' then, a mobility which is not only physical, but also socio-cultural, and constantly 'changing'. This is not transfigured into an equally 'changing' architecture. With regard to the Hunstanton School one could point out a very specific strategy as developed by the Smithsons. Rather than a singular 'architecture of reality' the project encompasses the bringing together of various 'realities', a 'multi-reality' perhaps as in line with 'n-dimensional' and 'multi-vocative', or even 'counter-realities' (just as we were discussing 'counter-histories' before) that may exist next to one another, a simultaneous accommodation of various 'parallel' phenomena.

Regarding the different 'lives' of the Hunstanton school the Smithsons stated:

*'Consider, therefore, the Hunstanton School as having two lives: an everyday life of teaching children, noise, furniture, and chalk dust, as equals with the building elements, all of which add up to the word "School".*

*And a secret life of pure space, the permanent built Form which will persist when School has given way to Museum or Warehouse, and which will still continue to exist as idea even when the Built Form has long disappeared.'*<sup>152</sup>

This 'secret life' – where 'pure space' and 'Form' reside – is then best communicated through the images of Henderson, images of the emptied interiors without the children and the school furniture. It was a request from the architects as the *Review* editors mentioned in an aside, and it simply infuriated the readers who called it inhumane, because of the very choice to show the architecture as a bare structure awaiting appropriation.

151 Ibid.

152 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, 2001, p. 42.



## 4 THE NEW BRUTALIST GAME OF ASSOCIATIONS

### On Principles of Ordering and Finding Processes

1 Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss have edited an anthology on the formless in twentieth century art (*Formless: A User's Guide*, Zone Books, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2000), but I am not aware of a systematic study of this phenomenon in architecture. See for a brief discussion of 'formlessness' and the work of the Smithsons: Irénée Scalbert, 'Towards a Formless Architecture, the House of the Future by A+P Smithson', in: *Archis*, nr. 9, 1999. pp. 34-47.

2 To mention one instance: the case of the British embassy in Brasilia, which was aborted by the Labour government in 1965, Peter Smithson noted how 'the form derived from the circumstances', how it was generated by climatic and geographic conditions as well as studies of the work pattern of the embassy and the ambassador's life, very much in the same vein as the designs for St Hilda's College or the new Model House were developed as discussed in the former chapter; see for full quotes: Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Smithson Time. Peter Smithson & Hans Ulrich Obrist. A Dialogue*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2004, pp. 24-25.

3 Alison and Peter Smithson, comments as part of 'Thoughts in Progress. The New Brutalism', in: *Architectural Design*, April 1957, p. 113.

4 The famous quote from Mies' 1938 inaugural address at IIT, then Armour Institute of Technology as included in Philip Johnson's book on Mies's work, published by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1947.

5 One wonders to what extent the Smithsons were aware of *Form Findung* and Häring's theories, but his name appears in notes on the New Brutalism, for instance in an unpublished typescript dated 7 March 1955 by Alison Smithson in the Smithson archive; next to the 'Garkau Farm' she mentioned 'recent works by Aalto' and 'the work of Paul Rudolph in Florida' as Brutalist; Häring is also included in their account of the origins of modern architecture, *The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture*, the special 1965 *Architectural Design* issue for which they served as guest editors.

### Principia

The deliberate vagueness regarding formal definition of the everyday in the architecture of Alison and Peter Smithson is continued throughout their body of work. This is in perfect accordance with one of the main avant-garde strands of the modern tradition in architecture: formlessness, including anti-academicism and the rejection of formulas. These were all part of the historic avant-garde and often enough traced back to Romanticism.<sup>1</sup> To the Smithsons this notion of formlessness didn't mean that form was altogether absent but that form was to be found so to speak in the actual project and its specific conditions. Confirmation of this comes from many of the Smithsons' comments on their own work and aspirations;<sup>2</sup> just as it informs the much quoted statement of 1957 summarizing the Smithsons' idea of the New Brutalism: '*Brutalism tries to face up to a mass-production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work.*'<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the statement is a paraphrasing of the Miesian credo 'to create order out of the desperate confusion of our time'.<sup>4</sup> Hugo Häring, with whom Mies shared offices, and his notion of *Form Findung* is just one other such reference.<sup>5</sup> This unstable, dynamic relationship between form and the notion of order, the larger societal conditions and the specifics of the architectural project, is one of the larger, unresolved riddles of the modern tradition. Its possible resolution was at the core of the post-war debates in Britain, from which the New Brutalism emerged. To arrive at some sort of resolution, the search was not so much for new forms as such, but as noted before for new principles of ordering.

The one historian who most profoundly expressed and explained this problematic as a veritable paradigm shift was John Summerson, the eminent historian of Georgian architecture

and curator of the Soane's Museum. His lecture 'The Case for a Theory of Modern Architecture', still serves as a key referent. The lecture was given at the RIBA, also in 1957, a month after the Smithsons' statement on Brutalist rough poetry appeared in the pages of *Architectural Design*; and it was organised as part of the continuous attempts to define the modern tradition while assessing its future value.<sup>6</sup> The notions of process and the social as process return here as being central to the development of the modern architecture discourse of the period. Reflecting on the revisionary debates on the future direction of modern architecture, Summerson speculated on the possible *principia*, that might unify the new tradition. Summarising the literature on modern architecture and its principles, and giving a rather fantastic, erudite overview of the historic development of the ideas and critique involved, Summerson extensively discussed Le Corbusier and László Moholy Nagy's contributions (among many others) with regard to the concepts of rationalism, biology and the organic in architecture, before he focused on Bruno Zevi's history of modern architecture.<sup>7</sup> Rereading Summerson it seems he didn't hold Zevi in as high esteem as he would other authors, but nevertheless according to Summerson, it was Zevi who hit the 'nail exactly on the head' by the remark that the new conception of architecture was based 'on a social idea and not a figurative idea'. Summerson then claimed that:

*'The source of unity in modern architecture is in the social sphere, in other words in the architect's programme.'*<sup>8</sup>

6 John Summerson, 'The Case for a Theory of Modern Architecture', in: *RIBA Journal*, June 1957, pp. 307-313; lecture given at the RIBA on 21 May 1957; another contribution was the lecture by Reyner Banham on futurism: 'Futurism and Modern Architecture', in: *RIBA Journal*, February 1957, pp. 129-139.

7 For all Summerson's erudition, Gevork Hartoonian critically noted that Pevsner was left out of his account of the development of a theory of modern architecture. Hartoonian suggests a fundamental difference of opinion between the two regarding the issue of historicism, see Hartoonian, *The Mental Life of the Architectural Historian*, 2011, pp. 49-51; Robin Middleton remarked that Pevsner was 'simply writing a particular historical account, not a theoretical analysis', letter to the author, 4 January, 2012.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 309.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

To Summerson this marked a major shift within the architectural discipline:

*'from the antique (a world of form) to the programme (a local fragment of social pattern).'*<sup>9</sup>

Eventually, he defined 'programme' as involving 'a process in time' stating that:

*'it is difficult to imagine any programme in which there is not some rhythmically repetitive pattern – whether it is a manufacturing process, the curriculum of a school, the domestic routine of a house, or simply the sense of repeated movement in a circulation system. Of course this pattern does not dictate a corresponding pattern in the architect's plan or anything crude like that but it does sanction relationships which are different from those sanctioned by the static, axially grouped dominants and subordinates of the classical tradition – different, but carrying an equivalent authority.'*<sup>10</sup>

By clearly defining the distinctions between these two traditions – a world of form versus social pattern – Summerson probably made one of the more important contributions to the debate on the future of modern architecture and the establishment of modern architecture as a legitimate, new tradition of its own; perhaps even more so than the historians and theorists who defined space as the distinctive category of modern architecture, even though Summerson himself credited both Moholy-Nagy and Giedion for the ‘brilliant’ way they formulated the new ‘space-time unity’.

In the discussion that followed after Summerson’s lecture Peter Smithson responded affirmatively to Summerson’s statement. In particular, he embraced the notion of process: *“process” has indeed something to do with the new unity for which we are looking. “Process” does not have overtones of “geometry”, but has overtones of collaboration, co-operation between various related techniques, and so on.*<sup>11</sup>

And:

*‘Architecture as something form-giving is involved in this business. It cannot be separated from “process.”’*<sup>12</sup>

And vice versa, still according to Smithson:

*‘form transforms “process” by taking part in it.’*<sup>13</sup>

Here, it appears that Smithson was talking about a notion of process slightly different from Summerson’s propositions. Summerson seemed to have thought of process and form as basically equal, yet unrelated categories, whereas Smithson thought of form as part of the process. On the other hand, both appeared to agree on the gap between architectural form, form language and the notion of process as the new unifying principle of modern architecture.

Summerson spoke of a ‘hiatus’, even a ‘missing architectural language’, meaning language as a set of ‘continuously related systems of inventions’ capable of translating the programme, the process and the set of interdependent relationships into a ‘visually comprehensible whole’. Summerson even went as far as to say that if one did not want to fall back on classical notions as ‘expression or style’ and thus become a ‘crypto-neo-classicist’, one just may have had to accept that:

*‘the missing language will remain missing, and that in fact the slightly uncomfortable feeling which some of us have that it ought*

11 Ibid., p. 312.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

to exist is nothing but the scar left in the mind by the violent swing which has taken place in the lifetime of one generation from an old order of principles to a new.'<sup>14</sup>

Smithson, in his turn, confirmed the existence of the hiatus and missing language:

'To say that you can evolve a form from a social programme or from an analysis of the situation in terms of flow and so on is meaningless, because analysis without the formal content, the architect's particular specialisation, has one factor missing from it. This "process", therefore, is more complicated than has previously been admitted.'<sup>15</sup>

'Process' does not simply replace the world of form, the idea of process itself is deployed to bridge this hiatus between 'form' on the one hand and 'social programme' or 'flow' on the other. Again, we touch here on a classic avant-garde notion (the one of process), next to the already noted ones of formlessness and form finding. And as such it was part of the Independent Group exchanges of the early 1950s.

Various authors have characterised the Independent Group discourse as one that largely revisited avant-garde and modernist concepts of the pre-war, historic avant-garde, while elaborating and further developing these by interbreeding them with the new concepts from science and technology, as well as the new sensibilities emanating from a new emerging consumer culture. In hindsight Independent Group exchanges emerge as a hothouse for the later much more clearly defined concepts of Pop, postmodernism and high-tech, and not just in Britain but throughout the western world.<sup>16</sup> Graham Whitham was probably the first to map the Independent Group meetings and events, while Anne Massey specifically focused on the idea of an aesthetics of expendability resulting from the group's interest in both technology and consumerism. Mark Wigley expanded this idea in relation to the Group's fascination with the new media of mass communication. Irénée Scalbert gave an insightful overview of the exchanges between the Parisian art scene and the Brutalist faction of the Independent Group, suggesting that such notions as anti-beauty and anti-form were derived from the Dada and Surrealist tendencies as represented by the figures of Tristan Tzara, Michel Tapié and Jean Dubuffet. Laurent Stalder has investigated the relations between formlessness, the concept of topology and the proposition of the New Brutalism by Reyner Banham.<sup>17</sup>

14 Ibid., p. 310.

15 Ibid.

16 Many publications have taken this as a premise, such as the already quoted *Modern Dreams. The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1988; David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group. Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, MIT press, Cambridge MA, London, 1990; and more recently Mark Crinson, Claire Zimmerman (eds.), *Neo-avant-garde and Post-modern. Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, Studies in British Art, nr. 21, The Yale Center for British Art and The Paul Mellon Centre of Studies in British Art, New Haven, 2010.

17 Graham Whitham, *The Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Arts: Its Origins, Development, and Influences 1951-1967*, PhD Thesis, University of Kent, 1986; Anne Massey, *The Independent Group, Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-59*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995; Mark Wigley, 'The Architectural Cult of Synchronization', in: *October*, nr. 94, 2000 pp. 31-62; Laurent Stalder, "'New Brutalism", "Topology" and "Image": some remarks on the architectural debates in England around 1950', in: *The Journal of Architecture*, nr. 3, 2008, pp. 263-281.



Stalder has summarised most succinctly the various avant-garde sources Independent Group members drew from: especially Alexander Dorner and his *The Way Beyond Art*; D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's *On Growth and Form*; Gyorgy Kepes' work *Language of Vision*; Michel Tapié and his *Un Art Autre*; and of course, too often overlooked as a carrier of prewar avant-garde notions between the generations as well as the two Atlantic continents: László Moholy-Nagy's *Vision in Motion*.<sup>18</sup>

The New Brutalism was (among others) the result of the revisiting and reconceptualising of avant-garde sources as undertaken by the Independent Group. Banham claimed that the *Parallel of Life and Art* exhibition of 1953, made by Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi and Alison and Peter Smithson, was the *locus classicus* of the movement. Here the call to come to a 'rough poetry' found its first manifesto-like expression. The foursome would present the whole event as the staging of a 'finding process', a kind of Surrealist game of 'picking up, turning over and putting with....,' not only involving the artists and architects but also the visitors, who were challenged to undergo a situation in the words of Henderson, and without much reference to rely on to recreate some sort of coherent order out of the collection of disparate materials brought together in the show. Unsurprisingly then, the New Brutalism 'eludes precise description' as Banham put it. Again, 'vagueness' is key to the discourse unfolding, with the main protagonists not always talking about quite the same thing.

### Rereading the Brutalist Discourse

Conventionally, historians and theorists alike turn to Reyner Banham's essay of 1955 as the prime source to explain the Brutalist discourse. Because of this, Banham's notion of 'Image' as developed in this essay, is made the central theoretical concept of the New Brutalism. The second concept proposed by Banham is the one of 'topology', in order to replace the geometries of routine functionalist rationalism and especially of the neo-classicist revival under the influence by Wittkower's studies. Also, conventionally, and despite the acknowledgement of Brutalist slipperiness, the so-called movement is portrayed as a singular event with a coherent programme. Yet, the Smithsons never elaborated the notions of 'Image' and 'topology' in their own writings; they are completely absent from their own statements

18 See Stalder, 2008, but also Nigel Whiteley's essay 'Banham and "Otherness"'. Reyner Banham (1922-1988) and his quest for an architecture autre', in: *Architectural History*, nr. 33, 1990, pp. 188-221.

that specifically address the New Brutalism. And in a very late interview between Peter Smithson and Hans Ulrich Obrist in 2000, Smithson simply noted that 'Brutalism was not what Reyner Banham was talking about'.<sup>19</sup> Smithson never really challenged his friend and historian of the movement in such unveiled terms, but when rereading his and Alison's review of Banham's 1966 book on the New Brutalism with these words in the back of one's mind, the disagreement behind the ambiguous and sometimes jocular tone becomes all too clear.<sup>20</sup> A footnote in their 1973 *Without Rhetoric* also demonstrates their discontent. Talking about 'the root of our way of seeing and thinking about things that we called New Brutalism' the Smithsons added the swipe:

*'Not much to do with the Brutalism that popularly became lumped into the style outlined in Reyner Banham's The New Brutalism.'*<sup>21</sup>

When following the trail of the various statements on Brutalism, it also becomes clear that the Brutalist discourse continuously shifted. It is not just elusiveness we are dealing with. The first description of the Smithsons, concerns a certain 'warehouse' aesthetic applied to a domestic context (December 1953); later descriptions allude to American advertising as Dada, and to the modernist indebtedness to traditional Japanese architecture (January 1955); human association, a social programme and ethic imperative come in only at a later stage, just as the issues of urban planning and mobility (April 1957). Smithson statements on the New Brutalism have always been published as part of listings, editorial comments by others (Banham or Crosby most notably) or debates, never as an autonomous statement or manifesto.

The first mention in print is in *Architectural Design*, in December 1953, the very first issue Crosby was involved as editor; Crosby was the first propagandist of the Smithsons, just before Reyner Banham. A small item in the editorial columns is devoted to the Smithsons' design for their House in Soho, which included a straightforward project description, largely written by Alison even though Peter's initials 'P.D.S.' appear as author. The second half of the text addressing the architecture and the principles of ordering at work, reads as follows:

*'It was decided to have no finishes at all internally - the building being a combination of shelter and environment.*

*Bare concrete, brickwork and wood. The difficulty of unceiled rooms was satisfactorily overcome by the disposition of rooms which were also placed high up or low down according to light-sunlight desired.*

19 Obrist, *Smithson Time*, 2004, p. 17.

20 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Banham's Bumper Book on Brutalism', in: *The Architects' Journal*, 28 December 1966, pp. 1590-1591; there is an unpublished review as well (dated 1 December 1966, revised 21 April 1967) which speaks of 'blockage', a hand-written note on the typescript says 'commissioned & later refused by *New Statesman*'. Robin Middleton noted during various conversations that Banham didn't consult the Smithsons once when writing the book.

21 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 1973, p. 6, note 6.

*Brickwork may suggest a blue or double burnt or coloured pointing; but the arbitrary use of colour and texture was not conformed with, and common bricks with struck joints were intended. The bars and colour variation have some sort of natural tension when laid by a good bricklayer.*

*In fact, had this been built it would have been the first exponent of the “new brutalism” in England, as the preamble to the specification shows: “It is our intention in this building to have the structure exposed entirely, without internal finishes wherever practicable. The Contractor should aim at a high standard of basic construction as in a small warehouse.”<sup>22</sup>*

A second mentioning by the Smithsons appears in *The Architectural Review*, April 1954, among the various editorial commentaries one is devoted to ‘The New Brutalism’ under the heading of ‘Future’; most probably introduced by Reyner Banham (who remained anonymous) the Smithsons stated the following: *‘It is necessary to create an architecture of reality.*

*An architecture which takes as its starting point the period of 1910 – of de Stijl, Dada and Cubism – and which ignores the waste land of the four functions.*

*An art concerned with the natural order, the poetic relationship between living things and environment.*

*We wish to see towns and buildings which do not make us feel ashamed, ashamed that we cannot realise the potential of the twentieth century, ashamed that philosophers and physicists must think us fools, and painters think us irrelevant.*

*We live in moron-made cities.*

*Our generation must try and produce evidence that men are at work.<sup>23</sup>*

In January 1955 a third and extensive statement by the Smithsons appeared as part of an *Architectural Design* editorial. By then the Hunstanton Secondary Modern School had been realized, and widely published while being discussed as a manifestation of the New Brutalism, among others in the *Architectural Review*. Banham’s essay on the New Brutalism as a new movement would not appear before the end of the year in the December issue of the *Architectural Review*. The couple, introduced by the editor as ‘the prophets of the movement’, stated now:

*‘Our belief that the New Brutalism is the only possible development for this moment from the Modern Movement, stems not only from the knowledge that Le Corbusier is one of its practitioners (starting with the “béton brut” of the Unité), but because*

<sup>22</sup> ‘House in Soho, London. Alison and Peter Smithson’, in: *Architectural Design*, December 1953, p. 342; in the archive there is a typoscript with Alison Smithson mentioned as author.

<sup>23</sup> in *The Architectural Review*, April 1954.

*fundamentally both movements have used as their yardstick Japanese architecture – its underlying idea, principles, and spirit.*

*Japanese Architecture seduced the generation spanning 1900, producing in Frank Lloyd Wright, the open plan and an odd sort of constructed decoration; in Le Corbusier, the purist aesthetic – the sliding screens, continuous space, the power of white and earth colours; in Mies, the structure and the screen as absolutes. Through Japanese Architecture, the longings of the generation of Garnier and Behrens found FORM.*

*But for the Japanese their FORM was only part of a general conception of life, a sort of reverence for the natural world and, from that, for the materials of the built world .*

*It is this reverence for materials – a realization of the affinity which can be established between building and man – which is at the root of the so-called New Brutalism.*

*It has been mooted that the Hunstanton School, which probably owes as much to the existence of Japanese Architecture as to Mies, is the first realization of the New Brutalism in England.*

*This particular handling of Materials, not in the craft sense of Frank Lloyd Wright but in intellectual appraisal, has been ever present in the Modern Movement, as indeed familiars of the early German architects have been prompt to remind us.*

*What is new about the New Brutalism among Movements is that it finds its closest affinities, not in a past architectural style, but in peasant dwelling forms. It has nothing to do with craft. We see architecture as the direct result of a way of life.*

*1954 has been a key year. It has seen American advertising equal Dada in its impact of overlaid imagery; that automotive masterpiece, the Cadillac convertible, parallel-with-the-ground (four elevations) classic box on wheels; the start of a new way of thinking by CIAM; the revaluation of the work of Gropius; the repainting of the Villa at Garches?’<sup>24</sup>*

24 ‘The New Brutalism’, in: *Architectural Design*, January 1955, p. 1; no authors are mentioned, although the Smithsons were credited with the statements; a slightly different draft is in the Smithsonian archive; Theo Crosby is probably responsible for the whole text as published. Curiously enough, the final lines do not have quotation marks as the others, as if they are not by the Smithsons but by the editor, who already mentioned in his introduction that he ‘somewhat edited’ the architects’ statement. In a first republication (in *Arena*, 1966), these lines were omitted, however, in a later republication of the statement as part of the 1973 book *Without Rhetoric* these lines were incorporated again.

*A later statement appears in April 1957, again in Architectural Design, as a response to a panel discussion on the New Brutalism: ‘If Academicism can be defined as yesterday’s answers to today’s problems, then obviously the objectives and aesthetic techniques of a real architecture (or a real art) must be in constant change. In the immediate post-war period it seemed important to show that architecture was still possible, and we determined to set against loose planning and form – abdication, a compact disciplined, architecture.*

*Simple objectives once achieved change the situation, and the techniques used to achieve them become useless.*

*So new objectives are established.*

*From individual buildings, disciplined on the whole by classical aesthetic techniques, we moved on to an examination of the whole problem of human associations and the relationship that building and community has to them. From this study has grown a completely new attitude and a non-classical aesthetic.*

*Any discussion of Brutalism will miss the point if it does not take into account Brutalism's attempt to be objective about "reality" – the cultural objectives of society, its urges, its techniques, and so on. Brutalism tries to face up to a mass-production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work.*

*Up to now Brutalism has been discussed stylistically, whereas its essence is ethical.'*<sup>25</sup>

Finally, there are two occasions at which the Smithsons once again debate the idea of the New Brutalism outside their usual platforms of the *Review* or *Architectural Design*.<sup>26</sup> First there is a 'Conversation on Brutalism' published in the Italian *Zodiac* in 1959, which is a staged conversation as suggested by the title, and interestingly enough between two couples and two generations so to speak, namely Alison and Peter Smithson and Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew; second there is the review of Banham's book of 1966, already noted, written by the Smithsons for the *Architects' Journal*.<sup>27</sup>

In a way, the 'Conversation on Brutalism' contains the most comprehensive of definitions of Brutalism by the Smithsons. At the same time, the shift from the domestic warehouse to principles of town planning is now complete. The conversation starts with discussing the legacy of the first generation of modern architects and the way they conceptualized a possible machine aesthetic in relation to the actual making and building of architecture, but soon enough the discussion moves to issues of town planning whereupon Peter Smithson claims that 'the essential ethic of brutalism is in town building'. He also explains that what matters is:

*'the way the buildings themselves fit together and inter-act with each other which creates the actual places in which you move, and have a feeling identity or lack of identity. In consequence of this sort of way of thinking, in terms of direct responses of building to building, you tend to get buildings which are less (in the Renaissance sense) complete. One puts less value on the thing being symmetrical or cubic and more on the fact that it's particular geometry, builds up into a relationship with other geometry not in a Camillo Sitte*

25 'Thoughts in Progress. The New Brutalism', in: *Architectural Design*, April 1957, pp. 111-113.

26 In later publications such as *Without Rhetoric* of 1973, some additional remarks are included, yet these are mostly of a retrospective nature; the steam of the debates surrounding the New Brutalism had evaporated by then.

27 Peter Smithson, Alison Smithson, Jane B. Drew, E. Maxwell Fry, 'Conversation on Brutalism' in: *Zodiac*, nr. 4, 1959, pp. 73-81; and Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Banham's Bumper Book on Brutalism', in: *The Architects' Journal*, 28 December 1966, pp. 1590-1591.

*romantic way, but in a functional way; that you read the building for what it is, and not for some idea that is constructed on it.'*<sup>28</sup>

And Alison added that:

*'the building (...) owes a greater responsibility to the whole of "town building" and (...) it always has to imply that behind the immediate relationship is the relationship to the rest of the village, or the rest of the district or the town, or the rest of the quarter of the city.'*<sup>29</sup>

It should be kept in mind that these statements are made after the Hauptstadt Berlin competition, and straight after a visit to the Hans Scharoun office in Berlin of which Peter makes explicit mention, but still before the Smithsons start working on the design for the Economist's headquarters.<sup>30</sup>

From the idea of town planning in terms of establishing relationships the foursome – in apparent unison – debate how a city and its spaces should be understood as a 'net of communication', among other things based on the new requirements of mass car ownership and mobility, while comparing the pros and cons of American engineering versus English New Towns and garden city ideas. At the conclusion Brutalist aesthetic is once again put on the table by Maxwell Fry who states that the morality of Brutalism is incorrectly reduced to the use of 'London stock brick' and 'bush hammered concrete' as the only valuable means of expression. The Smithsons respond by agreeing that Brutalism is not about such easy formalisms, Peter:

*'There has been an awful lot of writing by people assuming what we mean. A modern architect does not think of a theory and then build it; you assemble your buildings and your theories as you go along. The theory is evolved, a decision made 5 years ago will be a completely different decision from one made today.'*<sup>31</sup>

And Alison adds in another act of withdrawal:

*'Now everything is being done in brick, rough concrete, vast sections of this and that, and varnished planks. We have again to say that this is not [a] solution for every possible thing.'*<sup>32</sup>

28 *Zodiac*, nr. 4, 1959, pp. 74-75.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Scharoun's work had quite an impact on the Smithsons; they used Scharoun's scheme for Berlin in their *Urban Structuring* book, and he was also invited to Team 10 meetings, yet never attended.

31 *Ibid.*, p 81.

32 *Ibid.*

Ultimately, by 1966 when Banham published his book on the New Brutalism the whole cause seemed to have become part of history. The Smithsons' review of Banham's 'memoirs' does not propose new definitions, but mostly corrections of error and misinterpretation. They start their piece by critically debating the pitfalls for involved historians like Banham, stating:

*'For the period up to 1958 Banham is well up to Time standards. He was engaged and it shows. From 1958 onwards he seems not to have been paying attention and the reality of what we were all up to has got away from him.'*<sup>33</sup>

The closest the Smithsons come to some sort of retro-active definition in this particular review, reads:

*'For let there be no doubt, there was a movement, a sense of certainty about what to do, as far as we were concerned, shared at its most intense by the hard-core Team X, from 1953 to around 1963. (...) Banham gets this right.*

*He also gets right that it is an architecture – an architecture committed to some sort of social dialogue – that we are after. The people in this book are not in any way involved with technology as mystique.'*<sup>34</sup>

From thereon the review is a long list of small and large corrections, yet, the last sentence already spells out one of the major differences of opinion between the couple and Banham, namely the role of technology vis-à-vis architecture. Mid-1960s, having built the Economist's and re-interpreted Mies van der Rohe's work in America (Seagram Building, Lafayette Park), the Smithsons started to speak of an architecture 'without rhetoric', and of the 'machine-served society', in which technology was under control and at the service of society rather than the 'technology as mystique' of Banham's new favourites, the Archigram collective. The disagreement on the role of technology is one of the clearer moments in the exchanges between the Smithsons and Banham. Another clear distinction between the two parties would be the possibility or desirability of a Pop aesthetic for architecture. Mostly though, the positions overlap or are complementary. It was Francesco Tentori in his 1968 essay 'Phoenix Brutalism' for *Zodiac*, who put the tension between Banham and the Smithsons at the centre of the Brutalist 'movement', while at the same time pointing out all sorts of flaws and contradictions regarding both individual positions.<sup>35</sup>

The Smithsons could limit their contributions to succinct, aphoristic statements, because of Banham's attempts to provide the more coherently theoretical underpinning of the Brutalist ideas. While the extensively quoted Smithson statements already revealed how the elusiveness of the New Brutalism was part and parcel of the whole project, due to the shifting 'objectives' with regard to 'today's problems' of which they spoke, and due to the

33 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Banham's Bumper Book on Brutalism', 1966.

34 Ibid.

35 Francesco Tentori, 'Phoenix Brutalism', in: *Zodiac*, nr. 18, 1968, pp. 257-266.

evolution of ideas while working on projects, the dynamic between the protagonists thus substantially added to the impossibility of achieving a clearcut Brutalist argument or theory.

Another complicating factor involves the way the term New Brutalism is appropriated by third parties. The bold interventions and claims by the Smithsons and Banham were rather unusual at the time; they introduced a new form of architectural polemic which provoked a consistent stream of letters to various journals. One finds readers' responses of indignation and support alike not only in the pages of the *Architectural Review* and *Architectural Design*, but also in those of the *Architects' Journal*, *The Observer*, and *New Statesman*. Together they make a curious compilation adding to the confusion while further expanding Brutalist definitions. Apparently, the slipperiness, or 'vagueness' had the effect of an open invitation to join in and make one's own claims. There is for instance the famous letter of the photographer Eric de Maré claiming that he had a letter from Hans Asplund, son of the Swedish architect, who claimed that the term 'neo-Brutalism' was – irony of ironies – of Swedish origin, and involved a private house in Uppsala by Bengt Edman and Lennart Holm, built as early as 1950.<sup>36</sup> And there is a slightly annoyed reader of *Architectural Design* who suggested that the New Brutalism meant nothing else but the architecture of the Smithsons themselves,<sup>37</sup> basing himself on that well-known anecdote that Peter was nicknamed Brutus by his fellow students in Newcastle.<sup>38</sup> In line with this account are the jocular stories that Brutalism is short for 'Brutus and Alison', or even 'Brutal Alison'.<sup>39</sup> The Smithsons cherished their own version of the origin of the term; in retrospective statements they revealed that the '*brutal part was taken from an English newspaper cutting which gave a translation from a French paper of a Marseilles official's attack on the Unité in construction, which described the building as "brutal"*.'<sup>40</sup>

In many ways, this last revelation is representative for the Smithsons' shifting position within the debate on the future course of modern architecture. First of all, there is the indebtedness to Le Corbusier (next to the already mentioned paraphrasing of Miesian thought), and more importantly, there is his crucial incorporation in the Brutalist genealogy. Second, there is the presentation of the 'brutal' as a counter-movement: officials are hostile to Brutalist architecture, 'attacking' it. Third, there is the issue of erroneous 'translation' from one language to another,

36 Published in *The Architectural Review*, August 1956, p. 72, including a photo of the house in question.

37 The critic (and architect) Robert Furneaux Jordan had said that the New Brutalism entailed nothing else but the Smithsons talking to each other, as quoted by Banham in his 1955 essay 'The New Brutalism' in: *The Architectural Review*, December 1955, top of p. 356.

38 Letter by Edward J. Armitage, in: *Architectural Design*, May 1957, p. 220; also recounted to author by Ron Simpson, fellow student of Peter at Durham University.

39 Reyner Banham in his 1966 book, and Kenneth Frampton during conversations at our first Team 10 seminar at TU Delft, 5 November 2001.

40 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Banham's Bumper Book on Brutalism', 1966; also recollected in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 1973, p. 2, note 2: 'Coined on sight of a newspaper paragraph heading which called (by poor translation of Beton Brut?) the Marseilles Unité "Brutalism in architecture" – that was for us: "New", both because we came after Le Corbusier, and in response to the going literary style of the *Architectural Review* which – at the start of the 'fifties – was running articles on the New Monumentality, the New Empiricism, the New Sentimentality, and so on.'



the French *brut* into the English brutal – a discursive figure, which is common practice to the architectural debate as we know it, certainly in avant-garde circles. And finally, there is the reference to the ‘newspaper cutting’, a reference to the world of newspapers and media, where – perfectly in line with Independent Group ideas – the forces of contemporary reality can be monitored, and from which the ‘rough poetry’ of the Brutalist architecture is dragged.

Ultimately though, the instigators of the Brutalist intervention lost control over the definition and reception of the New Brutalism. Despite assertions of the opposite by Smithson and Banham, conventionally Brutalism continues to be discussed mostly in stylistic terms, with all sorts of subcategories and denominations: from brick Brutalism and concrete Brutalism to welfare state Brutalism or municipal Brutalism, to American Brutalism (Louis Kahn and Paul Rudolph in particular), Japanese samurai Brutalism or even Brazilian Brutalism.<sup>41</sup> And in 1967 Robin Middleton gave a beautiful account of how the Brutalism was really a northerners’ invention, revealing a web of personal connections between the Smithsons and the lesser known Gordon Ryder, Ronald Simpson, Jack Lynn, Ivor Smith and others.<sup>42</sup>

Still, one could classify these interpretations among the more friendly, sympathetic ones. There are also (mis)appropriations beyond control of Banham and the Smithsons from those who one might call the enemies of Brutalism. Take for instance Denise Scott Brown and her retrospective text ‘Learning from Brutalism’, commenting on the brief history of the Independent Group and her student years in London (1952-1954), claiming her right of territory as part of this history. In her view, Colin Rowe of all people should be considered a proto-Brutalist bringing the message to East Coast America where it was translated into what she calls the “‘White” architecture of the late 1960s and early 1970s’, while her own work would presumably represent ‘another link that had gone unnoticed’ with regard to an architecture of ‘reality’.<sup>43</sup> Or Rowe himself, an advocate of mannerism as an underrated working method for architects, he speaks of his appreciation of Brutalism as a tentative style (in *Collage City*), remarking he doesn’t quite understand why the inventors expressed their dissatisfaction with such achievement. And Pevsner and other historians of Victorian architecture would start to use brutalist as an epithet, most notably for the architecture of William Butterfield – whose All Saints’ church had already been re-appropriated as ‘precedent’ by the Brutalists themselves in the case of the Hunstanton school.<sup>44</sup>

41 The proliferation of interpretations is continued up until today; see for instance the issue of *CLOG*, March 2013, entirely dedicated to the New Brutalism and its legacy.

42 In his review of the 1966 Banham book: ‘The New Brutalism, or a Clean, Well-lighted Place’, in: *Architectural Design*, January 1967, pp. 7-8.

43 Denise Scott Brown, ‘Learning from Brutalism’, in: Robbins, 1990, pp. 203-206; the so-called white architecture of the late 1960s, early 1970s is of course a reference to the New York Five and the book *Five Architects* of 1972 in which the neo-avantgarde work of Hejduk, Meier, Gwathmey, Graves and Eisenman was published.

44 See for an excellent discussion of this historiographical oddity Elaine Harwood, ‘Butterfield & Brutalism’, in: *AA Files*, nr. 27, 1994, pp. 39-46; the source of the Butterfield revival is John Summerson’s *Heavenly Mansions* of 1949, including the chapter ‘William Butterfield, or the Glory of Ugliness’.

By then the New Brutalism is fully historicised and neutralised so to speak to make it available as part of a taxonomy of architectural fashion, the 'fancy dress ball' as Pevsner called it in his *Englishness of English Art*.

Because of this confusion, and in order to try and recapture the Brutalist discourse of the 1950s we may want to have a closer look at the words used by the threesome, who Tentori defined as the central axis behind it all. What dynamic can one detect behind the Brutalist exchanges, the play of words going on between the historian and the architects? As already noted, one of the complications is that one does not quite know how to assess the things not said, not written about and slipped away from memory. For sure, there existed friendship and quite an amount of agreement between the Smithsons and Banham, but as pointed out too, there is a process of falling out.<sup>45</sup> First of all then, we have to return to Banham's essay of 1955, even though he himself would later urge his readers of the *New Brutalism* book to regard the essay, which established the 'movement', with a grain of salt. Because despite the differences this must also be acknowledged: without Banham's support and his attempt to theoretically underpin the New Brutalism – as ambiguous as we now might view it – the Smithsons' architecture and ideas would have had much less impact without Banham's support of Brutalism. Second, we might use the classic double terms of image and process as used by the protagonists to map the differences and ultimate disavowals.

### The Historian's Image

Banham opened his 1955 essay 'The New Brutalism' by distinguishing between two kinds of '-isms', one being a style label describing 'consistent principles', 'whatever the relation of the artists' such as the label of Cubism, and the other being a slogan adopted by a group of artists, such as the one of Futurism, 'whatever the apparent similarity or dissimilarity' between the works of the artists involved. According to Banham the New Brutalism escaped clear definition, because it belonged to both kinds of '-isms'. After having thus situated the New Brutalism on an equal footing with two of the major historical avant-garde moments on the Continent, Banham then went on to recontextualize the origin of the term.

45 Adrian Forty confirmed in conversation the falling out between Smithson and Banham; when asked to have an interview on her relationship with the Smithsons, Mary Banham refused to grant this.

According to Banham the term emerged within characteristic Cold War polemics as present within the circles of the London County Council and other planning institutes in control of the building up of the welfare state. It was 'Communists versus the Rest' in Banham's words, and originally, the New Brutalism was a term of 'Communist abuse' intended to denounce the then dominant vocabulary of modern architecture. Apparently – Banham phrased this with some innuendo – this abuse was not so much directed to a specific 'class' but rather 'persons', persons who would have a *tendency to look toward Le Corbusier, and to be aware of something called le beton brut, (...) to know of the Art Brut of Jean Dubuffet and his connection in Paris.*<sup>46</sup> This is a direct reference to the Independent Group meetings, which Banham would not mention as such in 'The New Brutalism' essay, although he speaks of the ICA.<sup>47</sup>

Still according to Banham, this abuse would be reversed: *'Words and ideas, personalities and discontents chimed together and in a matter of weeks (...) it had been appropriated as their own, by their own desire and public consent, by two young architects, Alison and Peter Smithson.'*<sup>48</sup>

From there onward Banham set out to reframe the work of the Smithsons and the idea of the New Brutalism, first by pointing out the connections with artistic practices abroad and at home, and second by comparing the three projects he considered key to the Brutalist sensibility, namely the Smithsons' Soho House, their Hunstanton School and one outsider's project, Louis Kahn's Yale Art Centre.<sup>49</sup> This comparison culminated in the conclusion that the Smithsons' school project was superior to Kahn's art gallery, since it was in the words of Banham 'an image'. This notion of 'Image' with a capital 'I' was the core around which Banham's argument revolved. A Brutalist building was in his definition 'an immediately apprehensible visual entity', and as such 'affecting the emotions' – quite in line with Le Corbusier's statement: *'l'Architecture, c'est avec des matières brutes, établir des rapports émouvants,'* which Banham had used as opening words to his essay.

The New Brutalist architecture required that: *'the building should be an immediately apprehensible visual entity, and that the form grasped by the eye should be confirmed by experience of the building in use. Further, that this form should be entirely proper to the functions and materials of the building, in their entirety.'*<sup>50</sup>

46 Reyner Banham, 'The New Brutalism' in: *The Architectural Review*, December 1955, pp. 355-361; reprinted in: Mary Banham et al (eds.), *A Critic Writes. Essays by Reyner Banham*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, pp. 7-15.

47 The moment when the Independent Group meetings entered the writings of Banham and official historiography has a specific moment of its own and is connected to the appropriation of the term of Pop Art and its origins, as already noted in Chapter 3, footnote 122. At the time, in the 1955 New Brutalism essay, it was apparently more important to talk of the ICA rather than the 'Young Group' as a separate identity.

48 Ibid., p. 356.

49 There is an interesting correspondence between Louis Kahn and Colin Rowe, in which the latter scorns the way Banham integrates Kahn in his Brutalism essay and how he attacks the assumed 'pseudo-Palladian formalists', i.c. Colin Rowe, see *AA-files*, nr. 62, 2011, p. 99.

50 Banham, 'The New Brutalism', 1955, p. 358.

Banham admitted that in itself this specific 'relationship between structure, function and form' was not a new thing, but the 'basic commonplace of all good building'. The 'apical uncommonplace' of the New Brutalism was then the aspect of 'Image', or what he called 'the demand that this form should be apprehensible and memorable'. According to Banham, this 'makes good building into great architecture'. At that point, even Banham himself mentioned this wasn't very new either: 'All great architecture has been image-making'.<sup>51</sup> The event of the New Brutalism was a straightforward *rappel à l'ordre*, rather than a truly new direction deviating from the established tradition of modern architecture. Yet, this call to order was necessary to properly distinguish between the 'substandard architectural practices of the routine-functionalists' and truly 'conceptual buildings'.

The Hunstanton School served as the perfect case for such a call, Banham:

*'most modern buildings appear to be made of whitewash or patent glazing, even when they are made of concrete or steel. Hunstanton appears to be made of glass, brick, steel and concrete, and is in fact made of glass, brick, steel and concrete. Water and electricity do not come out of unexplained holes in the wall, but are delivered to the point of use by visible pipes and manifest conduits. One can see what Hunstanton is made of, and how it works, and there is not another thing to see except the play of spaces.'*<sup>52</sup>

The correspondence, or non-correspondence, between appearance and what a building was actually made of, was to be the first and foremost criterion of the Brutalist reformulation of modern architecture as proposed by Banham. It was also the first point of departure for the Brutalist ethic, even though – it should be noted – that at this point (in 1955) the ethic programme of the New Brutalism remained largely implicit and was neither discussed as such by Banham, nor by the Smithsons. The issue of ethics was introduced by the Smithsons in their 1957 statements.

Yet, parallel to this call for order two major shifts were eventually proposed, and these touched on the neo-Palladian or neo-classicist subtext which was part and parcel of the British revision of the tradition of modern architecture of those years. One shift concerned the displacement of 'Tomistic "beauty"' by 'Brutalist "Image"', and the other the displacement of 'elementary Platonic geometry' by an 'aformalism' based on an 'intuitive sense of topology'.<sup>53</sup> Banham observed these shifts in the so-called

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., p. 357.

53 Ibid., p. 361.

*locus classicus* of the New Brutalism, the exhibition *Parallel of Life and Art* of 1953, and two competition entries by the Smithsons, Golden Lane and Sheffield University. Here, symmetry and geometry gave way to the 'topological' organisation of flows and movement. It was here that Banham situated the anti-beauty and anti-classical tendency characteristic of the New Brutalism.

From this point of view Hunstanton turned out to be most problematic as a didactic example. The seminal Brutalist building by the Smithsons had all the characteristics of the neo-classicist manner as legitimized by and appropriated through both Wittkower's studies of Palladio and Mies's work in Chicago. And at this point Banham – who obviously positioned the Brutalists, himself and the Smithsons in the camp opposite of the so-called 'crypto-academicists' of the neo-classicizing party – had to untie this paradoxical knot before he could cast the Brutalist sensibility as a formal, or *brut*. He did so by suggesting that the formal axiality of the Hunstanton School was nothing else but some 'ad hoc device' to realize the so-called Brutalist 'Image'.

According to Banham, it was through the collaborations with Henderson and Paolozzi that the Smithsons were capable of rethinking their aesthetic ambitions and of discarding the neo-Miesian or neo-classicist geometric schemas. This was in fact only partly confirmed by the Smithsons. In their text 'The Stuff and Decoration of the Urban Scene' written in the early 1950s, they pointed to the work of Jackson Pollock in the first place: '*In 1949 at Peggy Guggenheim's palazzo in Venice we saw the first manifestation of the new ordering, in the painting of Jackson Pollock. In a roomful [sic] of academic abstract painting Pollock seemed to be too good to be true: the ghost of the twenties had at last been laid and the way was clear. At last we were free from the shadow of our international grandfathers, free to solve our problems in our own way.*'<sup>54</sup>

In later writings they also acknowledged Henderson and Paolozzi, for instance in *Upper Case*, nr. 3, published in 1960, and in *Urban Structuring*, published in 1967. At any case, Banham concluded that what could be defined as neo-classicist inclination in the project for Hunstanton, was left behind by the Smithsons from 1952 onward, while preparing the *Parallel of Life and Art* show, and working on the schemes for Golden Lane and Sheffield.<sup>55</sup> Platonic geometry had made way for topology and beauty for powerful 'images' capable of direct communication. Summarizing his

<sup>54</sup> Eventually published in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 86.

<sup>55</sup> The Smithsons together with Henderson and Paolozzi proposed their idea for an exhibition at the ICA in April 1952; see also Robbins, 1990, p. 18.

arguments he came up with three basic requirements for a building to be classified as Brutalist:

'1. *Memorability as an Image*; 2. *Clear exhibition of Structure*; 3. *Valuation of Materials "as found."*'<sup>56</sup>

As a final remark, slightly speculative, yet possibly clarifying how various traditions simultaneously remain at work, one might argue that one of the puzzling aspects of Banham's notions of image and topology concerns the fact that they are not incompatible with both the neo-classicist or the Picturesque. As difficult as it was to present the movement as something 'new' with regard to modernist orthodoxy, in hindsight it is also hard if not impossible to escape neo-classicist axiom; this of course already starts with the very notions of unity and architectural principles of ordering. Picturesque sensibilities too, remain at work, even though Banham attempted to define an alternative discourse. As noted before, it should be kept in mind that the 1955 essay was written at the same time Pevsner's BBC lectures on the *Englishness of English art and architecture* were broadcast.

For instance, the way Banham explained his idea of 'Image' as something 'conceptual' comes very close to the idea of the Renaissance *concetto* – the diagram connecting the world of ideas with the material one. Banham himself must have been aware of this, when he spoke of 'all great architecture' as being 'conceptual' – Bramante's Santa Maria della Consolazione in Todi is even included as an example of architecture as 'Image'. Topology too, is perhaps not so much a substitute of Platonic geometry, it might also be considered its expansion. Additionally and paradoxically, behind image and topology we can see Picturesque notions at work, too: this time as the critical transformation of the pictorial and the geometries of movement.

Banham's attempt to come up with a formulation of Brutalist principles thus remains deeply unresolved, while at the same time opening the door for completely new and unsuspected trajectories. For instance, how Banham's 'Image' is a precursor to Charles Jencks's semantic exercises of the late 1960s and later, must be left unanswered here. But despite Banham's refutation of postmodernist eclecticism (and one wonders what he would have made of Jencks's propositions for an iconic architecture), it is difficult not to see a connection. Topology too, has its unsuspected elaborations; it is not unrelated to the geometries of the digital paradigm and the concomitant interest

<sup>56</sup> Reyner Banham, 'The New Brutalism', 1955, p. 361.

in an architecture of surfaces and envelopes, nor is it alien to site specific architecture, in which territory and its manipulation are part of the design project.

### The Architect's Process

Comparing Banham's position with the Smithsons' statements of the period some differences emerge. First of all, and as important as it may be surprising, the Smithsons didn't make the idea of 'Image', or anything similar a central notion to their argument for Brutalism. It was simply absent from their statements on the New Brutalism. Of course, this doesn't mean the Smithsons were disinterested in the topic of images. On the contrary, in a retrospective statement from the 1990s Peter Smithson noted: *'Image was the favourite word of the period ... "a good image" was the highest possible praise, for a newspaper photograph, for an advertisement ... in fact for anything.'*<sup>57</sup>

57 Peter Smithson, 'Team X in Retrospect', manuscript from the Smithson archive, dated 1 October 1993, revised 1994-2001, p. 2. Staying close with the Smithsons statements of January 1955 in *Architectural Design*, Banham listed the following in his essay of December 1955 as 'images': 'A great many things have been called "an image" – S.M. della Consolazione at Todì, a painting by Jackson Pollock, the Lever Building, the 1954 Cadillac convertible, the roofscape of the *Unité* at Marseilles, any of the hundred photographs in *Parallel of Life and Art*'.

58 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'But Today We Collect Ads', in: *Ark. Journal of the Royal College of Art*, November 1956, pp. 49-50; see for instance Stalder, 2008, but also Nigel Whiteley, *Reyner Banham. Historian of the Immediate Future*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2002.

59 I do not know of a text by Banham in which he explains his own methodology, although naturally there are quite a few essays holding most explicit arguments about the role of historiography vis-à-vis the ongoing discourse, also within the texts on the New Brutalism; for a discussion of Banham's training and practice as a historian see Nigel Whiteley's biography.

60 John Summerson, 'The Case for a Theory of Modern Architecture', in *RIBA Journal*, 1957, p. 312.

Hence, the two main moments of reference for historians who would stick with Banham's definition of the New Brutalism as 'Image', are first and foremost the collection of photographs of the *Parallel of Life and Art* exhibition of 1953, as well as the Smithsons' short essay on advertising of 1956, 'But Today We Collect Ads', in which they discuss the advertisements as 'good "images"' of a special, 'almost magical technical virtuosity'.<sup>58</sup> The former serves then as an entry to investigate the possible reconceptualizations of pre-war avant-garde practice and principle, while the latter represents the connection with post-war consumer culture and proto-Pop sensibilities. Yet, images, or 'Image', occupy a very different place in the Smithsons' conception of the New Brutalism, and certainly not such a crucial one as in the 'New History' formulations by Banham, in which iconographic analysis was apparently the crucial and directive methodology.<sup>59</sup> Following the Smithson statements that Brutalism should try and drag a rough poetry out of the forces at work, that architecture should be the direct result of a way of life, we might turn to Peter Smithson's intervention at the end of John Summerson's RIBA lecture of 1957, and reconsider his acceptance of the notion of 'process'.<sup>60</sup> Also because the discussion ensuing Summerson's lecture partly referred to the Brutalist discourse.

There, Summerson had dismissed Brutalism as the fashion of plans 'wriggling in the wildest of "free" curves'; Summerson more or less explicitly refuted Banham's proposition for a New Brutalism as a possible resolution to the problem of a missing form language in the case of modern architecture, calling the idea of topology nothing but a 'red-herring'.<sup>61</sup> Banham, present in the audience, retorted that the idea of topology was 'dragged into the discussion' precisely because to him topology itself was 'a-formal', providing a 'method of analysis' that was not committed to 'any particular set of forms'.<sup>62</sup> It is after Banham's intervention that Peter Smithson took up the challenge that Summerson had proposed to his audience, by elaborating the possible relationship between process and form – form, which as we have seen in the Smithson statements of 1955 was a key notion indeed. Process, and how form might be part of this process then become the central notion that structured the Smithson project for a New Brutalism.

Another retrospective and rather late Smithson statement regarding Independent Group collaborations, the one concerning the As Found of 1990, also makes reference to process, and interestingly enough, also to the notion of image. Explaining why Pollock's work, but also that of Dubuffet, was so crucial to them and represented a next step in comparison to the prewar avant-garde, they wrote:

*'The image was discovered within the process of making the work. It was not prefigured but looked-for as a phenomenon within the process.'*<sup>63</sup>

It is crucial to note that the aspect of process is decisive here, and not so much the aspect of image. It is not dissimilar to Peter Smithson's response to Summerson in 1957 that '*architecture as something form-giving (...) cannot be separated from "process" and how form takes part in this 'process'*', and thus actually transforms the process.<sup>64</sup>

The other connection one should not overlook is how process is described here as the process of 'making the work', as noted before this concerns a continuity of Arts and Crafts ideas regarding the moral and aesthetic appreciation of objects well-made and things well-done, even though this continuity with the Arts and Crafts movement was suppressed from the Smithsons' writings. The importance of the 'process of making the work' as stated in 1990, was already present in the 1955 statements on Brutalism as published in *Architectural Design*. Then, the

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., p. 312.

63 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The "As Found" and the "Found"', in: Robbins, 1990, pp. 201-202.

64 Ibid.



couple addressed the issue rather ambiguously by referring to a 'particular handling of materials', close to 'craft', but according to the Smithsons not to be confused with craft. It is at this point, that many differences between Banham and Smithson come to the fore. Banham was not speaking about the making process as key to the Brutalist sensibility, let alone craft. Of course, Banham would recognize the importance of structure and materials as such, but only insofar they mattered to end results such as 'image quality'.

In the 1955 statements the Smithsons referred to two kinds of craft: craft in the sense of Japanese architecture as well as 'peasant' building. Of the eight points of their New Brutalism statements four made mention of Japanese architecture. That Japanese architecture might be understood here as close to and overlapping with 'peasant' as well, was evidenced from the later published *Without Rhetoric* (1973) where the Smithsons more explicitly referred to 'Japanese traditional peasant building'.<sup>65</sup> According to the Smithsons the 'generation of Garnier and Behrens' found 'form' through Japanese architecture. They also wrote that the 'seduction' of Japanese architecture 'produced' in Frank Lloyd Wright 'the open plan and an odd sort of constructed decoration', in Le Corbusier 'the purist aesthetic – the sliding screens, continuous space, the power of white and earth colours', and in Mies 'the structure and the screen as absolutes'.<sup>66</sup>

These remarks about Japanese architecture and its apparently crucial role as the Smithsons saw it, remained unexplained. They are quite surprising since it was not before 1960 that the Smithsons would visit the East Asian country. This wisdom had come to the couple mostly through 1930s books,<sup>67</sup> and a now rather obscure movie called 'Gate of Hell' which brought Japanese architecture in colour to the Smithsons for the first time.<sup>68</sup> Yet, what seems decisive here, is that the Smithsons recognized in Japanese architecture a 'reverence for materials – a realization of the affinity which can be established between building and man', and this affinity was 'at the root of the so-called New Brutalism'. The reverence for materials was further explained by linking it to the idea of craft as a 'particular handling of Materials', and the architecture of 'peasant dwellings'. However – and this complicates the statements on New Brutalism – the Smithsons were not after craft in the sense of a past architectural style, or Frank Lloyd Wright's decorative reworkings of the idea, but in the sense of 'intellectual appraisal'. Only through the proper 'handling of materials' analogous to the peasant way was it possible to

65 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 1973, p. 6, note 5. Illustrations of the Kyoto Imperial Palace, the Katsuga Shrine and the Ise Shrine are inserted here, even though these buildings can hardly be described as 'peasant' though.

66 All quotes are from: Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The New Brutalism', editorial statements in: *Architectural Design*, January 1955.

67 Obrist, *Smithson Time*, 2004, p. 18; Peter Smithson also mentioned here that Alison collected Japanese prints when she was still in school.

68 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The New Brutalism', January 1955; in a footnote to the statements.

reach the ultimate conclusion, the key Brutalist slogan of 1955:  
'We see architecture as the direct result of a way of life.'<sup>69</sup>

In an unpublished, preliminary manuscript of the statements, which is slightly more extensive, Alison Smithson explained that to her '*the doing is the craft. The doing must not be confused with the built form – the ensemble.*'<sup>70</sup> Again, it might be noted, this is very much in the spirit of Lethaby, who would also sing the praise of for instance old farm-houses and cottages as 'things themselves', and at the same time warned against their imitation.<sup>71</sup>

In peasant building then, the 'doing' of the architecture, the handling of materials and the making process are regarded as directly linked to a way of life, and hence they are considered exemplary, unlike Wright's architecture for instance, which decorative elaborations were artificially crafted from the Brutalist point of view. Thus, the idea of 'doing', finding form in the handling of materials and in the making process is the second measurement of the Brutalist ethic, next to and closely linked to the first one already mentioned, the correspondence between appearance and actual material construction.

Among the various retrospective reflections of the 1980s and later, one also finds quite substantial confirmation of the centrality of material qualities of Brutalist architecture, or good architecture in general for that matter. There is an unpublished sheet dated 1986, titled "'The 'Fifties'" – The Materials Sacred to Brutalism'. It simply reads:

*'Concrete blocks – laid and pointed like ashlar masonry.*

*Reinforced concrete – off smooth shutters.*

*Stainless steel – sheets, tubes, pressings, fixings.*

*Timber – in framing and detailing, left natural finish.*

*Common plywood and blockboard – left natural finish.*

*Enamelled metals – vitreous, stoved, (and powder-polyester, 1970's-80's).*

*Polysulphide pointing – to absorb movement.*

*Galvanised mild steel – sheets, tubes, pressings; left natural finish.'*<sup>72</sup>

And then there is another statement also trying to capture the architecture of the 1950s, which is published in the Smithson book *The 1930's*:

*'What signals the end of the architecture of the period of the bicycle? (the 'twenties)*

*The arrival of the grey and the brown. (the 'thirties)*

69 Ibid.

70 Alison Smithson, untitled manuscript, dated October 2, 1954.

71 W.R. Lethaby, *Form in Civilization. Collected Papers on Art and Labour*, Oxford University Press, London, first published 1922, second edition 1957, p. 76.

72 One page typescript from the Smithson archive: Peter Smithson, "'The Fifties". The Materials Sacred to Brutalism', dated 30 July 1986.

*What signals the end of the grey and the brown?*

*The arrival of the raw ..... (the 'fifties)*

*raw brick*

*raw block*

*raw steel*

*raw paint*

*raw marble*

*raw gold*

*raw laquer.*<sup>73</sup>

And in the Smithsons' *As Found* statement from 1990 we read that they '*were concerned with the seeing of materials for what they were: the woodness of wood; the sandiness of sand.*'<sup>74</sup>

And perhaps finally, a remark by Peter Smithson during his interview with Obrist:

*'Brutalism simply means – I am repeating some of what I said earlier about Soane's vaults: the quality of a plaster ceiling is entirely different from a concrete ceiling, in every way. And Brutalism is not concerned with the material as such but rather the quality of the material: what can it do? And by analogy: there is a way of handling gold in Brutalist manner and it does not mean rough and cheap, it means: what is its raw quality?'*

And in response to a question regarding the Smithsons' relation with Japanese architecture:

*'Brutalism is certainly related to the ethos of Japanese building construction. To be corny, the Japanese ask: What is the quality of running water? And that is Brutalist thought.'*<sup>75</sup>

So here, in 2000, the wheel has come round again, Brutalism is a certain 'raw' aesthetic, perhaps a warehouse aesthetic as in the Soho House, with references to the domestic environment of a house-museum (Soane's), in which we know the most elaborate collection is accommodated, and an exoticist appropriation of Japanese purity. Town building and the social imperative, which had become the essence of Brutalist thinking at the end of the 1950s during the heyday of Team 10, seems gone. For all the many interpretations which focus on the images in the work of the Smithsons and the Brutalist discourse, once again, the Banham notion of 'Image' is fully absent here, while in other statements – most notably the ones explaining the concept of Conglomerate Ordering developed during the 1980s as a continuation of the Brutalist idea – we even find that the search

73 From the Smithson archive; an annotated, one page typescript written by Peter Smithson, dated: 'date unknown, probably '60's.'; it is integrated into: Alison and Peter Smithson, *1930s, TECTA Möbel, Lauenförde* / Alexander Verlag, Berlin, 1985, p. 78; the reference to the 1950s is left out here.

74 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The "As Found" and the "Found"', in: Robbins, 1990, p. 201.

75 Obrist (ed.), *Smithson Time*, 2004, p. 17-18.

is for an architecture that offers 'pleasures beyond those of the eyes'.<sup>76</sup>

To further grasp the idea of finding processes then, we might look again at the *locus classicus* of the New Brutalism: the exhibition 'Parallel of Life and Art' of 1953. The exhibition serves as the perfect example of both the outcome of a process and the staging of one. Here we find that the Brutalist discourse is neither an ethic nor an aesthetic – how could such a simplification ever have been proposed? Next to the reworking of modernist sources, it also comprises the development of a discursive model, a 'common working aesthetic' as Nigel Henderson called it.

### 'Picking up, Turning over and Putting with...'

Considered a formative moment in the Independent Group history the *Parallel of Life and Art* show is by now folded into numerous historiographical accounts trying to capture the ambition and achievements of its authors, Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi and Alison and Peter Smithson, how it embodied a new (anti-) aesthetic in response to the Zeitgeist of post-war England, and how it would be the foreboding of things to come, in particular the New Brutalism and the As Found. At the same time, it was a rather modest intervention: a one room installation at the ICA premises in Dover Street, on show for five weeks only, from Friday 11 September until Sunday 18 October 1953. Apparently, at first it was hard to convince the ICA to accept the exhibition proposal, just as it wasn't easy to bring together the little money necessary to produce the installation.<sup>77</sup> Eventually, Ronald Jenkins, friend of the Smithsons and engineer of the Hunstanton school, joined the foursome and chipped in to make it all possible as suggested by Alison Smithson in a retrospective interview.<sup>78</sup> Still, one may wonder whether the contribution by Jenkins was not more substantial, since he was credited as co-editor in most documents, just as there were meetings held at his office at Ove Arup.<sup>79</sup> At any rate, Jenkins should be credited as the engineer of the New Brutalism; because of his involvement in the Hunstanton school as well as the Smithson competition entry for the Coventry Cathedral, and of course for the 1952 re-design of Jenkins' own office room by the Smithsons together with Paolozzi, including a modest John McHale drinks cabinet and slide projector box.

76 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Italian Thoughts*, Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm, 1993, p. 62.

77 Graham Whitham's chronology in Robbins (1990) contains a short overview of the steps leading to the exhibition; just as his description including an addendum with notes by Alison and Peter Smithson documenting the development of ideas, pp. 124-129.

78 Alison Smithson in an interview with Graham Whitham, his 1986 dissertation. The fold-out catalogue also mentions Denys Lasdun next to 'Scaffolding (Great Britain)' and 'Mr. E.C. Gregory, & Messrs. Entwistle Thorpe, who have helped to make the exhibition possible'. Other archival documents show that Henderson was not involved at first, but another artist-friend of the Smithsons and Paolozzi, namely Victor Pasmore. The invitation mentions the 'editors' of the exhibition in the following order: Eduardo Paolozzi, Nigel Henderson, Alison and Peter Smithson, Ronald Jenkins.

79 In *The Charged Void: Architecture*, p. 118, he is also credited by the Smithsons themselves as collaborator, albeit after Henderson and Paolozzi.

The title of the whole endeavour changed from *Sources* to *Documents '53*, to eventually *Parallel of Life and Art*. Technically, the organizers struggled to arrive at a satisfactory result. The black-and-white photographs that made up the exhibition were mounted on boards and hung with wire and hooks from the ceiling and on walls. Henderson remembered how they '*were probably hanging the material for about two or three days, and were trying to get it into a kind of spider's web above the heads of people, because the room had to be used for lectures during the exhibition; by the time we'd strung up an awful lot of wire and hooks and got out of line and back into line and so on, we'd built up a pretty good nervous tension which continued right up to the point when we decided that this was all we could do and we had to face the comments.*'<sup>80</sup>

Despite the obvious limitations – such as the apparent need for the desk in the room that we see in the pictures of the show – the installation aspired to realize a total environment, immersing the visitor in a cloud of images without any apparent hierarchical order. The collection comprised a hundred and twenty two images. Subjects depicted stemmed from widely diverse fields, including biology, sports, aerial photography, archaeology, geology, earlier cultures, as well as non-western ones, and modern art by Dubuffet and Jackson Pollock, among others. The images were hung, with little explanation, in the front room of the ICA, where they filled the entire space from floor to ceiling. One critic joked visitors needed to bring stilts to properly see the images most of which were displayed above head level due to the demand the space be free for lectures.<sup>81</sup>

It should be noted at this point that – despite Banham's identification of the exhibition as the *locus classicus* of the Brutalist sensibility – the foursome responsible for the installation never explicitly conceived of the exhibition as a manifestation of the New Brutalism as such. None of the typescripts in the archives nor the catalogue allude to anything in that direction. The foursome was however anxious to make some impact in true avant-gardist spirit, even though there was no such thing as a 'banner' or a 'movement' as yet. In an early, preparatory text, which explains the goals and format of the whole endeavour, the Smithsons stated with unrestrained bravado that they aimed for an event, which would '*present the opening phase of the movement of our time and record as we see it now, as did the Esprit Nouveau Pavilion for 1925.*'<sup>82</sup>

80 Quoted in Victoria Walsh, *Nigel Henderson. Parallel of Life and Art*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2001, pp. 97-98.

81 As quoted by Graham Whitham in: 'Parallel of Life and Art', in: Robbins, 1990, p. 124.

82 Notes by Alison and Peter Smithson, undated, published in: Robbins, 1990, p. 129.

'Recording' surely was one of the key techniques to understand the exhibition, since all 'found' images were reproduced and enlarged by way of black-and-white photography. This was also the special aspect that was highlighted by Banham in his original review of the exhibition for the *Architectural Review* of October 1953.<sup>83</sup> In this review Banham too, didn't make mention of the New Brutalism; the New Brutalism wasn't a public affair as yet, let alone a generally accepted reference. As said, the first appearance of the 'New Brutalism' in print was in *Architectural Design* in December 1953.<sup>84</sup> Banham's review was all about photography and images, and surprisingly perhaps, of a rather critical tone stating that the ones who overstate the value of 'photographic experience' may be culturally poorer than the ones like Sir John Soane, who had measured the stones of the Classical orders of the Colliseum and could quote the intercolumniations even in old age.<sup>85</sup>

Although the visual (in its latency Banham's proposition of 'Image' is already there) is key indeed, when we follow the various statements of the protagonists, we find that *Parallel of Life and Art* was constructed, quite emphatically, as a process, a situation for undergoing and (re-)constructing individual and collective experience. To understand how the installation is both the staging and the outcome of a process, or a 'common working aesthetic', the studies of Victoria Walsh and Irénée Scalbert are the most illuminating. Also with regard to understanding the revisiting of modernist sources of the prewar avant-garde and the further development of the avant-garde discourse during the 1940s and 1950s, they offer an insightful overview. In fact in Walsh and Scalbert's studies it appears that the avant-gardist discourse is actually quite continuous, and much less interrupted as suggested by such phrasings as those of historic avant-garde and neo-avant-garde. But then of course, to think of the avant-garde discourse as something evolving rather than as a series of ruptures, is perhaps too much of an oxymoron in itself to be acceptable for modern historiography.

83 Reyner Banham, 'Parallel of Life and Art', in: *The Architectural Review*, October 1953, pp. 259-261.

84 'House in Soho, London. Alison and Peter Smithson', in: *Architectural Design*, December 1953, p. 342.

85 Ibid., p. 261.

86 As already demonstrated in my essay 'Picking up, Turning over and Putting with ...', in Dirk van den Heuvel and Max Ris-selada (eds.), *Alison and Peter Smithson – from the House of the Future to a house of today*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004.

In addition to the interpretations of Walsh and Scalbert, which focus on the artistic procedures behind the *Parallel of Life and Art* installation, I'd like to propose that for a 'correct' understanding of the Brutalist discourse there should be a shift in interpretation from the singular notion of image to that of the collection, the image system, that what brings and holds the images together.<sup>86</sup> Apart from principles of ordering, this also

concerns the structure of the discourse itself. This is also how the Smithsons looked at contemporary arts. In their *Uppercase* publication of 1960 they stated that:

*'It was necessary in the early '50's to look to the works of painter Pollock and sculptor Paolozzi for a complete image system, for an order with a structure and a certain tension, where every piece was correspondingly new in a new system of relationship.'*<sup>87</sup>

So, what system, or various systems, are at work between the foursome and their installation *Parallel of Life and Art*? In her biography of Nigel Henderson, Victoria Walsh is the one historian who most extensively analysed and retraced the composition method of the exhibition. She points out the various (possible) origins for the specific hanging of the installation and the specific use of photograph, in particular Herbert Bayer's work and two of his diagrams from the 1930s to which the Smithson exhibition design for *Parallel of Life and Art* bears strong similarities, and one of which is included in their *Heroic Period*,<sup>88</sup> and an exhibit by Ernesto Rogers for the Milan Triennale of 1951, of which the Smithsons held a tear sheet in their archive.<sup>89</sup> Walsh also mentions a couple of installations by Duchamp, most notably the *Sixteen Miles of String*, of 1942 and done in collaboration with André Breton, and the *Twelve Hundred Coal Bags Suspended from the Ceiling over a Stove* of 1938. Finally, she includes in her analysis the notion of 'multi-evocative sign' as a key reference, an interpretation of Paul Klee's work by the critic David Sylvester and friend of Henderson and Paolozzi, as well as the idea of *Le Musée Imaginaire* by André Malraux, the French critic and politician.<sup>90</sup>

With regard to discourse and the organisational structure of the collections of images, the latter reference may be the more important one. Malraux's publication was a common reference within Independent Group circles, and at least to Henderson quite an important one, given the fact that initially Malraux was asked to open the exhibition.<sup>91</sup> In Banham's review of the show we also find a reference to Malraux's *musée imaginaire*, and in May 1954, as part of the Independent Group programme there is a discussion of Malraux's voluminous *The Voices of Silence*, which also includes the original *musée imaginaire* essay, with Henderson as one of the speakers.<sup>92</sup>

In his 1947 publication of 'Le Musée Imaginaire', Malraux described how museums and the development of reproduction techniques inevitably brought about a metamorphosis of the work of art.

87 *Upper Case*, nr. 3, 1960; Alison and Peter Smithson, *Urban Structuring*, 1967, p. 34.

88 The Smithsons' caption to the diagram reads: 'Herbert Bayer, Scheme for a photograph display, page from the catalogue for the Werkbund Exhibition, Paris, 1930' in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture*, 1981 re-edition with Rizzoli New York, 1981, p. 63; original edition: special issue of *Architectural Design*, December, 1965.

89 Walsh hasn't established the source of the French tear-sheet, it is from *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, nr. 36, August 1951, p. VII, with a special overview of the Triennial; the same issue holds items on the Festival of Britain (by Ernö Goldfinger), on the CIAM conference in Hoddesdon (by Pierre Vago) and one on the modulator by Le Corbusier.

90 Walsh, 2001, pp. 89-107; an extra reference identified by Robin Middleton is the Richard Paul Lohse book *Neue Ausstellungs-gestaltung, Nouvelles conceptions de l'exposition, New Design in Exhibitions* of 1953, Praeger, Zürich, however an early drawing of the exhibition is dated as early as 1952.

91 Walsh, 2001, p. 95; also mentioned by Graham Whitham, 'Exhibitions', in: Robbins, 1990, pp. 123-161, p. 125.

92 Graham Whitham, 'Chronology', in: Robbins, 1990, p. 27.

Removed from their original context, in which most works of art had a significance other than that of the modern meaning of an object of art, and displayed in museums, these objects were provided with a new context and thus with new functions and meanings. Reproduction techniques – gravure, as well as black-and-white and colour photography – carried an even greater implication: isolated works of art travel around the world as images. As a result, artists and students assembled an individual collections of pictures, which – together with memories of visits to museums, churches and cities renowned for their art and culture – constituted a new type of ‘museum’, an imaginary one without walls, and in which the arts and art pieces took on an entirely new significance.<sup>93</sup>

Henderson extensively referred to Malraux's ideas and the ‘imaginary museum’ in his introduction to the exhibition at the event of its opening. He explained how *Parallel of Life and Art* resulted from juxtaposing the personal ‘*musées imaginaires*’ of Paolozzi, the Smithsons and himself. In addition, he explained how the interest of the four transcended the world of art as presented by Malraux. Here, the latest developments in contemporary avant-garde circles and the natural sciences come in, among others the already noted examples of Moholy Nagy's *Vision in Motion*, Kepes' ‘New Landscape’ and Dorner's *Way Beyond of Art*. Following avant-garde example, technological innovations such as aerial photography, microscopy and X-ray photography, were of interest to the foursome for the new ways in which they rendered visible the natural order behind the outer appearance of things.

In her Henderson biography Walsh cites at some length Henderson's opening remarks for the exhibition. These quotations clarify how the foursome went to work and developed in Henderson's words ‘a common working aesthetic’:

*‘We had for some time been interested in exchanging images from our own private “imaginary museums.” You will remember that this is the way in which André Malraux discusses the assemblage of photographic material in printed form, gathered together from many points scattered in space and time, and representing the creative work of artists of all ages and civilizations. In our own case, however, the contents of these museums extended beyond the normal terms of art, to include photographs produced for technical purposes ... We often found that this exchange resulted in confirmation of our beliefs that we had happened upon something significant, that others too responded in the same way to the visual*

93 André Malraux, *Le Musée Imaginaire*, Paris, 1947; English translation: ‘Museum without Walls’, in: André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence: Man and his Art*, New York, 1978, pp. 13-127. Also see Walsh, 2001, pp. 92-95; and Scalbert, 2000, p. 56.



*impact of a particular image. Up to a point, that is, we found that we had a common working aesthetic, although we could none of us formulate a verbal basis for it. Eventually, we decided to pool the material we already had and to continue to collect more in an attempt to elucidate what we had in common and the nature of the material moving us. At this point certain groupings began to declare themselves ... these terms ... then began to play back on our selection and condition the choice of further images'.<sup>94</sup>*

This very much describes the Smithsons' idea of the As Found as a process of 'picking up, turning over and putting with', including the testing of responses to images and image combinations.<sup>95</sup> All sorts of Surrealist notions abound here of course, from the *cadavre equis*-like game that is set up between the four to the idea that some sort of order will emerge from this game. Surrealist procedure is also behind the applied reproduction techniques: the enlargements and the collage-ing of apparent incompatibilities into new totalities. The whole endeavour seemed to be mostly concerned with the enabling of the triggering of cross-references and analogies, setting up a game of associations. Alison and Peter Smithson's notes made in preparation for the exhibition explain the unusual arrangement of the installation in exactly those terms: *'The method used will be to juxtapose photo-enlargement ... these images cannot so be arranged as to form a consecutive statement. Instead they will establish the intricate series of cross relationships between different fields of art and technics. Touching off a wide range of association and offering fruitful analogies'.<sup>96</sup>*

At other occasions the Smithsons spoke of 'contrapuntal games' and 'cross references'.<sup>97</sup> The various, incongruent categories of the catalogue of the collection of images were in keeping with those ideas; they read in not quite alphabetical order:

*'Anatomy, Architecture, Art, Calligraphy, Date 1901, Landscape, Movement, Nature, Primitive, Scale of Man, Stress, Stress Structure, Football, Science Fiction, Medicine, Geology, Metal and Ceramic'.<sup>98</sup>*

The incomparable categories made clear, in advance, that the event had nothing to do with a closed system or a scientific classification.

It is not just in *Parallel of Life and Art* we find the contrapuntal games – they are part and parcel of the Smithsons' work and writings, as they are of Paolozzi and Henderson's. They are also key to understand at least the Brutalist tendencies within the Independent Group exchanges, the kind of 'rough poetry' one was after. One

94 Manuscript from the Henderson collection, Tate Archive, quoted in: Victoria Walsh, *Nigel Henderson, Parallel of Life and Art*, London, 2001, p. 92.

95 Alison and Peter Smithon, 1990, p. 201-202.

96 Notes by Alison and Peter Smithson, undated, published in: Robbins, 1990, p. 129.

97 Respectively Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Shift*, 1982, p. 14, and Alison and Peter Smithson, in: Robbins, 1990, pp. 201-202.

98 A copy of the exhibition catalogue has been corrected by Peter Smithson: the category '1901' should be '1910', and the category 'Stress Structure' should be 'Structure'.

could think of that odd reference to 'English precedent' in the case of the Hunstanton school, the coupling of the Victorian Butterfield church and Smythson's Hardwick Hall, but also – and classically so – to the way advertising techniques were both de- and reconstructed by the Independent Group and how the Smithsons claim that: *'to understand the advertisements which appear in the New Yorker or Gentry one must have taken a course in Dublin literature, read a Time popularizing article on cybernetics and to have majored in Higher Chinese Philosophy and Cosmetics.'*<sup>99</sup>

Another Henderson quotation in Walsh's biography states even more precisely how the 'as found' process of 'picking up, turning over and putting with' which constitutes the 'imaginary museum', actually works. At the same time, it once again indicates the Surrealist origins of the 'as found' method of working. Quoting from Henderson's personal notes, Walsh writes in relation to his photographic work:

*'The chance of being in the right place at the right time to trap on film these moments in time and out of time, Henderson specifically articulated through the philosophy and vocabulary of Surrealism:*

*“'Accident' – Let's have it in inverted commas, please. Accident the subtle prompter in the wings of unconscious – no friend to the BRASH – the coarsely confident or possibly? The VISUAL ENGINEER. Accident the great humbler . . . What we call SELECTIVE ACCIDENT to be good must function like the objet trouvé – a chance set of "found" phenomena bringing about an order which you might ideally wished|invented to create from scratch. It is a question of RECOGNITION.”*<sup>100</sup>

'Found' – a concept linked to 'selection' and 'recognition' – is thus aimed at creating 'order ideally created from scratch'.

In the Smithsons' notes made in preparation of the exhibition we also find such reference to the discovery of an order. The Smithsons refer to James Joyce and his idea of 'epiphany', the sudden insight into “a reality behind the appearance.”, thus tapping in the stream of consciousness methodology, one other, English tradition of associative thinking.<sup>101</sup> Another of their quotes refers to 'the reality beneath the appearance':

*'The material for the exhibition will be drawn from life – nature – industry – building – the arts – and is being selected to show not so much the appearance as the principle – the reality beneath the appearance – that is, those images which sum up the significant*

99 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'But Today We Collect Ads', 1956.

100 Walsh, 2001, p. 53.

101 Robbins, 1990, p. 129; the Smithsons' interest in the stream-of-consciousness way of writing is also clear from the title of the novel written by Alison: *A Portrait of the Female Mind as a Young Girl* (1966), reference to Joyce's famous novel of course.

*development in each field since 1925 and contain within them the seeds of the future.*<sup>102</sup>

To explain this idea of the epiphany, and the discovery of a reality behind or beneath the appearance the exhibition is then thought of as a:

*'key – a kind of Rosetta Stone – by which the discoveries of the sciences and the arts can be seen as aspects of the same whole, related phenomenon, parts of that New Landscape which experimental science has revealed and artists and theorists created.'*<sup>103</sup>

To provoke such a moment of epiphany, discovery or recognition, the 'image system' that is *Parallel of Life and Art*, and the 'as found' concept of 'picking up, turning over and putting with' entailed a third important aspect: the relationship between the works displayed and those viewing, reading or using such works. The compositional technique that was devised by Henderson, Paolozzi and the Smithsons had to extend their own private exchanges.

Walsh explores this aspect extensively in her reading of the installation, as does Scalbert. Following Reyner Banham's review, Scalbert uses one particular photograph from the *Parallel of Life and Art* show to arrive at an insightful interpretation of the ICA exhibition.<sup>104</sup> It is a photo of a typewriter, or at least of its separate parts. Banham linked the image to issues of classification and language. Scalbert notes that the picture of this collection of separate parts yields a transformation. The collection itself can no longer be read as a typewriter, as an entity. Scalbert says: *'It was no longer the signification of the whole which mattered, but that of the parts. These now lost to the manufacturer, drifted in a semantic field of their own, open to the musings of the observer. . . . Parts became pictograms of a language shorn of its syntax, whose grammar was not so much forgotten as it was waiting to be spontaneously invented by the observer.'*<sup>105</sup>

As Scalbert points out, the collection of *Parallel of Life and Art* 'reads' as fragments of a language, an order, that can be discovered only through the visitor's personal involvement, quite in line with the Smithsons' comparison to a Rosetta Stone or Henderson's idea of an order created out of scratch. In fact, because any information regarding the images or the actual selection process was absent, the visitor had no choice but to enter the game of associations as presented to him. Regarding

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 Irénée Scalbert, 'Parallel of Life and Art', in: *Daidalos*, No. 75, 'The Everyday', 2000, pp. 53-65.

105 Ibid.

the intended provocation of visitors, Walsh recounts Henderson's words at the opening:

*'We should like to bring about a situation in which people felt like undergoing a strong visual experience, without too much reliance on intellectual handrails for their support. And we value the fact that their experience will necessarily differ from our own, being ground in a different soil. It might be truer of this exhibition than of many to say that you can get out of it exactly what you put into it.'*<sup>106</sup>

The inclusion of the image of Jackson Pollock hard at work on his 'action painting' in *Parallel of Life and Art* is a key illustration to this. In Pollock's action painting the foursome recognized a way of working which made use of 'selective accident' to produce 'order from scratch'. As the Smithsons put it, Pollock had produced a 'process' through which he would discover or recognize the image he was looking for.<sup>107</sup> In the final instance then, the visitor finds himself creating his own process of 'picking up, turning over and putting with'; the visitor himself becomes rather like the included image of Jackson Pollock, busily occupied in an effort to draw from the apparent chaos a new idea of order.<sup>108</sup>

106 Introduction speech of Nigel Henderson, cited in: Walsh, 2001.

107 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The "As Found" and the "Found"', in: Robbins, 1990, pp. 201-202.

108 Christine Boyer has linked this working method of associative thinking to a discussion on cognitive models for processing information and imagining the workings of human memory. In this context the work of the foursome Henderson, Paolozzi and the Smithsons, and more generally the Independent Group discourse, can be described as the further development of associative grammars. It displays parallels and similarities to network models, interconnective, overlapping, non-linear and multi-nodal, and is open ended with loops and a recursive reflexivity. As such it is not only a cognitive model we're looking at, but also a discursive one aimed at a consistent regeneration of the exchanges and a further evolving of the game of associations. See also: M. Christine Boyer, 'An Encounter with History: the Post-war Debate between the English Journals of *Architectural Review* and *Architectural Design* (1945-1960)', in: Max Risselada, Dirk van den Heuvel, D'Laine Camp, Gijs de Waal (eds.), *Team 10. Between Modernity and the Everyday*, conference proceedings, Faculty of Architecture, TU Delft, 2003, pp. 135-163; Dirk van den Heuvel, 'Magic – The Installations of Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi and Alison and Peter Smithson', in: *Architecture + Art. New Visions, New Strategies*, Alvar Aalto Academy, Helsinki, 2005, pp. 46-51, proceedings to the conference of 12-14 August 2005.

109 Both Henderson and Paolozzi moved out of London.

### Transpositions

It can be argued that the regenerative model of the *Parallel of Life and Art* installation was transposed to the realms of the house and the city by the Smithsons during the 1950s. The clearest example of the former would be the *Patio & Pavilion* installation of 1956 which was once again a collaboration with Henderson and Paolozzi, the latter would be exemplified by the 1953 Urban Re-identification grid, which the Smithsons presented at the CIAM congress at Aix, with Henderson's pictures of children playing in the street inserted into the prescribed grid-format of presentation.

Realized three years after *Parallel of Life and Art*, *Patio & Pavilion* marked the end of the collaborations between the Smithsons, Henderson and Paolozzi.<sup>109</sup> The installation was part of the larger *This is Tomorrow* exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery which aimed to demonstrate the collaborations and cross-overs between the various disciplines of the visual arts, most notably painting, sculpture, and architecture. The collaboration between the foursome took on a quite different format to the one for *Parallel of Life and Art*. At the same time, here again, the design of

the installation structured the collaboration itself, the 'working together technique'. As the Smithsons kept remarking in their writings, after building the *Patio & Pavilion* they left for Dubrovnik to attend the tenth CIAM congress which they co-organised with their Team 10 colleagues. Thus, in their absence, Henderson and Paolozzi appropriated the empty structure filling it with their art pieces. As a piece of architecture, *Patio & Pavilion* follows the same strategy as the Hunstanton school: a frame accommodating inhabitation. Indeed, inhabitation was from the very beginning the focus of the installation, unlike any of the other contributions to *This is Tomorrow*. In the catalogue we read:

*'Patio & Pavilion represents the fundamental necessities of the human habitat in a series of symbols. The first necessity is for a piece of the world, the patio. The second necessity is for an enclosed space, the pavilion. These two spaces are furnished with symbols for all human needs.'*

And notes scattered over a double spread:

*'The head – for man himself – his brain & his machines  
The tree image – for nature  
The rocks & natural objects – for stability & the decoration of man made space  
The wheel & aeroplane – for locomotion & the machine  
The light box – for the hearth & family  
Artifacts & pin-ups – for his irrational urges  
The frog & the dog – for the other animals.'*<sup>110</sup>

Peter Smithson described the installation as:

*'a kind of symbolic habitat in which are found responses, in some form or other, to the basic human needs – a view of the sky, a piece of ground, privacy, the presence of nature and of animals when we need them – to the basic human urges – to extend and control, to move. The actual form is very simple, a "patio", or enclosed space, in which sits a "pavilion". The patio and pavilion are furnished with objects which are symbols for the things we need: for example, a wheel image for movement and for machines.'*<sup>111</sup>

110 'This Is Tomorrow' catalogue, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1956, unpaginated; 2010 reprint.

111 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, London, 1994, p. 109; a similar text we find in the catalogue of the exhibition: 'Patio & Pavilion represents the fundamental necessities of the human habitat in a series of symbols. The first necessity is for a piece of the world, the patio. The second necessity is for an enclosed space, the pavilion. These two spaces are furnished with symbols for all human needs.'

The structure the Smithsons had designed was as simple as effective: a fenced-in timber shed with a translucent roof of corrugated polyester sheets. The fence, which quite effectively separated the whole installation from the other exhibits, was clad with reflective sheets. Looking back at the collaboration, the process and the role of the visitor thirty four years later, the Smithsons wrote:

'Our Patio and Pavilion answered a "programme" of our own making, offering a definitive statement of another attitude to "collaboration": the "dressing" of a building, its place, by the "art of inhabitation". We were taking position in the acquisitive society as it began its run, by offering in a gîte a reminder of other values, other pleasures. With the transparent roof of the pavilion made to display Nigel's arrangement of the "as found", the sand surface of the patio (ultimately) chosen to receive Nigel and Eduardo's tile and object arrangement, the reflective compounding walls to include every visitor as an inhabitant, the "art of the as found" was made manifest. The complete trust in our collaboration was proved by our Patio and Pavilion being built to our drawings and "inhabited" by Nigel and Eduardo in our absence, as we were camping on our way to CIAM at Dubrovnik.'<sup>112</sup>

The 'architecture' of *Patio & Pavilion* was conceived with the idea in mind that it could be 'dressed' in the 'art of inhabitation'. Henderson and Paolozzi then 'inhabited' the installation with their art objects – again a demonstration of a 'working together technique'. The responses to *Patio & Pavilion* were mixed, for Banham it was too regressive, too parochial as a reference to working class backyards, unlike for instance the other famous installation of the T.I.T.-show, the one by Hamilton, McHale and Voelcker, which he preferred and which was in hindsight nothing less but the announcement of Pop art aesthetics.<sup>113</sup> For Kenneth Frampton though, *Patio & Pavilion* still embodied Brutalist 'resistance' to a rising consumer culture, unlike the House of the Future of the same year.<sup>114</sup>

There were no special comments on the exhibition technique or how *Patio & Pavilion* also represented a model for collaboration and presentation. Only Frampton casually referred to the classical notions present in the design when comparing the installation to a *temenos*, the sacred territory surrounding a temple; because this was also part of the design (just as in Hunstanton): the pavilion is a neo-Classical device (note the symmetry of the architecture, including the planks) just as the path winding around the pavilion is a Picturesque one taking the visitor along the collected objects. More importantly, these ordering devices work together in creating once again a total environment in an attempt to provoke a game of associations in the visitor's mind.

Thus, *Patio & Pavilion* redefined the modernist art of inhabitation as a game of associations, not a machine poetics, nor scientific

112 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The "As Found" and the "Found"', in: Robbins, 1990, pp. 201-202.

113 Reyner Banham's review of This is Tomorrow in: *The Architectural Review*, September 1956, pp. 186-188.

114 Kenneth Frampton, 'New Brutalism and the Architecture of the Welfare State: England: 1949-1959', chapter to his *Modern Architecture. A Critical History*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1980, revised and extended edition 1985, pp. 262-268.

*Existenzminimum*. Indeed, to the Smithsons dwelling was probably the game of making associations par excellence; dwelling as a changing web of relations and interactions between the architecture of the house, the objects contained and the inhabitants. To begin with, Henderson and Paolozzi 'inhabited' the installation with their artworks – often fragmentary but highly suggestive images and objects. Rather than an 'architecture trouvée', the result was a collection of fragments, traces of a 'process'. And reflected on the mirrored panels of the fence, the visitor was then transformed into an 'inhabitant' himself, challenged to get involved and forge a reconstruction by a game of associations and analogies not unlike the way this happened in the *Parallel of Life and Art* show. Seen as such, *Patio & Pavilion* had a sense of ambiguity as well: both installations made an effort to illustrate principles of universality, while simultaneously drawing the subjectivity of the visitor into the game.

Hanging in the 'pavilion' of the *Patio & Pavilion* installation was a life-size portrait by Henderson: 'Head of a Man'. A close look at the portrait revealed that it was actually a (photo of a) collage. Referring to this collage, Victoria Walsh said the following about Henderson's intentions:

*'[It] tenaciously resists any single reading, while simultaneously cajoling the spectator to find one. The clue to this lies in Henderson's conscious manipulation of his viewer, his audience, in his tireless desire to tease and please, conceal and reveal.'*<sup>115</sup>

It is also this game of associations that the Smithsons would bring to CIAM and Team 10. The Smithsons' noting of their departure for Dubrovnik is not just an explanation of the different roles of everyone involved in the design of the installation, it also marks how the Brutalist games of Independent Group exchanges come to a conclusion and how the Smithsons' attention shifted to Team 10 exchanges instead, partly continuing the Brutalist programme while now expanding it to town building. Just as the modern house was to be regenerated by Henderson games, so the street was to be revitalised too, with the photos of children's play as an indication for the kind of new patterns the Smithsons were looking for. This game of associations might better be kept in mind when trying to grasp the notions of 'human association' and 'patterns of association' used by the Smithsons to explain their urbanist concepts as developed within the CIAM and Team 10 discourse. Here too, the search was for new principles of ordering, for ways to (re)connect and (re)create identities.

115 Walsh, 2001, p. 135.

However, as noted, the expansion of the New Brutalist discourse to the realm of town building, which the Smithsons themselves identified with the period of 1953-63 and Team 10, if we follow their comments in their 1966 review of Banham's Brutalism book, seems rather stretched with regard to both the early and later statements on the New Brutalism, particularly with regard to the Brutalist essence being in the handling of materials and the quality of materials. Conventionally, the assumedly Brutalist project for a new urbanism is considered to be part of the larger Team 10 discourse, not the other way around. Only Robin Middleton seems to come up with a credible expansion of the Brutalist impulse to the realm of city planning. Middleton went back to the 1955 Banham essay and his concepts of topology in relation to movement and routing as in the case of the designs for Golden Lane and Sheffield University, in order to rethink the Smithson design agenda and their interest in organising the urban by way of routes, pavilions and events.<sup>116</sup> In the pages of *Zodiac* we find the second clearest attempt to refocus the New Brutalism project. First in the so-called 'Conversation on Brutalism' of 1959, when Peter stated that Brutalist ethic actually resided in town building, and second in *Zodiac*, nr. 18, entirely devoted to British architecture with a very large portion to the New Brutalism including a selection of texts on Brutalism translated into Italian. Francesco Tentori recaptured the New Brutalism by fusing it with the CIAM debates from which Team 10 emerged.<sup>117</sup> Interestingly enough, none of the Smithson built projects were documented in this publication, but their texts on the city and town planning were.

The third attempt to expand Brutalism to town building was by Banham, not in his 1955 essay, but in his 1966 book, in his subchapter 'The end of an old urbanism'.<sup>118</sup> He claimed that the ethic of the New Brutalism had involved two facets: one was aesthetic in the vein of 'l'art brut', and the other was 'social' and had purportedly led to the reform of CIAM urbanism. The chapter 'The end of an old urbanism' was dedicated to this urbanistic aspect of the New Brutalism, and went as far as to attempt to subsume the complete Team 10 discourse under the heading of the New Brutalism. For several reasons Banham's argument remains an unsatisfying one. The reduction of the Team 10 discourse to the Smithson contribution is disturbing – their whole essay 'Cluster City' of 1957 is, for instance, fully integrated into Banham's own text. Also the reduction of the Smithsons' ideas on town planning to their 1958 Hauptstadt Berlin project is problematic. Without comment, no other urban scheme other than the Hauptstadt Berlin project was included in the extensive

116 Robin Middleton, 'The New Brutalism, or a Clean, Well-lighted Place', in: *Architectural Design*, January 1967, pp. 7-8.

117 Francesco Tentori, 'Phoenix Brutalism', in: *Zodiac*, nr. 18, 1968.

118 Banham, *The New Brutalism*, 1966, pp. 70-75.



documentation of the 1966 book – nothing of the 1960s schemes by Candilis Josic Woods, or those of Van den Broek and Bakema.

After 1966 the whole Brutalist programme unwinds, though many buildings are still planned in the Brutalist fashion. By the mid-1970s, after finally having built Robin Hood Gardens, their version of a Brutalist handling of concrete, and after having published *Without Rhetoric*, in which they explained their idea of a language of modern architecture, the Smithsons seemed to face a profound crisis of creativity. It wouldn't be until the invention of their idea of a Conglomerate Ordering that they took up once again some of the lines of thought of the early years.<sup>119</sup> The visual made way here for an architectural order that 'harnesses all the senses', capable of offering 'pleasures beyond those of the eyes', in particular.<sup>120</sup>

Paradoxically, perhaps, it was only then that they reached a truly urbanist definition of the New Brutalism, totally beyond any functionalist notion, with buildings understood as being intrinsically part of the larger fabric of cities and territories. The Smithsons return then to an early statement, almost a promise, from their introduction to *The Heroic Period*: that one should not record 'buildings' any more, but should refocus onto 'built-places'.<sup>121</sup> The search for a 'complete image system' is abandoned, an all-sensory experience, a collection of different 'systems' all working together, almost beyond any notion of design but still very much a game of associations, is now foregrounded in their writings: *'an art of urbanism which operates at very deep levels in our being; through the senses we hardly know we possess. Those of us from the north of Europe who make our first contact with the world of the Mediterranean during hot summers months are particularly aware that our experiences are not only taken-in through our eyes ... the physical change we feel when we first tilt down to the southern sea is as a lizard must feel as it sheds its skin; the air feels different; the vegetation is scented; even dust rises, settles in a wholly different way ... in consequence, in an unexpected moment, a stray smell can bring back the jeep rides from Aix-en Provence to the sea; sounds over the water, the first approach to a Greek island; a smell of coal smoke simultaneously a northern childhood and the first vaporetto taken.'*<sup>122</sup>

119 A first essay explaining this notion was published in the *ILA&UD Year Book 1986-87*, 1987; reprinted in Alison and Peter Smithson, *Italian Thoughts*, Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm, 1993, pp. 58-61.

120 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

121 *Architectural Design*, December, 1965, special issue 'The Heroic Period', guest edited by Alison and Peter Smithson, reprinted in 1981; as quoted by the Smithsons themselves in their essay 'Territory', in: *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, p. 38.

122 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Territory', in: *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, p. 32.



## 5 ANOTHER SENSIBILITY

### The Discovery of Context and the Idea of Conglomerate Ordering

#### Extensions of the As Found

Perusing the writings of Alison and Peter Smithson one detects a consistent and growing attention for the issue of context in architecture and town planning. The first time the issue was explicitly addressed, though, was as late as 1972 in Peter Smithson's lecture 'Architecture As Town Building', at Cornell University.<sup>1</sup> Smithson would antedate his interest in 'context thinking' to the late 1950s, and his teachings at the AA School. And later in the 1990s, Smithson noted how the Doorn manifesto of Team 10 of 1954 already contained the seeds for a contextual approach in architecture and planning.<sup>2</sup> In retrospective statements the Smithsons consistently emphasized the importance they attached to context, speaking of 'specificity-to-place', or 'the building's first duty is to the fabric of which it forms part'.<sup>3</sup> They particularly did so throughout the exchanges with Giancarlo De Carlo during the years 1976-2000 that were part of the annual summer school organized by De Carlo: the International Laboratory for Architecture and Urban Design (ILA&UD or ILAUD). The summer school visits, the assignments and theoretical topics discussed as well as the designs proposed, they all resulted in a continued reflection by the Smithsons on their ideas regarding context.<sup>4</sup> Eventually, these would be reconceptualized and synthesized into what the Smithsons called Conglomerate Ordering, which might also be regarded as a reformulation of the abandoned project for a New Brutalism as described in the previous chapter.

To the Smithsons context awareness meant a sensibility to 'qualities of place', not to be confused with the kind of typomorphological orthodoxy that we know from the French and Italian discourse on the existing, historical city. The discovery or recognition of context as something constitutive of, or at least directive within the overall design process implied a different understanding of these qualities and of the notion of place. To the Smithsons, it also comprised processes over time, and

1 Peter Smithson, 'Architecture as Townbuilding – The Slow Growth of Another Sensibility', typescript in Smithson archive, largely integrated into Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 1973.

2 Peter Smithson, 'Team X in Retrospect', manuscript, dated 1 October, 1993, revised March 1994, October 1995, April 1999 and May 2001, 10 pages.

3 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, p. 66.

4 The contribution by the Smithsons to the ILAUD summer schools, most notably by Peter, who would attend each year, embody a fantastic register of the Smithson thinking during those years; various contributions, either in the form of lectures, aphorisms, and reflections, but also design proposals and interventions were published in the journal *Spazio e Società*, which was run by De Carlo and the *ILA&UD Year Book* series. Most of these contributions were then republished as: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Italian Thoughts*, Stockholm, 1993; and the two German volumes *Italienische Gedanken. Beobachtungen und Reflexionen zur Architektur*, Vieweg, Braunschweig/Wiesbaden, 1996, and *Italienische Gedanken, weitergedacht*, Birkhäuser, Basel and Bertelsmann Fachzeitschriften, Berlin, 2001, the former was edited and translated by Hermann Koch and Karl Unglaub, the latter by Karl Unglaub.

a shift from an object-oriented approach to an environmental approach, from 'buildings' to 'built-places' as they put it in their introduction to *The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture*. It also implied an understanding of the city as something 'multi-layered', a 'fabric', or 'tissue'. The central issue then became how to integrate the new, and how to revitalize the old, a matter of 'continuation and regeneration' as they put it. To the Smithsons, context was about reconnecting and re-identification, between the new and the old, pre-existing; not just new and old architecture, but also new and old technologies and new and old ways of living, specific to a place and a community.

With regard to the Smithsons' awareness of context one usually refers to the project for the Economist Building and how it fits neatly into its surroundings. Yet, one could also point to the very first projects as a testimony of the Smithsons' sensitivity to place and site-specificity. Looking back Alison and Peter Smithson would say that their 'language of connective landscape forms' had already begun in Hunstanton.<sup>5</sup> Since the Smithsons' work is imbued with Picturesque techniques and notions this is hardly surprising:

*'We have a vocabulary of connective forms that knit the building in with the "roundabout" (Cobbett's term for the sensed territory, adopted from the description of the Farnham|Alton Vale by Arthur Young, first secretary to the newly established Board of Agriculture, 1793); the ha-ha and indented slopes; the moat; clean-cut areas of hard surface or grass; graded foreslopes that stitch podium to site; small versions of bigger buildings as out-riders ("the microcosm of the macrocosm"); walls and screens (parts of the substance of the building); dense strip-thickets.'*<sup>6</sup>

Commonly, the wider context debate, its origins and how it was aimed to correct and ultimately replace modernist planning are not set within post-war England but the Italian discourse of the 1950s and 60s. However, the British discourse arguably holds an equally important position, here, due to the reactions to the massive modernization programmes as undertaken by the government, among others the buildings campaigns for the New Towns, housing and schools, just as the reconstruction of the bombed or dilapidated town centres of the country.<sup>7</sup> Both the *Architectural Review* and MARS intervened in the debates surrounding these building campaigns and aimed to redirect government and council policies while raising awareness of the qualities of existing landscapes and cities. The *Review* did so famously with their

5 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Shift*, Academy Editions, London, 1982, p. 40.

6 Ibid.

7 When discussing the debates on context and modern architecture Adrian Forty refers to the Italian debate as the main source and overlooks the British discourse; Adrian Forty *Words and Buildings. A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2000, p. 132 and further.

Townscape campaign, just as they did by consistently promoting ideas for the reconstruction of the immediate surroundings of St Paul's during the late 1940s and 50s. The MARS group organized the 1951 CIAM VIII conference around the theme of the 'Heart of the City', which might be viewed from this perspective as well. Their lesser-known 'Turn Again' exhibition of 1953 critically questioned the renewal of the City of London city centre.

Partly overlapping with the *Review* editors' Townscape campaign, interest in the subject of regionalism was widely shared, also among the younger Brutalists. For instance, James Stirling in the late 1950s would write on the topic.<sup>8</sup> A late, but still influential outcome of the post-war English debate was perhaps the way Kenneth Frampton proposed a Critical Regionalism in the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the Smithsons were part of a much broader trend of thought that was most characteristic of the English situation and in which notions of context, regional identity and modern architecture were interconnected.

The Smithsons' As Found idea functions as quite a versatile notion here. Although originally a strict avant-garde term from the New Brutalist discourse, conceptually speaking, it also connects the Picturesque idea of consulting the 'spirit of the place', Pope's idea of a *Genius Loci*, with developments within the historical and post-war avant-gardes as well as the seminal modernist notions of structural integrity and unadorned construction. Its initial, Brutalist meaning was defined by Banham in his 1955 essay as 'valuation of materials for their inherent qualities "as found"', and hence the overall ambition to arrive at a language with the building 'structure exposed entirely' and 'without interior finishes wherever practicable' as the Smithsons proposed for their Soho House of 1952. This notion of the As Found was expanded by the Smithsons to the walks with Nigel Henderson around Bethnal Green and his photographs of the bombed neighbourhood. At this point, the Smithsons proposed to consider their idea of context as an extension of the As Found idea. As late as 1990 they reformulated the idea of the As Found as follows:

*'Setting ourselves the task of rethinking architecture in the early 1950s we meant by the "as found" not only adjacent buildings but all those marks that constitute remembrancers in a place and that are to be read through finding out how the existing built fabric of the place had come to be as it was.'*<sup>10</sup>

8 James Stirling, 'Regionalism and Modern Architecture', in: Trevor Dannatt (ed.), *Architects' Year Book 8*, 1957, Elek Books, London, pp. 62-68.

9 Kenneth Frampton, 'Prospects for a Critical Regionalism', in: *Perspecta*, nr. 20, 1983, pp. 147-162 (reprinted in Kate Nesbitt (ed.), *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1996, pp. 468-482), and Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture, A Critical History*, Thames & Hudson, London, enlarged edition of 1985.

10 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'the Found and the "As Found"', in: Robbins, 1990, pp. 201-202.

In general, walking, visiting, moving through cities, sites, landscapes, territories – almost as a kind of intuitive form of survey – they are all at the basis of the development of the kind of context awareness the Smithsons were after. And as such, as might be noted once again, they stood in a profound English tradition: Ruskin's *Mornings in Florence*, William Cobbett's *Rural Rides*, the walks by Geddes through London, the walks by Pevsner as described in his monumental guide series of the 'Buildings of England' for Penguin editions, and so forth.<sup>11</sup> Peter Smithson produced his own variant of the genre with his walking guide to the city of Bath: 'Walks within the Walls. A Study of Bath as a Built-form Taken over by Other Uses' published in *Architectural Design*. After its initial publication in 1969 a reprint followed in 1971, as well as another walking guide for Oxford and Cambridge in 1976.<sup>12</sup> Alison Smithson's *AS in DS. An Eye on the Road* of 1982, in which she impressionistically described the journeys between London and the Smithson weekend home in Tisbury, also fits this tradition being a 'sensitivity primer', describing and explaining the new kind of landscape emerging from the new movement patterns made possible by the car. Self-consciously she included extensive references and passages from Cobbett's seminal *Rides* at the end of the book.<sup>13</sup>

From the *As Found* perspective, the English landscape then emerges as a 'situation' in the sense of the *Parallel of Life and Art* show; at first sight, perhaps too far fetched a conclusion, but this is exactly how the Smithsons would write about the landscape and their own sensibilities, most explicitly from the 1970s onward in such texts as *AS in DS*, but also 'In Pursuit of Lyrical Appropriateness' written and published mid-1970s.<sup>14</sup> To the Smithsons, the English landscape 'bears many marks', *As Found* 'remembrancers' one might say, of an 'overlaid tracery of patterns of work and movement', as far back as '1900 BC – supposed start of the Stonehenge – to the present time.' The 'trick' is to find new appropriate 'patterns supportive of life', with this vast inventory of acts of invention in the back of one's mind and not unlike the event of the Picturesque:

*'with those paintings by Claude or Poussin brought back by the English from the Grand Tour (...); the paintings becoming enabling images in the development of the English Landscape Garden (...), and extended from the garden into all aspects of life (...), finally buildings as landscape: a whole sensibility neatly and palatably communicated in the writings of Jane Austen...'*<sup>15</sup>

11 A comparison with the Situationist *dérive* might be appropriate as well, but one wonders whether the Smithsons were aware of this in the early 1950s; perhaps Henderson was, since he was familiar with the French Surrealist discourse.

12 Peter Smithson, *Bath: Walks within the Walls*, Adams & Dart, Bath, 1971, originally published as 'Walks within the Walls. A Study of Bath as a Built Form Taken over by Other Uses', in *Architectural Design*, October 1969; 'Oxford & Cambridge Walks', in: *Architectural Design*, June 1976.

13 Alison Smithson, *AS in DS. An Eye on the Road*, Delft University Press, 1982.

14 Alison Smithson, 'In pursuit of lyrical appropriateness', manuscript 1975-1976; published in *Spazio e Società*, Autumn 1976; and in: *AA Quarterly*, vol. 9, nrs. 2-3, 1977, pp. 3-23, as 'The City Centre Full of Holes'.

15 *Ibid.*

As discussed in previous chapters, the whole thinking and arguing is here overflowing with select notions of ‘englishness’, a profound awareness of cultural specificity and how it might inform architectural practice and concepts: *‘for, apart from the land, the other internal communication of conviction is for the English through literature: the English being fairly unmoved by form; but if something can be walked on, or read, it can be accepted as worthwhile.’*<sup>16</sup>

To understand the landscape as a ‘tracery of patterns’ – as walked on since prehistoric times, as read about in Jane Austen novels, and as seen from the road – might also be viewed as an approach based on survey and archaeology as suggested by the As Found itself and its ultimate manifestation in *Patio & Pavilion* (e.g. the included Pompei image). Certainly, it was also related to the Smithsons’ interest in aerial photography, and how aerial photography was a main element of *Parallel of Life and Art*, how it filled the pages of *Architectural Design*, most notably in the articles by the German emigré architect and publicist Erwin Gutkind.<sup>17</sup> The understanding of landscape as traces of patterns was also related to the way the Smithsons linked aerial photography to the experience of the First World War, the first great war with fighter planes and aerial reconnaissance, as evidenced by the unpublished manuscript of ‘1916 A.S.O.’, in which Alison Smithson attempted to connect those war time experiences to the specific sensibilities of the historic avant-garde and the architects of the Heroic Period.<sup>18</sup> In the last instance though, it should probably be viewed as an act of ‘synchronisation’ as argued for by Mark Wigley when discussing the Independent Group discourse and the work of John McHale, in particular.<sup>19</sup> The full temporal field from the Stonehenge era up to the present was as it were considered to be a potential field for acts of actualisation aimed at the regeneration of the landscape and society. The ‘marks of the land’ as As Found ‘remembrancers’ make up a whole environment of traces of systems and languages, expression of an accumulation of past experience, including the ‘enabling images’ waiting to be rediscovered to help bring about and accommodate new patterns of society – not a matter of revival, eclecticism or mannerism as historicists would probably have it, but as acts of ‘continuity and regeneration’ as the Smithsons put it.

Poetic examples of this, though at the periphery of the Smithson better-known production is a series of landscape design proposals from the 1970s to regenerate old industrial sites in the north, the Smithsons’ native region, by way of a couple of modest

16 Ibid.

17 The Smithsons used at least two of Gutkind’s images published in his *Our World from the Air. An International Survey of Man and his Environment*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1952: image nr. 53 of Chinese Honan, which the Smithsons published in *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 42, and image 252 of Isfahan re-appears as an analytic drawing also in *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 41; as late as 1991 they use an image of NY freeways in ‘The Recovery of Parts of the Gothic Mind’, in: *ILA&UD Year Book 1990-1991*, p. 50.

18 Unpublished manuscript by Alison Smithson, Smithson Family Archive.

19 Mark Wigley, ‘The Architectural Cult of Synchronization’, in: *October*, nr. 94, 2000 pp. 31-62.

interventions in the landscape of their youth. They are part of the Landscape into Art series and include among others: the Tees Pudding of Middlesborough, the Slaggie Eleven of the Spenymoor Slag Heaps, or the Skateboard Junction, Stockton on Tees.<sup>20</sup> It's all about re-using the 'as found' again, such as the slag from the mines and the sleepers from the abandoned railway yards. Slag mounds and railway sleepers are the 'remembrancers' from a by-gone era and in the Smithson design proposals they are the building materials for the new landscape events that transform and revitalize the polluted wasteland of the old mine industries, then at the end of the 1970s about to be foreclosed. The Tees Pudding for instance, provided a spiralling path to the top of the heightened slag heap from which 'there would be a considerable view as the terrain is flat: the wonders of Teesside, the Transporter Bridge, as well as Roseberry Topping and Captain Cook's Monument.'<sup>21</sup> The Skateboard Junction (as early as 1977) – a proposal to reconnect routes and thus revitalize the territory – is another example of how movement and play, new lifestyles and sensibilities were deployed by the Smithsons: the then new fashion for skateboarding among the youth was coupled with the 'antique rolling stock' of the former pride of the north, which was to be parked as 'pavilion-sculptures' in the landscape.<sup>22</sup>

Conventionally, within the historiography of modern architecture, the idea of context is discussed as part of the revision of modernist practices, and deployed against modern architecture, Functionalism and the idea of the Functional City. The Smithsons, however, viewed the notion of context as a natural expansion of the modern tradition. Because of this, it is necessary to have a closer look at the origins of the term, how it was already introduced within the CIAM discourse on urbanism and how it was subsequently used to formulate a critique of orthodox modernist planning and architecture, also by Alison and Peter Smithson themselves as modern architects of the third generation. Yet, it needs to be noted too, that the term context in the early years did not mean quite the same as it did when it re-appeared in the writings of the Smithsons in the early 1970s. In the 1950s the idea of context was connected to the biological idea of 'environment', and to an idea of 'ecological urbanism'. By the 1970s context had come to mean historical context in the first place. It was linked to the new issue of urban renewal that grew to dominate the agenda of politicians, architects and town planners, and it was appropriated and refashioned by anti-modernists who would advocate Postmodernism from the mid-1970s onward. Therefore, in the following paragraphs we

<sup>20</sup> See for an overview *The Charged Void: Architecture*, 2001, pp. 410-416.

<sup>21</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, 2001, p. 414; also published in *The Shift*, 1982, pp. 50-51.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 416.



will move back and forth between the various moments in which meaning and usage of the term shift, from CIAM to Team 10 debates, to New Town criticism, to the rise of postmodernism, summers spent in Italy at the ILAUD summer school, and quite a few other places as well. We start with Peter's visit to Cornell in 1972.

### The Slow Growth of Another Sensibility

In 1972 Peter Smithson visited Cornell University at the invitation of Team 10 colleague Oswald Mathias Ungers.<sup>23</sup> Smithson's lecture was titled: 'Architecture as Townbuilding. The Slow Growth of Another Sensibility',<sup>24</sup> addressing issues of historical continuity and renewal and the way technology transforms cities and their communities, and hence the premises for city planning. One of the key notions he used was that of 'context', which had become quite a fashionable topic by the 1970s; until then, the Smithsons hadn't used the term as explicitly as on this particular occasion. Yet, Smithson claimed:

*'When I was teaching in a school of architecture in the mid-fifties the school's syllabus was reorganised in a very simple way to induce what I then called "context thinking" – that a new thing is to be thought through in the context of the existing patterns. In the context of the patterns of human association, patterns of use, patterns of movement, patterns of stillness, quiet, noise and so on, patterns of form, in so far as we can uncover them; and it was taught that a design for a building, or building group, could not be evolved outside of context.'*<sup>25</sup>

Smithson's claim is substantiated by a one page statement written by himself and published in the *Architectural Association Journal* of January 1961. It is titled 'Education for Town Building' and describes assignments for "'context of building" studies'.<sup>26</sup> From there onward, the 1972 lecture, the Smithsons kept emphasizing the importance they attached to the issue of context, speaking of 'specificity-to-place', and 'the building's first duty is to its context.' Eventually, they would date this concern for context as early as the beginnings of Team 10. In retrospective notes on Team 10 and the Doorn manifesto of 1954, notes which Peter Smithson kept revising between the years 1993 and 2001, we find his characterization of this other sensibility: 'A long-after-afterthought on this Manifesto reveals what I now

23 Ungers was then Chair of the School of Architecture, and during the winter and spring of the academic year 1971-1972, he organized a very extensive Team 10 seminar. Ungers invited twelve of the Team 10 members to assist with the fourth-year and fifth-year student programmes on a kind of relay-race basis. Bakema attended for no less than six weeks, Polónyi for four and Pietilä for three. Others spent one or two weeks at Cornell. The scheme was organized so that there were always at least two Team 10 members in residence. In general, ideology formed one of the main topics of the seminar at Ungers' specific request. The lectures delivered in the seminar therefore touched on major social issues of the time such as the Vietnam War, the Cold War and environmental pollution. The Team 10 visitors also gave several presentations on the tradition of Modern Architecture in relation to their own design practice. The main emphasis was however on interaction with the students in the design studio. See also Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005, pp. 180-181.

24 Peter Smithson, 'Architecture as Townbuilding', 1972; two notes attached to the original text in the archive read: 'Also in "A Continuing Experiment" (A.A.) A press 1975. "Architecture as townbuilding" most of this essay published in W.R. Oct. '73'; and note 2: '(Based on a talk given in the A.A. tropical department in 1969, and subsequent lectures based on that talk given at Texas A.&M., Rice, and Cornell in 1972)'.

25 Ibid., p. 3.

26 Peter Smithson, 'Education for Town Building' in: *The Architectural Association Journal*, January 1961, p. 191.

*believe to be the main direction of Team X's effort, in a word, towards particularity. The Doorn Manifesto – which, seen retrospectively, is the founding statement of Team X – shifts the emphasis away from the “four-functions” of C.I.A.M. onto “human associations”. In its second paragraph the Manifesto says “To comprehend these human associations we must consider every community as a particular total complex.” The word underlined in the manuscript was total, but it was the particular that was to be critical to Team X thought.’<sup>27</sup>*

This attempt to revise the history of Team 10 – one wonders for instance to what extent the proposition would be accepted by the Dutch and French members who did share an interest in the universalist aspirations of the modern tradition – gives a succinct indication of the trajectory travelled by the Smithsons with regard to the relation between architecture and urban planning as developed by them over the years. Among other things this trajectory meant a continuously moving back and forth between both the quality of the whole and the specific, and leaving behind the totalizing and unifying concepts of CIAM and the generation of modern architects of the heroic period.

Context may seem a neutral term referring to reality as it is, but upon closer inspection of the discourse, it is nothing of the kind. Ákos Moravánszky has stated that the context debate in architecture is paradoxically preoccupied with the forging of identities and fictional narratives, and not with an empirical investigation of the actual reality in which architects are operating.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, context as a term immediately brings into play a few concomitant analogies that whilst being deployed in the debates on the future of modern architecture and planning redirected those debates effectively. The textile connotation – the Latin ‘texere’ meaning to weave – brings the notions of the city as fabric or tissue into play, whereas the textual one reframes the city and architecture with notions from the field of linguistics and semantics. With each participant in the context debate one sees these analogies at work. The Smithsons, too, would speak of the city as ‘fabric’ and its various ‘layers’; just as the city became a ‘net of communication’ that had to be ‘comprehensible’ and ‘legible’ to its citizens. ‘Texture’ is a term that was also used, in particular by Colin Rowe. However, Rowe’s ‘contextualism’ would paradoxically (not contradictorily) bring an exclusive focus on the city as an autonomous architectural construct, quite in line with Aldo Rossi’s publication *I’Architettura della Città* of 1966, and not as ‘process’ or Summerson’s ‘fragment of a social

<sup>27</sup> Peter Smithson, ‘Team X in Retrospect’, manuscript, dated 1 October, 1993, revised March 1994, October 1995, April 1999 and May 2001, 10 pages. Underlining and italics are as in original.

<sup>28</sup> In a lecture at the Faculty of Architecture, TU Delft, as part of a series on the theme of context, 20 September 2007.

pattern' but as form. Here, context was positioned against the positivist approach of modernist urban planning, and as such context was deployed as one of the ultimate arguments against modern architecture and CIAM doctrine. A characteristic example is the article 'Contextualism' of 1976 by Graham Shane, a former student of Rowe who polemicized against Team 10 by claiming that contextualist concerns were still traceable even within the CIAM discourse until the ninth congress.<sup>29</sup> At CIAM VIII at Hoddesdon, the interest in historical urban spaces, such as the forum, agora and piazza, had regained new momentum under influence of the theme of the 'core', or the heart of the city. Even a proposal as radical as Le Corbusier's scheme for the reconstruction of St Dié displayed such concerns, according to Shane, but when Team 10 emerged, this momentum was lost and 'architects erased from their memory a language for discussing the urban context'.<sup>30</sup>

Shane's text is one example of how the issue of context and a specific definition of the term was used to create opposition in order to try to break away from the tradition of modern architecture, and how the revisionist ideas of Team 10, including those of Alison and Peter Smithson, were rejected while supporting a postmodernism on the rise.<sup>31</sup> The ambiguity of intention and meaning surrounding the term context and its particular usage is already touched upon by Adrian Forty in his *Words and Buildings. A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*.<sup>32</sup> Forty included context as one of the entries in his 'vocabulary', partly as an element of the 'first substantial critique of modernist practice', for which it also might be classed as a 'postmodernist term', and partly 'as belonging to the period of late modernism', being 'wholly directed towards the discourse of modernism'.<sup>33</sup>

Generally speaking (and beyond the specifics of the architecture discourse), the term context refers to the setting of a phenomenon, object or word, from which its specific meaning may be derived, evidenced, and clarified. From such a point of view, one can justifiably state that the concern for context was always part and parcel of modernist principles of urban planning to the extent that the architectural and urban project was always considered as being part of a larger whole; context consciousness is not necessarily alien to modernist principles as was (and still is) propounded after the postmodernist shift in architectural thinking. At first sight, this might be a surprising observation, since today modern urban planning is conventionally held responsible for a *tabula rasa* approach with no eye for 'context'.

29 Graham Shane, 'Contextualism', in: *Architectural Design*, nr. 11, 1976, pp. 676-679.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 676.

31 See for instance: Stuart Cohen, 'Physical Context / Cultural Context: Including it All', in: *Oppositions*, nr. 2, January 1974, reprinted in: K. Michael Hays (ed.), *Oppositions Reader*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1988, pp. 65-103; William Ellis, 'Type and Context in Urbanism: Colin Rowe's Contextualism', in *Oppositions*, nr. 18, Fall 1979, reprinted in: Hays, 1988, pp. 227-251.

32 Forty, *Words and Buildings*, 2000.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 132-135.

There are different definitions of the term being deployed, just as one might observe a very different ways of appreciating context as the very field in which architects and planners operate. Context is never a neutral term. For instance, some regard context as something fixed and related to the pre-existing and historical, while others view context as the actual situation that is always in transition. Rereading the 1933 Statements of the Athens congress of CIAM, one of the key texts that documented the assumedly destructive intentions of the modernists, it becomes obvious that the conceptualization of the city as part of a larger 'economic, social and political whole' as well as the propagating of survey and mapping techniques of existing cities and regions were already there, containing the seeds for the contextual approach as developed in later years. Regionalism, although very different from the term's later usage in the late twentieth century, was also already present in the modern architecture discourse, and all key players from Le Corbusier, Sert to Ludwig Hilberseimer devoted their attention to the subject.

The 1933 Statements, which were largely formulated in a most general kind of phrasings, open with the following points of departure:

*'The city is part of an economic, social and political whole. It must also create the favourable conditions for the physical and psychological prerequisites of life of the individuals and the community. Significant for its development are:*  
*the geographical situation (topography, state of the ground, waters, transport situation, climate);*  
*the economic situation (within an economic system), raw materials, sources of energy;*  
*the political situation (within a system of government).'<sup>34</sup>*

With regard to context and situation, it can be said that these points weren't particularly revolutionary in themselves; they still complied with the ancient Vitruvian paradigm. Dutch historian Auke van der Woud already critically commented on the history of the Statements, how they were (mis)used for publicity purposes by Sert and Le Corbusier, and how their originality was too often overstated; yet, within the architecture discourse they have remained a touchstone for both the critics and defenders of modern architecture, despite all the misreadings, distortions and manipulations by key players.<sup>35</sup> Until the tenth congress of Dubrovnik in 1956, the CIAM discourse would still remain within the frame of the Athens Statements, despite the shift in attention

34 'Statements of the Athens congress, 1933' in: Auke van der Woud, *CIAM. Housing Town Planning*, Delft University Press, Delft / Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, 1983, pp. 163-164; in his history of the CIAM discourse Auke van der Woud has already extensively commented on the generalities of the Athens Statements, the various published versions by Sert and Le Corbusier and their assumed efficacy and overstated influence on planning practice.

35 *Ibid.*, in particular the concluding chapter 'Town Planning'.

toward the new theme of Habitat and the wish to substitute the Athens Charter with a Charter of Habitat.<sup>36</sup>

But even in the case of this shift, away from the four functions toward a more integral approach of architecture and town planning as 'habitat', the issue of context – as the larger whole of which the city and architecture are the smaller parts – firmly remained in place. Among the preparatory documents for the tenth CIAM congress in 1956, one finds a sheet with definitions of 'habitat' as an answer to the question 'what is habitat?' The various definitions summed up are botanical, biological and ecological. A letter of Le Corbusier to Emery is approvingly quoted:

*"L'Habitat" représente les conditions de vie dans le milieu total (implique par conséquent les grandes modifications qui s'annoncent sur l'occupation du territoire par le travail de l'homme de la civilisation machiniste. C'est l'état de confusion et de déchirement actuel).<sup>37</sup>*

And the piece ends by stating:

*'All these "definitions" are concerned with an atmosphere prosperous to "grow and live". To create this atmosphere for the human being is the principle aim of CIAM.'<sup>38</sup>*

'Le milieu total' and 'an atmosphere prosperous to grow and live' once again indicate the all-inclusive aspiration of modernist planning. The real issue at stake in the context debate doesn't seem to have been the issue of context itself, but rather the evaluation and role of the existing built structures in relation to their condition and the condition of the city, and society at large as a favourable 'atmosphere for the human being'. CIAM claimed to develop a positivist outlook at this particular point, embracing science, survey and technological progress as the basis for a new rationalism. Next to the formulation of general principles, the Athens Statements contained a fundamental critique of existing conditions and built structures. The authors of the Statements asserted that:

*'the machine and industrial production have brought a particularly rapid development of the cities. (...) This rapid, uncontrolled development has in most cases led to a chaotic situation in the structure of the city. Thus the elementary functions of a city are now carried out in a disorderly fashion.'<sup>39</sup>*

This diagnosis was met by CIAM with the familiar programme of reconstruction, slum clearance and amelioration through the proper

36 Eric Mumford identified the congress at Bergamo as the moment when the issue of a Charter of Habitat was introduced by Le Corbusier himself, Mumford, 2000, p. 187.

37 From the CIAM document, 'Prolegomena pour une Charte d'habitat', Zürich, July 1956, Roger Aujame archive; I thank Catherine Blain for bringing this document to my attention.

38 Ibid., underling is according original text.

39 Van der Woud, 1983, p. 164.

development of the four functions of dwelling, recreation, work and transportation. But, it must be emphasized, this programme too, was stated in humanist terms, rather than bureaucratic or techno-rationalists ones. For instance, any 'material' demand or basis, was consistently paired with its 'spiritual' or 'psychological' counterpart, and 'all the measures and planning that lie behind the functional city must be based on the human scale and human needs'. It was also stated that each city needed a town planning scheme 'supported by a thorough study by experts of the actual situation; it comprises the development of the city in space and time and is in agreement with the natural, topographical, economic and sociological facts'.<sup>40</sup>

Only a modest paragraph was dedicated to the 'Historic parts of the city', among others stating that 'an aesthetic adaptation of new parts of the city to the historic area has a catastrophic effect on the development of a city and is in no way to be desired'.<sup>41</sup> The only way to retain some historic monuments according to the CIAM Statements, was by way of demolishing the 'slum dwellings' surrounding them, creating green areas in order to improve hygienic conditions. It would be incorrect, however, to suggest that the conflict between the old and the new was exclusively a matter of 'aesthetic adaptation'. The document also briefly summed up the 'requirements' thought necessary to realize a healthy residential environment with plenty of sun, light and air, including 'concentrated high-rise building' in combination with 'extensive green areas', and the banning of 'strings of houses built along main roads'.<sup>42</sup> The resulting building configurations were diametrically opposed to the patterns of overcrowded streets and perimeter blocks of the industrial metropolis, the squares and boulevards of the Baroque, or the ideal geometries of the Renaissance.

Nine years before, in his book *Urbanisme* of 1924, Le Corbusier had made even bolder statements on the future of the historic structures, especially the congested city centres, which demonstrated the full scope of the revolutionary agenda of modern architecture for the old cities to deal with the problems at hand in the most radical of ways. Le Corbusier claimed that 'the great city of today is destroying itself'. Linking the problems of traffic with the requirements of urban economics, he observed that 'business demands the greatest possible speed in regard to traffic':  
*'Statistics show us that business is conducted in the centre. This means that wide avenues must be driven through the centres of our towns. Therefore the existing centres must come down. To save itself, every great city must rebuild its centre.'*

40 Ibid., pp. 166-167.

41 Ibid., p. 166.

42 Ibid., pp. 164-165.

And:

'Where do all these motors go? To the centre. But there is no proper superficial area available for traffic in the centre. It will have to be created. The existing centres must come down.'<sup>43</sup>

Leaving aside the intricate web of ideological and populist rhetoric we find in Le Corbusier's writings, it was such radical and iconoclastic antagonism toward the existing combined with the two aspects of the refusal to aesthetically adapt the new to the old, and the introduction of newly invented building configurations at the cost of the existing structures, which would become the main targets for the fierce criticism of modern architecture as ventilated from the late 1950s, mid-1960s onwards. The whole issue of context, its emergence and the various elaborations are, of course, too extensive to fully discuss here. It should be pointed out, perhaps superfluously, that its manifold origins are rather like a cloud of condensation points, and not so much the outcome of a clearcut discourse – for instance from Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction* which may be mentioned in addition and his idea that 'main street is almost perfect',<sup>44</sup> to the many heritage wars that would start in the 1960s when the demolition of historical buildings and city districts gained momentum with a booming economy in most of the western world.<sup>45</sup>

In his *Words and Buildings* Adrian Forty identifies the Italian magazine *Casabella Continuità* and its editorials by Ernesto Rogers of the mid-1950s as the main source of origin for the debate on context in architecture circles, even though Rogers preferred the term 'ambiente' (environment), rather than 'contesto' (context).<sup>46</sup> Looking at the context debate the terms context and environment were used as if interchangeable, sometimes with confusing effects.<sup>47</sup> Arguably, the post-war Italian debate was probably the foremost crucible in which the reconceptualization of context was developed as a criticism of modern architecture and Functionalist urban planning based on the Athens Charter. Forty also mentions two protégés of Ernesto Rogers, Vittorio Gregotti and his publication *Il Territorio dell'Architettura*, and Aldo Rossi and his *L'Architettura della Città*, both from 1966. With respect to the major Italian contribution and its particular practice of urban studies, one must also make mention of Saverio Muratori and Carlo Aymonino, or with reference to the Smithsons and the Team 10 discourse, the patient work of Giancarlo De Carlo, who was also a Rogers' protégé, just like Rossi and Gregotti.

43 Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow*, pp. 116-117, 1971; reprint 1977, facsimile edition of 1929, original French edition *Urbanisme*, 1924, Paris, Editions Crés.

44 Karin Theunissen has pointed out in her research that Venturi as early as 1951, in his final thesis, included the issue of 'context'.

45 With regard to the British context, the achievements of the Victorian Society must be mentioned here of course.

46 Forty, 2000, p. 132.

47 Forty points to the American translation of Aldo Rossi's *The Architecture of the City* of 1982.

The shift from 'environment' (or sometimes 'surroundings') to 'context', upon which Forty touched, is characteristic of the formation of the context debate. 'Environment' immediately exposes the biological, and ecological origins of the context debate, and its positivist inclinations.<sup>48</sup> Yet, at the same time, one cannot limit the term to this particular interpretation, with the Italians using 'ambiente' instead of 'contesto', as a clear example. The usage of context too, was far from unequivocal. Christopher Alexander, who according to Forty was the very first author to structure his argument by operationalizing the term in his *Notes on the Synthesis of Form* of 1964, would use it in a most radically positivist and unifying way, quite unlike its subsequent usage in the 1960s and 1970s. Speaking of 'good fit' and 'adaptedness', Alexander formulated the whole issue of context in unambiguous neo-Darwinian terms:

*'The form is the solution to the problem; the context defines the problem. In other words, when we speak of design, the real object of discussion is not the form alone, but the ensemble comprising the form and its context. Good fit is a desired property of this ensemble which relates to some particular division of the ensemble into form and context. There is a wide variety of ensembles which we can talk about like this. The biological ensemble made up of a natural organism and its physical environment is the most familiar: in this case we are used to describing the fit between the two as well-adaptedness.'*<sup>49</sup>

A final source mentioned by Forty concerns the teachings of Colin Rowe. Rowe ran the so-called Urban Design studio at Cornell University from 1963 until 1988. The work of the studio was an example of early investigations into 'contextualism' and 'contextualist' design practice.<sup>50</sup> According to Forty, Rowe had mainly a 'formal' interest in the issue of context, and the relationships between objects and spaces, whereas Rogers would identify context with the 'dialectical processes of history' as 'manifested through architecture'.<sup>51</sup>

One of Rowe's favourite references for founding his argument for a contextual design practice was *Gestalt* theory. Rowe would refer to this theory in relation to the so-called figure-ground phenomenon, which he developed in order to read and analyse city maps and the reciprocal configurations of open spaces and built volumes.<sup>52</sup> With other positions, too, we find the reference to Gestalt theory. With Alexander again, but most notably with Kevin Lynch. Lynch would write the most clearcut albeit also reductive thesis

48 In particular the work of the Scottish biologist and social reformer Patrick Geddes should be mentioned as a major influence, also with regard to the CIAM discourse; see also Volker M. Welter, *Biopolis. Patrick Geddes and the City of Life*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2002; and Volker M. Welter, 'In-between Space and Society. On Some British Roots of Team 10's Urban Thought in the 1950s', in: Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005, pp. 258-263..

49 Christopher Alexander, *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*, 1964, pp. 15-16; Forty (2000, p. 134) also refers to the following quote of Alexander: 'every design problem begins with an effort to achieve fitness between two entities: the form in question, and its context. The form is the solution to the problem; the context defines the problem.', p. 15 in Alexander. Interestingly, Alexander brought his research work to the Team 10 meeting of 1962 in Royaumont, see: Alison Smithson, *Team 10 Meetings*, Rizzoli, New York, 1990, pp. 68-69.

50 See also Colin Rowe, *As I was Saying. Recollections and Miscellaneous Essays*, edited by Alexander Caragonne, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1996, Volume III, 'Urbanistics'.

51 Forty, 2000, pp. 134-135

52 'Gestalt' as a key notion but also always rather imprecisely used, returns in almost any theoretical argument of the post-war period, evidence of the enormous impact of Bauhaus teachings and Josef Albers, even when most critically absorbed; the classic essay that tries to elaborate the Gestalt idea is of course the one by Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, 'Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal', in: *Perspecta*, nr. 8, 1963, also reprinted in Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1982, pp. 159 and further. For a critique of Rowe and Slutzky and their use of Gestalt theory see Detlef Mertins, 'Transparency: Autonomy and Relativity', in: Detlef Mertins, *Modernity Unbound*, Architectural Association, London 2011, pp. 70-87.



on visual perception of the city with his famous *The Image of the City* of 1960. Lynch's book is fully dedicated to understand the way people perceive the built environment visually. Throughout the book he distinguished five elements for analyzing built environments and their 'image': paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. Using empirical research techniques, mainly interview techniques, he sought to demonstrate that humans construct an 'environmental image' of the city. Lynch thought of this image as being constituted by, as well as reciprocally constituting identity, structure and meaning.

These categories of identity, structure and meaning, including the reciprocal issues of reading and 'legibility' as brought up by Lynch, foreshadow the structuralist doctrines that will dominate the architecture discourse of the 1960s and 1970s. Here, context was derived from, or at least connected with concepts from linguistics and semiology. As such its growing usage in architectural discourse in the 1960s was part of the critique on orthodox modern architecture and its International Style aesthetics as being too abstract and devoid of meaning. This then would be a point of departure for Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction* of 1966, and Charles Jencks's *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* of 1977.<sup>53</sup> It is at this point that we have, once again, arrived at Forty's unresolved predicament, when he stated that 'context' could be classified either as a final modernist term, or a first postmodernist one. One could solve the antithesis, as exists between the postmodernist and modern positions, by focusing on the apparent continuities and similarities. Yet, at the same time, this would seem incompatible with the mutual, scathing criticisms from both sides, and the very different elaborations of the idea of a language of architecture.

### Rowe versus Smithson

With regard to this unresolved predicament a comparison between the positions of Rowe and Smithson is rather illustrative, also with regard to the specifics of the British discourse, and what we called the English crucible. At this particular point of context a profound difference of opinion between the British contemporaries can be noted. Following Forty's suggestion to view the term as a hinge point between modernist and postmodernist concepts, Rowe might then stand for 'context' as belonging to the first substantial

<sup>53</sup> For an earlier example one might also point to the anthology *Meaning in Architecture*, edited by Charles Jencks and George Baird, George Brazillier, New York, 1969.

postmodernist critique, whereas Smithson belongs to the late modernist position.

Half jocular, half seriously, Peter Smithson once stated that Rowe was 'in a way, my enemy' and that he had 'never read any of his writings'.<sup>54</sup> The Smithson couple and the critic seem to occupy the far ends of the context debate: the Smithsons saw the issue of context and 'context thinking' as the natural extension of the tradition of modern architecture, whereas Rowe deployed the idea of contextualism for his devastating attacks on that very same tradition. The difference is even more striking, since looking from the outside the three seemed to have shared a multitude of similar interests and attitudes: among others a first, and fierce criticism of modern architecture combined with a lifelong admiration and love for the work of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, as well as a passionate interest in the history of architecture, especially that of ancient architecture and Renaissance ideals, the reconceptualizing of avant-garde composition techniques as collage and the *trouvé*, and a critical absorption of the achievements of Scandinavian modern architecture and how it evolved from a neo-classical tradition.

One of those curious moments of simultaneous overlapping and contradiction concerns – how appropriate for a Brutalist history – an image: namely a painting by Nicolas Poussin, the famous 'Landscape with the Ashes of Phocion' of 1648, and interestingly enough one of those constituent images of the British tradition of the Picturesque. The Smithsons used a fragment of it in 1957, as the opening image of one of their seminal short essays 'Cluster City'. And we find it again with Rowe, now as one of the two final images of his treatise for a Collage City, with the second image being a Poussin painting as well: 'Christ Healing the Blind' – perhaps a reference to Le Corbusier's famous 'eyes that don't see'.<sup>55</sup>

The Smithsons had this to say about the Poussin image: *'Poussin's vision of the classical city is an image of a consistent hierarchy of building forms, that runs from the high temple of the hill to the local temple and the profane buildings around it. Can modern architects create an equally convincing image of the city, without being caught in some similar closed hierarchy?'*<sup>56</sup>

It is in this sense they thought of the painting as belonging to that collection of what they called 'enabling images'. Rowe too,

54 Catherine Spellman and Karl Unglaub (eds.), *Peter Smithson: Conversations with Students. A Space for Our Generation*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2005, p. 19.

55 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Cluster City', in: *The Architectural Review*, 1957, pp. 333-336; and Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1978, pp. 180-181; Rowe and Koetter's essay was first published in August 1975 in *The Architectural Review*, August 1975.

56 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Cluster City', in: *The Architectural Review*, 1957; caption to the opening image. When the text is republished in their *Ordinariness and Light* (1970) the Poussin image is left out, perhaps in response to Banham's comments in his 1966 book.

thinks of the Poussin vision as an inspiring imaginary landscape. In his argument the Poussin painting functions as the final chord of the last chapter of *Collage City*, the 'Excursus' intended as an 'abridged list of stimulants, a-temporal, and necessarily transcultural, as possible *objets trouvés* in the urbanistic collage', as Rowe put it himself.<sup>57</sup>

It is not just the recurring of the Picturesque that attracts attention, and which would draw stinging remarks from Banham in both cases. Quite in line with Raymond William's lessons we might remember that when we're looking at Poussin's pastoral landscape we're not just looking at some innocent, idyllic scenery. On the contrary, it is also a painting about loss, mourning and corruption for anyone who is familiar with the story of Phocion. To briefly recapture: Poussin reframed the story of Phocion, the morally sound and superior Athens general, who was put to death after false accusation by his adversaries. Plutarch's history tells us that to further humiliate the hero, his body was denied to be buried. And here, in the painting we see the moment when the widow is collecting the ashes of Phocion's body. It is at this point that we start to see the painting as a proper allegory, and we can start to read the manifold meanings of the various elements as originally construed by Poussin himself, or as ascribed to by critics and interpreters. A quite different history from the one of revitalization of the modern architecture discourse would unfold, involving the web connecting art production, and its trade, cultural institutions and media, and how the painting travelled to England, and how during the 1950s the study of Poussin paintings had become a major and prestigious research project under Anthony Blunt and Rudolf Wittkower at the Courtauld. One could retrace the formation of cultural concepts and values, of discourse in the making, and it is with this in mind that we should return to the way the Smithsons and Rowe deployed the Picturesque idyll.<sup>58</sup> In the vein of Malraux's *musée imaginaire* and the inherent acts of displacement, we see that the image is decontextualised while being integrated into a completely different discourse and cultural system.

The Smithsons used it to criticize old school CIAM and the generic, 'functional mechanic' way, in which the New Towns were realized with no eye for specific, local qualities. The French classicist painting functioned here to incite the creation of new images 'equally convincing' as the Poussin one. Twenty years later, Rowe deployed the image against the craze of a ruthless modernist

57 Rowe and Koetter, 1978, pp. 151-181.

58 Such unpacking and recombining is of course not uncommon since Manfredo Tafuri's critique of operative historiography, see his introduction to his monumental *The Sphere and the Labyrinth. Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1987; original Italian edition, 1980. Yet, even though Tafuri speaks of deconstruction of naturalized totalities, and of the 'breaking of the magic circle of language etc.' (p. 15), because of his neo-Marxist frame he cannot but speculate on the reconstruction of an immanent larger whole and its laws, from which the events of architecture are produced; with Tafuri history is still an almost metaphysical 'puzzle' to be solved, implying the revaluation / resurrection of this total immanence.

practice levelling differences and erasing specificity. But at the same time, Rowe would also point out the Palladio designs accurately depicted in the landscape, and how in Poussin's 'imaginary cities everything becomes classically condensed'. The neo-Palladian maniera is key to him, especially with regard to the idea that context is, in the first place, about formal patterns, just as Rowe would like to have it.

As said, Rowe developed his argument for contextualism through among others his teachings at Cornell University. The publication of *Collage City*, first in the *Architectural Review* in 1975, later as a book in 1978, can be regarded as the outcome and summary of the ideas as developed within the Urban Design studio. Rowe's *Collage City*, with Fred Koetter as co-author, starts off with a frontal attack on the idea of utopia as a programme for actual social reform as proclaimed and supported by modern architects, as well as on the idea of architecture being subjected to *Zeitgeist* and historical *telos*. The second chapter paints a succinct overview of positions of the post-war decades. Then, in the third chapter, tellingly called 'Crisis of the Object: Predicament of Texture', the authors launched their attack on modern architecture for being responsible for the 'disintegration of the street and of all highly organized public space', partly due to the 'rationalized form of housing and the new dictates of vehicular activity', and partly due to the 'fixation' of modern architecture on the ideal of a building as a free standing object without any impact on the continuum of free flowing, open space that was characteristic of the modern city.<sup>59</sup> They reproached modern architects, with Le Corbusier as the most prominent one, and their vision for an 'absolute detachment, symbolic and physical, from any aspects of existing context which has been, typically, envisaged as a contaminant, as something both morally and hygienically leprous'.<sup>60</sup>

Thereupon Rowe and Koetter founded their argument for a Collage City on a combination of two elements. First, as mentioned, they appropriated the 'figure-ground phenomenon' from Gestalt theory. It resulted in the now famous, black-and-white analyses of urban space that quite simply consisted of reducing the complexity of the city to the opposition of 'solid and void'. The strong rhetorical power of the diagrams served to demonstrate how traditional cities provided a rich and versatile 'supporting texture or ground', unlike the modern city, which was diagrammed by way of black spots of free-standing 'solids' drifting in a white sea of 'void' designating undifferentiated 'space'. Le Corbusier's plan for

59 Rowe and Koetter, 1978 pp. 56-58.

60 Ibid, p. 51.

St Dié (1945) was strategically placed opposite of the inner city of Parma, and a double spread of the modern master's Plan Voisin (1925) communicated at a single glance the disaster that would have hit Paris if the plan had ever been executed.<sup>61</sup>

The second element of Rowe and Koetter's argument related to the nature of the 'texture' that constituted the city, the city's built substance so to speak. Referring to the examples of imperial and papal Rome, London squares and terraces, and the Munich of Leo von Klenze, this texture, or ground, was defined by Rowe and Koetter as a multitude of fragments of almost exclusively (neo-)classicist architectural models. This texture was the outcome of 'cross-breeding, assimilation, distortion, challenge, response, imposition, superimposition, conciliation',<sup>62</sup> in the words of Rowe and Koetter a process of 'bricolage' in the vein of Lévi-Strauss, mediating and negotiating between the platonic ideal, technological progress and the pragmatic situation at hand.<sup>63</sup>

Looking back in his 1995 introduction to the documentation of the work of the Urban Design studio, Rowe described the studio atmosphere as follows:

*'If not conservative, its general tone was radical middle of the road. It believed in dialectic, in a dialectic between the present and the past, between the empirical and the ideal, between the contingent and the abstract. (...) Its ideal was a mediation between the city of Modern architecture - a void with objects - and the historical city - a solid with voids.'*<sup>64</sup>

However, rereading *Collage City*, as well as considering other writings by Rowe of the 1970s, such as his introduction to the English translation of Rob Krier's book *Stadttraum into Urban Space* in 1979, this oxymoronic proposition for a 'radical middle of the road' that may have been prevalent in the studio itself, seems hardly valid to be extended to Rowe's own position – it simply reeks too much of Pevsnerian 'compromise', and of which he himself may have been all too aware, hence the epithet 'radical' probably. Besides, Rowe was too much rigorous in his critique of modern architecture to come even close to such a middle class notion as the one of a 'middle of the road'.<sup>65</sup> *Collage City* concluded with a collection of poetic and inspiring examples, the already mentioned 'list of stimulants, a-temporal and necessarily transcultural' according to the authors.<sup>66</sup> Yet, this 'Excursus' actually reads as quite a homogeneous collection with a rather clear, cultural bias, namely a desire to resurrect the finest of

61 Ibid., pp. 62-63, and 74-75.

62 Ibid., p. 83.

63 Ibid., p.102-103.

64 Colin Rowe, *As I Was Saying*, 1996, Vol. III, p. 2.

65 Studio work is generously covered in Colin Rowe, *As I Was Saying*, 1996, Vol. III; to me it doesn't quite look as a 'middle of the road' position, but with a clear preference for the closed urban configurations of the 19th century city or before, although perhaps not exclusively so.

66 Rowe and Koetter, 1978, p. 151.

Western humanist tradition, which also becomes evident from the positioning of Michelangelo's Piazza del Campidoglio as the final image to the Collage City argument, and opening the collection of selected examples. Modern architecture apparently does not belong to this tradition at all. Of the fifty-five included projects there is only one that can be classified as modern, namely Van Eesteren's design for Berlin's Unter den Linden, under the category of 'Memorable streets'.<sup>67</sup> There are no examples of the modern city included, no 'void with objects' one could learn from.

Moreover, going through the collection of architectural 'stimulants', the '*objets trouvés*' ready to be used for a practice of 'urbanistic collage', Rowe and Koetter's preference for the neo-classical is all too obvious. It seems fair to say that Rowe's pursuit of neo-classicism is also dominant in the Collage City argument, rather than the 'radical middle of the road'.

This assumption is supported by the (re)publication of Rowe's seminal double essay on 'Neo-"Classicism" and Modern Architecture' in 1973, in the first issue of *Oppositions*, a text already written in 1956-1957.<sup>68</sup> Here, Rowe's second main contribution to the revision of the discourse of modern architecture must be stipulated, namely the concept of autonomy of the architectural discipline, a concept which was already prepared for by Emile Kaufmann in his history of modern architecture.<sup>69</sup> Both the uncovering and revisiting of neo-classicist principles of ordering by Colin Rowe served the forging of what he called the 'architectural equivalent of the rule of law', an autonomous authority transcending the modernist claims that architecture was to be subordinated to the imperatives of *Zeitgeist*, programme and technology.<sup>70</sup> To elucidate his case, Rowe strategically used the development and shifting position of Mies van der Rohe. Here, Rowe reached a superb level of analytic and rhetorical genius, taking a modern master and the development of his ideas over the years all in order to dismantle some of the central tenets on which the modern tradition was founded. Considering Rowe's writings of those years, the 1970s, it becomes evident that he succeeded in firmly establishing the concept for an autonomy of architecture by building his argument on internal developments within modern architecture itself and on the idea of urban contextualism.<sup>71</sup>

Yet, it is also here, both at the issue of architectural autonomy and neo-classicist idealism, and at the reconstruction of the tradition

67 Ibid., 1978, p.154.

68 Also included in the anthology of Colin Rowe essays: *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, 1982.

69 Emil Kaufmann, *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier, Ursprung und Entwicklung der autonomen Architektur*, Passer, Vienna, 1933; later publications *Three Revolutionary Architects*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1952, and *Architecture in the Age of Reason. Baroque and Post-Baroque in England, Italy, France*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1955.

70 Rowe's phrase 'architectural equivalent of the rule of law' comes from *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, p. 132.

71 The origins of the autonomy debate in the 1960s and 70s are of a plural character though; next to Rowe's contribution both Rossi and Eisenman should be mentioned, just as the concept of Neo-Rationalism as propounded by Ungers.

of modern architecture, that Alison and Peter Smithson took a principally different position with regard to context and town building, or urban design. It is here that we start to understand the profound differences between the British contemporaries.

In the 1972 lecture 'Architecture as Townbuilding', after having stated that 'a design for a building or building group could not be evolved outside of context', Smithson explained why this idea would be such a major distinction that one could speak of 'another sensibility', he said:

*'This sounded easy. But it cut against all inherited post-Renaissance tradition. A tradition of "ideas", a tradition of "abstraction", a tradition of buildings as simple mechanisms, and it cuts against the simple force of fashion.'*<sup>72</sup>

Unlike Rowe Smithson understood 'context thinking' as fundamentally opposed to the classicist tradition as a tradition of hand books and any attempt at its resurrection. To him the classicist tradition was not unlike the International Style, a detached tradition disseminated by way of pattern books and forms to be imitated without consideration of local specificity. To the Smithsons, 'context thinking' was part and parcel of an architecture which was the 'result of a way of life', the 'rough poetry' dragged out of those 'confused and powerful forces which are at work,' something the Smithsons had started to understand as the unfolding of long-term processes, of what they called the 'slow growth of another sensibility.' It is also in this sense that the Smithsons' position and New Brutalism must be understood as an attempt to regenerate the idea of Functionalism, of design as a 'finding process', and an ethical imperative to move beyond predetermined, formal categories. Form partakes in the design process, it does not stand outside of it. Partaking in the process, form redirects the whole process, just as 'context' does one might add.

So, at the time, in 1972, when Peter Smithson came to Cornell to deliver his lecture 'Architecture as Townplanning', and re-appropriated the issue of context as he thought fit, his proposition might be considered a provocation. Context and contextualism had been re-discovered as a 'new' topic then, as demonstrated by the publication of another of Rowe's students, Thomas Schumacher, in *Casabella*, only one year earlier. Under the heading of 'Contextualism: Urban Ideals + Deformations' the essay discussed many of the ideas that would later be fully elaborated

<sup>72</sup> Peter Smithson, 'Architecture as Townbuilding', 1972, pp. 3-4.

by Rowe himself in *Collage City*.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, there is no record of any proper debate surrounding Smithson's visit and his ideas on context – may be because the profound difference in approach was not immediately recognised as such, perhaps also because the postmodernist polemic hadn't fully started yet. Or perhaps the 'enmity' between the parties as identified by Peter Smithson simply translated in a mutual ignoring of the other; for instance, apart from one image the Smithsons contribution is completely absent from *Collage City*.<sup>74</sup>

In any case, Smithson illustrated his idea of 'context thinking' by relating it to his and Alison's own design practice: *'In our own design work – the "context" is a main centre of effort. It is not exactly a question of "fitting-in", but of re-materialising, re-focusing – the words are difficult. The context may demand a totally invisible building or no building, a "counter-geometry" or a "continuation geometry". In a way like decorating, re-arranging and "preparing" a room, for a real homemaker, a real restaurateur or inn-keeper it is more than a question of taste: it is an act of both continuity and re-generation.'*<sup>75</sup>

To Smithson this combination of continuity and regeneration is key for a context-responsive architecture. For the machine-served society the difficult task for architects would lie in the bringing together of the 'qualities of continuity and newness'. Peter Smithson mentioned the Economist Building (1959-1964) as an example for the 'struggling with the idea of continuation and re-generation'. He also showed the projects for St Hilda's college in Oxford (1967-1970) and their weekend home, the Upper Lawn pavilion (1959-1962).

Quite remarkably, Smithson also included the American projects of Mies van der Rohe in his argument for a context-responsive architecture, calling the New York Seagram building 'a clear, simple and easily read context-conscious urban form'.<sup>76</sup> This 'context-consciousness' would be a 'question of sensibility', Smithson: *'... it is not a question of continuing Mies' space and meanings that I am talking about – it is being aware of his space and meanings when making further buildings and spaces. A question of sensibility. As Mies was sensible not only of the Racquet Club, but of the flanking buildings, the "net" of New York, the nature of Park Avenue as an urban chasm – all as parts of his decision on how to build in that particular place. Mies's architecture at its marvellous best – for example at Lake Shore Drive or the early buildings on the IIT campus,*

73 Tom Schumacher, 'Contextualism: Urban Ideals + Deformations', in: *Casabella*, nr. 359-360, 1971, pp. 79-86.

74 According to footnotes in *Collage City* Rowe (or Koetter?) attended the lectures by Bakema and De Carlo: p. 182, notes 4 and 5, chapter 'After the Millenium'.

75 Peter Smithson, 'Architecture as Townbuilding', 1972, p. 4.

76 Remarkable, since we have come to understand the Seagram as the apotheosis of the ideas of negation, absence and autonomy after the Italian and American poststructuralist readings of Mies's work, in particular by Francesco Dal Co and K. Michael Hays.



*to use American examples of his work, is itself a sign of the growth of a sensibility about cities.*

*As I have said elsewhere there has been, in this Century, a slow-growing sensibility of the machine-served city. A seeing that its very existence and continued and continuous maintenance is a miracle, and that how delicate is its fabric.'*<sup>77</sup>

To recapture: for the Smithsons the 'newness' of the 'machine-served society' – the technology and market driven consumer society, the allegedly resulting loss of sense of place and community – was a central and constitutive part of the problem of a context-responsive architecture. This was quite unlike Colin Rowe's proposition, even though Rowe would start from an observation similar to that of the Smithsons that modernization, modern planning and modernist ideology exercised a 'disregard for context, distrust of social continuum', used 'symbolic utopian models for literal purposes', and held 'the assumption that the existing city will be made to go away.'<sup>78</sup> Rowe aimed to solve the problem with what Aldo Rossi called the 'technology' of architecture, an autonomous apparatus containing formal strategies of typology, composition and transformation to be deployed in a 'bricolage' way in order to revitalize the existing city fabric. A 'contextualist' architecture as proposed by Rowe didn't seem to consider technology or other aspects of modernization to have a particular relevancy to architectural discourse and the development of any architectural language or tectonics. On the contrary, the two references to contemporary technology that were included in the 'Excursus', the selection of inspiring examples for Collage City architects, were quite ironically positioned under the heading of 'Nostalgia-producing instruments'.<sup>79</sup>

### Habitat and Ecology: between the Particular and Total

As noted Peter Smithson claimed that 'context thinking' went as far back as the mid-1950s, and that context was a 'main centre of effort' in their work. However, retracing the Smithsons' writings the term context is not among the obvious ones deployed; most certainly it was not developed as a concept that structured their critique of modern architecture. So, what was Smithson actually referring to, when he made this claim? And what do we find when we look back at the writing and design production from the perspective of 'context thinking'?

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 6; the 'elsewhere' Smithson refers to may be the lectures he and Alison gave at TU Berlin, 1965 and 1968, also at the invitation of Ungers.

<sup>78</sup> Rowe and Koetter, 1978, p. 38.

<sup>79</sup> Cape Canaveral, and an unidentified oil rig, in: Rowe and Koetter, 1978, pp. 172-173.

In the Smithsons' writings the word context itself can be found as early as the mid-1950s, and the early Team 10 discourse. There is one brief statement that was part of the so-called Dubrovnik Scroll, one of the two presentations Alison and Peter Smithson brought to the CIAM 10 conference of 1956. The quote reads: '*Scale of Association was intended to induce a study of particular problems in a real context (ecology).*'<sup>80</sup>

The Dubrovnik Scroll was – as the name suggests – a paper scroll onto which the Smithsons had glued a compilation of their key ideas on the central issue of the CIAM discourse of those years, the one of 'habitat'. Again, since we are retracing the origins of 'context thinking', it should be noted that context was not among the presented key ideas presented, but 'identity', 'association', 'cluster' and 'mobility' were. The topic of habitat had already been introduced at CIAM VII, in Bergamo in 1949, when Le Corbusier himself had announced that it was necessary to replace the Charter of Athens with a Charter of Habitat, in order to address more adequately the urgent problem of global urbanization and housing.<sup>81</sup> The call for a new Charter of Habitat resurfaced in 1952, after the Hoddesdon CIAM conference, which had been dedicated to the topic of the 'Heart of the City', the 'fifth' function of the Functional City, due to the wishes of the organising British MARS group. In 1952, at the Sigtuna conference organised by younger CIAM members, it was decided that the issuing of a Habitat Charter should be the main effort for the ninth CIAM conference in 1953, held in Aix-en-Provence.<sup>82</sup> However, this ninth conference, with a few thousand in attendance, the biggest CIAM conference ever held, would not reach any agreement on the proposed charter. Confusion around the definition of the term habitat, that had already started at the Sigtuna meeting, continued and could not be overcome. From then on, the demise of the CIAM organisation set in, by now a familiar history.<sup>83</sup>

At the time the Smithsons would propound their ideas on habitat, modern architecture and the city at many occasions in slightly different versions. This included the Doorn Manifesto of 1954 that they co-authored (including the correspondence leading up to its formulation), the already noted Dubrovnik Scroll, and its counterpart the Valley Section grid of 1955-1956, demonstrating five prototypes for urbanization patterns responsive to local characteristics and differences, various articles published in *Architectural Design* and *Architectural Review*, in the *Architect's Year Book*, edited by Trevord Dannatt and Jane Drew, the Oscar

80 Reprinted in Newman, 1961, p. 69.

81 See Mumford, 2000, p. 187.

82 Ibid., p. 215 and further.

83 Mumford, 2000 and Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005.

Newman publication on the last CIAM conference in Otterlo in 1959, and the various editions of the *Team 10 Primer* as compiled by Alison Smithson.

As indicated in the quote from the Dubrovnik Scroll of 1956, in those years Alison and Peter Smithson took the idea of 'context' from ecological theory, equating context with ecology. The ideas of the Scottish biologist and social reformer Patrick Geddes were probably most influential here – something that becomes clear from the inclusion of the so-called Valley Section diagram of Geddes by the Smithsons in the Doorn manifesto. The diagram was devised by Geddes to conceptualize human settlement and its development. It was re-used for the definition of the theme of the tenth CIAM conference, for which the Smithsons prepared their Valley Section grid as a test and example to other contributors.<sup>84</sup> Another influence must have been Erwin Gutkind's publications such as *The Expanding Environment and Community and Environment. A Discourse on Social Ecology* both of 1953, and *Revolution of Environment* of 1944, in which the terms of environment and ecology were discussed with reference to the issues of housing, town planning and human association.<sup>85</sup>

Other statements by the Smithsons of those years also speak of this ecological analogy. In one of the drafts for the working method for CIAM X, Alison and Peter Smithson put:

*'It was decided (...) to try to formulate some way of thinking which would consider each problem of Urbanism as an entity, as a unique form of Human Association at a particular time and in a particular place.*

*This might be termed the ecological concept of Urbanism, a concept of obvious value when we are dealing with the problem of "Habitat".'*<sup>86</sup>

To the documentation of the last CIAM conference the Smithsons contributed a compilation of statements taken from the Dubrovnik Scroll and the Valley Section grid under the heading of 'The whole problem of environment'.<sup>87</sup> In a slightly different way they restated: *'To comprehend the pattern of human associations we must consider every community in its particular total complexity, in its particular environment. (The ecology of the situation).'*<sup>88</sup>

Some things should be noted here. First, in those early years the Smithsons took a positivist outlook on the 'whole problem of environment', although they would also made statements

84 Volker M. Welter, 'In-between Space and Society', in: Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005, pp. 258-263.

85 Gutkind also published extensively in *Architectural Design* in 1953. Between January and July he published six articles on vernacular architecture from China, Japan, Africa and North Africa, North America, the Pacific. Various authors (Tom Avermaete, Christine Boyer and Steve Parnell) suggested possible influences; see note 17 for images the Smithsons took from Gutkind publications; Jos Bosman might have been the first though, in his 'CIAM After the War: a Balance of the Modern Movement', in: *Rassegna*, nr. 52, December 1992, p. 17. On the side it might be noted that Gutkind was also a MARS member.

86 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Draft Framework 4, CIAM X, Instructions to Groups', typoscript published in: Alison Smithson (ed.), *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, The Architectural Association, London, 1982, p. 38; also reprinted in Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005, p. 48.

87 Newman, 1961, pp. 68-79.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

rejecting universalist objectives and propounding cultural ones instead.<sup>89</sup> There can be no doubt about this, despite Peter Smithson's later claim, that Team 10 thinking, as well as their own efforts, were aimed at the 'particular' rather than the 'total' complexity of community. At the same time, one can trace a first 'sensibility' for the 'particular'. Yet, this sensibility was only to be prominently foregrounded in their writings after the completion of the Economist Building and St Hilda's college. With regard to the discourse of the mid-1950s there are two other clues denoting this sensibility. First, there is the consistent, although critical referencing to Geddes' theory of urban planning. Geddes' theory underpinned the need for, as well as the superiority of planning interventions based on an awareness of local specificities rather than modernist blueprint planning and slum clearance.<sup>90</sup> And secondly, there is the Smithsons' polemic against the New Towns in Britain. In criticizing the planning of New Towns as too generic with no relation to local distinctions the Smithsons betrayed their culturalist inclination, almost taking on a plain regionalist approach to architecture and town planning.

In one of their first essays on town planning, 'An Alternative to the Garden City Idea' published in *Architectural Design* in 1956, the Smithsons listed three principles of town development as they saw fit to the task of architects in those years of post-war reconstruction and New Town planning.<sup>91</sup> According to the Smithsons the British New Towns and their buildings failed in producing any concept of identity or community, or as they called it 'human association'. The three principles of town development they listed describe a 'contextual' approach to planning and architecture. The Smithsons mentioned three principles: *'The first principle of town development should be: Continuous objective analysis of the human structure and its change.'* *'The second principle of town development should be: Establishing a positive relationship with the climate and the site.'* *'The third principle of town development: Extending and renewing the existing built complexes.'*<sup>92</sup>

The last principle is further explained: *'Any new development exists in a complex of old ones. It must revalidate, by modifying them, the forms of old communities. The architect is no longer the social reformer but a technician in the field of form, who cannot rely on community centres, communal laundries, community rooms, etc., to camouflage the fact that the*

89 In their draft statements on habitat: Alison and Peter Smithson, three page manuscript 'Habitat – Every culture produces type objects, (...)', dated 1954, published in: *Alison Smithson, The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, 1982, pp. 14-16; the notions culture and culturalism in the work of the Smithsons were discussed in Chapter 2.

90 A fine introduction into the ideas of Geddes and an example of the impact of his work in Britain is provided by: Jaqueline Tyrwhitt (ed.), *Patrick Geddes in India*, Humphries, London, 1947; see also the already referenced Welter, 2002.

91 Published in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, pp. 123-127; according to the Smithsons the text 'originated: 1954. Completed: 25.3.56. Finally revised: 30.3.56.' (p. 123) Originally published in *Architectural Design*, July 1956.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 123, p. 125 and p. 126; underlining by author.

*settlement as a whole is incomprehensible. Form is generated, in part by response to existing form, and in part by response to the Zeitgeist, which cannot be pre-planned. Every addition to a community, every change of circumstance, will generate a new response.*<sup>93</sup>

Thus the Smithsons proposed to abolish the masterplan. Whether this was a realistic proposition regarding the project for an ever more complex, bureaucratic welfare state redistribution economy is not to the point, but the kind of procedure they suggested is instead, namely that:

*'the procedure for developers would be, first a thorough briefing as to the existing facts and the principles deduced from them. Secondly, the individuals would assess the briefing and the form-demands of the existing built situation, and then get on with it. There should be no further controls.'*<sup>94</sup>

In the final paragraph a reference to Patrick Geddes is made, as a pioneer of 'survey techniques', and as an 'observer of organisms' in order to improve existing sanitary conditions, followed by the statement that 'today different compulsions are at work within us, our analysis has to be creative and not ameliorative. The end-product must be principles to guide a constructive urge, the principles of town building'.<sup>95</sup>

What do we see here? The first two principles are still in line with the Athens Charter, but the third one is a significant amendment in relation to existing structures and neighbourhoods, in particular the subsequent explanation which states that 'any new development exists in a complex of old ones'. Also the remark that 'form' is in part a 'response' to 'existing form', and in part to 'Zeitgeist', this is a profound shift away from the Athens Charter that stated that no 'aesthetic adaptation' of the new to the old should be made.

But acknowledging the 'form-demands of the existing built situation' didn't imply that the Smithsons were taking a historicist position, quite the contrary. They continued the modernist and avant-gardist proposition that new forms were needed to suit contemporary society. Concerning the desired forms for the house, street and district, they also stated:

*'It is important to realize that the terms used, street, district, etc. are not to be taken as the reality but as the idea, and that it is our task to find new equivalents for these forms of association for our*

93 Ibid., p. 126; underlining by author.

94 Ibid., pp. 126-127.

95 Ibid., p. 127.

*new non-demonstrative society.*

*The problem of re-identifying man with his environment cannot be achieved by using historical forms of house-groupings, streets, squares, greens, etc. as the social reality they represent no longer exists.'*<sup>96</sup>

One of the clearest statements of this orthodox modernist approach to town planning by the Smithsons is probably their London Roads Study of 1959, originally an entry for the private competition *New Ways for London: a London Traffic Competition*;<sup>97</sup> other examples being the competition entries for Golden Lane and Sheffield University, where the Smithsons too, refused to subject the new programme to the geometries of the old and projected a new pattern onto the older ones. The London Roads Study displays a profound Corbusian outlook to the restructuring of London and its congested centre. Perfectly in line with Le Corbusier's call to drive wide avenues through the towns the Smithsons proposed a vast web of new motorways for London to redistribute the economic pressures and to control intensity of use. The web served to create a new polycentric, 'cluster'-like urban form to fit the new patterns of use and community as triggered by mass car ownership and the new physical and social mobility brought about by the welfare state. Although less known, and certainly much less celebrated than the Berlin Hauptstadt scheme of 1958, which was also based on patterns of movement, the London Roads Studies was much more radical, in the sense that it uses the vast urban territory of the British capital as one gigantic *As Found* landscape, with the new motorways winding in generous curves from one historical 'fix' to another, from 'interchange' to 'node', ultimately bringing about a completely new urban perception and aesthetic they imagined to be in line with mid-twentieth century living. The web of the new road system projected onto the existing fabric of London appeared as if the result of Jackson Pollock action painting planning, perhaps the most 'Brutal' example of urban design ever by the Smithsons.

Alison and Peter Smithson presented the London Roads Study at the CIAM conference at Otterlo. Most notably, it received fierce criticism from Ernesto Rogers, just as the Smithsons would in reverse criticize Rogers' project for the Torre Velasca in Milan at the same conference, an argument that went down in history as the Otterlo incident.<sup>98</sup> At stake was the issue of context and how to deal with existing conditions. Rogers reproached the Smithsons for 'destroying history completely', to which Peter Smithson replied that:

<sup>96</sup> Newman, 1961, p. 68.

<sup>97</sup> A brochure of which is in the Alison and Peter Smithson archive, Frances Loeb Library at the GSD, Harvard University, BB025.

<sup>98</sup> See for instance: Alison Smithson, 'The Otterlo Incident', in: *Città Studi, Quaderni del Dipartimento di Progettazione dell' Architettura del Politecnica di Milano*, nr. 15, special issue on Ernesto Nathan Rogers, September 1993.

*'Soho is an area of great dereliction, everything is in decay. So we have grown a bigger sort of Soho but with the same sort of function. But we did not consider it necessary to respect the present architectural character of Soho.'*<sup>99</sup>

The London Roads Studies is probably the most iconoclastic of schemes as produced by the Smithsons even though it took the existing London as a point of departure. It remains unclear to what extent the Smithsons saw it as a sheer theoretical exercise to provoke debate on new ways of connecting in a mobile society, or a real proposition. The assumption that it largely concerned a conceptual proposition is sustained by the many other projects within London that demonstrate a much more sensitive awareness of the London fabric, not just the Economist, but also as modest a project as their Soho house, which after all was completely based on the small scale, almost as an homage to the humbler kind of brick structures of the West End. The Soho house held the premise of rebuilding war-damaged London by way of a bottom-up approach, very different of course from the welfare state policies then being put into place by the post-war governments, and very different from American-styled highway construction of the period.

The discussion on the Torre Velasca by Rogers' office BBPR focused on its architectural language, not so much on its site planning. Rogers claimed the specific shape of the building – the cantilevering block of apartments on top of the office block, together with the pitched roof and chimneys lend the whole project a medieval flavour – resulted from the wish to: *'give this building the intimate value of our culture - the essence of history –, we were never given to imitating the shapes and forms of the past, only understanding what has happened before us. This building is a sky-scraper in the very centre of Milan, five hundred metres from the Cathedral. It is at Milan's very historical centre and we found it necessary that our building breathe the atmosphere of the place and even intensify it.'*<sup>100</sup>

The Smithsons' took a moral stance on Rogers' tower. In a Loosian way Peter Smithson criticized the aesthetics of the project for being not 'open', but 'closed', an imposed style unable to absorb the various other products of contemporary culture, Smithson: *'my definition of a work of art (...) is that it is capable of living with other objects produced by the same culture (...). Now your building I suggest does not live in the same world as the artifacts of our day because the plastic language it speaks is of another time.'*<sup>101</sup>

99 Newman, 1961, presentation and discussion of London Roads Study on pp. 73-78.

100 Ibid., p. 93.

101 Ibid., p. 97.

Interestingly enough, the Otterlo incident happened just before the Smithsons secured their most prestigious commission, the Economist Building in the London district of St James's, and as such a highrise in a context determined by history as much as the site of Torre Velasca.

The Smithsons' Economist – three volumes sharing a raised plaza between them and of an architectural language largely based on American precedent, namely SOM and Mies' skyscrapers – is a much discussed and often praised project. In February 1965 the two leading British magazines, the *Architectural Review* and *Architectural Design*, published major reviews of the finished building group with plenty of drawings and photographs. Ken Frampton wrote an essay for *Architectural Design* in which he compared the group to the earlier Berlin Hauptstadt scheme of 1958 and how the building group represented a fragment of a possible larger approach to city planning. He praised the classicism that he recognised in 'its simple geometric order' but deplored the 'mannerism' of the smaller tower at the back of the plaza, which housed the dormitory of the adjacent Boodle's Club. By mannerism he meant the way in which the façade and its modular language had been manipulated and scaled down to suit the smaller tower on no apparent functional ground. Such mannerism he also found in the way the balustrading was treated, a simple echoing of the profiles and sizes of the supportive façade columns, as well as in the 'appliqué mullions' to the plant rooms at the top of the buildings, and the timber bay that was added to the Boodle's Club to cover and make good use of a former light well, and which was designed in the form language of the new volumes.

Regarding the issue of context, Frampton made three points, one regarding the continuity of the street and the Bank office block, another regarding the space on the plaza and a third regarding the language of the architecture. Context in itself, seems to be understood by Frampton as an issue of creating continuities. The first point is the clearest: Frampton had nothing but praise for the way the division of the programme into three separate volumes – the newspaper headquarters, the bank office and the Boodle's extension – was handled by the Smithsons, and how the smaller volume of the bank had been used to create a continuous street front, in terms of street alignment, heights as well as the chosen cladding material, namely roach-bed Portland stone. Also the introduction of the extra space of the plaza, offering an



additional pedestrian connection between St James's Street and the back of the block (Bury street) was hailed by Frampton as an innovative element that to him deserved to be followed. He was more critical of the actual shape in relation to the 'interplay of scale' between the volumes which creates a spatial dynamism – he spoke of a *trompe l'oeil* – that in the final instance was not awarded since the smaller residential tower would not sustain this dynamism programmatically. Another effect he deplored was how the detailing of the cladding system that protected the supportive structure also created a 'scenery façade' of a 'theatrical' effect, since at the plaza level the entrances to the tower were organised by way of setbacks, and the cladding was not continued all around the freestanding columns there, thus creating the effect of a front and back as if the facades constituted some sort of set design. The third issue concerned the issue of language and technology, according to Frampton the Economist emphasized: *'once again the present crisis in architecture; the problem as to the legitimate process through which we should create form and enclose space at this time both for the society of the present and the immediate future.'*<sup>102</sup>

The Economist succeeded here in creating continuity in the sense that it, according to Frampton:

*'incorporates successfully industrialized products and processes, and conversely that it legitimately looks to the past in the classicism of its simple geometric order.'*<sup>103</sup>

It remains interesting to read how Frampton talked of the classicism of the Economist and how its form solution was dependent on 'the "acropoli" of the ancient past' next to the 'direct line of modern development that leads from Sullivan to Mies', whereas Reyner Banham would accuse the Smithsons of giving in to Picturesque sentimentalities. In his 1966 book of the New Brutalism Banham still made a prudent judgment: *'It may offer a vision of a new community structure, but it does so upon the basis of an ancient Greek acropolis plan, and in maintaining the scale and governing lines of tradition-bound St James's Street, on which it stands, it handles the "street idea" very tenderly indeed.'*<sup>104</sup>

102 Kenneth Frampton, 'The Economist and the Hauptstadt', in: *Architectural Design*, February 1965, pp. 61-62.

103 Ibid.

104 Banham, 1966, p. 134.

In Banham's 'Revenge of the Picturesque' of 1968 the gloves come off, and the young friends of the earlier ICA meetings, and not just exclusively the Smithsons, had shown to be 'adepts' of the *Review* policies, after all, following Pope's command to 'consult the

genius of the place in all', much to Banham's regret. And just as in the 1966 book the Smithsons' Economist and Stirling's Leicester Engineering Laboratories were the key buildings that marked the end of the Brutalist cause for *une architecture autre*, with these building projects the former 'angry young men' had now matured and demonstrated the total triumph of 'the unacknowledged Picturesqueness of the Picturesque's avowed enemies'.<sup>105</sup> Banham's feeling of betrayal must have been triggered most, one assumes, by Cullen's depiction and analysis of the Economist in characteristic Townscape fashion. According to Banham, Cullen's 1965 review was preceded by the Smithsons hiring Cullen as early as 1962 to prepare the perspectives of the Economist project.<sup>106</sup>

Cullen's ten-page discussion of the Economist was all about how the buildings formed a group or 'family', and as such how there were basically two games being played, one internal between the family members so to speak, and one between the group and the outer world. Cullen's review has been largely overlooked, perhaps because of its apparently straightforward interpretation, the lack of conceptual rigour – a structural flaw of Townscape perhaps –, or perhaps because of the still unlikely overlappings between the Townscape campaign of the *Architectural Review* editors and the Brutalist image the Smithsons had cultivated, and which Banham had successfully cast as profoundly anti-Picturesque. And here, the two parties suddenly met and seemed in perfect agreement with each other. Cullen – just as Frampton – admired the way the new bank, while being 'new and white', was also 'perfectly adjusted street architecture'. He was also positive about the 'variations in scale and temperament, not a rigid application of the pattern' with regard to the different façade treatments of the building group: *'If the tower building is taken as the norm or father figure, then the residential tower is a more delicate copy to half scale, the bank building has tall windows on the piano nobile facing St James's Street whilst the windows of the projecting bay are domestic and elegant in proportion.'*<sup>107</sup>

Whereas Frampton exercised a puritan severity with regard to the perceived mannerism, Cullen noted in a gentle tone: *'I would have been glad to see even more variation in detail and finish.'*

Commenting on the way the Smithsons broke the programme into three pieces Cullen carefully observed how the new ensemble and its composition brought about both continuity and separation: *'This process of taking to pieces and assembling with skill and*

105 Reyner Banham, 'Revenge of the Picturesque: English Architectural Polemics, 1945-1965', in: John Summerson (ed.), *Concerning Architecture. Essays on Architectural Writers and Writing*, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, London, 1968, p. 273; Banham mentioned two other buildings: Harvey Court in Cambridge by Leslie Martin and Colin St John Wilson and the Times buildings by Llewelyn-Davies and John Weeks.

106 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

107 Gordon Cullen, 'The "Economist" Buildings, St James's', in: *The Architectural Review*, February 1965, pp. 115-124.

*insight is at the root of creative planning. Serial vision itself is not a continuity, but the repeated juxtaposition of two things: the existing and the revealed view. The only way we can humanize the environment is to discover how it falls apart so that we can get inside the synthesis. The art of site assessment lies in finding the lines of cleavage.'*<sup>108</sup>

Ultimately, the bank building holds the key to the success of the project. With the tower 'just hidden behind the roof-line of the street', the bank ensures that the streetscape remains intact only giving away the reality of the project when coming closer, the bank acts like some sort of bait:

*'Rather like setting a sprat to catch a mackerel, this modest and well adjusted piece of street architecture is quickly revealed to be part of a much greater complex. It is at this point that the change from traditional street-by-street planning to a pedestrian precinct-group complex occurs. All is revealed: the dominant tower, the echoing but delicate residential block, the bay window and the steps leading up to the raised piazza where the relationships of all members exist in calm communication.'*<sup>109</sup>

With the 'piazza' and the views through the blocks a whole new game starts: 'the piazza never appears as an enclosure of itself but as a space in relation to the outer space'. A 'possessed landscape' or a 'charged' atmosphere results, both between the buildings on the podium that works as a 'carved enclave' and between the enclave and the cityspace outside. The one view that sums it all up according to Cullen is the view from the podium back into St James's Street and its eighteenth century architecture, in his words: 'the interplay between the central complex and the netting of the outside world'.

So, how to view this Townscape appropriation, also in view of Banham's identification of Picturesque planning here, whereas Frampton spoke of the classicist geometry? The Smithsons would maintain their own opinion naturally, redeveloping their Brutalist game of associations into a plea for an architecture 'without rhetoric', based on their experience of building the Economist.

Once again, what becomes clear is that the Smithsons succeeded in absorbing and integrating the various ordering techniques while elaborating modernist principle into a new coherent 'system' one might say, tailored to the situation. It is in that sense too, that the Economist succeeds in refuting Rowe's proposal for a Collage

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.

City; the Economist is still a project for a comprehensive language rather than a bricolage of a multitude of possibilities. It also succeeds in refuting Rowe's claims that the assumed modernist ideal of a free-standing building (as if Bramante's Tempietto or Palladio's Villa Rotonda are suddenly precluded from classicism) cannot be integrated into a historical fabric. Thus, to once again grasp the tension between the two positions, one should set the 'geometries' of the Economist plaza and how it succeeds in bringing into play the geometries of the surroundings as well, as shown by Cullen, against Rowe's proposition of the Campidoglio and its geometry as the ideal image of city space, also for the late twentieth century.

### Interventions and Fragments

Looking at the Smithon designs such as the Economist one cannot but notice how they often concern fragments, and that they are interventions in damaged or ruinous and impoverished contexts. The early competition schemes for Golden Lane and Coventry Cathedral of course, but also the Robin Hood Gardens housing estate, which is set in the London Docklands, could actually be characterized as a rather early urban renewal project. Since it is one of the few built projects, it is conventionally considered to be the main representative of the Smithsons' ideas for large scale housing. Yet, as built, Robin Hood Gardens is nothing of the kind. It is an enclave, not a superstructure like the one proposed in their UR-grid of 1953 at Aix. The site, the outcome of piecemeal decision by the local council and political struggle with local citizens complaining about their poor housing conditions, was set between abandoned docks and warehouses, dilapidated, war damaged lower class housing and large scale traffic thoroughfare such as of the nearby East India Dock Road and the Blackwall tunnel approach bordering the site.

The site planning might be considered the result of an expanded As Found approach, a careful observing of existing patterns, connecting routes, the few remaining neighbourhood shops, and responding to the special features of the site such as the East India Dock basin, the church of All Saints, views to the Thames river, the tunnel ventilation shafts and the old power plant on the south bank. The As Found idea of 'picking up, turning over and putting with...' literally returned in the way the Smithsons re-used

the rubble of the demolished structure for the creation of two mounds in the central green space of the estate, thus creating a land art-like intervention reminiscent of the English countryside.

Re-using the old, the leftovers, revitalising the existing and abandoned – it runs like a thread through the Smithsons' work and thinking. It is polemically there in the various early competition schemes for Golden Lane, Coventry Cathedral and Sheffield University; with the projects for the Economist, their country escape in Upper Lawn and slightly later the dormitory building for St Hilda's a much more conscious approach seems to have set in, working with ambiguities and reciprocities of the existing and the new rather than one of clearcut opposition in a purist, modernist way.

Eventually, this aspect can be detected in all sorts of projects from the Smithsons design production ranging from the urban to the smallest of domestic arrangements, the fitting-in of cabinets, as in the case of the Anthony Caro house, but also the houses the Smithsons lived and worked in themselves. In the case of the houses designed for the film maker Joseph Losey and the writer Wayland Young existing trees and even complete cottages were fully integrated. There is a series of projects for the ageing cities in Europe and the Mediterranean, in particular Berlin, from the redesign of the bombed city centre crossing former east-west sectors to the insertion of new pathways by re-using the vast abandoned railyards of the German capital, but also the Paris Parc de la Villette scheme or the Damascus Gate proposal for Jerusalem up to the siting of the Acropolis museum in Athens. There is the set of interventions done at the 1960s Bath University campus, and two series in Germany for Axel Bruchhäuser, his own house and the Tecta factory; and ultimately, the whole range of sketches and design thoughts made in the context of the ILAUD summer schools and published in the ILAUD Year Books.

Especially the latter series, for Tecta and ILAUD, show an approach in which the search for complete image systems of the early 1950s made way for a revelling in devising interventions of the most modest yet poetic kind: suggestions for special bollards and benches to accommodate visitors to the Siena Piazza del Duomo, proposals for porches and gates marking new, informal connections in the city or landscape, tree huts and bay windows in case of the German Hexenhaus. Mostly, these proposals concern fragments that are aimed to either restore, repair or

reconnect, while at the same time framing views and spatial experience.

The development of the Smithsons writing and designs suggests this is nothing but the natural outcome of an approach grounded in 'context thinking'. Mid-1960s, 20 September 1965, at the invitation of Oswald Matthias Ungers, Peter Smithson delivered a lecture at the TU Berlin, with its now well-known title of 'Without Rhetoric'. Smithson concluded his lecture by stating that:  
'As architects, we have opted for the 'model mode of operation', – of seeing each building as a unique fragment, but a fragment which contains within itself the formal and organisation seeds which could lead to a freely-arrived-at group-form.'<sup>110</sup>

And instead of modernist, welfare state master planning the way to proceed was:  
'A mode analogous to the town-building of the middle-age.'<sup>111</sup>

Similar trends of thought shimmer through in various other texts, such as the short 'A Fragmentary Utopia', of 1966, and much more pessimistic in 'The Violent Consumer' of 1974, and here very much related to the demise of the welfare state project.<sup>112</sup> As early as 1960 they spoke of 'the whole concept of a mobile, fragmented, community' connecting the affluence of the post-war consumer society to a breaking up of that very same community.<sup>113</sup>

110 Peter Smithson, 'Without Rhetoric. Some Thoughts for Berlin', published in the series *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur*, Heft nr. 2, February 1966, TU Berlin, Lehrstuhl für Entwerfen und Gebäudelehre.

111 Ibid.

112 Both in *Architectural Design*, the former by Peter Smithson, the latter by Alison.

113 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Upper Case*, nr. 3, 1960, unpaginated; reprinted as: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Urban Structuring*, 1967, p. 50.

114 Largely collected in Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, 1994; the next Chapter 6 will extensively discuss this notion of the fragment of an enclave.

115 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The 1930's*, Alexander Verlag, Berlin and TECTA Möbel, Laufenerstraße, 1985, p. 13; reprinted as part of 'Staging the Possible', in: *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, p. 23, and *ILA&UD Year Book 1981, 1982*.

In the 1980s we find that the idea of a 'fragment of an enclave' appears as a key idea in various texts and lectures on inhabitation.<sup>114</sup> And perhaps ultimately, in the mid-1980s we find a recapture of 'Some Lines of Inheritance' in the booklet *The 1930's*, produced for Bruchhäuser and Tecta, the following statements by Peter Smithson:

'The Modern Movement is not a legacy in the sense of a sum of money to be spent or speculated with ... it is a genetic stance, a responsibility ... something to live up to. To what have the four generations so far addressed themselves?'<sup>115</sup>

Smithson then distinguished four generations listing their 'intention' and key 'image':  
'1st generation, '20's: To announce l'Esprit Nouveau.  
*The polychromatic object.*

*2nd generation, '30's: To embrace the machine for the common good.  
Cool social equipment.*

*3rd generation, '50's: To make new fragments which engage with the existing urban fabric.*

*The net and the lattice.*

*4th generation, '80's: To signal the changes of use within the existing fabric.*

*Devices and decorations.'*<sup>116</sup>

The thinking in terms of generations becomes much more fluid than in the case of the 'Three Generations' essay. The generations are not necessary authors, but buildings and changing design attitudes; both Rietveld and Le Corbusier would embody the first two generations, while the Smithsons and Team 10 stood for the latter two. Also the time lapses suggest a free interpretation in order to demonstrate the development as Smithson saw it: from the object to equipment to net and lattice and ultimately to decoration, and from a spiritual-socialist idea to a practice of interventions within and transformations of the existing.

Mid-1980s is also the moment the Smithsons came up with a new overall concept that summarized their intentions and idea of order, namely that of Conglomerate Order, or Conglomerate Ordering. The concept is completely developed through various lectures for De Carlo's ILAUD summer school programme. The Smithsons themselves mentioned two different moments of origin: in *The Charged Void: Architecture* they state that 'conglomerate ordering' was the 'phrase invented in 1983 to describe formulations that were coming into being in our work',<sup>117</sup> while in *Italian Thoughts*, which also holds the essays explaining the new concept, they state:

*'The words "Conglomerate Order" came from A.S. in Spring 1984: as a formulation it lies at the centre of this period; a formulation that expands, gets further definition with every year.'*<sup>118</sup>

After the dissolution of Team 10 the exchange between the Smithsons and De Carlo was continued through the ILAUD summer schools, founded and continued by De Carlo from 1976 until as late as 2002.<sup>119</sup> Peter Smithson attended each year, and both Alison and Peter wrote essays, or smaller statements for De Carlo's two publication series, the magazine *Spazio e Società* and the ILAUD year books. It was through these contributions that the Smithsons would clarify and further develop their idea of Conglomerate Ordering.

116 Ibid.

117 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, 2001, p. 541.

118 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, p. 103, note 4.

119 International Laboratory for Architecture and Urban Design, founded in 1974, first summer school 1976, last 2002; see also Mirko Zardini, 'ILAUD 1974-2004. Giancarlo De Carlo and the International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design', in: Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005, pp. 216-217; see also Mirko Zardini, 'From Team X to Team x', in: *Lotus International*, nr. 95, 1997, pp. 76-97.

'Conglomerate Order' was both a revision and summary of the Smithsons' early ideas on building as a 'place oriented' practice, instead of an 'object oriented' approach. The aspect of continuity and regeneration of existing structures would be reconsidered, just as the relation between the whole and the specific or in other words, how the architectural project could be an act of both unifying and differentiation. Key terms would now be territory, fabric, density, rather than patterns, mobility or growth and change. And instead of designing complete city centres an approach of interventions was proposed, making connections, creating pathways, and marking edges or boundaries.

Within the Team 10 discourse one can already trace the responses to the issue of context and the various ways it has been reconceptualized. At Team 10 meetings there were some occasions when the issues of context and the regeneration of the existing urban fabric were addressed. In hindsight key projects would be Oswald Matthias Ungers' competition entry for Grünzug Süd, Cologne (1962-1965), and Aldo van Eyck's design for the Deventer town hall (1966), both presented at the 1966 meeting in Urbino.<sup>120</sup> Another interesting, and relatively early example would be Christopher Alexander's contribution; he gave a presentation at the meeting in Royaumont in 1962. Alexander would speak of 'environment', 'existing structure' and 'existing pattern of the village', not of 'context' as he would do in his 1964 *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*. But undoubtedly, the foremost contribution to the subject was made by Giancarlo De Carlo, especially through his patient research of the town of Urbino and the realization of various complexes and interventions for the town and for the University of Urbino, such as Il Magistero (1968-1976), or the sophisticated Operazione Mercatale (1970-1983).<sup>121</sup> De Carlo carried out his meticulous survey of Urbino between 1958 and 1964. The survey also included the devising of a masterplan for future development of the small, historic university town. It was published in 1966 – the same year as Rossi's and Gregotti's celebrated books –, and translated into English in 1970. It displays a spirit very much akin to the one of the Smithsons with regard to the question of 'continuity and regeneration'. In the chapter 'Shaping the Form of the City Through Detailed Plans' De Carlo posed the key question: *'Two basic problems plague the preservation of all historic centers. First, can an old form retain its significance when the activities of the city itself have changed radically? And second, can a modern architectural form be successfully woven into an older architectural fabric?'*<sup>122</sup>

120 See for a documentation Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005, pp. 152-155.

121 Giancarlo De Carlo, Urbino. The History of a City and Plans for Its Development, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1970, originally published in Italian: *Urbino. La Storia di una Città e il Piano della sua Evoluzione Urbanistica*, Marsilio Editori, 1966.

122 De Carlo, 1970, p. 125.



From 1965 onward De Carlo's input in Team 10 would gain in importance. In 1965 he presented his student housing project for Urbino at the first Berlin meeting. The following year De Carlo invited Team 10 to gather at this very project, then just completed. On that occasion he would present his masterplan for Urbino. A second meeting of Team 10 organized by De Carlo was in 1976, in Spoleto. Its general theme was twofold: 'participation and the meaning of the past'. The organisation of the Spoleto meeting coincided with the first annual ILAUD summer school, which brought both a widening of the Team 10 circle and a continuing of the discourse with kindred spirits and students.<sup>123</sup> As already noted, Peter Smithson would attend each year. Since Alison and Peter Smithson refused to attend the 1966 meeting in Urbino – among other things they were discontented with the number of outsiders invited – it seems fair to conclude that the exchange between De Carlo and the Smithsons attained a much more intense and special character from the 1976 Spoleto meeting onward.

In many ways the propounding of a Conglomerate Order can be regarded as a retake, and reformulation of the New Brutalism and the As Found approach. And just as context thinking was understood by the Smithsons as a break with Renaissance traditions – 'a tradition of "ideas", a tradition of "abstraction", a tradition of buildings as simple mechanisms, and (...) fashion' as they had put it to their Cornell audience in 1972 –, so was the now proposed Conglomerate Ordering taking cues from among others what they called the Gothic and the Doric, the pre-modern 'others' to the geometric control of neo-classicism or Cartesian rationalism. Central to this new proposition was a non-visual understanding of architecture and its experience. The Smithsons listed as one of the characteristics of a building of the Conglomerate Order that it:

*'is hard to retain in the mind... elusive except when one is actually there; then it seems perfectly simple.'*

Moreover, they would say that a 'building of the Conglomerate order':

*'harnesses all the senses: it can accept a certain roughness, it can operate at night; it can offer especially, pleasures beyond those of the eyes: they are perhaps the pleasures of territory that the other animals feel so strongly. [it] has spacial presence – more awesome than object presence – something not remotely reducible to a simple geometric schema or communicable through two dimensional images.'*<sup>124</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Zardini, 'ILAUD 1974-2004', in: Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005.

<sup>124</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The Canon of Conglomerate Ordering', in: Italian Thoughts, p. 62.

The couple clarified the new concept for Conglomerate Ordering by way of drawing a canon of buildings of that order. Looking at the buildings included one finds a few former Brutalist ones, most notably four post-war masterpieces in *béton brut* by Le Corbusier: the Shodhan House, Ahmedabad (1952), the Mill Owners' Association Building, Ahmedabad (1954), La Tourette, near Lyon (1960) and the Carpenter Centre, Harvard University (1964). From the Team 10 discourse we find the Smithsons' own building for the School of Architecture in Bath (1982-1988), and from fellow Team 10 members also university buildings: De Carlo's Il Magistero, and Ralph Erskine's library for the Stockholm University (completed in 1983).<sup>125</sup>

As if still polemicizing with Banham and Townscape-ists alike the visual is consistently denied importance, instead we find that 'roughness', 'lumpishness' and 'weight' reappear as characteristics, but not the conventional overdimensioning of lintels and beams as criticized before by the Smithsons which they would still find unacceptable. There is a whole list of exact requirements. A building of the Conglomerate Order is about 'variable density plans and a variable density section', structural elements 'diminish in thickness as their load or need for mass diminishes', there is 'irregular column and wall spacing, responding to use and natural placing', it is 'dominated by one material ... the conglomerate's matrix', and it seems 'pulled down to meet the ground (not the ground built-up to meet the building)' and 'has a capacity to absorb spontaneous additions, subtractions, technical modifications without disturbing its sense of order, indeed such changes enhance it'.<sup>126</sup>

Ultimately then:

*'we experience a fabric being ordered even when we do not understand it or are "lost". We may not be able to see where we are, but can nevertheless navigate through our capacity to feel light and warmth and wind on our skins; sense the density of surrounding fabric; know that behind that wall are people; smell who has been here, or where someone has gone.'*<sup>127</sup>

Another Brutalist characteristic that recurs with the canon of Conglomerate Ordering, is the concept of topology but completely redefined, not so much as a new mathematical order but as the geometry of the territory. At the end of *Italian Thoughts*, the Smithsons quote Banham approvingly from his 1966 book, at the same time it also seems a conscious misreading in an

125 Ibid., pp. 66-67.

126 Ibid., pp. 62-63.

127 Ibid., pp. 62-63.

attempt to re-appropriate the New Brutalism discourse, since the quote is also a reference to the Smithsons' Sheffield University competition entry – one of the key examples of une architecture autre in Banham's 1955 New Brutalism essay; the quote reads: *'As the situation stood in 1954-55, however, this estimate involved a complete misunderstanding of the Brutalist concept of order. That concept was not classical, but topological: its implementation on a site such as that of the Sheffield University project, would have involved judging the case on its merits (or rather, dominant factors) such as the land-form, the accommodation required and the finance available, rather than in accordance with some pre-established classical or picturesque "schema".'*<sup>128</sup>

Routes, pathways and patterns of movement re-appear once again, with the Sheffield reference of course; routes, pathways and patterns of movement as connecting and identifying devices, 'experienced beyond the visual...' as the Smithsons kept insisting.

Touching on the way architecture and town planning interlock they arrive at the following statement:

*"That a building's first duty is to the fabric of which it forms part" is, we believe, that understanding which separated the third – Team 10's – generation of the Modern Movement from the one which preceded it – the generation of the nineteen 'thirties.'*<sup>129</sup>

This topological or territorial aspect – Alison Smithson speaks of 'topographical sensitivity' and 'topographical languages'<sup>130</sup> – just as the favouring of 'spacial presence' over object presence, are concomitant to the Smithsons' conviction that any building should be regarded and designed as a part of a larger whole, a fabric as they say themselves – both in space as in time. This is a relatively new element, which was not an explicit part of the early Brutalist moment between 1953-1955. After the attempts to synthesize the Brutalist 'handling of materials' with an approach to town planning by the end of the 1950s, this is ultimately achieved in the formulation of the canon of a Conglomerate Order.

A city of the Conglomerate Order as envisaged by the Smithsons would be the outcome of forces that slowly, yet continually evolve over long term periods of time, and work with or against each other. The characteristics of the urban spaces of the Conglomerate Order are quite consistently described in a most fragmentary way and almost always unsystematically, yet always reflective

128 Ibid., p. 103, footnote 3.

129 Ibid., p. 66.

130 Alison Smithson, 'In pursuit of lyrical appropriateness', 1975-1976; in *Spazio e Società*, 1976; and in: *AA Quarterly*, nrs. 2-3, 1977, pp. 3-23, as 'The City Centre Full of Holes', p. 17.

as well as speculative. In the many published and unpublished contributions to the ILAUD summer school we find their definitions and genealogies. The titles and its key words give us some clues of the directions the Smithsons were thinking: 'To establish a territory', 'Tracks for the territory', 'Territorial density', 'Use and re-use', 'Devices and decorations', 'Some further layers', 'Staging the possible', 'Another way', 'Parallel inventions', 'Markers on the line', 'Markers on the land', and so forth and so on.<sup>131</sup>

Much of this was of course, a continuation and elaboration of earlier writings. In particular one can point to such texts as 'The Route and the Pavilion' of 1965, and 'Density, Interval and Measure' of 1967, or the series on Collective Design of the early 1970s.<sup>132</sup> Next to place-consciousness, there is an awareness of time, as well as the passing of time, and the manifold ways time is experienced – by the way one traverses the territory (cf. density, interval and measure), and by the way one 'reads' the layering of time, and the continuing presence of the past in the here and now.

A final reference perhaps regarding the Smithsons' sensibility for site specificity and context, concerns their lifelong investigation of the classical sites of the Mediterranean. The Greek studies of the South African architect Rex Martienssen, but also the ones by Vincent Scully and how he viewed the interrelations between the architecture of the temples, their position in the landscape in relation to ancient cosmology were formative to the Smithsons.<sup>133</sup> Walking routes and pathways are key again, with a special role for the Acropolis and Parthenon of course, following not only Le Corbusier's footsteps, but also Pikionis' interventions in the Ancient landscape. Just as all sorts of Picturesque references and elements are absorbed by the Smithsons, so is the classical omnipresent, also in their thoughts on the Conglomerate Order. It is present in the 'Three Generations' essay of course, most notably by the inclusion of the work of Francesco di Giorgio in Urbino, but also the town of Urbino itself, the main place of study for De Carlo's summer schools, next to Sienna, San Marino, and Venice which also figure prominently in the Conglomerate projects and writings of the Smithsons. Di Giorgio's buildings are also firmly integrated in the Conglomerate canon, the fortresses, two churches as well as two palazzi. The lessons taken from classicist precedent are manifold – one modest example may perhaps suffice to enlighten, the Ansty Plum garden path.

131 See note 3; the Smithson conversation with De Carlo (and the other participants to the ILAUD Summer school programme) is worthy of a separate research project.

132 All published in *Architectural Design*.

133 Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods. Greek Sacred Architecture*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1962; the Smithsons wrote various essays on the classical most notably Peter Smithson, 'Theories Concerning the Layout of Classical Greek Buildings', in: *AA Journal*, February 1959, pp. 194-209.

Bought by Roger Rigby, a friend of the Smithsons, the 1950s house, which is designed in a Brutalist fashion by the architect David Leavitt, sits on a steep slope that is also its garden. To make the whole site accesible and to re-activate the garden so to speak, a garden path is introduced: a concrete track that consists of a ramp and steps, and that zigzags from one side of the site to the other, thus introducing a much gentler and slower pace of climbing up to the house and its terraces. Owner and designers compare the intervention half-jokingly, half seriously to Ancient Greek architecture and the route up to the temple of Delphi. The 'events' along this track leading up to the holy place as well as the various vistas help to enliven the territory. Thus, the track creates a new possibility for an unified experience, an order 'found' *in situ*, that is key.

### The Conglomerate

The issue of fragments, fragmentation and a practice of intervention and transformation begs the question what principles of ordering are still at work here, and how far have we travelled from the cosmological classical as well as modernist objectivism. 'Conglomerate' it must be noted was a concept already used by Paolozzi in his early work, even though the Smithsons don't seem to recall this.<sup>134</sup> Hence, it seems fair to say that the conglomerate is in more than one way a revisiting of the New Brutalism; it is a continuation of the search for the possibility of that 'complete image system', which the Smithsons were after in the early 1950s and for which they looked at the work of Paolozzi and Pollock.<sup>135</sup>

At the same time, it is a transformation; a complete system is possible only up to a point, apparently, a fragment of a complete set, as well as a set of fragments that works as a conglomerate, or a cluster, and not a collage. There is an idea that more systems are at work at the same time, which have to work together, to get things done so to speak. Especially, within the Team 10 discourse this idea is developed as a critique of the megastructure concept, and the Albertian idea as propounded by Van Eyck specifically, that a city is like a big house, and a house like a small city. The conglomerate is then not a total system but a way to think the plurality of systems together.

134 Until recently there was not much research available regarding Eduardo Paolozzi and the New Brutalism. The possible connections between the Smithsons's idea for Conglomerate Ordering and Paolozzi's definitions of 'conglomeration' remain unresearched. See for more on Paolozzi and 'conglomeration': Alex Potts, 'New Brutalism and Pop', in: Crinson, Zimmerman (eds.), *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern. Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, New Haven, 2010, pp. 29-52; for more on the New Brutalism and Paolozzi see the special *October* issue, nr. 136, Spring 2011, edited by Alex Kitnick and Hal Foster, esp. the essays by Ben Highmore, Alex Kitnick and John-Paul Stonard.

135 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Urban Structuring*, p. 34; and *Upper Case*, nr. 3, 1960.

Not by accident, the conglomerate is devised after the crisis of the 1970s. It can be said that this development of the Smithsons' ideas paralleled the more general, shifting condition of the Western European welfare state: from an all-inclusive, centralist and unifying project to its economic and ideological demise in the 1970s and the subsequent fragmentation of public space under the new dominance of the consumer society, neo-liberal ideology and further economic globalization.

This moment of crisis did not only concern the larger societal issues, for the Smithsons it concurred with a new phase in their career: having finished Robin Hood Gardens (1972) and published *Ordinariness and Light* (1970) and *Without Rhetoric* (1973), when Peter was just 50 and Alison 45, they seemed to have arrived at a temporary moment of closure. With the economic crisis and no jobs for the office, the new wind of postmodernism and the falling apart of the welfare state as a guiding framework, it might be argued that the Smithsons also faced a crisis of creativity. At any rate, it brought a new moment in their intellectual development, which forced them to find new directions in design, to reformulate older ideas, which ultimately crystallized in what they called the Conglomerate.







## 6 THE GREAT SOCIETY

### Between Welfare State Ideals and Consumer Drives

#### Affinities and Critique

It was Herman Hertzberger who rather bluntly stated that in architecture Team 10 and CIAM were the equivalent of socialism, while immediately adding that one is not supposed to say that.<sup>1</sup> Alison Smithson put it slightly differently but in an equally sweeping way when she said that the modern movement was 'a parallel cultural phenomenon to the first brave successes of socialist ideals.'<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Frampton critically questioned such postulates in his essay 'Des vicissitudes de l'idéologie' published in the special issue of *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* of 1975 that was devoted to Team 10.<sup>3</sup> Working under welfare state conditions Team 10 seemed unable to escape the shadow of CIAM and modernist planning that was criticized by the youngsters of Team 10. At the same time, neither CIAM nor Team 10 pursued an explicit political agenda. Society, community and the collective were usually addressed in the most general of terms. From the late 1960s onward, in the context of an ideologically radicalized and politically conscious academic culture this would render modernism and modern architecture most vulnerable to such devastating critiques as formulated by for instance Manfredo Tafuri, or Charles Jencks.<sup>4</sup>

Alison and Peter Smithson too, hardly ever explained their position in terms of politics or ideology. Speaking of the role of the architect in society they preferred to take up a moral stance, upholding ethics rather than aesthetics as their Brutalist credo goes. Yet, in their writings we find their affinities, which unmistakably were on the left, with what they called the 'socialist dream' and the project of the welfare state in general. Still, the Smithsons' relationship with the British Labour party was an ambiguous one, to say the least. Their prestigious job for the British embassy in Brasilia (1964-1965) was aborted by the Labour government of Harold Wilson without a follow-up job, according to Peter Smithson because the government thought the project unaffordable.<sup>5</sup>

1 Clelia Tuscano, 'I Am a Product of Team 10. Interview with Herman Hertzberger', in: Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005, pp. 332-333; he immediately added that 'you are not supposed to say it.'

2 Alison Smithson, 'The Violent Consumer. Or Waiting for the Goodies', in: *Architectural Design*, nr. 5, 1974, pp. 274-279.

3 Kenneth Frampton, 'Des vicissitudes de l'idéologie', in: *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, pp. 62-65; edited and republished as Chapter 3 of: Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture. A Critical History*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1980.

4 Manfredo Tafuri, *Progetto e utopia: Architettura e sviluppo capitalistico*, Bari, Laterza, 1973; American edition: *Architecture and Utopia. Design and Capitalist Development*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1976; Dutch edition: *Ontwerp en Utopie. Architectuur en Ontwikkeling van het Kapitalisme*, SUN, Nijmegen, 1978; Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-modern Architecture*, Academy Editions, London, 1977.

5 Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Smithson Time. Peter Smithson & Hans Ulrich Obrist. A Dialogue*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2004, pp. 24-25; according to Kenneth Frampton this marked a hinge point in the Smithsons' career with no other projects under construction after the Economist, at various occasions in Delft, and during conversations.

The trajectory travelled by the Smithsons with regard to the welfare state can be tracked by their Golden Lane competition entry of 1952 and the realization of the Robin Hood Gardens housing estate in 1972.<sup>6</sup> Although the design projects show an obvious continuity, the related writings and statements indicate a change of heart, as well as growing discontent with the course of the British welfare state project. One notes a clear split when comparing the early texts on the Smithsons' idea of human associations and the retrospective essays such as 'The Violent Consumer' of 1974; a split almost impossible to resolve, between their loyalty to the larger whole as a moral obligation and their deeply felt dissatisfaction with the actual form the welfare state had taken. In Team 10 circles they criticized what they called the 'Labour Union Society', thus giving vent to their anger and disappointment regarding the way the welfare state idea had been derailed as a consequence of the prevalent materialism and populist rhetoric in politics and the media. They did so, for example, at the Team 10 meeting in Holland in 1974. Among others Bakema's town hall for Terneuzen was visited then, just as Hertzberger's Centraal Beheer office building in Apeldoorn. To the Smithsons the latter was an exemplar of a consumerist approach, an obsession with choice, whereas the former was a testimony to an already 'historic' period when there was still a mutual trust between a community and its local government.<sup>7</sup>

Alison Smithson, in particular, would attack politicians for what she considered false promises and unfair redistribution that corrupted the organisation of everyday life; she would uphold the idea of a 'real' socialist society based on individual responsibility and the reciprocal obligations between society and its citizens, something she saw in 1930s Sweden in particular, but also 1950s Holland or 1970s Switzerland.<sup>8</sup> One might question though, to what extent the Smithsons had a clear understanding of the political systems of these countries, for they all successfully deployed as a key welfare state principle the Keynesian model of redistribution of wealth and supply, which the Smithsons seemed to have contested almost as a matter of principle, as they believed too much state subsidy would undermine free, individual choice, while creating too much bureaucracy.

Having said that, the idea of some sort of an egalitarian society was central to the Smithsons' thinking. In 1989, in a piece entitled 'Heritage', which was written for De Carlo's *Spazio e Società*, Alison Smithson discussed the editorial policies of

6 For an appreciation of Robin Hood Gardens in relation to the British welfare state building programme see Nicholas Bullock, 'Building the Socialist Dream or Housing the Socialist State? Design versus the Production of Housing in the 1960s', in: Mark Crinson, Claire Zimmerman (eds.), *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern. Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, Studies in British Art, nr. 21, The Yale Center for British Art and The Paul Mellon Centre of Studies in British Art, New Haven, 2010, pp. 321-342; see also Dirk van den Heuvel, 'Robin Hood 2001. The Colonisation of the Modern', in: *OASE*, nr. 57, 2001, pp. 98-103; re-published as 'Recolonising the Modern: Robin Hood Gardens Today', in: *Architecture is not Made with the Brain*. *The Labour of Alison and Peter Smithson*, Architectural Association, London, 2005, pp. 31-37.

7 A report of the so-called Rotterdam meeting, which in fact included many site visits around the Dutch country, can be found in: Alison Smithson (ed.), *Team 10 Meetings*, Rizzoli, New York, 1991; a short comment from Hertzberger can be found in the interview by Clelia Tuscano: 'I Am a Product of Team 10. Interview with Herman Hertzberger', in: Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005, pp. 332-333.

8 Alison Smithson, 'Heritage: *Carré Bleu*, Paris, May 1988', and 'A Comment, Long Lost and Found Again, on Atelier 5 Conversation. Can the Swiss Have Their Apple and Shoot It?', both published in: *Spazio e Società*, nr. 45, 1989, pp. 100-103 and p. 123; I added Holland too, because of footnote 4 in the 'Heritage' statement with a reference to 'Dutch rational hopefulness', but also based on Smithson's discussion of Bakema's Townhall of Terneuzen during the 1974 Team 10 meeting in Rotterdam.

the French-Finnish magazine *Le Carré Bleu* founded and run by André Schimmerling. In it, she unequivocally expressed her high expectations with regard to the welfare state: 'that dream of a friendly society that now seems far-fetched'.<sup>9</sup> Sweden was to her the ultimate example, representing the:

*'Scandinavian invention of Social Democratic architecture, with its clean blend of rational functionalism and of response to use, related to climate worthiness that was rooted in a still rememberable vernacular.'*<sup>10</sup>

And:

*'(...) to my generation, the flags of Stockholm's Exhibition of 1930 signalled a joyful promise of a friendly, trusting society that believed socialism meant a togetherness of one extended family.'*<sup>11</sup>

She further explained, and here, her own idea of the 'dream' becomes even more pronounced:

*'The remarkable thing about that Scandinavian equitable dream – where an architecture, made to serve social, educational, health programmes, was given on a head-count allocation – was that it this way overrode any previously acknowledged grouping (...), to instead give services directly to people, whoever, wherever they may be: this way it made redundant the term and concept of provincialism. That escape from provincialism – so that people were to all be wonderfully equal, equal, equal – was a remarkable concept; it implied that somehow society could be self-organizing (in contrast to the authoritarianism then current in Russia, Germany and Spain), that individuals would take responsibility for input. Team 10 and Carré Bleu inherited these attitudes of personal moral responsibility.'*<sup>12</sup>

Although talking about social democracy and the socialist dream, the equality Smithson was after was clearly not the socialist kind. In the final instance, to be equal implied it was possible to also accept difference and change, to have options and choice, which the Smithsons considered to be absent from the egalitarian levelling and erasing of difference through the New Towns programme for instance, and of which as already noted, the Smithsons were highly critical. But in the 1989 text, criticism of the welfare state system is present only insofar as the initial dream, its proclamation and creative energy had dried up as early as the 1950s according to Alison. It had exercised a major impact on their own work through such 'other moderns' as Asplund and Aalto, plus what she called 'Danish draughtmanship', and the 'data files on the dimensions of gestures and objects in everyday use' that they

9 Alison Smithson, *Spazio e Società*, nr. 45, 1989, p. 101.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.; the relationship between Aalto and Brutalism is an interesting topic for further research. In their criticism of Banham's 1966 book Aalto's work was used as a key reference.

14 Hans van Dijk, "'Wat is er nu helderder dan de taal van de moderne architectuur'", interview met Peter Smithson', in: *Wonen-TA/BK*, nrs. 19-20, 1978, pp. 31-34.

15 Ibid., p. 31; the interview was published in Dutch only, all following quotes are translations by the author since the original transcript does not survive; the original Dutch reads: 'Desgevraagd zou ik toen gezegd hebben dat ik ook een socialist was. Het leek nu eenmaal een goede zaak. Ik veronderstel dat iedere generatiegenoot van mij hetzelfde zegt. Als U Bakema dezelfde vraag zou stellen zou U hetzelfde antwoord krijgen, omdat een generatie het zo voelde.

Je zou kunnen zeggen dat vanaf 1943 de oorlog niet slechts uitgevochten werd om de Duitsers te verslaan, maar om een meer vrij, meer egalitaire regeringsvorm te installeren in zowel de landen die overwonnen werden als in de overwinnende landen. Het werd een kruistocht om de sociaal-democratie te vestigen. Dat gevoel hield aan tot 1955.'

16 Ibid.; original Dutch text: 'het was een poging om een vormconcept aan dat gezamenlijke sociale concept toe te voegen. In steden als Bath, Nancy, Karlsruhe of 18e eeuwse Berlijn kan je het stadsplan niet voorstellen zonder architectuur, zonder een formele taal die het ondersteunt. (...) Wat in de directe naoorlogse periode leek te ontbreken was een ideëel beeld van hoe een nieuwe stad er uit zou zien. Wij probeerden een beeld te geven van wat latent aanwezig was in de sociaaldemocratische planning.'

17 Ibid.; original Dutch text: 'Ik geloof dat je moet terugkeren van de bureaucratische staat naar een situatie waarin het individu veel meer verantwoordelijkheid gegeven wordt. Want het bleek dat het naoorlogse egalitarisme bedrieglijk was. Er bestond een klaarblijkelijke vrijheid op politiek terrein, dat wil zeggen, je kon kiezen tussen verschillende partijen. Maar de partijen leken zo op elkaar en ze hadden het financiële systeem op zodanige wijze gestructureerd dat het nauwelijks enig verschil maakte.'

used in their own office, the language of both the temporary nature of Scandinavian summer houses and the permanence of the 'brick solidity' of the Stockholm town hall by Ragnar Oostberg, and all this ultimately 'ending with Säynätsalo', Aalto's multifunctional town hall complex, completed in 1951.<sup>13</sup>

In an interview of 1978 between Peter Smithson and the Dutch critic Hans van Dijk, the issue of the welfare state and state patronage emerged as a major topic.<sup>14</sup> Quite uncharacteristically, Smithson made some extensive and candid statements regarding his and Alison's largely a-political stance. Assessing the immediate post-war period and the way new planning institutes started to reorganize the building industry Smithson mentioned: *'At the time I would have said I was a socialist as well. It simply seemed a good cause. I suppose everyone of my generation would say the same thing. If you would ask Bakema the same question you would get a similar answer, because a generation felt it this way.*

*One could say that from 1943 onward the war wasn't only fought to beat the Germans, but also to establish a more free, egalitarian government, in the countries defeated as well as the victorious ones. It became a crusade to establish social democracy. This feeling lasted until 1955.'*<sup>15</sup>

About their own attempts to develop an alternative for New Town planning, such as their idea of 'cluster', Smithson said: *'(...) it was an attempt to complement that shared social idea with a form idea. In cities like Bath, Nancy, Karlsruhe or 18th century Berlin one cannot imagine the urban plan of the city without the architecture, without a form language supporting it. (...) What seemed missing in the immediate post-war period was an ideal image of what a new city would look like. We tried to propose an image of what was latently present in social democratic planning.'*<sup>16</sup>

And distancing himself from the politics of egalitarianism: *'I believe one should come back from the bureaucratic state to a situation in which the individual is given much more responsibility. Because post-war egalitarianism turned out to be deceptive. There seemed to be a political freedom, that is, one could choose between different parties. But the parties were so similar, and they had structured the financial system in such a way, it hardly made any difference.'*<sup>17</sup>

Just before the winter of discontent and its paralysing union strikes and sky-rocketing inflation rates in Britain, and one year

before Margaret Thatcher would rise to power by crushing Labour in 1979, Smithson formulated his idea of a working democracy, which would hold much more room for the market:

*'If you want a truly working democracy, you should be offered options at all levels. In a society with a fixed class structure, the only change you should introduce is when someone has certain capacities, he should be enabled to offer his talent, to enjoy it and have others profit from it. But in all other aspects of society the 19th century theory was better: instead of delegating all choices to the central government, you'd better have the market anticipate the way society develops.'*<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, Smithson felt uncomfortable with the turn in the conversation, feeling forced to disclose his affinities with a meritocratic kind of society rather than a socialist welfare state; he claimed his position was principally a-political:

*'You are asking me questions of a political character. In fact, we hardly discussed politics at the time. Only recently, it became important to be political while in a normal conversation. It depends on the circumstances in which one finds oneself. Only when something goes obviously wrong – when buildings are badly treated or when patronage is completely state controlled or in the hands of large banking institutions – one gets interested in other models of organisation and the way to obtain them. But if everything goes fine, it doesn't matter. Then your only concern is your own work.'*<sup>19</sup>

It is not just the political disinterest that is striking, it is also the change of tone when compared to the early 1950s, which at the time was high spirited and optimistic. In their 'Urban Re-identification' manuscript of the early 1950s the Smithsons wrote, perhaps naïve and overconfident:

*'We have to try to re-identify man with his environment – to arrive at an idea of city in which every building, every lamppost and street sign will seem part of a predestined harmony of which man is part. All else is futile.'*<sup>20</sup>

The all-encompassing ambition was for that 'complete image system (...) where every piece was correspondingly new in a new system of relationship'.<sup>21</sup> This was the Smithsons' heroic moment: to search for a new, coherent formal language of a 'random aesthetic reaching-out to town-patterns not based on rectangular geometries, but founded in another visual world' appropriate to the new post-war situation.<sup>22</sup> Cluster, scatter, patterns of association, patterns of growth and change, patterns of mobility,

18 Ibid., p. 32; original Dutch text: 'Daarom, als je een echt werkende democratie wil hebben, moet je op alle niveaus keuzemogelijkheid geboden worden. In een maatschappij met een starre klassestructuur is de enige verandering die je aan moet brengen dat, in het geval iemand over capaciteiten beschikt, hij in staat gesteld moet worden zijn talent aan te bieden, zich erin te verheugen en anderen ervan te laten profiteren. Maar op alle andere punten van de maatschappijstructuur was de 19e eeuwse theorie beter: je kunt beter de markt laten inspelen op de manier waarop de maatschappij zich ontwikkelt dan alle keuzen delegeren aan de centrale regering.'

19 Ibid.; original Dutch text: 'U stelt me vragen die een politieke inhoud hebben. In feite praatte we toen heel zelden over politiek. Pas de laatste tijd is het belangrijk gebleken om in een normaal gesprek politiek te zijn. Het is afhankelijk van de situatie waar je in verkeert. Pas als het zonneklaar is dat er iets misgaat – als er slecht met gebouwen wordt omgegaan of het patronaat geheel in handen van de staat of de grote bankinstellingen is – raak je geïnteresseerd in mogelijke andere organisatiemogelijkheden en de manier om die te verkrijgen. Maar als alles goed gaat doet het er niet toe. Dan bekommer je je alleen om je eigen werk.'

20 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 38.

21 *Upper Case*, nr. 3, 1960; Alison and Peter Smithson, *Urban Structuring*, Studio Vista, London / Reinhold Publishing Company, New York, 1967, p. 34.

22 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 11.

houses riding the landscape, and so forth and so on, these were all part of this quest. This was an ambition shared with their Team 10 friends and the discursive fights between them very much focused on the new sort of language appropriate for the post-war egalitarian society. Arguably though, the Continental colleagues were much more engaged with this project than the Smithsons' detached fellow-travelling as depicted by Peter, Jaap Bakema and Georges Candilis, in particular, who ran large architectural firms controlling the realisation of numerous projects that were part of the various welfare state programmes. Bakema might even be called the ultimate architect of the Dutch welfare state having proposed such monumental schemes as the Amsterdam Pampus plan of 1965. Ralph Erskine, working in Sweden, should be mentioned as well of course, who would, like Giancarlo De Carlo, experiment with a participatory approach in planning and housing as early as the 1960s.

23 There is quite some literature on the topic of welfare state building policies available, the already referenced books by John Gold, and Nicholas Bullock for instance, but also: Andrew Saint, *Towards a Social Architecture: The Role of School Building in Post-war England*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987, and Stefan Muthesius, Miles Glendinning, *Tower Block. Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993.

24 I. Chippendale (pseudonym for Alison Smithson), 'The LCC was our Uncle', in: *Architectural Design*, September 1965, p. 428.

25 The Architects Coop for instance, also responsible for the Brynmawr Rubber Factory; an interesting counter-example is Richard Seiffert, architect of Centre Point and many other commercial projects in Britain, an until now overlooked strand of modernist architectural production of the post-war decades.

26 See also I. Chippendale (pseudonym for Alison Smithson), 'The LCC was our Uncle', 1965; there is far too much innuendo to fully comprehend Smithson's text, but this passage may be characteristic: 'The LCC was a home from home (...) for the first job of the provincial in London [i.e. the Smithsons themselves, DvdH] it gave short hours, no real burden, leaving time for floodlit evenings, theatre queues, competitions; for odd people – what a problem the well qualified man out of Auschwitz – as one employer said, "I've got several borderline cases, just normal ones, one problem like that even in the building would tip them over." But the LCC was big, 1600 "designers" alone. It could be, and was, everyone's Uncle.'

With regard to the British context, the post-war project of the welfare state set the larger framework for much, if not most of architectural practice during the post-war decades. Until the mid-1950s the building industry was completely state regulated as part of the reconstruction effort and rationing of building resources.<sup>23</sup> Although by 1954 all sorts of measures concomitant to a war economy were largely lifted, national and local planning policies still controlled developments until the end of the 1970s, when Thatcher and her Tory party came to power and abolished various welfare state institutions, among those the Greater London Council, the successor to the London County Council, effectively bringing an end to an era of a unique kind of state patronage. It has often been noted that in the 1950s the LCC architect's department was the largest architecture firm ever in the western world. In a short statement written under the pseudonym of I. Chippendale, Alison Smithson mentioned that 1600 designers were working at the LCC at the time.<sup>24</sup> British architects working in private practice too, were largely dependent on welfare state commissions, sometimes exclusively so.<sup>25</sup>

The Smithsons were no exception to this situation. They started their career within welfare state institutes. They got their first employment as architects in the school building department of the London County Council,<sup>26</sup> and second, they got the opportunity to establish themselves as independent architects by obtaining a welfare state job by winning the competition for the Hunstanton

Secondary School. This commission, as any commission for a school in those years, was part of the much larger school building programme in Britain that was an outcome of the new Education Act of 1944. Hence, it can be argued that while the Smithsons' career followed a rather idiosyncratic path with the office deliberately kept small, at this particular point they fitted into the general pattern of architects loyally serving the building up of the post-war welfare state.

But there is more. It is striking to see how the Smithsons' initial leftist leanings shine through throughout their early writings. Despite Smithson's dismissal of politics being a subject for much debate we find quite a few strategic references to Labour politics structuring their texts of the 1950s as compiled in their anthology *Ordinariness and Light*. Especially Aneurin Bevan's ideas and his political testimony of 1952, *In Place of Fear*, were an explicit reference. Bevan (1897-1960) was the Labour minister who installed the National Health Service, one of the key infrastructures of the post-war British welfare state. His Ministry of Health was also involved in drawing up the new Towns and Country Act of 1947 enabling the execution of the large scale housing programmes for the next decades, including the planning of the New Towns. The very first chapter of *Ordinariness and Light* bearing the straightforward title 'The Problem', opens with a quote of Bevan's: '*The Great Society has arrived and the task of our generation is to bring it under control.*'<sup>27</sup>

Bevan's mentioning of the Great Society was – as might be recalled here to demonstrate the larger web of socialist ideas at play – a reference to Graham Wallas, author of the 1914 book bearing the very same title of *The Great Society*.<sup>28</sup> The socialist idea of controlling the Great Society through state intervention and legislation meant controlling industrialization, including its driving forces of capitalism and entrepreneurship, as well as other forces of relentless modernisation such as the one of technology.

Today, the phrase the 'Great Society' is better known through US president Lyndon Johnson's appropriation as part of his so-called war on poverty that was a central aspect of his economic policies of the mid-1960s. Here, with Johnson, the Great Society stands for the institutes of the welfare state, the benefactors of the poor and working classes, involving new laws to secure access to education and health care. In the case of Wallas' original definition, the phrase meant quite the opposite representing the

27 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 18. The quote is taken from Aneurin Bevan, *In Place of Fear*, William Heinemann Ltd., London 1952; more references to Bevan's book on pp. 18, 19, 22, and 68.

28 Graham Wallas (1858-1932), psychologist, educationalist, leader of the Fabian Society and co-founder of the London School of Economics; he published *The Great Society* in 1914. Since *Ordinariness and Light* was published in 1970, and contains a couple of revisionary notes inserted in the older, original texts, the reference may also be an allusion to the US president Johnson, who famously declared the 'war on poverty' in 1964, under the same heading of 'The Great Society'. However, the Bevan reference predates the Johnson reference with twelve years, and Bevan is the source explicitly mentioned by the Smithsons themselves.

shift from a society organised around direct personal relations to one of impersonal associations, from a society founded on local and national institutions to one structured by global systems and networks, not unlike the shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* as described as early as 1887 by Ferdinand Tönnies, Wallas' German contemporary.<sup>29</sup> And although it would be an anachronism to equal the concept of the Great Society with the one of the spaces of flows as defined by Manuel Castells,<sup>30</sup> it is certainly related to it to the extent that the notion of the Great Society is characterized by the new global condition following nineteenth century industrialisation and the establishment of multinationals and international geo-politics.

In his book, Wallas broadly painted such a new society governed by a global web of trade and industry, effecting the daily life of every citizen, surprisingly perhaps we can already recognize the concept of the megalopolis:

*'In those countries where the transformation first began a majority of the inhabitants already live either in huge commercial cities, or in closely populated industrial districts threaded by systems of mechanical traction and covering hundreds of square miles. Cities and districts are only parts of highly organised national states, each with fifty or hundred million inhabitants; and these states are themselves every year drawn more effectively into a general system of international relationships.'*

*Every member of the Great Society (...) is affected by this ever-extending and ever-tightening nexus. A sudden decision by some financier whose name he has never heard may, at any moment, close the office or mine or factory in which he is employed, and he may either be left without a livelihood or be forced to move with his family to a new centre. (...) Even in those English villages into which the Great Society may seem to have scarcely penetrated the change of scale is already felt. The widow who takes in washing fails or succeeds according to her skill in choosing starch or soda or a wringing-machine under the influence of half-a-dozen competing world-schemes of advertisement.*

*(...) all know that unless they find their way successfully among world-wide facts which reach them only through misleading words they will be crushed. They may desire to live the old life among familiar sights and sounds and the friends whom they know and trust, but they dare not try to do so. To their children, brought up in the outskirts of Chicago or the mean streets of Tottenham or Middlesborough, the old life will have ceased to exist, even as an object of desire'<sup>31</sup>*

29 Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 2005; the first 1887 edition had as subtitle: *Abhandlung des Communismus und des Socialismus als empirischer Culturformen*.

30 In his famous three volumes of *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, published between 1996 and 1998, in particular the first volume 'The Rise of the Network Society'.

31 Graham Wallas, *The Great Society. A Psychological Analysis*, MacMillan and Co., London, 1932, pp. 3-5; original edition 1914.



The latter claim of a disappearance of nostalgia may be disputed as we know now, but clearly Wallas' picture of the new global condition already holds various key elements that would remain characteristic for urban culture and everyday life in the twentieth century, such as the impact of the media, the change of scale, and social mobility, be it forced or voluntarily – elements which also consistently resurface in the Smithsons' reflections on modern society and architecture. Wallas wrote his book just before some of the 'greatest' events of the twentieth century: before the Great War of 1914-1918, before the Great Depression following the Wall Street crash of 1929. And when Aneurin Bevan once again referred to the Great Society, in 1952, the idea had now become intrinsically connected with those devastating experiences as well as with the event of the Second World War and the unmatched destruction it brought on Britain and the everyday life of its citizens. Bevan's urgent demand that the Great Society was to be finally brought under control, and the Smithsons' reminding of this, cannot be uncoupled from those larger historical events.

Moreover, to finally complete the picture, within the context of the Cold War – as originating within the end game of the Second World War – the welfare state project attained an extra geo-political dimension that should be borne in mind with regard to national and cultural politics. It is a subtext that is almost always actively present in the debates of those decades, and surely so in Bevan's statement. Through the welfare state – the Great Society brought under control so to speak – it became possible to devise what is often loosely referred to as the 'third way', a new Western European identity which – to put it in very general terms – was to realise an alternative to both the capitalist, market-driven economy of corporate USA on the one hand and Soviet Union Communism and the occupied satellite states in Eastern Europe on the other.

### Questioning the Welfare State

In itself it may be rather easy to see how the politically moderate, Fabian idea of controlling the Great Society and its violent forces of modernisation aligns with the Smithsons' idea of a 'machine-served society' as defined by them from the mid-1960s onward. In this ideal world of a machine-served society the available 'machine energy' is at the service of a 'lyricism of control', of 'calm as an ideal.' It is about 'energy ordered and controlled',

about ordered flows of traffic too, and about the need to reduce urban densities, all in order to prevent 'overcrowding', since overcrowding would mean 'violence' and 'stress'. Ultimately, this late twentieth century world with its 'technology and its mechanisms under control' is about enabling 'each individual' to 'choose his degree of contact ... or protection ... and thereby pleasure ... in the machine-served society' according to the Smithsons in 1973.<sup>32</sup>

That Peter Smithson in 1978 proposed to embrace the idea of the market seems quite at odds with the statement of 1973, just as it sits most awkwardly with the Smithsons' disgust with commercialism and any display of material wealth. Perhaps it indicates only the extent to which Peter and Alison must have been disappointed by the British welfare state politics. Their emphasis on the individual and individual choice may once again be read as parallel to Aneurin Bevan's *In Place of Fear*, especially its final chapter, in which Bevan explained his idea of a 'Democratic Socialism'. Bevan's Democratic Socialism was a careful construction of a position between the two extremes of Soviet Communism and a politics of economic *laissez-faire*. Here, Bevan designated individual well-being as the ultimate measure of socialist progress and civilisation:

*'There is no test for progress other than its impact on the individual. If the policies of statesmen, the enactments of legislatures, the impulses of group activity, do not have for their object the enlargement and cultivation of individual life, they do not deserve to be called civilised.'*<sup>33</sup>

Bevan defined his Democratic Socialism as a project for the 'ordinary man and woman', as something 'essentially cool in temper', against the 'taste' for war as the greatest adventure of all (Fascism), against 'the abandonment of private judgment' (Communism), and against conspicuous consumption, media hype and public spectacle.<sup>34</sup> Such values are also to be found throughout the Smithson writings.

Yet, one could argue, that it was exactly the provision of welfare for all that would bring about a system that would paradoxically corrode the very same values it was based upon. In the 1970s, with the welfare state system fully expanded and social mobility as a normalized condition, culturalist notions of ordinariness, the importance of education and belonging turned out to be incompatible with individual choice and aspiration as construed

32 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 1973, pp. 14-19.

33 Aneurin Bevan, *In Place of Fear*, 1952, p. 168.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

by mass media and peer pressure. This is something the Smithsons themselves must have realised too, and it is perhaps another reason why they started to talk about the 'shift' in their work from the late 1970s onward, with a special focus on the more ephemeral aspects of architecture, once again inhabitation of course, but more than ever the ephemeral aspects of dressing, decoration, layering, while creating events, rather than theorising all sorts of structuralist notions as 'patterns', which involve the long term and deep structure so to speak.<sup>35</sup>

However, this shift does not simply concern the identification of a change within the work of the Smithsons itself, a new direction so to speak. This shift enabled them also to look back from the 1970s and critically review their earlier design production, to see it in a new light as it were. They would reconceptualise their own body of work or as Peter Smithson himself put it: the shift is not so much about a fixed moment to be identified somewhere within their design production, it concerns the moment when they actually became aware of this shift, when it became an idea as Smithson would say, an idea that could redirect from then onwards the design production as well as retroactively tease out new meanings from the older work.<sup>36</sup>

When Smithson talked about this shift, it was in an almost detached way, as if it didn't concern himself and Alison but someone else. Slightly earlier, this realization of a turn in their work and its larger context of the welfare state got a much more acute expression, namely in their series of 'Collective Design' essays written for *Architectural Design* between 1973 and 1975, most particularly Alison's revisionist essay of 1974 'The Violent Consumer, or Waiting for the Goodies'.<sup>37</sup> The 'Collective Design' series was dominated by Alison Smithson's contributions, not only because she delivered the four longest essays, but because of the way she addressed the welfare state project, its flawed politics and the need to find new ways to proceed as architects and as a society. Peter opened the series with 'Initiators and Successors' in the October issue of 1973, trying to redefine the architect's special contribution to collective design in general terms, while refraining from any political commentary and at the same time explaining the recently completed Robin Hood Gardens in terms of such responsibility to create a 'place' that clearly communicated the manner in which it was 'to be used':

'So that its occupiers are left in no doubt, yet be unaware of having been "told", which is intended to be the quiet part and which is the

35 At a couple of occasions: Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Shift*, Academy Editions, London, 1982, with an early publication in the special issue of *Wonen-TA|BK*, nr. 19-20, 1978, which was devoted to the Smithsons; Max Risselada has discussed some aspects of this shift in his essay 'Another Shift' in: Van den Heuvel, Risselada, 2004, pp. 50-58.

36 In the interview with Hans van Dijk, in: *Wonen-TA|BK*, nr. 19-20, 1978, p. 34.

37 The series consists of the following seven essays:

Peter Smithson, 'Initiators and Successors', in: *Architectural Design*, nr. 10, 1973, pp. 621-623;

Alison Smithson, 'The Violent Consumer. Or Waiting for the Goodies', in: *Architectural Design*, nr. 5, 1974, pp. 274-279;

Peter Smithson, 'Lightness of Touch', in: *Architectural Design*, nr. 6, 1974, pp. 377-378;

Alison Smithson, 'Re-appraisal of Concepts in Urbanism', in: *Architectural Design*, nr. 7, 1974, pp. 403-406;

Alison Smithson, 'Collective Quality', in: *Architectural Design*, nr. 11, 1974, pp. 719-721;

Alison Smithson, 'The Good Tempered Gas Man', in: *Architectural Design*, nr. 3, 1975, pp. 163-168;

Peter Smithson, 'Making the Connection', in: *Architectural Design*, nr. 5, 1975, pp. 271-274.

Robin Middleton notes that the series wasn't preconceived as such.

*noisy, where one is expected to walk and where to drive, where to play, where to deliver or bring the ambulance. The form-language of the building to indicate and enhance use.'*<sup>38</sup>

It is this kind of claim, together with the idea that one is 'building toward a community structure', that made the Smithsons vulnerable to fierce criticism when the newly built estate was vandalised by its inhabitants and didn't live up to expectation.<sup>39</sup>

Alison Smithson started her contributions to the series only half a year later with 'The Violent Consumer. Or Waiting for the Goodies', in the May issue of *Architectural Design*, which was written in a very different tone, much more combative and fiercely criticizing the welfare state project, rampant vandalism and individual response or the lack of it. She continued thus with three other contributions: 'Re-appraisal of Concepts in Urbanism' (nr. 7, 1974), 'Collective Quality' (nr. 11, 1974) and 'The Good Tempered Gas Man' (nr. 3, 1975). Peter contributed two other texts, laterally addressing the issues at stake: one minor piece called 'Lightness of Touch' (nr. 6, 1974), which was made up of lecture notes from 1972, and a final text his transcription of another lecture 'Making the Connection' (nr. 5, 1975). Both texts discussed the language of modern architecture, the first one expanding and amending Le Corbusier's five points into a language 'without rhetoric' and open to accommodate the 'signs of occupation' of the users, an argument that reiterated that of their book *Without Rhetoric* of 1973. The last lecture also stressed the need to further develop the language of architecture, once again synthesizing Wittkowerian cosmology with Miesian philosophy, and highlighting Bath as a perfect demonstration of the fusion of the neo-Palladian 'ideal' with the Picturesque 'real', and ultimately putting forward Shadrach Woods' Free University complex in Berlin as the one example of the possibilities offered by the 1970s, a building that according to Smithson was firmly rooted in the larger modern tradition harking back as far as Alberti.

Within the work of the couple, both Robin Hood Gardens and 'The Violent Consumer' mark the moment that 1950s culturalism breaks down as a concept to understand developments in society at large and to develop comprehensive planning models in response. Especially, Alison Smithson seemed to have been acutely aware of this, or at least she was the one who most needed to reflect on this. From the earliest Team 10 correspondences it becomes clear that the Smithsons assumed, as so many, that the

38 Peter Smithson, 'Collective Design: Initiators and Successors', in: *Architectural Design*, nr. 10, 1973, pp. 621-623; especially the so-called verbal illustration nr. 1, p. 621.

39 Charles Jencks in particular chose Robin Hood Gardens as a target in his 1977 book *The Language of Post-modern Architecture*.

specific 'culture group' one was to build for, was the one of the middle classes.<sup>40</sup> The Smithsons wrote among others that the welfare state was to cause a 'levelling down of middle and upper classes' and that the 'removal of economic limits to working class aspirations' would eventually lead to a similar lifestyle pattern for the former working classes. They believed that welfare state policies together with a new consumerism would bring about the levelling of class differences quite naturally. The new, post-war middle class way of life would provide some sort of generic framework keeping it all together.

In 1957, in a published conversation between a still thirty-something Peter Smithson and the distinguished planners Sir William Holford and Arthur Ling, in which they discussed the developments in CIAM, Smithson expressed such convictions unambiguously. Speaking of a 'new sort of social set-up' driven by 'different sorts of status-urges' he summarized: *'As we have all been saying, we are in a state of change towards a middle-class society which will correspond roughly to the sort of set-up one has in Sweden or in the United States of America.'*<sup>41</sup>

The reference to the USA shows that the new consumer culture was considered formative here, next to the arrangement of welfare. This becomes evident too, from the way Smithson views new developments in advertising as related to the shifting class consciousness of the period:

*'Take the simple example that one is always discussing, the impact of the ad-man. I mean that mass-production techniques have produced mass-communication techniques and the ad-man has changed working class objectives fantastically even in the last five years. And if you imagine what is going to happen in the next five years – that, for example, the shape of the man's car, the shape of his refrigerator, the shape of his kitchen equipment, how he works in his kitchen, the shape of his living room, will be dictated, not by architects or the culture instigators of previous epochs – the "avant garde" artist and his clients, the upper class, but by industry which will itself produce a new pattern of culture simply by having to get rid of its products.'*<sup>42</sup>

The argument runs very close to the Smithsons' 'But Today We Collect Ads' statement of 1956, but here, the visual spectacle of advertising and its values are much more explicitly placed against the background of an assumed shift toward a new middle class way of life, and not so much as part of an avant-garde project for

40 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'HABITAT', undated manuscript of the year 1954, published in: Alison Smithson (ed.), *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, The Architectural Association, London, 1982, pp. 14-16.

41 William Holford, Arthur Ling and Peter Smithson, 'Planning Today', in: *Architectural Design*, June, 1957, pp. 185-189.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

an aesthetic revolution as in the case of the 1956 statement. Take for instance the way car and kitchen are – once again – pointed out as key characteristics of the new home fit for this new lifestyle. The two page piece 'But Today We Collect Ads', along with their participation in the Independent Group, earned the Smithsons the status of forerunners of Pop Art, even though they themselves dismissed Pop Art as a formalist game, and of propagandists of 'low brow' ordinariness, in which the paraphernalia of the American consumer culture – cars, refrigerators and, of course, the splashy colour ads promoting them – became the new totems of post-war European society. This was of course triggered by the Smithsons incredibly strong and poetic riddle-statement, still often quoted, and from which the title of the statement was derived:

*'Gropius wrote a book on grain silos,  
Le Corbusier one on aeroplanes,  
And Charlotte Perriand brought a new object to the office  
every morning;  
But today we collect ads.'*<sup>43</sup>

The Smithsons – at this particular point very much in line with Independent Group fellows as Toni del Renzio or Lawrence Alloway – speculated on how advertising would conflate the various taste groups in society, from the popular to the educated:

*'Advertising has caused a revolution in the popular art field. Advertising has become respectable in its own right and is beating the fine arts at their old game. We cannot ignore the fact that one of the traditional functions of fine art, the definition of what is fine and desirable for the ruling class and therefore ultimately that which is desired by all society, has now been taken over by the ad-man.'*<sup>44</sup>

43 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'But Today We Collect Ads', *Ark: the Journal of the Royal College of Art*, November 1956, pp. 49-50; 'but today' was a pun on the name of the 'This is Tomorrow' show, paraphrasing an advert from the 'This is Tomorrow' exhibition catalogue for the roofing contractor S.J. Woodford, 'But today?', first advertisement page in the back of the unpaginated 1956 catalogue.

44 Ibid. It should be noted that the favourite 'ad-man' of the time would have been Herbert Bayer; well-known through Alexander Dornier's book *The Way beyond Art*; the spatial lay-out of the Smithsons' collaboration with Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Parallel of Life and Art', was taken from Bayer; Bayer also figures in the Smithsons' celebration of the first generation of modern architects, the special issue of *Architectural Design* of 1965, 'The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture', reprint 1981, p. 63.

45 Ibid., p. 50.

Hence it was concluded:

*'Mass production advertising is establishing our whole pattern of life – principles, morals, aims, aspirations, and standard of living. We must somehow get the measure of this intervention if we are to match its powerful and exciting impulses with our own.'*<sup>45</sup>

In 1974, less than twenty years later, amidst economic and political turmoil in Britain (miners' strikes, the call for a three-day working week, IRA bombings in London, first oil crisis and so forth and so on), we find this enthusiasm for the 'exciting impulses' of commercial practice makes way for a deep pessimism. In 'The Violent Consumer' Alison Smithson noted scathingly, but also candidly:

*'Mass communications tend to be an iceberg: the bit most of us never see – baser films, banal magazines or comics, baser instinct paper-backs, blatant advertising – is that to which the ship of state is most vulnerable. The hidden bulk of the iceberg out-balances all the visible face civilized society judges as acceptable – that is free education, the family, the creative minority in the community, the myriad balancing good works of government, state, municipality, and institutions.'*<sup>46</sup>

'The Violent Consumer' essay fully lives up to its title; the piece is a devastating assessment of the consumer society as a morally corrosive phenomenon and of its big 'do-gooder', the welfare state, which was painted by Smithson as a system tailored to assure that everybody might participate in the 'consumer race' and its sheer material profit. The idea of a society moving toward a shared way of living as embodied by the dominant 'culture group' of the middle classes had turned out to be a fata morgana. Smithson concluded that it was no longer possible to assume that:

*'(...) we are all similarly cohesive groups, now of various shades of middle-class, speaking a common caring-for-possession and established-values language; (...) that as new-society-equals, all children feel equally secure swimming in the great society, with hidden potential for equal understanding and subscribing to the socialist dream. But those for whom the socialist|democratic societies are said to have been called into being – for whom they can still be said to be primarily bureaucratically kept in existence; the very people for whom all this bureaucratic structure was created, that all might share this ideal – feel the most bitter.*

*We must face that for more than half of us, this universal-society is not the answer. It was a marvellous way for some, to the next stage of consideration-for-others, but we must move on to that next level where the underlying belief in brotherhood is rooted in a sufficiently strong trust that we are all Greeks – collectively understood in our bones – to allow society to freely fragment, become compartmented, group in its own loose way, seek difference in quality through effort in work ... or not as the case may be.'*<sup>47</sup>

The idea of allowing society to 'freely fragment' is in itself not a new idea to the Smithsons. As we have seen it is also tied to their idea of a context-responsive approach which almost as a matter of course leads to the creation of fragments and enclaves. But here, the problem runs deeper than the shift from total planning to proceeding by way of intervention and transformation. The problem concerns the social fabric itself. In 'The Good Tempered

46 Alison Smithson, 'The Violent Consumer', 1974, p. 274.

47 Ibid., quote on p. 278.

Gas Man' Alison Smithson claims that 'the collective gesture has withered to vandalism'; in 'Collective Quality' smaller and larger acts of vandalism against the collective are described, from the house owner who ruins a historic streetscape by replacing his chimney in an insensitive way, to football hooligans demolishing 'objects – collectively paid for – such as trains' and the emergence of 'no-go areas' in Marseilles, Belfast or New York. Alluding to the then new fashion of participation she asks what modes of operation are available to the individual if one sought to contribute to the larger whole of the collective that ultimately constitutes 'quality of place':

*'(...) where is the freedom of the individual to remember quality, have a quality insight, make the instinctive, unpremeditated contribution that might enrich the depth of quality of place?'*<sup>48</sup>

The longing is for an almost unself-conscious vernacular as recognised by Alison in the domestic scenes of Pieter de Hooch that lavishly illustrate the essay:

*'What is the collective nature of the civilising choice? Keeping to this problem of the house, how do we play the Pieter de Hooch game? ... match the inside to the outside face, and both to daily life? ... the acts of placing, caring, renewing, cleaning, enjoying ... so that they mesh together to become the fabric of a culture? ... every item of life contributing to a unison whose nature joins the poetry of the collective?'*<sup>49</sup>

In a slightly later text, written in July-November 1976, Peter wrote about the same issue and ideal. Singing the praise of Giancarlo De Carlo's housing project for the village of Matteotti visited during the Team 10 meeting at Terni of that same year, Smithson started by defining his idea of a 'burgher society' as represented in the De Hooch pictures: 'continuity of family' as the first characteristic, followed by 'continuity of possessions, continuity of place, continuity of involvement'.<sup>50</sup> This 'burgher society' of equals was assumed to be 'a society of specialists living and working in the same place, expecting certain perfections, each from each, right through the social scale'. And this then was represented in an architecture with 'the houses, each different, all in the same style. Houses looking into streets and yards, making one indivisible internal world.'<sup>51</sup> According to Smithson De Carlo had succeeded in bringing together the qualities of such a 'burgher town' with a 'detailed architectural language', that was 'developed out of that of modern architecture, and inescapably communicates some of

48 Alison Smithson, 'Collective Quality', 1974.

49 Ibid.

50 Peter Smithson, 'Some Thoughts After Team X Terni', typescript Smithson archive, eventually published as 'Apropos Terni' in: *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, nr. 189, February 1977.

51 Ibid., p. 1.



its heroic stance'. This then was what Team 10 was all about: housing as 'urban-fabrics not buildings'.<sup>52</sup>

But this was of course the very problem that Alison Smithson also referred to in 'The Violent Consumer', that very 'urban-fabric', 'fabric of a culture', or more poignantly the lack of it. Peter also touched on it when he wrote that the Matteotti housing was for industrial workers who in his view were not concerned by such qualities as possessions, place or involvement, especially with their children moving socially upward. Discontinuity was much more likely to appear. He 'resolved' this assessment by concluding that the project offered a 'new fabric, something alongside the existing fabric ... a new start', that to him seemed capable of accruing new meanings and uses over time.<sup>53</sup>

Such political incorrectness is also what Alison Smithson in 'The Violent Consumer' put on the table with regard to the debasement of the welfare state and the premises it was built upon. Where Van Eyck had already rhetorically asked how one could build the counterform of society as an architect, when society itself has no form (rhetorical in the sense that the architect and architecture apparently stand outside of society in this formulation), Smithson politicized the question in no uncertain terms:

*'The drive towards uniformity in the guise of socialism or social democracy is becoming undesirable to many who find no quality, no identity in such a framework.'*<sup>54</sup>

'Identity', which at first in the 1950s seemed the key to go beyond the Functional City and rationalist planning, now had to be redefined and recalibrated into a much more flexible multiplicity, also with regard to migration in a post-colonial era:

*'We assume we are English with English standards, and that all-comers see these standards clearly and will go along with them and contribute to their furtherance. But implicit in the various Emancipation Bills of the nineteenth century was a diffusion of standards; a taking aboard of multifarious ethics and rules for behaviour and redress of the previously closed social élite. (...) With the opening of Universities and so on, to all came a de-Anglicizing which effectively swept away the incestuous control mechanism of our Englishness. The glue of a particular society became less and less adhesive. Gradually, the visible result, a hundred years after such emancipation we see the loss of the particular English milieu: today an indigenous cultural mix*

52 Ibid., pp. 3-5.

53 Ibid., pp. 5-6.

54 Alison Smithson, 'The Violent Consumer', 1974, p. 277; the quote by Van Eyck runs: 'If society has no form, can architects build the counterform?', in: Aldo van Eyck, 'The Fake Client and the Great Word "No"', in: *Forum*, August 1962, nr. 3, p. 79.

*that permits the last break-up of towns and cities, and these somehow get rebuilt in a life style more alien to many of us than ever were Victorian Italian Romanesque or Victorian Venetian Gothic. In many buildings, added even to cultural institutions, instinctive sense of English scale seems lost.*

*To those that use any city, the mix is certainly becoming stranger, incomprehensibly so. However, we in England continue to assume our communal Englishness ... but can we – since the influx of hired labour? Since Emancipation? ... is any northern European country itself?’<sup>55</sup>*

According to Smithson the ‘paternalistic universal answer welfare state’ had largely failed:

*‘Where attempts have been made to think out needs, the immediate beneficiaries of the welfare state smash and foul those portions of cities provided specifically for them, and do so in blind violence against it knows not what. Lack of sacredness for the results of labour, lack of respect for others’ possessions or contributions, leads ultimately towards a vandalism of people.’<sup>56</sup>*

Clearly, this must be read with the fate of Robin Hood Gardens and its vandalism in the back of our mind, even though Smithson refrained from mentioning their project. However, she did defend modern buildings fiercely against accusations that:

*‘the wrong forms have been provided, forms expressing wrong aspirations for the beneficiaries of a socialist state; and more, that these forms would contain something wilfully architectural that calls up the vandals.’*

According to Smithson modern buildings were ‘releasant, not at all overpowering or threatening.’ She also pointed out that: *‘the anonymous apartment block without any open space or community-provided feature is at a high premium in one part of the city; not far off, people rehoused from so-called much worse conditions, apparently hate the same modern amenities (but with open space and other social facilities) and in a few years the whole environment is a wreck. Anonymous is here called prison, open space and full light are here judged threatening.’<sup>57</sup>*

She claimed there was a fundamental problem with the welfare state system in that it didn’t hold people responsible or accountable, that there was no ‘care of possessions’

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

when simply provided by the state instead of being earned. One needed a system of governance in which 'allowance of freedom' is 'balanced by responsibility for that freedom'.

Smithson painted a colourful but most disturbing picture of the council housing system and its social shortcomings, very different from her ideal of a trusting and friendly society, the 'togetherness of one extended family', she said:

*'(...) a whole family – not necessarily understanding any rules of the collective, under stress, perplexed, disorganized, financially muddled, aggressive, bad cooks, poor shoppers, without knowledge of true value, unable to weigh alternatives, perhaps bearing insurmountable family problems, without real direction – a whole family is simply given a key and starts paying rent for a portion of a fairly expensive bit of property, complete with grounds and equipment – the result of years of theory and design and paper work, and three to five years construction time, work of many dedicated people – which is simply entrusted to their care. They are just there, in a non-existent collective without even any instincts of community.'*<sup>58</sup>

And:

*'(...) in the present world of municipal housing, subsidies are in fact cruel to a greater number than they are kind to, for they tend to pack together, without distinction, families with completely different standards of cleanliness, noisiness, obtrusiveness, and so on.'*<sup>59</sup>

Eventually, there was no mutual 'trust', the 'glue' that held society together was gone, and consumer politics as an outcome of 'socialist theory and consumer urge' had reshaped the working class as a 'class of resentment' instead.

The quotations above are perhaps extensive – Alison Smithson elaborated her argument among others including society's responsibility to children as well as anti-American remarks – yet they show how far removed she was from the optimism of the 1950s and Independent Group days. Consumer culture, the world of media, but also the mechanisms of fashion, although still acknowledged as forces of their own, by now they had lost their appeal to the Smithsons as indicators of the way forward to an open, egalitarian society that was the dream of post-war British society.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

## Free Choice and Fragmentation

The so-called shift of the 1970s was already in evidence in the 1960s. After the dissolution of CIAM Team 10 members got involved in numerous projects for the welfare state, and despite the economic boom of those years, the fantastic rise in living standards and new opportunities, one also sees the emergence of a new cultural pessimism, that culminated in the events of May 1968. Paradoxically, Team 10 itself was confronted with this on the occasion of the Milan Triennale, organised by Giancarlo De Carlo, who had chosen the classic Team 10 issue of the greater number as the general theme. Van Eyck, Woods, the Smithsons and De Carlo himself made special installations each addressing what they considered the most acute issues in town planning. Yet, in the spirit of 1968 the Triennale was occupied by students and artists protesting the establishment.

Within the Team 10 discourse itself the new cultural pessimism was most evident in the re-edition of the *Team 10 Primer* in 1968. A new 16 page preface was added by Alison Smithson, which contained a patchwork of statements by founding members and other participants: Ralph Erskine, Giancarlo De Carlo, Alison and Peter Smithson, Jerzy Soltan, Jaap Bakema, Shad Woods, Karl Polonyi, Aldo van Eyck, José Coderch, Stefan Wewerka, and Brian Richards. However, the texts speak of dismay with the practice of planning and building, even though this was what Team 10 earlier had claimed to be their aim. 'Not to theorize but to build, for only through construction can a Utopia of the present be realized', as the 1962 introduction read. The 1968 texts then show an embarrassing account of the limited possibilities of architects to improve the situation of mass building, in Western Europe and the USA in particular, or to intervene in the politics of planning toward a new post-industrial knowledge-driven society of which the architects themselves were instrumental in more than one way: as builders, teachers, and theorists.

The new preface also offered the possibility to add new projects, and perhaps in line with the new late capitalist condition university projects dominate: for Urbino, for Zurich, for Bochum and for Bremen. Other projects were urban renewal projects revitalizing the old fabric for modern uses by way of meaningful and intelligent strategies of intervention, Urbino again, but also Berlin and Paris. Underneath it all there was also a sense that one was entering a new geopolitical phase which one didn't seek to support while

at the same time couldn't resist getting involved in; most notably Alison Smithson and Shadrach Woods mentioned the ongoing Vietnam war and the extreme costs of post-colonial warfare and Cold War technologies as opposed to the money spent on decent quality housing. Smithson included two projects by the Hungarian Polonyi for Ghana stating that 'it is perhaps in the new countries that architects most significantly fail; as if our discipline was too cumbersome to touch their needs.'<sup>60</sup>

In general, on the one hand one felt one's talents and energies were not used quite enough (Soltan: 'it is an unhealthy paradox that in a domain so pragmatic, in a science and art so very much applied as urban design, theorizing is what remains to the majority of the practitioners'), and when they were called upon to build, it seemed neither under the right conditions nor for the right purposes. General discontentment was the result. 'The noise of the stencil machine is everywhere' Bakema wrote, referring to all the pamphlets, posters and little magazines produced in the many architecture schools he visited (Philadelphia among others). Yet, at the same time he also admitted 'we can put on paper what has to be done and in the next moment we do quite another thing'.<sup>61</sup> In its simplicity this statement summarized the predicament of Team 10, which Ken Frampton would once again elaborate in his critique 'Des vicissitudes de l'idéologie'. To some extent the Smithsons accepted such limitations too, when talking about design as 'staging the possible'.<sup>62</sup> Even though the Smithsons used the phrase when explaining their interest in exhibitions as a testing ground and demonstration of ideas, this notion can also be expanded to their built work. Certainly, a most personal and very specific project as the Upper Lawn pavilion was intended as such, but in general, when the built projects are necessarily restricted to fragmentary interventions, those fragments come to represent almost naturally the bigger ideas at stake. Alison Smithson stated that 'in such long-stride, long-term art as architecture, it is almost an immoral act of building not to leap with foresight, and so to offer to people a quality which might not have been seen before, therefore which no one can know, or choose to want, until it is there'.<sup>63</sup> Such statements were in line with Peter's, when he discussed the long term processes before an idea in architecture becomes an accepted vernacular, or vice versa, before a craft convention was generalized into a conceptual understanding.

The Smithsons' change of heart with regard to welfare state politics can – at least partly – be retraced by way of their actual

60 Alison Smithson, *Team 10 Primer*, 1968, p. 15, caption to illustration nr. 12.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

62 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Staging the Possible', in: *Italian Thoughts*, 1993; also in *ILA&UD Year Book 1981*, 1982.

63 Alison Smithson, 'The Violent Consumer', 1974, p. 276.

involvement in welfare state housing. From 1963 onward they had worked on a housing project for Manisty Street in the borough of Poplar for the London County Council. There they would personally experience the many restrictions imposed by the welfare state bureaucracy through tight budgetting, statutory guidelines for housing, as well as the difficulties in communication between the council and the local community. The project consisted of two small-scale gallery access blocks, randomly inserted in the war damaged urban fabric of East London. The Manisty Street blocks were never built, but in 1966, the project was redeveloped into the much larger Robin Hood Gardens estate to be finished by 1972. Complaining about the proliferation of bureaucracy, and the unsustainable promises to the public by politicians and planners, Alison Smithson rather dramatically contributed the following to the extra 1968 preface of the *Primer*:

*'If we examine our position in England, we must also in the general political context question whether the Welfare State in choosing so much for us might not be freezing our life pattern, forcing social benefits to answer a time before, unopposed by allowing no incentives. Incentives naturally generate decisions of choice. Freely made choices are the redirective factors in society. Without free choice bureaucracy becomes a dead load and it is here the politico|planner|bureaucrat|, jammed in the manipulation of the administrative machine now too big for anyone to master, tends to act against any re-establishment of honesty and resultant trust in a community. We are locked in a wasting struggle with Welfare State Bureaucracy in a very similar way to how men were in the size-kind war of 1914-1918. Even at a simple day to day level, useless struggles with committees are wasting valuable working energy and time. Only by the reduction of friction between bureaucracy and action can the available talent be spread as far as it needs to be.'*<sup>64</sup>

If we accept the predicament as painted by Bakema – putting on paper the ideal, actually having to do something else – what alternative models then did the Smithson imagine for the welfare state? What models for 'freely made choices' did they envisage, and of which their built work is then nothing but a glimpse due to its fragmentary character? Their two books of the early 1970s, *Ordinariness and Light* (1970) and *Without Rhetoric* (1973), summarize the couple's ideas. *Ordinariness and Light* covers the early years bringing together a selection of their writings of 1952-1960, especially the ones on town planning (subtitle 'Urban theories 1952-60, and their application in a building project 1963-

64 Alison Smithson, *Team 10 Primer*, 1968, p. 5.

70'). The book's argument largely revolves around two concepts, the Golden Lane project of 1952-53 and the idea of a Cluster City of 1957. *Without Rhetoric* spans the larger period of the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s focusing on the issue of expanding the language of modern architecture.

Rereading *Ordinariness and Light* it should be noted that its year of publication, 1970, marks a time lapse of up to eighteen years from the original writing. By then the Smithsons' own ideas about the welfare state and town planning had already shifted profoundly. Perhaps herein lies the explanation for the Smithsons' reservations in their preface to the anthology. They stated, in an apologetic tone, that to them the publication seemed in hindsight 'a tumultuous rag-bag of a text, naive, embarrassingly rhetorical, but stuffed with good things.'<sup>65</sup>

Without clarifying what exactly then they considered to be so naive and embarrassing, the Smithsons summed up their 'good things' in a remarkably a-political fashion: 'The main themes we still believe in passionately: the restoration of the feel of the land; the invention of an architecture structured by notions of association – of place; the re-direction of our cities and towns towards safe-movement, openness and light by inserting into the old structure urban events at the scale of our new patterns of communication.'<sup>66</sup>

Although the main body of texts was written much earlier than 'The Violent Consumer' essay of 1974, its conclusion to 'allow society to freely fragment, become compartmented' instead of seeking some sort of 'universal-society' was already present in the pages of *Ordinariness and Light*. As noted the book was organised around the two different, major concepts for the welfare state project as devised by the Smithsons: the elaborated Golden Lane idea and the proposition of a Cluster City. The two concepts largely coincide with the two parts of *Ordinariness and Light*, the first being the until then unpublished, and already mentioned, 'Urban Re-identification' manuscript from the early 1950s, and the second a compilation of what the Smithsons called 'essays on urban theory,' published in the second half of the 1950s, mostly in *Architectural Design*, but also in the *Architectural Review* and the *Architect's Year Book*.<sup>67</sup> The third part of the book is an appendix documenting the design of Robin Hood Gardens, by the time of publication already under construction. Its inclusion served to demonstrate the application of the

65 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 11.

66 Ibid.

67 The chapters 'Cluster City', and 'Fix: Permanence and Transience' were published in *The Architectural Review*, in 1957 and in 1960; 'The Built World: Urban Re-identification', 'Caravan: Embryo Appliance House?', 'An Alternative to the Garden City Idea', 'Letter to America', 'Mobility', 'Scatter', 'The Functions of Architecture in Cultures-in-Change', and 'Social Foci and Social Space' were all published in *Architectural Design* between 1955 and 1960; 'Aesthetics of Change' was published in the *Architects' Year Book*, nr. 8, 1957.

theorized ideas in the collected writings as well as the various transformations of those initial ideas.

To be able to think of the city, its territory and districts as both a comprehensive whole and a collection of fragments, the Smithsons first of all proposed to think of the city in terms of layers and different systems loosely working together. The new infrastructure of motorways that provided a new sense of freedom by way of mobility was considered the foremost system among those. Surprisingly, the Smithsons hardly looked at public transport systems when theorizing the post-war city. Second, the city was also regarded as a collection of fragments or enclaves providing different qualities in the sense of 'patterns', that is as spatial and territorial configurations vis-à-vis the specific lifestyles they were to accommodate. Third, the house itself should be a basic cell, not in terms of functionalist *Existenzminimum*, but as a container open to appropriation by the inhabitants, providing its inhabitants the possibility to alter the house as need arose or a change of lifestyle occurred.

To start with the latter, the house as a basic cell offering choice to the inhabitant. Golden Lane designed in 1952 provides the clearest example in this respect; a rationalised, neutral slab structure offering various housing typologies. Access was organised by way of the famous decks, the 'streets-in-the-air', but perhaps more importantly in between the collective deck and the private cell a so-called yard garden was inserted. This 'yard garden' was a space left empty and open to 'appropriation by the inhabitants: one could add extra bedrooms, a place for house work, a house-shop, or simply enjoy it as a large outdoor space. According to the Smithsons this extra function would not 'interfere with the normal working of the plan', since the scheme offered the possibility of two separate front doors.<sup>68</sup> In the chapter 'Realisation: Cost, Legislation, versus Dreams' the Smithsons further explained: *'The Golden Lane Project was a pilot scheme to try and develop solutions and techniques. Suppose we project a scheme to optimum social and structural standards? The houses would be larger and simpler than those in Golden Lane, where rooms and equipment were provided to statutory (and obsolete) standards. Internal finishes, partitioning, equipment and services would in the first place be of the simplest. We would provide enough space to make civilised life possible, and occupiers would furnish those things which were personally essential. Thus we could provide for the man who would die without a Morris wallpaper or a private*

68 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, pp. 56-57.



*bathroom for his guests. For the "cobbler or the candlestick-maker", his work-bench and store could be right at his door; no need to travel from Hendon to Holborn.'*<sup>69</sup>

According to the Smithsons the 'choice should be the individual's not the State's.'<sup>70</sup> Subsidies should be geared to this basic cell. In the welfare state system 'housing subsidies come between us and the individual's choice. There can only be a reality where the individual makes a choice from given and real alternatives.' Choices available to the consumer society include then: '*Houses or guns, guns or butter, TV or picture window, car or sun lounge, clothes or model home.'*<sup>71</sup>

And another list of choices reads:

*'Open space*

*Enclosed space*

*Extra cells (as distinct from space)*

*Fine finishes and fittings*      *equipment*

*The bare necessities*              *better car*

*Bare structure*                      *better clothes.'*<sup>72</sup>

The two other categories of choice, that of the creation of enclaves and the city as a set of systems were closely intertwined. Mobility was regarded perhaps the foremost creative (some would say destructive) force here:

*'Mobility has become the characteristic of our period. Social and physical mobility, the feeling of a certain sort of freedom, is one of the things that keeps our society together, and the symbol of this freedom is the individually owned motor car.'*<sup>73</sup>

Cluster City was the concept that embodied this ideal, more so than the earlier Golden Lane project, even though we can already see an approach based on systems and mobility present in Golden Lane, not so much in the competition entry of 1952, but in its restaging for the 1953 CIAM conference in Aix, the Urban Re-identification grid. There the Smithsons defined the city of Golden Lane as consisting of three layers on top of each other, the road infrastructure 'on the ground', the 'ground elements', being all sorts of amenities, work and service programmes for the city, and the 'space elements', the interconnected system of streetdecks of the housing blocks. Next to this, the city was rather roughly broken up in specialised districts, characterised in a sketchy diagram as: 'offices', 'factories', 'craft' and 'ceremonial'. In a way, the Smithsons' entry for the competition Hauptstadt Berlin of 1957-

69 Ibid., pp. 95-96.

70 Ibid., p. 83.

71 Ibid., pp. 82-83.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., p. 144; already stated as such in *Upper Case* nr. 3, 1960, and *Urban Structuring*, 1967, and in the 1958 essay 'Mobility' in *Architectural Design*.

1958 and done together with Peter Sigmond, largely followed the same scheme: the existing roads on ground level were left intact to accommodate car traffic, on top of it a new, vast layer of pedestrian decks was projected connecting the programmes of shopping, leisure, housing, government buildings, museums and so forth and so on.

In the diagram of Cluster City, dated 1955, the Smithsons had slightly shifted this layering method of the Golden Lane model; the motorway system became a more independent system, while aggregating the landscape and the enclave-like districts into a new composition. The motorway system was thus one of the most important 'identifying systems' of the contemporary city and the new landscape, a similar category as fortifications or harbour areas from earlier times. The construction of motorways re-organised cities and societies, controlling pressure and channeling flows. 'To lay down a road in a built-up area is a very serious matter, for one is fundamentally changing the structure of the community', the Smithsons stated. And next to mobility and its infrastructures, density was a major instrument in establishing different qualities of place. In the Cluster City diagram we see a simple differentiation between 'high' and 'low' densities, mostly depending on programme and distance to motorways. Such notions of accessibility and availability together with identity and change made Cluster City something of a precursor to the post-industrial city leaving behind the egalitarian welfare state model; the Smithsons description boiled down to a multi-nodal network: *'In the Cluster concept there is not one "centre" but many. Areas of high intensity of use, related to industry, to commerce, to shopping, to entertainment, would be distributed throughout the community, and connected to each other and to frankly residential dormitories and dormitory-used villages by urban motorways. It is useless to pretend that our lives are so simple that we can all "live where we work". We have to accept that families have more than one "worker" in them and that choice of where one lives is a complex matter. Our job is to give choice; to make places that are meaningfully differentiated; to offer true alternative lifestyles.'*<sup>74</sup>

It should be remembered at all times that this idea was presented as an alternative to then contemporary town planning practice in Britain, most notably that of the planning of the New Towns, probably the largest welfare state project of all in those years. All the new terms and 'typologies' were devised to

74 Ibid., pp. 132-133.

dislocate the ongoing programme and try and think of alternative modes of operation in order to recreate the English landscape, cities and identity along the lines of a modern understanding of place construction: cluster, greenways, landcastles, patterns of growth and change, houses riding the landscape, and so forth and so on, all these new terms and concepts were in function of this.

With regard to the idea of a polycentric Cluster City (and what we would call today a network city), there remains an issue pertaining to the way the several systems would actually work together. At this particular point the Smithsons spoke of 'making the connection', 'connective linkages' or 'events in a connective network'. Sometimes these connections were literal connections as in the case of a road system or creating routes and pathways, but they could also be spaces simply left open, or what Peter Smithson called the space between,<sup>75</sup> a very straightforward example being the already mentioned yard-garden of the Golden Lane housing scheme. The idea of a 'charged void' belongs in this category as well, an idea Gordon Cullen suggested for the first time when reviewing the Economist,<sup>76</sup> and which the Smithsons themselves had recognized in the work of Mies when they spoke of his 'open-space-structured urban pattern' and how his buildings would 'charge the space around them with connective possibilities';<sup>77</sup> the 'doorstep philosophy' and the street idea,<sup>78</sup> both formulated in the years leading up to the formation of Team 10; and finally perhaps in the case of visits to North America and reflections on American urban design, the devices of interval, measure and distancing between buildings and blocks.<sup>79</sup>

Within the body of work of the Smithsons, there are not many examples of full scale city designs. There are of course the well-known, more theoretical exercises of Golden Lane (the 1953 version) and Hauptstadt Berlin. Cluster City itself is nothing but a diagram. Most of the urban work – as already mentioned – concerns fragments, interventions within existing contexts. There are three exceptions to this: the competition design for a city extension of Hamburg, the new district of Steilshoop (1961), a series of designs for expanding the village of Street in Somerset (1964-1966), and the competition scheme for Kuwait City (1968-1972), however none of those was actually realized. The common denominator behind the urban plans remains the idea of a moderate consumerism of an egalitarian, democratic society – the preferred combination of the models of Sweden and the United States as suggested by the Smithsons during the 1950s. The Cold War context is most evident

75 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The Space Between', in: *Oppositions*, nr. 4, 1974, pp. 74-78.

76 Gordon Cullen, 'The "Economist" Buildings, St James's', in: *The Architectural Review*, February 1965, pp. 115-124.

77 This notion is developed among others through the exchanges with Ungers at TU Berlin, in the second half of the 1960s, see 'Peter Smithson: Without Rhetoric', in the series: *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur*, Heft nr. 2, TU Berlin, 1966, and 'Alison & Peter Smithson: Seminar zu Mies van der Rohe', in the series: *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur*, Heft nr. 20, TU Berlin, 1968. It was subsequently integrated into the various publications by the Smithsons such as *Without Rhetoric*, 1973, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, 1994 (in particular pp. 16-22), and of course *The Charged Void* volumes, 2001 and 2005.

78 As already formulated by the English Group (Smithsons and Howells) in the CIAM Commission Six at Aix-en-Provence, 1953, and later by the Smithsons in their texts 'The Built World: Urban Re-identification', integrated in *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, pp. 104-113 (also published as an essay in *Architectural Design*, June 1955, pp. 185-188), and the chapter 'Human Associations' in *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, pp. 39-61.

79 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Density, Interval, and Measure', in: *Landscape*, Spring 1967, pp. 18-20, reprinted in: *Architectural Design*, September 1967, pp. 428-429; Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The Space Between', in: *Oppositions*, nr. 4, 1974, pp. 75-78; Peter Smithson, 'Space is the American Mediator, or the Blocks of Ithaca: a Speculation', in: *The Harvard Architecture Review*, Spring 1981, pp. 106-112.

in their proposals for Berlin, which they called 'the open city' in need of an 'open centre'; they also noted that '[a]n open society needs an open city. Freedom to move and somewhere to go, both inside and outside the city.'<sup>80</sup>

Karl Popper's definition of an open society (of 1945) already contained the predicament for the architects of the post-war period who aimed to build toward an egalitarian society – the result of the mismatch between a fragmenting society that has no clear, self-evident form of its own and the call for architecture to counter this by providing images and forms of a clear identity and community. Popper defined the open society as an 'abstract society' that 'functions largely by way of abstract relations, such as exchange or co-operation'. Because of this, the 'social groups' of the open society are inevitably 'poor substitutes' of the 'real groups' of a so-called closed, or tribal society, according to Popper. Yet, this is the price one has to pay for the ultimate 'gains' of an abstract, open society: a new individualism and personal freedom that become possible and that go beyond any sort of class system, allowing for 'relationships of a new kind (...) freely entered into, instead of being determined by the accidents of birth'.<sup>81</sup> As such, the 'abstraction' of human and social relations is not an original insight of Popper's; yet, he connects it to the idea of twentieth century democracy and thus, he values this abstraction as something that also holds positive effects and connotations.<sup>82</sup>

80 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1970, p. 180; other references are found in *Upper Case* nr. 3, 1960 and *Urban Structuring*, 1967.

81 Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1945, 2002 edition, pp. 166-167.

82 Popper connects the emergence of Open Societies with the emergences of commerce, trade, travelling and migration, basically a society of 'burgers'; how the industrial revolution and the new forms of capitalism and organisation of labour might or might not be compatible with such an idea of society is not quite elaborated.

83 As part of the meetings of Commission Six at CIAM 9, 1953, 'Report of the English Group' as published in Alison Smithson (ed.), *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, The Architectural Association, London, 1982

84 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 48

85 *Ibid.*, p. 42

The problem of abstraction of human relationships returns in the Smithsons' work too, most specifically with the so-called 'human association' diagram, which they produced together with Bill and Gill Howell at the ninth CIAM conference in 1953.<sup>83</sup> The diagram distinguished between the four categories of house, street, district and city. On the house level (as place of the family and birth, a very 'real' group one might say) the Smithsons spoke of 'involuntary association', and on the level of the city (the most abstract level) of 'voluntary association'. Of the higher levels (higher than the house) they said that 'it is extremely difficult to define the higher levels of association, but the street implies a physical contact community; the district an acquaintance community; and the city an intellectual contact community'.<sup>84</sup> They also stated that in a modern society 'real social groups cut across geographical barriers', and 'the "extended family" can be scattered through many districts and classes of a town; and the "assessment group" of the intellectual or artist may be international and non-collingual, yet with more in common than with many neighbours'.<sup>85</sup>

How to respond to such ascending indeterminacy in terms of architecture and planning was to be the subject of fierce debate at the Team 10 meetings.

### Urban Infrastructure and Building Group Concepts

In the exchanges within Team 10 circles, the idea of a city as a set of systems loosely working together (as proposed by the Smithsons) caused clashes between the Smithsons and the Dutch in particular, Jaap Bakema and Aldo van Eyck. The Dutch were working toward a full integration of the disciplines of architecture and urbanism to overcome the shortcomings of functionalist town planning. Firmly building on the Dutch avant-garde traditions of *De Stijl* (Van Doesburg, Rietveld and Mondriaan, less so Oud) and Dutch Functionalism (the so-called *Nieuwe Bouwen*, most notably Duiker and Van der Vlugt, but also the urban studies of the Rotterdam CIAM group *Opbouw*), Van Eyck coined this a 'configurative discipline', while Bakema spoke about the architect-urbanist and his idea of 'Total Space', a cosmological design approach embracing all scales from what he called 'van stoel tot stad' – from chair to city.<sup>86</sup> In the early years, when the Smithsons would still seek a 'unison' of everything that made up the everyday life patterns speaking of a 'fabric of culture' and the 'poetry of the collective', this seemed to be in line with Van Eyck and Bakema, but by 1962 at the Royaumont meeting a gap opened up between the parties. Among others, discord arose with regard to the Albertian 'city-as-building' analogy as favoured by Aldo van Eyck. The idea of the city as a building or big house, and the building or house as a small city, was a most popular one in architectural circles at the time, and certainly with the Dutch architects of *Forum*, the journal that was led by Bakema and Van Eyck among others.<sup>87</sup> At the 1959 CIAM conference in Otterlo, they had handed out their first issue largely compiled by Van Eyck, which was a manifesto-like stocktaking of CIAM and Team 10 ideas under the heading of 'The Story of Another Idea', which culminated in Van Eyck's credo 'vers une "casbah" organisée'.<sup>88</sup>

This was the time of the rise of the megastructure, from Yona Friedman's *Ville Spatiale*, and the first ideas for *Toulouse-Mirail* by the team of Candilis Josic Woods, to the Japanese Metabolists, who in the 1960s would be represented at Team 10 meetings by various members.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, the city as building

86 Aldo van Eyck 'Steps Toward a Configurative Discipline', in: *Forum*, Augustus 1962, pp. 81-94; Jaap Bakema, *Van Stoel tot Stad. Een Verhaal over Mensen en Ruimte*, De Haan, Zeist / Standaard Boekhandel, Antwerpen, 1964; Van Eyck and Bakema's work laid the foundations for what later would be coined (Dutch) Structuralism, esp. by Arnulf Lüchinger, *Structuralism in Architecture and Urban Planning*, Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart 1981; and Wim J. van Heuvel, *Structuralism in Dutch Architecture*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1992.

87 The other editors were Dick Apon, Gert Boon, Joop Hardy, Herman Hertzberger, and Jurriaan Schrofer who was responsible for the graphic design.

88 *Forum*, nr. 7, 1959.

89 Kenzo Tange was at the Otterlo conference in 1959, Kisho Kurokawa at Royaumont in 1962 (Tange, Kikutake, and Maki were also invited), Kurokawa and Maki were invited for the 1965 Berlin meeting but didn't attend, Kurokawa came to the 1966 Urbino meeting, and finally, Tange came again to the 1971 meeting in Toulouse; see for the full list of participants reconstructed from the archives in: Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005, pp. 346-353.

analogy came under attack within Team 10 circles, and most notably by the Smithsons. This was surprising since the couple had issued a rather clearly formulated invitation to the meeting, including the main topic to be discussed by the participants. It stated among other things that the participants were to focus on the possible interrelations between the ideas of an urban infrastructure and building group concepts. The problem of the greater number and the large scale were – once again – up for debate in this Team 10 gathering:

*'Theme of the meeting:*

*would focus on reciprocal urban infra-structure | building group concepts.*

*That a communication system can both "structure" and offer "building organisation potential is clear: what is less clear is how to sustain this building organisation potential in the actual building groups, in the "infil" of the infrastructure.'*<sup>90</sup>

The Smithsons then suggested two possible 'modes of operation' towards an answer, the first being a concept as proposed by the Candilis Josic Woods office and the second from the Metabolist camp:

*'1. An extension of the infra-structure idea into the building group, so that a system with growth potential is put forward and the ultimate form is not fully anticipated (the STEM idea in its ideal sense);  
2. The "group form" idea, in which all the components are directed towards the final pre-conceived form (as Maki's Shinjuku project).'*<sup>91</sup>

So, to the participants this might have naturally appeared as a call for all sorts of megastructure projects merging architecture and urbanism in an effort to meet the new demands of the post-war society, technology driven, providing welfare and affluence. Yet, at the meeting all kinds of large scale projects dealing with this issue of infrastructure and infill were consistently criticized and rejected by the Smithsons. For instance, Jaap Bakema's competition entry for the University of Bochum was met with disbelief and scepticism from Peter Smithson. Bakema's project entailed a superstructure proposal growing from central entrance points and making clever use of the falling slopes of the site. Eventually, the university complex was to be a gigantic complex integrating all necessary academic functions. Smithson then dismissed the project as being too literal, he said:

*'I think there is a danger involved in this city – the one-big-building – it's taken too literally where it is in fact a metaphor and it doesn't have to be everything-connected-to-everything, all*

<sup>90</sup> As quoted from a copy, present in the Bakema and Smithson archives at NAI Rotterdam; see also my summary of the Royau-mont meeting in: Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005, pp. 99-101.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

*geometries tied to all other geometries. This is system building which results in a system which is one-big-thing. I have the strongest feeling that dislocation of the elements is a better technique on the whole for making a collective than sticking them together. We agree generally the business of systems of linkages but they needn't be physical.'*<sup>92</sup>

In the exchanges with Aldo van Eyck the discussion became completely derailed. Van Eyck showed the work of his favourite and much admired student Piet Blom, the project of Noah's Ark, since he himself had no new projects to show to his Team 10 peers.<sup>93</sup>

The project embodied the full integration of architecture and planning as envisioned by Van Eyck. It proposed the large-scale urbanisation of the Amsterdam region by way of a vast system of interlocking grid structures based on massive, polycentric units each housing 10-15.000 people and projected between the cities of Haarlem, Alkmaar, Amsterdam and Hilversum. As is well-known at some point Alison Smithson said that some sort of Gestapo mentality emanated from it, and that to her it represented a fascist-like approach to the issue of the greater number.<sup>94</sup> Peter Smithson once again called the city-house analogy as something taken too literal:

*'We are looking for systems which allow things to develop as they need to develop, without compromising each other. Here you have a system which takes absolutely literally the concept that the city is a big house. But the city is not a big house, and it's a complete false analogy, a false image.'*<sup>95</sup>

This outspoken position of rejecting the megastructure, superstructure or 'the one-big-building-thing' as unproductive with regard to the issue of urban infrastructure and building groups, can also be retraced in the design production of the Smithsons of the time. As a follow-up to their competition entry for Hauptstadt Berlin they had entered another Berlin competition for Mehringplatz (in autumn 1962), this time together with Günther Nitschke, German architect who was most familiar with contemporary Japanese architecture and the Metabolists.<sup>96</sup> But for Mehringplatz, there was no attempt at a superstructure as in the case of the Hauptstadt Berlin competition scheme, but an almost Baroque elaboration of the future traffic node with the systems of car infrastructure and office buildings taken apart instead of being fully integrated into one built structure.<sup>97</sup> However, this was not the project they showed to their Team 10 colleagues in Royaumont. They brought two completely non-architectural plans

92 Alison Smithson (ed.), *Team 10 Meetings 1953-1984*, Rizzoli, New York, 1991, p. 81.

93 The relation between Piet Blom and Van Eyck begs more research; for a first attempt to assess the work of Blom with regard to the Team 10 discourse see Dirk van den Heuvel, 'The Kasbah of Suburbia', in: *AA Files*, nr. 62, 2011, pp. 82-89; and Dirk van den Heuvel, 'Piet Blom's Domesticated Superstructures', in: *Delft Architectural Studies on Housing (DASH)*, 'The Urban Enclave', NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2011, pp. 56-70.

94 This incident is well-documented by now in: Francis Strauven, *Aldo van Eyck. The Shape of Relativity*, Architectura & Natura, Amsterdam, 1998, original Dutch edition 1994; I myself formulated a slightly different interpretation trying to balance the Van Eyck and Smithson positions, in: Dirk van den Heuvel, 'The Spaces Between / Encounters', in: Dirk van den Heuvel, Madeleine Steigenga, Jaap van Triest, *Lessons: Tupker | Risselada. A Double Portrait of Dutch Architectural Education 1953|2003*, SUN, Amsterdam, 2003, pp. 96-153.

95 *Team 10 Meetings*, 1991, p. 79.

96 He edited a special issue on the topic for *Architectural Design*.

97 The project is published as part of their *Urban Structuring* book, 1967, and in *Architectural Design*.

one could say, dealing only with infrastructure and not so much with building groups. As a follow-up to the 1959 Otterlo incident they brought again their London Roads Studies, but this time extended with a second study into what they called Greenways and Landcastles (1962-1963), and a preservation scheme for the city of Cambridge called Citizens's Cambridge (1962). In a way, these schemes represented the Smithsons' idea of a Cluster City, that is creating new identities by way of planning the infrastructure and actually nothing else. They were the Smithsons' substitute for the functionalist masterplan by way of zoning.

The Greenways and Landcastles study was a further elaboration of the London Roads Studies of 1959. The study was now no longer about the traffic system but about how to develop a parallel structure that could offer peace and quiet to the stressful life of the London citizens. To this end, the Smithsons performed several analyses of the region, for example to map areas of 'noise', 'smell' and 'stress'. Another analysis related to the larger areas of greenery such as parks, squares, mews and cemeteries, as to create links between them, the so-called greenways for pedestrians and cyclists. This new structure sometimes coincided with combined traffic arteries of roads and railways, and sometimes it ran parallel of them. The aim was to achieve a polycentric network which would reduce pressure on the centre. The 'landcastles' were clearly identifiable pockets of residential neighbourhoods which were surrounded by the greenways and consequently had a quiet, sheltered character.

The 1962 Citizen's Cambridge planning study concerned an early, if not the first preservation scheme in order to maintain and strengthen the special qualities of the small university town. Instead of the new requirements of mass car ownership pedestrians' interests were put first here. The Smithsons noted how the qualities of Cambridge were suffering from the town's own success. Besides the pressure from the large student populations Cambridge had to deal with a substantial increase in tourism, that paradoxically threatened to kill the qualities that were the town's attraction. The Smithsons sought a solution by creating a new regional centre just outside the existing inner city, turning the old centre into a pedestrian zone, instituting a one-way traffic scheme and providing a shuttle service and strategically situated car parks. A new by-pass completed this 'immediate action plan', as they called their proposal.



However, in the early 1970s the issue of the city as a large-scale building structure was taken up again in Team 10 circles, also by Alison and Peter Smithson. Alison's essay 'How to Recognise and Read Mat-Building' published in *Architectural Design* in 1974 was the immediate outcome of this renewed interest.<sup>98</sup> The 1973 Berlin meeting at the just realized Free University complex by Woods saw large scale projects pinned up on the walls, and the 1974 visit to Holland included several projects once again dealing with the idea of the 'city as house and the building as city', most notably the Centraal Beheer project in Apeldoorn by Herman Hertzberger (1968-1972) and the Kasbah housing project by Piet Blom (1969-1973).<sup>99</sup> The Smithsons themselves had worked on quite an astonishing project for Kuwait City (1968-1972). Together with the offices of BBPR, Candilis Josic Woods and the Finnish firm of Reima Pietilä, they were invited to develop a plan for the whole city as well as a design for a government building.<sup>100</sup> It was from this commission that the very term 'mat-building' first arose, referring to an approach that stressed the interconnectedness of buildings. Mat-building as a term did not relate to a specific building type but rather to a design scale somewhere between architecture and urbanism. Its purpose was the regulation of buildings without immediately limiting their programme or form.<sup>101</sup>

In their proposal the Smithsons tried to pinpoint what they saw as the specific qualities of the capital of the British protectorate, with the aim of strengthening the city's identity within the developing, increasingly international economy of the Arab peninsula. They decided that the city's location between the desert and the sea was its most notable characteristic. Therefore they proposed an urban pattern that extended along the coast instead of reaching inland. The distinct quality of the light at sunrise and sunset – a result of the location between sea and desert – implied in the Smithson's view the use of low-rise volumes for the new government centres and business offices. The low-rise volumes were arranged in an ample 20 × 20 m grid of *pilotis*. Quite like Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital design, which must have been an inspiration to the Smithsons and which was also included in the Mat-building essay's canonical overview of paradigms, the ground level of the Kuwait buildings was kept entirely free for pedestrian encounter. The Smithsons thought this consistent with:  
*'that Arab sense of space as being low, light, unmonumental, full of stops and starts and shadow – with a high degree of connectedness to allow for change of mind and inroads of time....'*

98 Alison Smithson, 'How to Recognise and Read Mat-Building. Mainstream Architecture as It Has Developed towards the Mat-building', in: *Architectural Design*, September 1974, pp. 573-590.

99 Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005, pp. 182-197 and 202-215.

100 See for more on this: As-seel al-Ragam, 'Explorations of Mat-Building. Urban Critique of Kuwait', in: Tomas Valena with Tom Avermaete, Georg Vrachliotis (eds.), *Structuralism Reloaded*, Edition Axel Menges, Stuttgart, 2011, pp. 150-156.

101 For more on the mat-building phenomenon see also Hashim Sarkis with Pablo Allard and Timothy Hyde (eds.), *Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital and the Mat Building Revival*, Prestel and Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 2001. Tom Avermaete discusses the mat-building phenomenon from the perspective of the work of the Candilis Josic Woods office, *Another Modern: The Post-War Architecture and Urbanism of Candilis-Josic-Woods*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam 2006.

*It would seem that the Arabs are more spontaneous, less worldly than the west or the east.*<sup>102</sup>

The new grid of pilotis differed from the grid of the historic city, and thus made the new intervention visible and tangible. The new geometry was attached to the existing city structure by using mosques as reference points. Long, open gallerias were planned between the mosques, thereby defining a spatial format for the otherwise formless structure. Car parks and air-conditioning buildings were two more infrastructural elements contributing to the formal definition of the new city structure. Above ground level, the floors consisted of freely divisible slabs, limited only by the distance to vertical circulation shafts, all in order to cope effectively with future changes. Interchangeability would be the second hallmark of mat-building, after connectedness. The greatest possible variety of building programmes could be accommodated, according to the needs and location, ranging from new ministeries and universities to expanded Souks. The outside of the built volume was therefore kept rather amorphous. The architectural expression was derived from a sophisticated façade system. Overhangs provided shading and a 'veil' of grids allowed for the further regulation of sunlight and natural ventilation.

It is hard to fully assess the many paradoxes in the work of Team 10 and the Smithsons at this particular moment in time. The early 1970s provided the opportunity to look back, to critically judge built results like the Berlin Free University, Toulouse-le-Mirail, Hertzberger's Centraal Beheer headquarters or Blom's Kasbah housing, while at the same time one could project these ideas and critique into the future. This was the hinge point Alison Smithson used when writing her essay on mat-building: 'having got some built examples – you can now write a little piece, how to recognise the new architecture – quite clear – how to read the new architecture.'<sup>103</sup>

Alison Smithson's introduction to her idea of so-called mat-building was one of the clearer moments in the Team 10 discourse. Whereas normally the group consciously refrained from synthesizing their ideas into one single message, and persisted in producing clouds of thoughts open to a multiform of interpretations, Smithson published a concise, albeit reduced summary of the Team 10 meetings in 1973 in Berlin and 1974 in Rotterdam. It must be noted at this point that by the early

102 For a rather complete documentation see Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Urbanism*, Monacelli Press, New York, 2005, pp. 136-169; also included in the mat-building essay in *Architectural Design*, September 1974, see p. 576.

103 Alison Smithson, *Team 10 Meetings*, 1991, p. 124.

1970s Alison's writing of the history of Team 10 had taken on a more personal dimension than in earlier years. At the time Alison Smithson was more or less designated as the editor of the *Team 10 Primer*, probably due to her earlier publications in *Architectural Design* on the CIAM-Team 10 debates.<sup>104</sup> After the 1968 edition of the *Primer*, this was no longer the case, any Team 10 publication of hers became part of a larger project of stocktaking, similar to the one of the 'Collective Design' essay series.

The opening lines of Smithson's 1974 essay clarify our understanding of the ambitions of Team 10:  
*'Mat-building can be said to epitomise the anonymous collective; where the functions come to enrich the fabric, and the individual gains new freedoms of action through a new and shuffled order; based on interconnection, close-knit patterns of association, and possibilities for growth, diminution, and change.'*<sup>105</sup>

To build for the anonymous collective was undoubtedly the ultimate question for architects of the post-WWII period in general, and the Team 10 discourse emerged from it, with the issues of habitat and *le plus grand nombre* as the key questions for architects. But Smithson also used her essay to draw some lines of definition, and in many ways it can be read as a continuation of the debates of 1962 in Royaumont. In her short text, which served as an introduction to the sixteen page overview of qualified examples, Smithson singled out the Berlin Free University as the one building that made the idea of mat-building visible. At the same time she fiercely criticized Hertzberger's office building, which she called 'an off-shoot of the mat-building phenomenon'. Blom was completely ignored. There was only a swipe at 'casbah-ism'.<sup>106</sup> Apparently, some lines of definition had to be drawn, and Hertzberger's project was only included to serve as some sort of counterpoint to make Woods' achievements more visible yet.<sup>107</sup>

Still, such strong opposition could not mask the fact that 'casbah-ism' and mat-building, or even cluster were actually very close concepts, despite the obvious differences between the actual projects. The Smithsons defined their cluster idea in rather vague terms which seemed to include the kasbah idea: *'The Cluster is a close knit, complicated, often moving aggregation with a distinct structure.'*<sup>108</sup>

104 In the archive one finds notes with a kind of division of tasks between the members, especially the 1961 Paris Statement; see also 'The Aim of Team 10', in: Risselada, Van den Heuvel, 2005, p. 92.

105 Alison Smithson, 'How to Recognise and Read Mat-Building', 1974.

106 Hertzberger has a fantastic, hilarious story, telling that the Smithsons simply refused to get out of the car when Team 10 arrived at the site of Blom's project in Hengelo.

107 In *Team 10 Meetings*, 1991, Smithson also criticised the Hertzberger project in no uncertain terms, see p. 124.

108 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 131.

Hauptstadt Berlin drawings too, show an explicit reference to the kasbah typology, perhaps partly meant as a pun for the informed reader, but it also demonstrates that it was considered a valid concept in itself.<sup>109</sup> And as became clear from the Smithsons' explanation of the mat-building configuration and how it was conceived as to accommodate 'that Arab sense' of space of encounter and exchange, one sees how the idea of mat-building itself implied some sort of 'casbah-ism' in the sense of a touch of mild orientalism quite characteristic of those new post-colonial realities.

Part of the ongoing debate between the Smithsons and the Dutch was the appropriate form language suited for the anonymous collective and the various urban concepts for connectivity and encounters. The Israeli architect Arthur Glikson and guest at some of the Team 10 meetings spoke in this sense about a division between two standpoints, one of 'understatement' and one of 'overdesign'.<sup>110</sup> Shadrach Woods and the Smithsons were on the understatement side, Van Eyck and Hertzberger on the one of overdesign. Clearly, the Smithsons were aiming for an ordinary, anonymous vernacular as they argued for in their 1973 book *Without Rhetoric*, a demonstration of which they had built with their Robin Hood Gardens project, also finished in this same period as the Free University, Centraal Beheer and the Kasbah. The Dutch, and Hertzberger and Blom probably even more so than Van Eyck, looked for a language that consistently articulated individual units and cells, corners, doorsteps and other spatial transitions. Referring to Blom's work Peter Smithson would claim that in Dutch structuralism form and structure were confused, and that it was actually highly formalistic.<sup>111</sup> Yet, this was probably too easy a dismissal. Rather, one sees the divide between two different principles of architectural organisation at work: one that thought the city as a set of different systems working only loosely together (Smithsons), and the other that tried to develop a coherent, all-encompassing language fully integrating architecture and urban planning (the Dutch structuralists).

109 The archive of the Deutsches Architektur Museum in Frankfurt holds all drawings and sketches of the Smithson competition entry.

110 In the report of the Berlin meeting as published by Ungers in 1966, as part of the series 'Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur' produced by Ungers when a professor at the TU Berlin: Heft nr. 3, 'Team X: Treffen in Berlin'.

111 'Mart Stam's Trousers. A Conversation between Peter Smithson & Wouter Vanstiphout', in: Crimson (eds.), *Mart Stam's Trousers: Stories from behind the Scenes of Dutch Moral Modernism*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1999, p. 132.

Part of this ongoing argument between the parties concerned a juxtaposition of the concepts of the 'visual group' and the 'appreciated unit'. The former term was proposed by Bakema based on the many studies by the Rotterdam Opbouw group, for Pendrecht among others, while the latter was formulated by the Smithsons as a form of critique. The visual group was basically a design unit that accommodated the smallest community unit of a

district comprising houses for all age groups and family sizes, thus assuring a socially balanced mix of people living together, which the visual group would also express architecturally.

The Smithsons for their part had stated that:

*'social groups are not created by location alone but by community of interest and physical and psychological interdependence. The family can still be tight-knit and possessive when its members are thousands of miles apart; the "extended family" can be scattered through many districts and classes of a town; and the "assessment group" of the intellectual or artist may be international and non-collingual, yet with more in common than with many neighbours.'*<sup>112</sup>

This so-called appreciative unit that the Smithsons proposed instead of the visual group was therefore not a specific design unit, it had to be defined anew for each specific situation. Hence, it had no clear structure, form or language of its own, necessarily remaining vague and undefined in those terms.

The Dutch for their part would criticize the more laconic attitude of the Anglo-Americans toward architectural articulation and expression. Woods' Free University for instance became a target when completed, especially the fire doors which compartmentalized the long, collective interior streets of the building effectively killing the very idea of a street. Woods and his project architect Manfred Schiedhelm had simply accepted this without giving any further design attention to the effect the fire doors had on the experience of the continuity of the interior streets and their semi-public status.<sup>113</sup> Shadrach Woods was not present at the 1973 meeting held at the site of his *magnum opus*, he was already too ill with cancer and would die soon. He was sent the tapes though, and replied with a short poem saying:

*'... I really feel I must decline  
To clutter the streets with overdesign.  
A door that is more than a door is much  
of a bore (except to the Dutch)  
...'*<sup>114</sup>

Because of the realism that shimmers through in Woods' defence (a door is a door), and his rejection of any kind of spectacular technophile fetishism, that was so characteristic of the megastructure wave and the incipient high tech, Reyner Banham would characterise the architecture language of the Free University as 'unrhetorical reticence' and

112 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970, p. 42.

113 A reference to this debate is included in Alison Smithson's essay on Mat-building, 1974, p. 574; according to Smithson Schiedhelm himself wasn't very happy either with the fire doors.

114 The full text reads:  
*'On listening to the last tape  
(Berlin April 4 1973)  
I really feel I must decline  
To clutter the streets with over-  
design.  
A door that is more than a door  
is much  
of a bore (except to the Dutch).  
An unroofed space with grass,  
a tree,  
Lightwell?, Courtyard?, wait and  
see!  
The intellectual grid is all in your  
head.  
But people (& pipes) need direct  
routes, instead  
Of so much indeterminate art,  
in which building is clearly to the  
last part.  
Enough pretentious verbiage &  
fraud & perversity.  
A modest recommendation:  
When next in Berlin, go and see  
the university.'*

'unsettlingly ineloquent'.<sup>115</sup> Yet, this 'unrhetorical' quality of the Free University was the very reason the Smithsons embraced the building as the most important one of those years, successfully developing the kind of 'non-demonstrative' language of 'control' that in their eyes belonged to the core efforts of the Modern Movement and its inheritors.

### The Language of Modern Architecture

The shift of the mid-1970s also concerned the issue of architectural form language as developed through the various design projects and the Team 10 discourse. Looking at the major built projects: Hunstanton School, the Economist, St Hilda's and Robin Hood Gardens, the consistency of development is striking. From the late 1970s onward we see that the Smithsons came up with various, different language systems so to speak. This is only partly explained by the various contexts in which they were working. One group of projects concerns the work at Bath University between 1978 and 1985, and the second the work in Germany, in Lauenförde and Bad Karlshafen for Tecta and Axel Bruchhäuser from 1986 onward. Generally speaking, the projects in Bath represent the 'lumpish' language of Conglomerate Ordering, a heavy, romantic kind of architecture of a bare materiality romantic quality, inviting weathering and ageing, while the ones in Germany embody a language of the 'light touch', of 'lattices' and 'layering', further investigating the architecture of inhabitation.

As discussed the conversation on the language of architecture as entertained by the Smithsons throughout their life largely included the Team 10 circle: not just the competition with the Dutch, or the affinities felt for Woods, but also the summer school exchanges with De Carlo, and the various lectures the Smithsons delivered at the invitation of Ungers in Berlin and Ithaca. Yet, it could also be argued that the whole issue of a language of architecture belonged to the specific English contribution to the post-war debate on modern architecture. When the Smithsons spoke about it, they were also addressing – albeit implicitly – their peers of Independent Group days, the so-called 'classicizing party' and Reyner Banham, but for instance also John Summerson or Robert Middleton. At all times, it should be remembered that the whole idea of a language of architecture is first and foremost a concept stemming from classical architecture, and as such quite eloquently

115 Reyner Banham, *Megastructure. Urban Futures of the Recent Past*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1976, p. 140.

communicated by Summerson.<sup>116</sup> He was also the one who put the whole problem of modern architecture and its principae in terms of a 'missing language', at which occasion he defined language as a coherent 'system of inventions', which in itself is already a first displacement as might be noted on the side – the notion of system belonging to a very different realm (technology) than language itself (culture). At this point, it should also be remembered that Peter Smithson (and through him Alison) was quite knowledgeable of classical architecture theory having studied at the Royal Academy Schools with Richardson, even though he posed as being antagonistic toward neo-classicist revival as such.<sup>117</sup> Despite the popularity of linguistics in the 1960s then, when the Smithsons started speaking and writing about 'language', this should in the first instance be understood as a reference to this discourse, even though it conveniently connects with structuralism, how language is also social and implies class group dynamics between the academic and established versus the vernacular, so-called spontaneous and authentic.

The problem of the fragmentation of the 'fabric of culture' posed a major challenge with regard to this question of architectural form and form language, probably even more so than Summerson had already pointed out, although he would also use the formulation of programme as 'a local fragment of social pattern'.<sup>118</sup> As well-known, the issue of language and meaning rang throughout the architecture world of the 1960s and 1970s prompting very different responses, which ranged from Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction* to Aldo Rossi's *Architettura della Città*, from Rowe's proposal of a Collage City to Eisenman's interest in deconstructivism. For Alison and Peter Smithson, it meant among others they would start to speak about language and form language next to the categories of pattern and form they had used in the early Team 10 years. One could say that the ideas regarding pattern and form eventually crystallized in their book *Urban Structuring* of 1967, which was still about structures (as the title indicates) or systems, mixing Independent Group terms with Team 10 ideas – note how it was all about system, structure, relationship, association and pattern: 'It was necessary in the early '50s to look to the works of painter Pollock and sculptor Paolozzi for a complete image system, for an order with a structure and a certain tension, where every piece was correspondingly new in a new system of relationship. It is our thesis that for every form of association there is an inherent pattern of building.'<sup>119</sup>

116 For instance his introduction of classical architecture to a larger audience based on six radio talks for the BBC: *The Classical Language of Architecture*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1963; literature on the topic is vast, two relatively recent studies are Sylvia Lavin, *Quatremère de Quincy and the Invention of a Modern Language of Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1992, and the instant classic Adrian Forty's *Words and Buildings* of 2000.

117 See also Catherine Spellman, Karl Unglaub (eds.), *Peter Smithson: Conversations with Students. A Space for Our Generation*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2005, in particular pp. 14-20.

118 John Summerson, 'The Case for a Theory of Modern Architecture', in: *RIBA Journal*, June 1957, p. 309.

119 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Urban Structuring*, 1967; and *Upper Case* nr. 3.

The idea of language and even style in the sense of a modern vernacular were ultimately elaborated in their *Without Rhetoric* of 1973 with the most telling subtitle: *An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-1972* (1973); most telling, for its emphasis on the 'aesthetic' rather than the 'ethic' of course. *Without Rhetoric* is a compilation of texts taken from the Brutalist discourse of the 1950s combined with 1960s and early 1970s texts on use, inhabitation, technology and classical architecture, including the lectures for Ungers in Berlin, all re-edited into one large essay. *Ordinariness and Light* of 1970 represents a middle-ground, but is in the end closer to *Urban Structuring* and the issues of the large scale, town planning and housing, since the included texts dated from the 1950s exclusively. The key project was the Economist (1959-1964), which is absent from both *Urban Structuring* and *Ordinariness and Light*, but central to *Without Rhetoric*. In *Without Rhetoric* the Smithsons would situate a new found interest in the issue of style, which they would date back to the 'mid-Economist years', that is around 1962, when they clashed with most of the Team 10 colleagues at Royaumont: *'What we are looking for is the gentlest of styles, which whilst still giving an adumbration of the measures of internal events and structures, (rooms activities, servicing arrangements, supports), leaves itself open to – even suggests – interpretation, without itself being changed.'*<sup>120</sup>

120 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 1973, p. 69.

121 Van Dijk, 1978, p. 32-33; original Dutch text: 'Ik ben uit op het plezier van vormen die interpreteerbaar en niet expliciet zijn. Habraken en Hertzberger zeggen dat de dingen werktuiglijk veranderd moeten kunnen worden door de mensen. Ik beweer daarentegen dat de mensen in staat zouden moeten zijn om hun huis anders te zien. Je hoeft het niet fysiek te veranderen, maar je zou in staat moeten zijn je eigen betekenis eraan toe te voegen. Het is een proces in de geest van de beschouwer. Het is de geest die er bezit van neemt, zoals een minnaar zijn geliefde. Hij wil haar niet veranderen, maar niettemin wordt zij een deel van hem en wordt er een wederkerigheid ontwikkeld.

Ik sta helemaal open voor heldere dingen, het werk van Palladio, Schinkel, het Pruisisch classicisme. Ik zou graag in zo'n huis willen wonen, maar ik zou er niet iets aan willen veranderen. We veranderen het door het te gebruiken en door de manier waarop we erover denken.'

It was not a concept of adaptability or flexibility the Smithsons set forth here, rather an architecture that anticipated the change of meaning assigned to it by its users through use and experience. In his interview with Van Dijk Smithson made this clear enough: *'I am looking for the pleasure of forms that are open for interpretation and that are not very explicit. Habraken and Hertzberger say that things must be capable of being changed by people in an instrumental way. I on the other hand would claim that people should be able to see their house in a different way. You don't have to change it physically, but you should be able to add your own meaning. It's a process in the mind of the observer. It is the mind that takes possession of it, like a young man his girl. He doesn't want to change her, but still she becomes a part of him and a reciprocity is developed. I am completely open for clear things, the work of Palladio, Schinkel, Prussian classicism. I would love to live in a such a house, but I wouldn't change a thing. We change it by using it and by the way we think about it.'*<sup>121</sup>

Thus to develop a language, neutrality, anonymity, a 'non-demonstrative' kind of architecture or an architecture



'without rhetoric' seemed the most appropriate direction to follow for the Smithsons:

*'it would seem that one of the things that is crucial to the long use of an idea in architecture (...) is a special sort of anonymity of styling (a conclusion no one would have dared think about in 1952 [sic] at the 9th CIAM Congress at Aix-en-Provence), and this is an important and civilizing realisation.'*<sup>122</sup>

*Without Rhetoric* must (among many other things) be regarded as a response to Reyner Banham who had criticized the Economist building as regressively picturesque.<sup>123</sup> In this sense the book itself was not so unrhretorical. Banham was not mentioned, on the contrary, he was suppressed from the publication even though the Brutalist argument was repeated and several references to 'another architecture' were made.<sup>124</sup> Louis Kahn was present, most clearly of course in that very notion of a 'machine-served society', which referred to Kahn's paradigmatic distinction between served and servant spaces. And when the Smithsons stated that the 'first primitive histories of building services as useful things are just being written', they referred to Giedion's *Mechanisation Takes Command* of 1948; Banham's writings on the subject were left out, both his *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* of 1960, and his follow-up to Giedion's book *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment* of 1969.

In addition, the couple took a stand against the Futurist position that Banham (and with him Archigram) would promote. At the beginning of *Without Rhetoric* the Smithsons had already made clear that according to them:

*'When the few had cars then was the time for rhetoric about the machine, of violence as an ideal. When all have machine-energy – cars, transistor radios and light – to throw about, then the time has come for the lyricism of control, for calm as an ideal: for bringing the Virgilian dream – the peace of the countryside enjoyed with the self-consciousness of the city-dweller – into the notion of the city itself.'*<sup>125</sup>

Here, the Smithsons reject the Futurist position of Marinetti, 'violence as an ideal' and the destructive urge for the new.<sup>126</sup>

The Smithsons' rethinking of the consumer society, its technology and media culture brought the Smithsons to link Sigfried Giedion's call for *Befreites Wohnen* and Corbusian machine poetics with a sense of security, control and continuity for modern city dwellers. In *Without Rhetoric* they would recognize this mostly in the

122 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, p. 85; 1952 should be 1953 actually.

123 Reyner Banham, 'Revenge of the Picturesque: English Architectural Polemics, 1945-1965', in: John Summerson (ed.), *Concerning Architecture. Essays on Architectural Writers and Writing*, The Penguin Press, London 1968, in particular pp. 272-273; see also Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism. Ethic or Aesthetic?*, Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1966, pp. 74-75.

124 His name is left out of the index of the book, but he is actually mentioned once in a footnote, nr. 6 on p. 6, in which the Smithsons once again criticize Banham's 1966 book: 'Not much to do with the Brutalism that popularly became lumped into the style outlined in Reyner Banham's *The New Brutalism*, Architectural Press, 1966.'

125 *Ibid.*, p. 14; Peter Smithson, 'Without Rhetoric. Some Thoughts for Berlin', lecture at TU Berlin at the invitation of O.M. Ungers, text dated 20 September 1965, revised 9 October 1965; published in: *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur*, Heft nr. 2, Februar 1966; integrated in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 1973, p. 14.

126 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 1973, pp. 92-93.

work of Mies van der Rohe, but already by 1959, at the occasion of an AA School symposium organised together with the ICA, Peter Smithson would talk about a 'humane, poetic, disciplined, machine environment for a machine society' while stating that 'without Le Corbusier there would be no modern architecture as an ideal, although there would be modern buildings'.<sup>127</sup> And according to him Le Corbusier's 'dream' was of a 'city of shining towers in a sea of trees, with the automobile used at the scale at which it is a moving poetic thing and not a stinking object – an essentially controlled, quiet environment with the energies of transit and communication channelled and not randomly and wastefully displayed'. Any display of mechanisms, which was part of the celebration of the machine by (neo-)Futurist tendencies, was now considered an obsolete 'early nineteenth century attitude towards machines'.<sup>128</sup>

This was written five years after Hunstanton, where almost anything was 'displayed', and about nine months before the Smithsons would embark upon their Economist project, in which we find the application of cladding and suspended ceilings. The language suitable for a 'machine-served society' was apparently consistently under scrutiny, examined and elaborated into new variations. Alongside such classic issues as mass-production, standardization and repetition<sup>129</sup> – all in order to raise the standard of living for all ('mass-production would give houses to those who had previously none'<sup>130</sup>) – there is the issue of the part and the whole and how part and whole were to be mutually defined through a coherent language system. The Smithsons addressed this issue at various instances in their career, and again, it shows the extent to which their conception of a language of modern architecture was imbued with classicist notions - and this time in opposition to the Picturesque, that had no affinities with such 'structuralist' notions.<sup>131</sup>

In 1965, in a two page statement Peter Smithson came up with two basic concepts to understand the evolution from Hunstanton to the Economist, and one may add, to Robin Hood Gardens a few years later. This piece was titled 'The Rocket' after the 1829 ground-breaking steam locomotive design by Stephenson – a reference to Smithson's own northern background of course. The text addressed the issue of technology and how from it a new language might evolve, not just from the machine itself, but from its much broader context: the Stephenson invention also involved the transformation of mobility systems, the new landscape and the

127 'Le Corbusier. A Symposium', in: *Architectural Association Journal*, nr. 832, May 1959, pp. 254-262.

128 Ibid.; Reyner Banham spoke after Peter Smithson contesting Smithson's view on almost everything he had said.

129 Quite extensively discussed in *Without Rhetoric*, also in relation to classical and neo-classicist architecture.

130 Peter Smithson, 'The Rocket', in: *Architectural Design*, July 1965, pp. 322-323; it served as an introduction to the theme issue dedicated to technology and architecture, it would be almost fully integrated into *Without Rhetoric*.

131 Banham in his 'Revenge of the Picturesque' of 1968 touches on this too, when he stated that the younger generation had absorbed picturesque planning techniques and thus were giving in to the policies of *The Architectural Review* camp, even though the younger architects would stick to a modern form language as if embarrassed to admit this.

concomitant modes of perception (as always with the Smithsons understanding of technology and its cultural repercussions). In 'The Rocket' Smithson distinguished two possible modes of making things: one a method of the 'assembled', the other 'designed'. Stephenson's Rocket locomotive stood for the assembled, all of its parts still recognizable and clearly definable, remaining themselves, whereas the counter-example, a modern locomotive (a photo of an unidentified English electric diesel locomotive), represented the 'designed', where special parts came together in one way only, namely to constitute the 'object' of the modern locomotive. This distinction between the 'assembled' and 'designed' came close to another such proposition by the Smithsons, namely the one of an aesthetics of 'concealment' and one of 'display', of a year later, published in the context of product design and home interiors.<sup>132</sup>

From here onwards the Smithsons started to re-arrange various language systems so to speak, and their interrelated development: from the 'Constructivist/Sachlichkeit' that used 'ready mades' provided by industry (steel beams, glazing, ships handrails and so forth and so on) to the 'Purist/Bauhaus' that developed a 'unifying aesthetic' while absorbing such achievements of machine technology, from the body of an E-type Jaguar to the logic of Miesian curtain walls that were of a language in which a 'catalogue' aesthetic had been sublimated into the unique and one-off. The Smithsons considered the IIT Metal and Mineral Building as an exemplar of the 'assembled', the later Colonnade Apartments in Newark of the 'designed', for it was in their view the outcome of a perfected technology of repetition and quality control of the serially produced, one which resulted in a coherent architectural language. In this sense they also referred to the architectural practice of SOM. Despite the apparent banality of the commercial aspect (they mentioned Lever House here) SOM succeeded in delivering an equal level of coherence, especially so in the case of the Manhattan Chase Bank. The influence of SOM must in fact have been tremendous, and is perhaps too often underestimated. When discussing inspirational examples that marked the further development of modern architecture the Smithsons listed, without blinking, the Chase Manhattan Bank alongside Le Corbusier's Chandigarh, Mies and Hilberseimer's Lafayette Park in Detroit, and Max Bill's Hochschule in Ulm.<sup>133</sup>

Although not as something to be exhibited or displayed then, for the Smithsons technology maintained a crucial role in furthering

132 Peter Smithson, 'Concealment and Display. Meditations on Braun', in: *Architectural Design*, July 1966; also integrated in *Without Rhetoric*, 1973.

133 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 1973, pp. 17-19; An unnoted SOM example might be their Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company bank building of 1953-1954, that stands on a corner, just like the bank in the Economist group, and equally similar has a public bel-etage accessed with escalators and of a larger than standard floor height, clearly expressed through the modulations of the curtain wall system that lends the volume its specific identity.

the language of modern architecture with the experience of the Economist as a moment of learning, making another step. Talking about air systems and lighting they said:

*'we have tried to melt these devices into the architecture to make them one with it: mostly by concealment or contrivance: and no special enrichment or re-ordering has taken place, rather a gentle modification without definite flavour.*

*We are now trying more confidently to think servicing, think air-systems, think lifts and other mechanisms: think them into the matrix of ordering decisions from the very beginning, as we have already managed to do with vehicle movement, and storage and servicing. It is difficult because here today's architect is on his own: Brunelleschi didn't have air-conditioning, and Violet-le-Duc didn't theorize about central vacuum cleaning systems.'*<sup>134</sup>

In the Economist this led to an 'ambient' kind of architecture, very different from earlier Brutalist rough poetry it seems: *'Ambient light, ambient air, no fuss about detail – awareness in a quiet way of the sweet functioning: that is architecture; and in a large building, its achievement involves us now with the organising of the mechanisms and services with a clear formal objective in mind. For, as Kahn says, the "suspended ceiling" speaks about nothing – not of the services it hides, not of the structure which is above, not of the space below – nothing, except perhaps its manufacturer's taste.*

*In a real building the light and the space and the air are one... sniff the air... sense the space... know how to act. How to keep this sense of what is going on... where the light and heat and air are coming from... how to get in and out... and where the lifts are... these are the questions.*

*In the Economist Building we answered them with a simple plan with an obvious services core; a suppression of the pipe-work with an easily-read hierarchy of access panels from the sealed tight to the readily accessible, doors to walk through which cannot be confused with cupboards; light, on the whole being made just to seem to be around, air arriving and departing obviously, but unobtrusively, the arrangement of the storage and work areas, so that they indicate their intended use.'*<sup>135</sup>

It was all about a new kind of vernacular, a matter-of-factness to be understood 'instinctively' according to the Smithsons; and perhaps more important, this went beyond the sheer visual, inhabiting the architecture of the 'machine-served society' one 'senses' space, where to go and how to behave, rather than 'seeing' it. This idea

134 Ibid., pp. 60-61.

135 Ibid., p. 48.

seemed to be very different from the transparency of the As Found of the 1950s, and its non-visual aspect would be further radicalized with the Conglomerate idea of the 1980s.

Although Smithson seemed to suggest a linear development, from the rejected Futurist position as something belonging to the nineteenth century to the machine-calm of the mid-twentieth century, from an 'assembled' Rocket to a 'designed' diesel electric locomotive, and from display to concealment, such straightforward development cannot be discerned in their own work. Rather, at different times and depending on the specifics of the project we see the 'assembled' and 'designed' re-appear differently elaborated. For instance, the House of the Future belongs to the 'designed' with its special parts and concealment of the mechanisms of air conditioning, pipes and other equipment. But for the Sugden House, of the same year, a very different approach was developed, one in which we can still 'read' the distinct qualities of the constitutive elements such as the standard Crittal windows and the re-used stock brick. Hunstanton seems a clear example of the 'assembled', when thinking of the abundant use of steel beams and how they work together with the concrete floor elements, the brick infill and glazing system, but also the famous water tank and as found display of the wash basins in the wash rooms. For the Economist the Smithsons designed a double system, a supporting, load-bearing skin structure (the Economist is not a curtain wall building) and a protecting cladding system (the roach-bed Portland stone, the suspended light ceilings, but also the full integration of services into partitioning walls and window sills), that absorbed the lessons of the 'designed' systems of Mies and SOM.<sup>136</sup> St Hilda's seems more of a hybrid system structurally speaking, with the added layer of timber bracing that acts as a veil or 'yashmak'. Robin Hood Gardens can be regarded as an example of the language of the 'designed', in this case a completely coherent language of (pre-stressed) prefab concrete, even though its mullions seem an overt reference to the steel curtain wall systems of America.

At this point, the issue of a form language of modern architecture touches on the Brutalist concern for the handling of materials and bringing out their specific qualities. In a retrospective text Peter Salter, former office assistant to the Smithsons, has noted how the detailing and preparing during the construction phase of a project was a special part of the work done in the office. According to Salter the construction details contained certain design strategies bringing together the specific idea

136 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The Pavilion and the Route', in: *Architectural Design*, March 1965, pp. 143-146.

of order, use and meaning. Salter worked on the drawings for the Second Arts Building at Bath University. He explained how 'construction rules' were developed from 'strategic ideas', which 'provided a coherence to the details that enabled a "reading" of the built spaces:

*'One such idea was "economy of means" as an aesthetic tool – that is to say, a decision was made to spend the money on the things that the inhabitant touched in the building. This offered a radical understanding of the space. Ceilings were left as constructed and services were surface-mounted, but doors, window linings and spandrel panels were finished with British Columbian pine and beech-faced plywood panelling. Door linings and other frames were constructed out of solid timber, not built up from small-section stuff. This clarity offered a kind of calmness to the space.'*<sup>137</sup>

And Salter added:

*'The idea of reading strategies from the detail was all around us. The office and home of the Smithsons was in an Italianate lodge, its layout of historical propriety converted into a new pattern of use. Each alteration to the house was marked by a plywood and pine component or lining. This rigour enabled an understanding of the different generational uses of the building.'*<sup>138</sup>

Both examples by Salter represent other, later variations on the 'assembled' and 'designed', with concealment and display yet again defined in slightly different ways – specifically tailored to the project. As an instrument to develop and fine-tune such design strategies, the working drawings were thus crucial to the Smithsons' work. Salter meticulously described how office routines revolved around most accurate drawing methods specific to the Smithson office. He mentioned among others how interns were asked to first draw axonometrics of past projects, to get familiarized with the Smithson laborious way of thinking and working, how Peter would use 1:25 and 1:1 drawings for both exploration and information, how he would also use notes and free hand drawing 1:25, and how Lorenzo Wong – one of the most faithful assistants in the office – in particular would scrutinize all such drawings, marking them up with red pencil revisions.<sup>139</sup> The importance attached to working drawings returns in the key publications of built projects, where the Smithsons make sure that such drawings were always included, as well as extensive descriptions of the construction specifics.

137 Peter Salter, 'Strategy and Detail', in: *Architecture is not Made with the Brain: The Labour of Alison and Peter Smithson*, Architectural Association, London, 2005, pp. 40-49; this quote on p. 44.  
138 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

139 Another former assistant to the office, Louisa Hutton, also gives a wonderful account of her time working with the Smithsons: 'Godparents' Gifts', in: *Architecture is not Made with the Brain: The Labour of Alison and Peter Smithson*, Architectural Association, London, 2005, pp. 50-60; Christopher Woodward, 'Drawing the Smithsons: An Artisanal Memoir', in Max Risselada (ed.), *Alison & Peter Smithson. A Critical Anthology*, Ediciones Polígrafa, Barcelona, 2011, pp. 258-267.

What once again comes through in Salter's description is how such strategies of detailing were part of the Smithsons' aim to set up 'a dialogue between object and user'. This dialogue was to be based on a form language evolved for 'the architecture of a machine-served society on a basis of the pleasures of common use'.<sup>140</sup> It is the 'simple life, well done' as recognised by the Smithsons in the cases of Bath, Lafayette Park, Oud's Kiefhoek housing or the former 'burgher cultures'. According to the Smithsons there was no real reason why that 'trick' could not be pulled off again. This was at least what they tried to do in Robin Hood Gardens:

*'We have tried to evolve the form-language to indicate and to enhance use. Concrete near the eye is smooth and moulded to be self-cleaning and neat – able to be touched. Concrete far from the eye is coarser – it is concrete to be passed by, not lived with. Joinery to be touched has smoothly rounded edges and is made of excellent timber of straight knot-free grain – inviting further waxing and polishing. Where much wear or weather is expected, timber is protected by paint, glossy – suggesting wiping down, re-painting. And so on.'*<sup>141</sup>

One wonders perhaps what has happened to the glamour couple of Marilyn Monroe and Joe diMaggio, who initially inhabited the streets-in-the-air of Golden Lane. Although 're-painting' was already a part of the Brutalist statement in *Architectural Design*, January 1955 (the very last words: 'the repainting of the Villa at Garches?'), there it seemed to be part of a reworking of Surrealist strategies capable of absorbing and turning around the media spectacle, even including the handling of materials that was also mentioned in that statement. Repainting here, in 1972, was thought of as part of a fabric of culture free from that 'iceberg' of the mass communications with its 'baser films and instincts', a culture of care and mutual responsibility as situated by the Smithsons in those workers' houses in Kiefhoek and Pieter de Hooch paintings.

As noted, the Smithsons seem to have been aware that the dream of an egalitarian society brought about by a welfare state had started to falter along the way. Already in *Without Rhetoric* they wrote:

*'a form-language based on common use and the pleasures of common use is resisted today in spite of its having been normal to all Europe since the rise of the Burgher cultures of the 1400s. Now form-language can set up a dialogue between object and user... the user responds by using it well... the object improves: or it is*

140 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 1973, p. 77.

141 Peter Smithson, 'Signs of Occupancy', in: *Architectural Design*, February 1972, pp. 97-99; reprinted as verbal illustration with the first essay in the Collective Design series, 'Initiators and Successors', in: *Architectural Design*, October 1973, pp. 621-623.

*used badly... the object is degraded... the dialogue ceases: and it can revive... for there is a secret and permanent life in things solidly established and intensely made, that can come alive for other uses, other generations – even when the damage is extremely severe, only a ruin or a fragment left.*<sup>142</sup>

Of course, when this was put down on paper, the Smithsons had no idea to what extent Robin Hood Gardens was to become a ruin itself, a so-called sink estate, largely due to poor maintenance management by the council authorities. But the problem is not so much the vandalism that hit Robin Hood Gardens estate – in the 1970s vandalism was rampant throughout the country and left no urban estate untouched.<sup>143</sup> The main question concerns to what extent did Robin Hood Gardens embody welfare state aspirations, while at the same time being a fragment, an intervention in an existing and decaying urban-industrial fabric? Surprisingly unshaken by the strong criticism on their work and ideas during the postmodernist years, the Smithsons were unequivocal in a late, retrospective statement in *The Charged Void*:

*'This building for the socialist dream – which is something different from simply complying with a programme written by the socialist state – was for us a Roman activity and Roman at many levels: ... in that it was built for an elaborate system of government and one with its own permanent building bureaucracy; ... in that it takes its stand alongside the heroisms of what has been made before – the port and the roads; ... in that it is as heroic as supplying a Romanised city with water: whether one sees this service as dramatic and obvious as an aqueduct or as secret and craftsmanly as the underground conduit; ... in that one has to deal with the problem of repetition; ... in that it is a bold statement working with the land forms; ... in that it provides a place for the anonymous client; ... in that it wants to be universal, greater to our little state – related to a greater law.'*<sup>144</sup>

The latter statement remains especially puzzling in the sense that the universal is mentioned again, since in the 1950s, within the CIAM debates universalism was already rejected in favour of cultural specificity. Clearly, Robin Hood Gardens, its form language and the handling of materials still aspired to embody some sort of general, societal framework in the spirit of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. With the fragmentation of society and the demise of welfare state planning we see that projects of a 'Roman' ambition remained

142 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 1973, p. 77.

143 In the early 1970s, vandalism became a key to read the state of the country, by some as a form of working class and/or youth rebellion to middle class paternalism and its values (dubbed 'political vandalism'); see among others Colin Ward (ed.), *Vandalism*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1973 (which incidentally opens with a photo of the Pruitt-Igoe Housing estate); another key publication of the time was of course Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space*, Macmillan, New York, 1972.

144 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, The Monacelli Press, New York, 2001, p. 296.



absent from the Smithsons' work after Robin Hood Gardens and after 'The Violent Consumer'. If one were to characterize the subsequent work, one might define it as the creation of 'fragments of an enclave'. More than before a strategy of intervention and transformation is proposed to arrive at specific qualities of place.

One of the questions that arises at this point is whether there is still one common language available or even possible for modern architecture; a common language which might hold a multitude of variations, or whether one should accept and work with a multitude of architectural languages. The Smithsons do accept a variation of 'patterns' with equally varied centres in the case of town planning and the scattered landscape of a Cluster City as suggested by Alison Smithson in 'The Violent Consumer'. But equally clearly, the Smithsons resisted the idea of an eclecticism of architectural languages. In his 1978 interview with Van Dijk, Peter Smithson was unequivocal about this, he opposed the idea of a collage of languages; he might have been referring to Jencks among others and his book *The Language of Post-modern Architecture* of 1977:

*'The fashionable architecture critics claim that the style and architectural theory for today should be the one of eclecticism. They maintain that the only language which can be understood by many is the one that is derived from a collage of other languages. It is a kind of theft. That is so alien to puritan cultures that it is for me impossible to work in that way. So logically speaking, I have to accept that it is possible to extend the language we already have and to make it more explicit.'*<sup>145</sup>

145 Van Dijk, 1978, p. 32; original Dutch text: 'Door de modieuze architectuurcritici wordt beweerd dat de stijl en de architectuurtheorie tegenwoordig die van het eclecticisme moeten zijn. Ze houden staande dat de enige taal die door velen begrepen kan worden er een is die door een collage van andere talen verkregen wordt. Het is een soort diefstal. Dat is iets wat puriteinse culturen zo vreemd is, dat het voor mij onmogelijk is op die manier te werken. Ik moet dus logischerwijs accepteren dat het mogelijk is om de taal die we al hebben uit te breiden en explicieter te maken.'

146 Ibid.

147 Aldo van Eyck, 'A Miracle of Moderation', in: Charles Jencks, George Baird (eds.), *Meaning in Architecture*, George Braziller, New York, 1969.

Smithson thought so, because to him language itself is capable of holding a multitude of meanings; ambiguity is always at play even in the case of the most clearly articulated signs and words, as demonstrated by the example of historical architecture, including Palladio's work or neo-classicism.<sup>146</sup> Meaning is then something essentially 'open', it is latent and slumbering, a 'vagueness' to be actualized in time, accrued by use and all sorts of forms of appropriation, rather like Van Eyck had postulated in his debate with Jencks and the semiologists.<sup>147</sup>

The Smithsons would continue to pursue their project for a 'fabric of culture' that paradoxically took the shape of an 'open society' made out of enclaves: inviolate fragments as safe havens in the larger fabric that was the great, globalised society. It is at

this point that they seemed to concur with Kenneth Frampton's idea of a Critical Regionalism, which he developed in response to the dominance of postmodernism in the early 1980s:

*'Its salient cultural precept is "place" creation; the general model to be employed in all future development is the enclave that is to say, the bounded fragment against which the ceaseless inundation of a place-less, alienating consumerism will find itself momentarily checked.'*<sup>148</sup>

Such enclaves, the creation of which will be the topic of the final chapter, can be a single cell for contemplation, or a vast expansion of landscape and sky; they act as places for regeneration and revitalization, just as they are vessels for continuity preserving specific values of culture while carrying them into the future.

148 Kenneth Frampton, 'Prospects for a Critical Regionalism' in: Kate Nesbitt (ed.), *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture. An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1996, p. 482; originally published in *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal*, nr. 20, 1983, pp. 147-162. Surprisingly, in the 1985 edition of *Modern Architecture. A Critical History*, this statement is not included in the final chapter on Critical Regionalism.





## 7 AT HOME

### Domesticity and The Order of Things

#### 'Gone Swimming'

1 See Erten Erdem's PhD research for more on this: Shaping 'The Second Half Century': *The Architectural Review 1947-1971*, MIT, Cambridge MA, 2004.

2 Steve Parnell, *Architectural Design 1954-1972*, PhD Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2011, esp. Chapter 6 'A Critical History of AD 1965-1972'. As is well-known the 1970s brought economic hardship for the building industry, architects and their journals included; Parnell has researched this in relation to both *The Review* and *Architectural Design*, see p. 214 and 216.

3 When listing the items on and/or by the Smithsons in the pages of *Architectural Design* it is striking to see how important the late 1960s and early 1970s actually were, when Robin Middleton was technical editor of the journal. Only 1970 shows a dip in the Smithson production for the magazine: in 1964 they appeared in 4 out of 12 issues, in 1965 in 9/12, in 1966 in 6/12, in 1967 in 4/12, in 1968 3/12, in 1969 in 6/12, in 1971 they appeared in 6/12 issues, in 1972 in 5/12, in 1973 in 4/12, in 1974 in 7/12, in 1975 also in 7/12, and in 1976 in 2/12; after that nil. Total overview: 1951, Sep; 1952, nil; 1953, Sep, Nov, Dec; 1954, Jan, Aug, Sep; 1955 Jan, Jun, Sep, Dec; 1956, Mar, Jul, Oct; 1957, Apr, Jun; 1958, Mar, Apr, May, Jun, Oct, Nov; 1959, Apr, Jul, Sep; 1960, Feb, Apr, May, Sep, Dec; 1961, Feb, Jul, Nov; 1962, Apr, Aug, Dec; 1963, Jul, Sep, Oct; 1964, Jun, Aug, Sep, Oct; 1965, Feb, Mar, May, Jul, Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov, Dec; 1966, Feb, May, Jul, Aug, Sep, Nov; 1967, Jan, Jul, Sep, Dec; 1968, Apr, Sep, Oct; 1969, Jan, Apr, Jun, Jul, Oct, Dec; 1970, Sep; 1971, Feb, Mar, May, Jul, Aug, Oct; 1972, Jan, Feb, Apr, Jun, Sep; 1973, Feb, Aug, Oct, Nov; 1974, Jan, Apr, May, Jun, Jul, Sep, Nov; 1975, Apr, May, Jun, Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov; 1976, Jun, Oct.

4 In conversation with the author 17 September 2007.

With the event of postmodernism in architecture Alison and Peter Smithson were relegated to a position in the margins of the ongoing discourse. Major shifts in the British world of architectural publishing accompanied the postmodernist surge and had an immediate impact on the Smithsons' access to their familiar publicity platforms. In 1973 De Cronin Hastings retired and said farewell to his lifetime project of *The Architectural Review*; Pevsner and Richards had quit their editorial work for the *Review* just two years earlier, in 1971.<sup>1</sup> But more importantly in 1975 Andreas Papadakis, owner and founder of the publishing house Academy Editions, bought the troubled *Architectural Design*, after which he transformed it into a mouthpiece of the new postmodernist fashion in architecture.<sup>2</sup> The last substantial piece by the Smithsons as published in *Architectural Design* was Peter Smithson's 'Oxford and Cambridge Walks', in the June issue of 1976. After that, no major text by the Smithsons would appear in the pages of the magazine any more, whereas in the preceding two decades they had dominated the pages of the journal, especially during the last three years before *Architectural Design* changed owners.<sup>3</sup> From 1973 to 1975 the 'Collective Design' series of essays was published, just as two major pieces on the history of Team 10, in casu Alison Smithson's mat-building essay in September 1974 (almost a special theme issue) and her extensive account of the 1962 Royaumont meeting in November 1975. Eventually, the one publication by Academy Editions dedicated to the Smithsons was the monograph *The Shift*, of 1982, with David Dunster as chief editor of this series of monographs, who mentioned that, by that time, he considered the Smithsons as unjustly forgotten, the very reason to offer them once again a podium.<sup>4</sup>

This shifting position – from the zenith of their fame in the early 1970s to the margins of the discourse by the end of the decade – can be best demonstrated by the assessment of the Smithsons' achievements by the star author of Academy Editions,

Charles Jencks, in particular on the basis of his famous diagram of the 'Evolutionary Tree to the Year 2000'.<sup>5</sup> As well-known, the diagram is a chronological index depicting the major historical developments of the architecture of the twentieth century by the use of architects names and style labels only (no buildings or designs were included for instance); a pattern of splitting and merging clouds of the various tendencies resulted, which were categorized under the metahistorical terms of 'logical', 'idealist', self-conscious', 'intuitive', 'activist' to 'unself-conscious 80% of environment'.<sup>6</sup> The diagram was first published in 1969, with Alison and Peter Smithson's names included, just as the labels 'Brutalism', 'CIAM-Team X' and 'Pop', whereas in the updated version of 2000 the Smithsons were removed. 'Brutalism' was kept, 'CIAM-Team X' and 'Pop' as well, just as their Team 10 fellows Bakema, Van Eyck, and Erskine or their main rival Stirling, while new names included were De Carlo, Ungers, and Woods; also writers were part of the historic movements now such as Colin Rowe and Jencks himself.<sup>7</sup> The Smithsons were quite aware of the changing mood of the 1970s, in 1978 Alison Smithson wrote with some dismay about the new situation and historicist collageing: 'Now it is the era of the ragpickers and the antique dealers. So be it; it is no joy to fight the zeitgeist.... So we go swimming.'<sup>8</sup>

This shifting position within the architecture discourse can be retraced by other instances as well. In the early issues of *Oppositions*, the journal of the then just established Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) in New York, they were still ranked as central figures. Eisenman republished his review of the Robin Hood Gardens estate in the very first issue of the journal of 1973, a full bibliography of the Smithsons' writings was published by Julia Bloomfield (who happened to be one of the former office assistants), and Ken Frampton wrote a most laudatory review of their *Without Rhetoric*, setting it against Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction* and Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture*.<sup>9</sup> In 1975 *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* published a special issue evaluating the work of Team 10. In a much more critical mood Frampton measured the internal contradictions of the claims made by the self-proclaimed inheritors of the CIAM legacy. By 1977 the tables had turned completely. Charles Jencks – one time a (critical) attendant to the Team 10 meeting of 1966 in Urbino – picked up what Frampton had left to his readers to conclude for themselves. To Jencks the 'essentially humanist values of "place, identity, personality, home-coming"' could not be communicated by any kind of architectural language 'based on the machine metaphor'

5 Charles Jencks, *Architecture and Beyond. Success in the Art of Prediction*, Wiley-Academy, Chichester, 2000.

6 *Ibid.*, these terms were consciously borrowed from Claude Lévi-Strauss.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5 and 46-47; the name of Sandy Wilson was also removed from the last version.

8 One page typescript, Alison Smithson, 'The Smithsons..... Gone Swimming', dated July 2 1978.

9 Peter Eisenman, 'From Golden Lane to Robin Hood Gardens; or If You Follow the Yellow Brick Road, It May not Lead to Golders Green', in: *Oppositions*, nr. 1, 1973, reprint of the publication in *Architectural Design*, September 1972; Julia Bloomfield, 'A Bibliography of Alison and Peter Smithson', in: *Oppositions*, nr. 2, 1974, pp. 105-123; Kenneth Frampton, 'On Alison and Peter Smithson's *Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-1972*', in: *Oppositions*, nr. 6, 1976, pp. 105-107.

in the way the Smithsons and Team 10 were pursuing according to Jencks: 'their Robin Hood Gardens simply does not do the trick'.<sup>10</sup> Instead, Robin Hood Gardens was classified as an example of architecture signifying 'social deprivation': 'the repetitive pattern and homogeneous material' signified 'council housing', 'anonymity', and 'the authorities didn't have enough money to use wood, stucco, etc.' A strategically placed photograph of critic Paul Goldberger at the elevator with his hands raised as if held at gun point with an equally strategic caption summed up the final verdict:

*'The long empty streets in the air don't have the life or facilities of the traditional street. The entry ways, one of which has been burned, are dark and anonymous, serving too many families. The scheme has many of the problems which Oscar Newman traced to a lack of defensible space. Here architectural critic Paul Goldberger mimes an act that often occurs.'*<sup>11</sup>

There is quite some innuendo to briefly recapture here, but the following points may be mentioned in order to try and grasp the shifting positions and the confused, at times confusing assumptions behind the arguments exchanged. First, what remains striking is that in suggesting that the architecture of Robin Hood Gardens provoked crime and other deviant behaviour, Jencks seems to take up a behaviourist position, not unlike the modernists, and the functionalists in particular. Whereas the Smithsons, although aiming for the establishment of a clear connection between use and architectural form, they also propounded that there was a simultaneous disconnection between use and architecture at work – when they spoke of the 'secret' or 'parallel' life of architecture for instance, or when they observed that modernist buildings and their language were appreciated very differently in different contexts, the same sort of (modern) building could be characterized by some as a 'prison' and by others as 'releasing'.<sup>12</sup> And although Jencks claimed that his argument for a postmodernist language was built on the notion of 'multi-valence' in contrast to modern architecture that would comprise a 'univalent' phenomenon, the sort of ambiguity (or 'vagueness') as observed by the Smithsons was precluded from his understanding of architecture as a linguistic grammar system. Indeed, the two parties entertained a profoundly different notion of meaning: Jencks thought of meaning as something coded, as semiotics, something to be 'read' visually, whereas the Smithsons (and Team 10) understood meaning as the outcome of patterns of 'use' and experience (here they came close to the Lefebvorean notion of lived experience).<sup>13</sup> A similar different kind of conception

10 Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-modern Architecture*, Academy Editions, London, 1977, revised enlarged edition 1978, pp. 22-23.

11 Caption to illustrations nrs. 34 and 35, p. 23; this particular image triggered a response by Peter Smithson published in *Architectural Design*, nrs. 7-8, 1977, p. 461, which was then answered by Jencks in *Architectural Design*, nrs. 9-10, 1977, p. 588. Peter Smithson talks about how Goldberger seems to act as if hit on the head, Jencks claims it was to mime an act of vandalism as if breaking the lights.

12 The first remark was made in the context of the Hunstanton School, see also *The Charged Void: Architecture*, 2001, p. 42; the second by Alison in her essay 'The Violent Consumer', 1974.

13 Peter Smithsons, 'Signs of Occupation' in: *Architectural Design*, October 1972, pp. 97-99; 'Signs of Life – Venturi and Rauch', in: *Architectural Design*, August 1976 pp. 496-498.

with regard to the notions of meaning, identity, everyday experience and semiotics comes to the fore when one compares the Smithsons' essay 'Signs of Occupancy' of 1972 and published in *Architectural Design*, with the famous 'Signs of Life' exhibition by Denise Scott-Brown, Steven Izenour and Robert Venturi on Levittown, which was on show in 1976 in Washington.

When Jencks did 'read' modern architecture as having multiple meanings (in apparent contradiction to his own claims about modern architecture being univalent), it was almost invariably for the sake of ridicule. He admitted himself to 'modern architecture-bashing' as a 'form of sadism which is getting far too easy'.<sup>14</sup> Mies van der Rohe was a main target (technology as fetish), but also Aldo Rossi's Gallarate housing complex in Milan (fascist) was included just as Herman Hertzberger's Amsterdam old age home of De Drie Hoven (an unfortunate stacking of columns and infill panels in a pattern reminiscent of white crosses and black coffins). But then, Jencks was not after subtlety and nuance, he was after the complete displacement of the modern architecture discourse in the first place, as a precondition to establish his idea of 'multi-valency' in architecture; fed-up with its claims of moral superiority he aimed to reveal modern architecture's 'credibility gap' between 'statement and result', which according to him had reached 'impressive proportions'.<sup>15</sup> *The Language of Post-modern Architecture* had therefore an entirely different approach than Jencks's earlier *Modern Movements in Architecture* of 1973, in which he demonstrated how the modern movement and the avant-gardes were a multiform collection of overlapping and all too often contradicting tendencies, much in contrast with the homogeneous, historiographical constructs of the mid-twentieth century period which had supported the modernist paradigm. However, in *The Language of Post-modern Architecture*, Jencks resurrected modern architecture as a homogeneous phenomenon once again, an architecture of a form-language which remained largely abstract and devoid of meaning according to Jencks, and against which he could build the case of his alternative proposition for a 'radical eclecticism'. Ultimately, this 'amalgam' would even provide room for 'Modernism' as one of its many constituent ingredients too, 'precisely because the theory of semiotics postulates meaning through opposition', a cursory yet crucial remark regarding the whole discursive construct behind Jencks's book, quickly followed by the one admission by Jencks of the quality of modern architecture, namely that the language of modern architecture held the 'possibility of rich meaning using a restricted language'.<sup>16</sup>

14 Jencks, 1978, p. 25.

15 Ibid., p. 24.

16 Ibid., p. 128; this slip – which seems contradictory to Jenck's argument regarding the 'univalence' of modern architecture – is explained in a note as follows: 'If meaning consists in relation then a restricted as well as rich palette can articulate it. My general favouring of rich over restricted systems is partly due to our Miesian age, and partly due to the fact that elites and specialists are better at decoding restricted systems than the general public.' p. 134, endnote 62.



Equally remarkable, Jencks's choice of terms remained largely in line with those developed throughout the 1950s and 60s; but he turned them around against those who had introduced them – once again, nothing seems as slippery as discursive language. Architectural eclecticism as 'the natural evolution of a culture with choice' was defended by Jencks in unmistakably structuralist and Brutalist terms alike:

*'if our pattern books today include four hundred building systems, if "local" materials now mean everything down at the hardware shop, then our natural vernacular is eclectic if not polyglot, and even the present attempt at a simple Neo-Vernacular is bound to be infected by these mixed sources. In semiotic terms, the langue (total set of communicational sources) is so heterogeneous and diverse that any singular parole (individual selection) will reflect this, even if only in excluding the diversity. Such are the facts of architectural production.*

*A corresponding argument can be made concerning consumption. Any middle-class urbanite in any large city from Teheran to Tokyo is bound to have a well-stocked, indeed over-stocked, "image-bank" that is continually restuffed by travel and magazines. His musée imaginaire may mirror the pot-pourri of the producers, but it is nonetheless natural to his way of life.'*<sup>17</sup>

The musée imaginaire reference brings Jencks eerily close to earlier Independent Group exchanges, or even Van Eyck's universalist 'Story of Another Idea', as presented in 1959 in Otterlo. Jencks's idea of 'multi-valence' seems derived from Van Eyck's use of 'multi-meaning' and Herman Hertzberger's 'polyvalence'. But whereas Van Eyck and his colleagues of Dutch *Forum* and Team 10 sought to overcome eclecticism, Jencks embraced it:

*'it seems to me desirable that architects learn to use this inevitable heterogeneity of languages. Besides, it is quite enjoyable. Why, if one can afford to live in different ages and cultures, restrict oneself to the present, the locale?'*<sup>18</sup>

Despite Jencks's own claims this embrace of eclecticism, which he paired with such notions as 'pattern book' and 'image-bank', rendered the proposition as an empty formalism, meaningless and contextless from the perspective of the Team 10 discourse and the Smithsons and Van Eyck. They would never think of *parole* as a simple form of 'selection', as if a consumerist option, but rather as a way of appropriation, a spoken and 'lived' vernacular, almost as a base on which the superstructure of a *langue* would rest,

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

which in its turn would represent the larger system of abstracted and generalized rules of universal human interaction.<sup>19</sup>

Regarding ideology there is another profound opposition to note. If the Smithsons and Team 10 could be reproached for making themselves an instrument, albeit rather ambiguously so, of welfare state bureaucracies, Jencks produced here a depoliticized and naturalizing account of the incipient neo-liberal dominance in politics and ideology: eclecticism as the 'natural way of life' of the 'middle class urbanite', 'quite enjoyable' for the ones who can 'afford' it. While quite aptly criticizing architects for their often embarrassing alliances and untenable claims with regard to politics and authorities, Jencks gave up on any such claims of architecture as liberating citizens or enabling democratic development. He stated that 'there is nothing much the architect can do' considering the 'triumph of consumer society in the West and bureaucratic State Capitalism in the East'.<sup>20</sup> The most an architect could do was in a Venturi-like way embrace 'complexity' and display 'contradiction' through:

*'dissenting buildings that express the complex situation. He can communicate the values which are missing and ironically criticise the ones he dislikes. But to do that he must make use of the language of the local culture, otherwise his message falls on deaf ears, or is distorted to fit this local language.'*<sup>21</sup>

But this was of course the very problem as raised within the Team 10 discourse, just as it was the source of its internal contradictions; remember Van Eyck when he asked how architects could build society's counterform if society itself had no distinct shape of its own, or Alison Smithson in her essay 'The Violent Consumer' when she diagnosed the combination of welfare state policies and consumerist values as destructive to any such concept of a 'language of the local culture'. Upon closer inspection one might argue that the proposed eclecticist amalgam of styles could not overcome the fallacy of the reworkings of modern architecture of the second half of the twentieth century, that this 'post-modern' notion itself was built on that same misunderstanding.

Finally, to try and understand the displacement of the modern architecture discourse as proposed by Jencks and others, we must note the displacement of the issue of housing and the house as a paradigm. Clearly, Jencks did not consider the welfare state system as a category of its own; nor do we find any special interest

19 It must be noted that it was actually Herman Hertzberger who would utilize the *langue-parole* distinction most explicitly throughout his teachings.

20 Jencks, 1978, p. 37; even Robert Venturi was called to order by Jencks for his statement that 'Main Street is almost all right', as too easy a way out and an opportunistic embrace of American capitalism and its consumer values, which may create 'private wealth', but also 'public squalor', p. 35, Jencks referred to Kenneth Galbraith here.

21 Ibid.

in social housing as a key institution for architectural practice in *The Language of Post-modern Architecture*. On the contrary, Jencks famously opened his argument with the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project by Minoru Yamasaki in St Louis. To Jencks it symbolized the 'death of modern architecture'. The caption summarized his point succinctly, in particular the last remark: '*Several slab blocks of this scheme were blown up in 1972 after they were continuously vandalised. The crime rate was higher than other developments, and Oscar Newman attributed this, in his book *Defensible Space*, to the long corridors, anonymity, and lack of controlled semi-private space. Another factor: it was designed in a purist language at variance with the architectural codes of the inhabitants.*'<sup>22</sup>

Thus, in the last instance the whole social issue and its very real complexity was reduced to a debate on 'codes' and the communication of the right (or wrong) messages preferably by way of a consumerist vernacular.<sup>23</sup> When Jencks – as a conclusion to the first chapter, which described modern architecture's death – eventually defined the 'major commissions' and the 'most prevalent building types' that would represent the 'major monuments of modern architecture and the social tasks for which they were built', he left out the modern house and social housing projects, just as other classic welfare state programmes as university buildings, schools and hospitals. The four categories of buildings considered most characteristic to modern architecture were according to Jencks: 'monopolies and big business', 'international exhibitions, world fairs', 'factories and engineering feats', and 'consumer temples and churches of distraction'.<sup>24</sup> It was apparently all about the cycle of production and consumption as driving forces behind the world of late capitalism. Housing, and especially mass housing were only briefly discussed under the category of 'factories and engineering feats'. Clearly, while aiming to displace the modern architecture discourse, the house as paradigm and housing as a major task for architects were to be designated a very different position within the whole debate. If those questions of inhabitation and dwelling, which had so passionately ignited the CIAM and Team 10 debates, were still something of an issue to Jencks, then only as a matter of intellectual 'pastime' (how picturesque one might add). The final chapter of *The Language of Post-modern Architecture* discussed among many other things various weekend homes and country houses as an 'opportunity' for architects to create 'visual puns' by way of all sorts of serious and silly metaphors, from Stanley

22 Ibid., p. 9.

23 The recent 2011 documentary 'The Pruitt-Igoe Myth: An Urban History' by Chad Freidrichs re-opened the debate questioning the way the estate was stereotyped by critics as part of their diatribes against modernist architecture.

24 Ibid., p. 26-35.

Tigerman's Hot Dog House to Peter Eisenman's conceptual House VI, whose rigour was appreciated by Jencks in terms of 'humorous touches' and 'witty' semantics, thus completely overlooking the profound (post-)existentialist overtones of Eisenman's project in relation to the problem as formulated by Summerson, namely the one of a missing language of architecture in the first place (including the refutation of transcendent meaning as part of any architectural ordering).<sup>25</sup>

### In Retreat

The 'shift' as discussed by the Smithsons in their 1982 Academy publication didn't address the postmodernist debate of those years apart from the one page introductory statement on the two 'trees' or traditions they wished to distinguish: the one of 'enquiry' and the one of 'classicism'.<sup>26</sup> Still, their idea of a shift did concern the further development of the language of architecture in the first place. The language of architecture was a topic successfully monopolized by postmodernism one may state in relation to the semiotic issues of meaning and communication, yet to the Smithsons, following Summerson, it was also central to the development of the modern architecture discourse, and as such it recurred throughout their writings. In *The Shift* they argued how their own interest had moved to an 'aesthetic of the light touch'. This was an idea that Peter Smithson had started developing from the early 1970s onward, among others through a lecture given at the opening of the new school building for the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1972, and of which a reworked version was published in 1974 in *Architectural Design* with the title 'Lightness of Touch' as part of the 'Collective Design' series.<sup>27</sup> Comparing the five points of Le Corbusier with his and Alison's work, he defined this new language as 'gentle, interpretable, even dressable' and 'accommodating'. While the architecture of the Heroic Period was 'universal' theirs was 'place-connected', 'place-establishing', and 'time-capable'. The garden was not to be on the roof, but a 'quiet place immediately accessible from living spaces'. The 'dressable' architecture was demonstrated by the examples of St Hilda's College dormitory building and their Upper Lawn weekend house. Through diagrammatic pencil drawings, once again based on Le Corbusier's '5 points d'une architecture nouvelle', Smithson explained the key characteristics of this architecture of 'light touch'. In these diagrams, the dormitory building of St Hilda's re-appeared,

<sup>25</sup> On the side it might be noted that Peter Eisenman's work can be regarded as a response to John Summerson's RIBA lecture of 1957, in which he postulated the possibility of the language of architecture gone missing; in conversation with the author Summerson's postulate was once again recollected by Eisenman as the beginning of his critique of the modernist, humanist paradigm and the concomitant centrality of dwelling and inhabitation for architecture, 30 July 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Alison and Peter Smithsons, *The Shift*, 1982. p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Smithson, 'Lightness of Touch', in: *Architectural Design*, June 1974, pp. 377-378.

especially the lattice work of the added timber frame; 'light touch' then, was about a hybrid structure, 'part-cellular' (as opposed to the 'pilotis'), with fixed service cores (as opposed to the free plan idea), and a 'dressable facade' of the 'layered' elements of the fixed facade structure and the added frame (in contrast with the 'facade libre' with its 'fenêtre en longueur').<sup>28</sup>

In *The Shift* this aesthetic was further explained as one that was based on 'overlay or lattice', which 'form[ed] part of, or supplement, longer lasting structures', and which 'suggest[ed] the possibilities of design contributions to their inhabitants'.<sup>29</sup> This was a paraphrasing of the same argument as already propounded in 'Signs of Occupancy' and *Without Rhetoric*, both also from the early 1970s,<sup>30</sup> and which aimed at a redefinition of the relationship between the architecture and the user in terms of inhabitation: an architecture that accommodated 'events', and invited added 'decorations' by its users.<sup>31</sup> In the concluding remarks to *The Shift*, the Smithsons mentioned as the three key projects: the competition design for Lucas Headquarters (1974), the Yellow House (1976) and the House with Two Gtries (1977). All three of them remained unbuilt, the designs still displayed facade structures of a transformed Miesian language. They were an elaboration of the timber frame of St Hilda's, based on a strongly articulated, repetitive tectonic language of the basic elements, of which the diagonal braces featured as the most striking ones. In his lecture 'Three Generations' – also developed throughout the 1970s when visiting various architecture schools – Peter Smithson mentioned the diagonal as an element that was characteristic of the third generation of modern architects, even though he also identified Mies as an early source.<sup>32</sup> These pergola-like structures or lattices, formed frameworks rather than façades. As frameworks they aimed at the accommodation of the everyday life of the inhabitants by allowing for appropriation through the very acts of inhabitation, made visible by what the Smithsons had earlier called the 'stuff and decoration of the urban scene'.<sup>33</sup> Hence, according to the Smithsons between the 'layers' there 'seem[ed] to be room for illusion and for activity', as they put it in a slightly puzzling way.<sup>34</sup> The design strategy was to be perfected later, when the Smithsons started working with Axel Bruchhäuser and redesigned his house and factory in the German forests during the 1980s and 90s.

Still, in 1982 at the peak of historicist postmodernism, it seemed almost too cool an understatement to strictly limit the notion of a

28 Ibid.

29 Alison and Peter Smithsons, *The Shift*, 1982., p. 67.

30 Peter Smithson, 'Signs of Occupancy', 1972, and Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 1973.

31 Alison and Peter Smithsons, *The Shift*, 1982., p. 67.

32 Peter Smithson, 'Three Generations', in: *OASE*, nr. 51, 1999 pp. 82-93; first published in: *ILA&UD Annual Report 1980*, 1981; and in Alison and Peter Smithson, *Italian Thoughts*, 1993.

33 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Shift*, 1982., p. 72; an auto-quotation from the Smithsons 1952 Urban Re-identification manuscript, later published at other places, most notably in *Ordinariness and Light*, 1970.

34 Ibid., p. 67.

'shift' to modernist architectural grammar and linguistics, while also by-passing the postmodernist brawl of the day. To once again list the abovenoted aspects:

- the coming down of the welfare state project, not just through the election of Margaret Thatcher and the subsequent abandonment of welfare state institutions as the LCC, but also through the post-1968 critique on structuralism and humanist thought in architecture and planning, under which the Team 10 discourse usually – and probably too routinely – is classified;
- the major shift in the British and international debates with postmodernism emerging as the new discursive game, thus sidelining Team 10 and the Smithsons;
- the Smithsons themselves reaching a decisive, almost conclusive point in their career with the realization of Robin Hood Gardens in 1972, the publication of *Ordinariness and Light* in 1970 and *Without Rhetoric* in 1973.

There are some other things to note as well:

- in the first place, probably the lack of new commissions once Robin Hood Gardens was finished; though this was not exclusively typical for the Smithson position, many architects were forced to close office because of the ongoing building crisis of those years and the lack of welfare state commissions (Alan Colquhoun for instance, to name but one);
- the closure of the Team 10 discourse, with the very last Team 10 meeting in 1977, organized by Georges Candilis in Bonnieux, France;
- the loss of a publication podium in the United Kingdom after *Architectural Design* changed its editorial policies; and so forth and so on.

Just as there are also a couple of biographical aspects to be mentioned, and although perhaps slightly speculative, they should be mentioned here as well, since they help to explain the Smithsons' very different position within the larger discourse from the one they had occupied through the 1950s and 1960s. Various authors have touched upon this, Max Risselada, David Dunster and Peter Cook, in the first place.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Cook, 'Regarding the Smithsons', in: *The Architectural Review*, July 1982, pp. 36-43; interestingly enough, around the same time the AA School had invited Alison Smithson for a seminar on Team 10, which led to the publication of *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, 1982.

Cook paid homage to his intellectual parents in an extensive essay written for *The Architectural Review*, just as the Academy Monographs edition of *The Shift* published in the year 1982.<sup>35</sup> Cook suggested how the Smithsons cherished their existence in the relative quiet away from the centre of discursive action:

'Peter Smithson has returned to regular teaching [at Bath university], but only at a place that appears not to hustle him and allows for a very easy disappearance into the gentle Somerset trees. In other words, the hurly-burly of the international pecking-orders, the plotting of New York, the twittering of London are not for him. Alison is more likely to come in to the fray on issues that really engage her interest, so that she might sometimes crop up as a conference speaker: and then return, puzzled (or bored) at the crassness of most architectural chat.'<sup>36</sup>

Cook linked the Smithsons' mood to their South Kensington house, 'very calm' and 'behind a wall', 'distanced by a lawn' with 'tea at a certain moment in the day'.<sup>37</sup> This house was their home-cum-office at 24 Gilston Road, called Cato Lodge, an Italianate villa built in the famous year of 1851 and to which the Smithsons had moved in 1971. For ten years, they had lived just across the street at 2 Priory Walk, a four storey terraced house with basement, and before that in Limerston Street, also close by in Chelsea, just south of Fulham Road, after having moved there from their room in 32 Doughty Street, Bloomsbury. Moving socially upward from rooming with Theo Crosby in the late 1940s to the upper middle class clique of Cato Lodge in the early 1970s delineated the Smithsons career in quite a characteristic way. Besides a demonstration of their aspirations and how they had established themselves, it also marked a new phase not just of their career, but of their life – with Alison being 43 years old and Peter 48. In hindsight one might argue that it was only then that they became their truly selves, forced by the circumstances (the combination of a lack of commissions and postmodernism taking over) and the closure of the first period of their patient and consistent reworking of the modernist legacy (the realization of Robin Hood Gardens and the publication of *Ordinariness and Light* and *Without Rhetoric*).

Such a hypothesis seems plausible, because after that the whole design production moved away from any kind of Corbusian or Miesian following; especially the built production of the 1980s and afterward, the two sets of various projects at Bath university and in Germany for Axel Bruchhäuser. The proposition of an architecture of 'light touch' as made in *The Shift* was only the foreshadowing of the many other shifts to come, smaller ones as well as bigger ones. The most profound one concerns the abandonment of the search for 'total image systems' that was central to the Smithsons' work in the 1950s; or to put it slightly more careful, at the very least we

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

are looking at the temporary adjournment of such a possibility of a total system approach until (postmodern) times might change again. The so-called 'shift' and the architecture of 'light touch' entailed an approach that built on the realization of fragments and enclaves only, not the 'total systems' of the 1950s any more.

The Smithsons' interest in specificity and context responsiveness evolved into an architectural language of fragments and interventions that can only be understood from the specific project situation and the particular development of the Smithsons' theoretical investigations. Whereas the built projects before the 'shift' can still be regarded as belonging to an architecture language akin to total systems and their representations (the microcosmos of the macro-cosmos – complete image systems), even as they already carried the idea of fragments and intervention within them; this is hardly possible to maintain when looking at the projects realized from the late 1970s onward.

The Hunstanton school and its gymnasium are a most didactic and eloquent example of the reflection of the architectural order at stake here, on the larger scale of the whole just as in the smaller bits and pieces; the 'fragment' of the sports hall demonstrates this best, it maintains its own integrity while it also stands for the larger whole, but one could also point to the raised water tank, how it is both an a-symmetrical 'sign' for the whole school, while it also creates a 'local' symmetrical focal point when one arrives closer to the project and its entrance. As such Hunstanton communicates its architectural principles most effectively, which makes them transferable and imitable. In the case of the Bath school of architecture this seems hardly imaginable. And when following the Smithsons' writings of the period, clearly, this was intentionally so. The building acts as a perfect illustration of the 'canon of conglomerate ordering' and the requirement that such a building of that canon:

*'has spacial presence – more awesome than object presence – something not remotely reducible to a simple geometric schema or communicable through two dimensional images.'*<sup>38</sup>

And that such a building:

*'is hard to retain in the mind ... elusive except when one is actually there; then it seems perfectly simple.'*<sup>39</sup>

The school acts as a fragment added to the 1960s campus creating a most specific connection between the raised level of the campus

38 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The Canon of Conglomerate Ordering', in: *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, p. 62.

39 Ibid.



deck and the eastern entrance and landscape, with bus stop and car park. The architectural language of the building, of a romantic, almost Ruskinian sensibility, establishes a surprising reversal – the new Smithson school building is perceived as if ‘older’ as the original campus buildings. Thus the school building renders the architecture of the 1960s campus as fresh and new again. The ‘lumpish’ building’s geometry is completely dependent on the conditions of the site, such as climate, sun path and specific routes, and the accommodated functions with every floor of a different spatial configuration in terms of density, division of rooms, floor heights, inner connections et cetera.<sup>40</sup>

The Smithsons linked this approach to what they called the ‘Gothic mind’. This may seem confusing since the Gothic of the Smithsons was very different from the 19th century revivals and its delight in Gothic detail.<sup>41</sup> Speaking of a ‘set of mind’ the Smithsons defined the Gothic as a way of working without having to think in terms of ‘larger systems’.<sup>42</sup> To them the Gothic concerned a ‘sensibility’:

*‘In the middle-ages the sense of the land, known through walking, riding, working on it permeated all acts of inhabitation.’*<sup>43</sup>

This sensibility should ideally work its way through to the smallest elements of the architecture, in particular ‘doors’ and ‘doorsteps’.<sup>44</sup> Thus, we find a renewed definition of the 1950s doorstep philosophy here, just as one might add, a continuation of Arts and Crafts notions with regard to authenticity, the vernacular and the reciprocities between use, design and production.

Much of the language of the Bath university projects was quite naturally derived from Peter Smithson’s earlier studies of the town of Bath, in which he had already expressed an interest in accidental detail, and the particular fragmentary character of the Georgian architecture and interventions as he saw them, and which were capable of establishing an overall connective ‘fabric’ in his view, while also successfully maintaining the feel of the Somerset landscape within the city boundaries. Again, one may say, a sensibility of the ‘land’ working its way through to those details of doors and windows, pathways and pavement texture, building silhouettes and rooftops.<sup>45</sup>

To complicate things, it must be noted that even though the Smithsons’ new lines of thought are different from the years before the shift of the 1970s, they also still relate to early modern

40 The current managerial demands of flexibility of a contemporary university are largely at odds with the building’s spatial lay-out as proven by a site visit and Smithsons study day, organised by the Twentieth Century Society, 3 September 2011.

41 The Smithsons refer to what they call ‘the Gothic’ quite frequently in those years, while not fully explaining this; it is certainly not the Gothic revival of the 19th century, nor the cathedrals but the fabric of a pre-rationalist town building before the Renaissance; see the conclusion to *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, the chapter ‘Set of Mind’, pp. 102-103; and the essay ‘The Recovery of Parts of the Gothic Mind’ in: *ILA&UD Annual Report 1990-1991*, 1992, also included in *Italienische Gedanken, weitergedacht*, 2001, pp. 26-45.

42 Peter Smithson, ‘The Recovery of Parts of the Gothic Mind’, in: *ILA&UD Year Book 1990-1991, The Contemporary Town*, 1992, p. 53; published in German in: *Italienische Gedanken, weitergedacht*, p. 42-44.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Peter Smithson, *Bath: Walks within the Walls*, Adams & Dart, Bath, 1971, originally published as ‘Walks within the Walls. A Study of Bath as a Built Form Taken over by Other Uses’, in *Architectural Design*, October, 1969; see also ‘Oxford & Cambridge Walks’, in: *Architectural Design*, June 1976.

sources. Although the later built work seems far removed from the orthodox modern canon, especially in terms of formal language, one cannot uncouple the new directions in their work as epitomized by the catchphrase of Conglomerate Ordering from the larger modern tradition.<sup>46</sup> Rather, the Smithsons re-activate other, more peripheral strands within that tradition (as argued for in chapter 3), strands that still deal with function and use, but then in a very different way from the positions and postulates as put forward by the canonical historiographies such as Pevsner's and his proposition of Gropius as the central figure to the functionalist paradigm. As noted before among the references used by the Smithsons, Hugo Häring (Mies former office partner in Berlin G days) is probably the clearest representative of one of those 'other' strands within the modern tradition as exemplified by his farm buildings for Gut Garkau and his idea of *Form Findung*.<sup>47</sup> Shaking off the lessons of Mies (and the purist Le Corbusier) the Smithsons now seemed to have gotten much closer to their Brutalist ambitions than ever before with a most 'lumpish' and materially speaking very 'present' project.<sup>48</sup> At Bath the Smithsons also seemed to finally realize an architecture that could replace what they had called a Banister-Fletcher approach to architecture as 'buildings' in their introduction to *The Heroic Period* – that is architecture as a collection of isolated objects; in its stead an architecture of 'built-places' had been proposed by them. At the same time the Bath university projects and the Conglomerate also seemed an implicit critique of the postmodernist fascination with 'image', spectacle, and visual coding. The Smithsons stated that the Conglomerate concerned an architecture beyond the visual and harnessing all the senses; but then again, this was never explicitly put as a critique of their own day and age, but rather as part of their own, quite idiosyncratic agenda. Regarding postmodernism, cool understatement remained the dominant form of rhetoric.

46 The best summary of the Smithsons's texts on Conglomerate Ordering are in *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, while the idea as such was developed within the exchanges with De Carlo and thus can be retraced in the various *ILA&UD Annual Reports* and *Year Books*. In the *Charged Void* volumes the idea of Conglomerate Ordering is retro-actively applied to the much older design production of the 1950s, esp. Chapter 5 in the *Architecture* volume of 2001.

47 As noted before in the Chapter on Brutalism, Häring's farm building was included in the early (draft) statements on the New Brutalism, as well as in *The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture*, 1965, 1981. Another late reference by the Smithsons concerns their work in Bath, see 'Think of it as a farm' in *Italian Thoughts*, 1993, p. 80; reconfirmed again in an interview with Kester Rattenbury in: Kester Rattenbury (ed.) *This is Not Architecture. Media Constructions*, Routledge, London, 2002, pp. 91-98.

48 I have argued this before in 'Une dynamique générative', in: *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, nr. 344, January-February 2003, special issue on Alison and Peter Smithson, pp. 30-39.

Yet, the cool quiet of Cato Lodge was also a relative thing. Despite the lack of building commissions and the end of the special relationship with *Architectural Design*, a look on the Smithsons list of works and publications makes it immediately clear that neither the design work ever stopped, nor the writing and publishing. If energy wasn't channelled by 'fighting the zeitgeist' as Alison put it, it certainly was so by further exploring both new and older design directions. For instance, after Robin Hood Gardens a handful of other housing schemes were designed by the Smithsons, although none of them were realized: a project for Cherry Garden Pier in the London Docklands (1972-

1976) as part of a collaboration with Theo Crosby and others, a competition scheme for a block of apartments at Millbank, also in London (1976-1977), a closed competition for Berlin, at a site bordering the Lützowstrasse (1980) as part of the IBA (Internationale Bau Ausstellung), and one for Maryhill, Glasgow a tenements building consisting of three-storey walkup flats (1984). In the design of these housing schemes we can see the similar kind of shifts that culminated in the Bath university buildings and later in the many projects for Axel Bruchhäuser and Tecta in Germany. For each project a specific 'language' was developed, again in response to the specific context of the site (noise, views), climate and programme, different typologies and new spatial configurations in relation to 'density' of space, room division (combinations of smaller, specific rooms with open, more generic rooms), access systems et cetera. But contrary to Robin Hood Gardens, or the aspirations of the 1950s and 60s, there was no 'Roman' or 'universal' ambition at stake here, no project as heroic as the one for the post-war welfare state. It was now all about the local and bringing out the specific qualities of the project.

Arguably, the writings of the Smithsons followed a similar trajectory as the design work. There were no more attempts at a comprehensive publication similar to the 'Urban Re-identification' manuscript, *Urban Structuring, Ordinariness and Light, or Without Rhetoric*. Rather one sees the consistent publication of 'thoughts in progress' so to speak. And almost without exception, they were published by way of collaborations with editors outside of England, such as the Swedish *Italian Thoughts* booklet and the German *Italienische Gedanken*, and *Italienische Gedanken weitergedacht*.<sup>49</sup> A documentation of the Upper Lawn pavilion was done together with Enric Miralles at the Barcelona school of architecture, the 'sensitivity primer' *AS in DS* together with Otto Das at Delft University, even *Team 10 Meetings* was produced with then a relative outsider, Max Risselada, also at Delft University.<sup>50</sup> These ongoing thoughts were developed through teaching at various institutes, mostly in Europe, and mostly through professional friendships as the ones already mentioned.<sup>51</sup> And again, just as the building projects, the fragmentary yet prolific production of thoughts, statements, speculations and reflections resisted the fashion of the day, as it would resist easy following and transference to the (postmodernist) media. Apparently disinterested by the 'hurly-burly' and 'pecking-orders' of the ongoing international discourse as Cook had put it, Alison and Peter Smithson preferred to dwell on the functions of

49 The first one being compiled at the Stockholm Royal Academy of Fine Arts by Bengt Edman, the second translated and compiled by Karl Unglaub and Hermann Koch.

50 See also Max Risselada, introduction to the anthology *Alison & Peter Smithson. A Critical Anthology*, Ediciones Polígrafa, Barcelona, 2011.

51 Ibid.

Christmas decorations, the clarity of articulation in the paintings by Piero della Francesca, the origins of the canopy, all sorts of costumes from Di Giorgio's vision of an architect to those of the military, the importance of pavement and other territorial textures (thus continuing townscape polemics) or simply, the wonders of the sky above a road (and so on). In this way, the Smithsons seemed to have deliberately placed themselves outside of the mainstream of the architectural discourse – indeed, 'going swimming' as they said, pursuing what they were most interested in.

Two exemptions should be mentioned at this point, two publications that more or less frame the more fragmentary bulk of writing and thinking: the publication of the relatively modest *Changing the Art of Inhabitation* in 1994, published a year after Alison's death, and their monumental monograph of *The Charged Void* as published by Monacelli in 2001 and 2005. The former is a collection in the vein of earlier collections, this time modelled on the 'Three Generations' essay with three chapters on Mies van der Rohe, Charles and Ray Eames, and the Smithsons themselves.<sup>52</sup> The latter is an incomplete three volume publication of the Smithsons' oeuvre as they themselves had edited it. The first volume *The Charged Void: Architecture* was published eight years after Alison's death, the second one *The Charged Void: Urbanism* two years after Peter's. A third volume with a rather modest selection of texts remained unpublished.<sup>53</sup> What once again comes through from the two publications is the issue of inheritance and a careful but highly selective rereading and redefining of the modern tradition and the Smithsons' own place in it. Despite the very different form language of the later years after the so-called shift, the Smithsons still saw themselves as firmly remaining within modern orthodoxy, in particular with regard to the central issue of the modern tradition as they saw it, namely the one of inhabitation.

52 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, 1994.

53 Unlike the volumes on architecture and urbanism which are a comprehensive documentation of the design work, the third volume of texts is not a comprehensive overview of the Smithson writings, but rather a new selection of a wide range of published and unpublished texts that span the period between 1958 and 1993 (the year that Alison died). These texts were not part of the earlier book compilations *Ordinariness and Light*, *Without Rhetoric or Changing the Art of Inhabitation*. The texts are compiled under the heading of 'The Space Between'. In general, they address the issue of what might be called 'place making' as something situated between the fields of architecture and urbanism, a classic Smithson and Team 10 subject.

### Territories and enclaves

The organization of spaces and territories was obviously crucial to the Smithsons's design strategies for housing, with the example of the yard garden in their competition scheme for Golden Lane perhaps once again as a very early and clear demonstration of this. The very notion of a 'doorstep philosophy' as suggested by

them during the early 1950s was already territorial by definition one might argue. Yet, the Smithsons wouldn't theorize their ideas on territory in those terms until the late 1970s and 1980s when they started participating in the summer schools that were organized by Giancarlo De Carlo. De Carlo made the notion of territory a major topic for subsequent editions of the summer school thus supplying the Smithsons with a vocabulary to rethink their earlier postulates.<sup>54</sup> In *Italian Thoughts*, the first collection of the Smithsons' contributions to De Carlo's summer schools, we find essays on 'Territory' and 'Territorial Density' but also on 'Gates, Porches, Portals,' and also one – but how can one be surprised – on Janus, the two-faced Roman god, guardian of the threshold, who can look both forward and backward at the same time.<sup>55</sup> In another collection, the German *Italienische Gedanken*, *weitergedacht*, we find among others reflections and speculations on 'Markers on the Land' (Markierungen auf dem Land), and 'Tracks for the Territory' (Pfade für das Territorium).<sup>56</sup> And as proposed by Peter Smithson in the case of 'the shift,' these new terms would allow for a re-appreciation of the older works from the 1950s, especially the Patio and Pavilion exhibit. In the original catalogue of *This is Tomorrow* from 1956, the exhibit was described as representing 'a piece of the world' and 'an enclosed space'.<sup>57</sup> For the BBC Third Programme, Peter Smithson talked about 'a view of the sky, a piece of ground'.<sup>58</sup> To think of architecture as intrinsically related to the land and as enclosure in the first place, remains a major shift with regard to the modern architecture of the Heroic Period and the Smithsons' intellectual parents, most certainly Le Corbusier's purist years as represented by his villa Savoye and the way this machine à habiter was lifted off the ground by way of its pilotis. The Smithsons' agenda was for 're-identification' as most clearly expressed by their 1953 grid for CIAM 9 in Aix-en-Provence. Here, in 1953 the 'superstructure' of the interconnected units of the Golden Lane scheme and its 'streets-in-the-air' still followed the idea of a brusque severance of the relation between the ground and the buildings as something positive, while re-inventing the 'street' up 'in the air' by way of the new, broadly spaced access gallery typology, including the transition space of the 'yard garden' between gallery and individual housing unit. By 1956, when CIAM reconvened in Dubrovnik and Team 10 had started to take on the CIAM re-organization, that aspect of their work (the broken relation between ground and building) had changed completely, while the ideas of re-identification and doorstep philosophy remained firmly central to the Smithsons' argument.

54 See for an overview the *ILA&UD Annual Reports* and *Year Book* series as published by De Carlo from 1976 onward.

55 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Italian Thoughts*, 1994, pp. 76-79.

56 Published in the *ILA&UD Year Book* series and in Alison and Peter Smithson, *Italienische Gedanken, weitergedacht*, 2001.

57 *This is Tomorrow* catalogue, 1956, 2010, Group 6, unpaginated.

58 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, 1994, p. 109.

In the case of the 1956 House of the Future – usually regarded as the opposite or counterpoint of Patio and Pavilion, for instance by Banham but also by Frampton – the notion of territory and the creation of an enclosed space were key as well, even though the spatial scheme itself was inverted here, with the House of the Future holding a patio in a house, and the Patio and Pavilion a house inside a patio. The garden of the House of the Future was nothing less but a reference to the biblical garden of paradise as explained by the Smithsons themselves; another Brutalist ‘image’ or ‘enabling image’, namely a medieval painting from an unknown German master served as example here.<sup>59</sup> In addition to the garden allegory there was the idea of sun light penetrating the house. Here too, the enclosed space of the patio was crucial since the house itself was enclosed by windowless walls and sun light came into the private rooms only through the enclosed garden of the patio. The varying roof height around the patio was manipulated as to profit maximally of the sun with the course of the sun directing the organization of the daily domestic routines; the specific shape also ensured that the rain water was captured in a bassin in the garden, which had its ‘mirror image’ inside by a wash basin on a slender pedestal. Colomina has pointed out before how this garden was created as a ‘safe space’ of ‘Edenic innocence and purity’ to produce an ‘encounter with an empty sky, made private by the house’.<sup>60</sup>

Colomina also described the patio space as a ‘quasi-theological’ encounter – touching on the transcendental notions that were at work within the Smithsons work, however the architects couple themselves talked more often about the issues of safety, security and privacy as profoundly basic human needs to explain their proposals for enclosed spaces. These basic human needs were listed in their ‘Criteria for Mass Housing’ and ‘Bye-laws for Mental Health’ among others.<sup>61</sup> They were psychological in the first place perhaps, but also often defined as ‘instinctive’ to the human ‘animal’, the human apparently being understood as a social and territorial animal. And at this point, once again a major shift regarding modernist orthodoxy can be noted. In the work and writings of the Smithsons, the paradigm of the house did not reappear as a reduction to productivist logics and total mobilization in the vein of Gropius or Hannes Meyer; the paradigm of the house was considered as interrelated with the creation or sustenance of individual and collective identities. Therefore, the notion of territory – ‘a piece of ground’ or ‘an enclosed space’ – was brought into play; its derivative notions of control, privacy,

59 See Beatriz Colomina, ‘Un-breathed Air 1968’, in: Van den Heuvel, Risselada, 2004, pp. 46-47.

60 Ibid., the ‘private sky’ reference is to Buckminster Fuller of course.

61 There are various versions: first published in 1957, revised in 1959; republished in *Architectural Design*, September 1960 and in the 1964 edition of the *Team 10 Primer*.

pride of ownership, and security positioned next to those classic modernist tropes of health improvement, emancipation and liberation. Re-territorialization was always part of the Smithson project, next to de-territorialization, as one already might have noted with regard to the issues of landscape and existing cityscapes. During the 1950s and 60s these notions were still part of the larger ambition to develop a planning approach responsive to the new welfare state condition, even though from 1962 onward the Smithsons acknowledged that these could only be realized as fragments, as 'contributions to a fragmentary Utopia'.<sup>62</sup> With the demise of the welfare state as a directing force this ambition seemed to have disappeared, and the notion of territory was then not only connected with those of housing and identity, with the landscape and the connecting infrastructures such as road systems, but also with the creation of enclaves.

This was relatively new, not the idea of the enclave or the fragment itself, but the foregrounding of it in their writings. It can be situated mid-1980s, after the work on Bath university was done and work for the German furniture manufacturer Tecta began. The conversation on territory and architecture between Peter Smithson and De Carlo was still very much ongoing, while Alison herself started teaching abroad, lecturing in Delft, Munich, Barcelona and Stockholm among others.<sup>63</sup> Through these lectures she formulated the idea of a 'fragment of an enclave', which was eventually published as the essay produced by and for the Tecta company firm as *Saint Jerome: the Desert, the Study* in 1991. They would also be partially integrated in the 1994 *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*.<sup>64</sup>

The beginnings of the idea of the enclave – once again leading to a reconceptualization of earlier intentions and work – also comprised another rereading of the modern legacy. It was triggered by the reconstruction of the Barcelona pavilion of Mies van der Rohe at the time, when Alison Smithson was teaching in the Catalan city. Building on the Three Generations idea Alison Smithson held a seminar 'A Fragment of an Enclave' in Barcelona, in November 1985, where she herself gave a talk with the title 'Three Pavilions of the Twentieth Century: the Farnsworth, the Eames, Upper Lawn', with the Upper Lawn as the 'Brutalist grandchild' of the Barcelona Pavilion.<sup>65</sup> In an afterthought, published as a conclusion to *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, Smithson supplied the following definition of 'fragment of an enclave', a definition which brings back to mind Peter Collins'

62 Peter Smithson, 'Contributions to a Fragmentary Utopia', in: *Architectural Design*, February 1966, pp. 64-67.

63 Soraya Smithson stated this was due to her leaving the parental home, after the elder children Simon and Samantha had already left; Alison had much more time available and was free to travel abroad, in conversation with the author summer 2003.

64 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, 1994, p. 33-35

65 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

definition of the house as paradigm of the larger modern era: *'The piece of territory that can support and become the mid- to late-1980s equivalent to the idyll of the restorative-place-in-nature, that for the last two centuries has taken the form of pavilion within the landscaped park.'*<sup>66</sup>

In her Barcelona lecture, she had explained the notion of idyll in relation to the pavilion and territory:

*'The dictionary definition of "idyll" is as follows: a description of a picturesque scene or incident, especially in rustic life; an episode suitable for such treatment.*

*The three pavilions [the Farnsworth house, the Eames house, and the Smithsons Upper Lawn weekend home] embody the idyll as a place wherein to be restored to oneself; as a source of one's energies. The pavilion is thus seen as a place made idyll; a dream of a stress-free way of life, a domain – often a greater garden – often in the pretend wild; that is, in nature.'*<sup>67</sup>

And as a tentative conclusion we read:

*'Territory is necessary to support the pavilion as idyll, to allow the illusion of idyllic life. The pavilion in an enclave in a domain; that is important in this story; not the formal solutions which are very personal and already history.'*<sup>68</sup>

The Picturesque as an 'enabling image' returns here, quite emphatically, but this 'restorative-place-in-nature' is not disconnected from the city:

*'All three pavilions are effective form-inventions for the place in nature: the fragment of a would-be enclave, whose integrity relies on the decent behaviour of others. In the St Jerome sense, a study from which to appraise, contemplate, consider, re-assess, the city.'*<sup>69</sup>

The Saint Jerome reference is of crucial importance. Based on the Barcelona lectures on the notion of the pavilion and the enclave, Alison Smithson would elaborate a lecture on the habitats of the saint, and how they were depicted throughout the Renaissance and Baroque. Written and published toward the end of her life, Saint Jerome unintentionally became the epitome of Alison Smithson's thoughts on inhabitation and her and Peter's notion of domesticity.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps one shouldn't read too much biographical parallels into the text, yet this is hardly impossible when one notes how Smithson interspersed her discussion of Saint Jerome's life and the many depictions of him and his 'habitat' with all sorts of associations that were

66 Ibid., p. 149.

67 Ibid., p. 141.

68 Ibid., p. 142.

69 Ibid.

70 Alison Smithson, *Saint Jerome. The Desert, the Study*, published by Tecta, Lauenförde, 1990.



most specific to the Smithsons themselves, with regard to their own idea of a professional life as architects and writers, as well as the issue of inhabitation in general. The habitat of Jerome would represent an inhabitation of the 'light touch', and one finds one remark which mentioned that Jerome followed 'the third generation's response to a new idea', explicit example of identification by allegory between Smithson and Saint Jerome.

Already in the very first lines of her essay, Smithson opened the field for this game of associations by pointing out the 'allegorical capabilities' of 'Jerome's two habitats', namely the desert and the study; allegorical capabilities that Smithson would relate to a 'quality of encapsulation', be it the desert as the 'restorative place in nature', or the study as the 'energising cell supported by urban order'. Jerome, the inhabitant of those two habitats, was in need of these places of 'quiet', of 'asceticism', and of 'a sense of inviolability' in order to live a life of 'creative activity' that entailed 'perfection of thought, creation of the perfected object, for deliberated choice'. To this end his two habitats provided a 'quality of encapsulation', of 'being cocooned', since according to Smithson:

*'a place for creative activity will need to continue to rely on its fragment of space being within an enclave encapsulated within a protective territory.'*

An assertion to be restated at a later point in the text:

*'such a sense of inviolability relies on its fragment of functional space being within an enclave encapsulated in its turn within a protective territory.'*

The two habitats, desert and study, were described as 'places-apart' that acted as:

*'two magnetic poles that, holding certain truths, seem always to be at work: in successive periods of our lives one or other of these poles will particularly attract us, perhaps according to current fashion. Both alternatives are present in a re-vitalising role, as the one appears to re-energise the other for man's sense of well being.'*

As mentioned before, those two 'magnetic poles' were also the Smithsons' Upper Lawn pavilion and their own Chelsea home, Cato Lodge. They were the two Smithson habitats, their walled gardens turning them into places set apart and perfectly fit for the Smithsons' own creative activity, enclaves 'from which to

appraise, contemplate, consider, re-assess, the city'. The books, or 'sensitivity primers', *AS in DS*, *Upper Lawn Folly Solar Pavilion*, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation* and a text like *Saint Jerome* were all a reflection of this, being structured on the Smithsons' own work and life and the places they inhabited.

Upper Lawn was the 'restorative-place-in-nature', Cato Lodge the cell 'supported by urban order'. We know much more about Upper Lawn than we do about Cato Lodge, since Upper Lawn was often used by the Smithsons as a demonstration of their ideas on inhabitation; Cato Lodge much less so. In the 1986 book dedicated to Upper Lawn the Smithsons summed up their intentions and experiences. In his introduction Peter stated how 'Upper Lawn was a device for trying things out oneself'.<sup>71</sup>

This concerned the building process itself in the first place. The Smithsons bought the site in 1959 and would work on the weekend home for three years, clearing the garden, partly demolishing the existing cottage, having a balloon-frame-like, aluminium clad box built on two concrete stilts and beam and the exterior wall of the former cottage. They called this phase 'work-camp' and under 'Aims' they listed:

*'To test certain new products which are not yet permitted by the Authorities in the London area. (...)*

*To try out on ourselves certain applications and assemblies of materials which if successful we will later use on clients' buildings.'*<sup>72</sup>

Once the house was finished it was to be a 'device' to take in the English landscape and climate:

*'To find out what it is like to live in a house in England all the year round which presents glass walls to entire South, East and West, but a solid wall to most of the North face.'*<sup>73</sup>

After the box was glazed, a second-hand pair of Zeiss binoculars for bird watching was bought, by which a whole new kind of assessment began, namely the changing patterns of the days and seasons. Once finished, in 1962, Upper Lawn was also a device to re-assess a changing 'pattern of habitation':  
*'a setting of rooms and small garden spaces which could be tuned to the seasons, to the changes in the pattern of family-use, to the changes in one's sensibilities.'*<sup>74</sup>

71 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Upper Lawn. Solar Pavilion, Folly*, UPC Ediciones, Barcelona, 1986, unpaginated.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

And:

*'It was here we explored the small adjustments, the temporary decorations, the invention of those signals for change which we later would come to recognise as being necessary work for the fourth [sic] generation of the Modern Movement.'*<sup>75</sup>

And finally, Upper Lawn was a device for writing, especially for Alison. From mid-1962 onward diary-notes were made (to be published much later in the *Upper Lawn* book), just as a 'document bag began to be a regular piece of luggage' when going to Upper Lawn for the weekend or a holiday. According to the Smithsons:

*'in this way, the pavilion and its compound supported by a peaceful English countryside were conducive to serious reading, much editing and writing; to name but a few: essays for Architectural Design; the computer print-outs prior to the type-setting of Without Rhetoric; the major part of the work on the Imprint of India + 1916 a.s.o. that gradually became evocations of Sensibilities; the diary AS in DS, the diary of the Upper Lawn garden; La Paradis Eloigne; Maigret's Map ... were all or in part written or re-written over the years at Upper Lawn.*

*The slow growth of these documents helped intellectually and emotionally to bridge the troughs between what architecture urbanism came our way.'*<sup>76</sup>

The other Smithson habitat, Cato Lodge, hardly appeared in the couple's publications on inhabitation. Perhaps regrettably so, since the way they had organized the combination of work and family life was another demonstration of their ideas on the subject. The one time Cato Lodge figured most prominently was in *The Shift*, as an example of the Smithsons' idea of the art of dressing and how festivities and celebrations produced 'signs of occupancy'. Louisa Hutton has noted how Alison and Peter Smithon switched roles here, from architects to inhabitants, since – according to Hutton – the dressing itself was a privilege of the inhabitant in the Smithson view, while the framework accommodating the acts of appropriation was to be provided for by the architect.<sup>77</sup>

Cato Lodge also served as the office of the Smithsons, the lower two floors were converted into office spaces by a clever repositioning of stairs and entrances. The formal entry was reconstructed at the front by way of an added porch, which provided a new flight of steps leading down to the drawing rooms below as well as steps going up to the bel-etage with the

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Louisa Hutton, 'Godparents' Gifts', in: Pamela Johnston (ed.), *'Architecture is not made with the Brain': The Labour of Alison and Peter Smithson*, Architectural Association, London, 2005, p. 60.

reception room and Alison and Peter's studio space in the front room. At the rear a second, more informal entrance was situated, which together with the turned around stairs provided a private entry to the two upper floors of the family.<sup>78</sup>

And just as Upper Lawn became a place for writing and reflection, Cato Lodge too, brought a new impetus to Alison's writing in particular, since the house offered her the opportunity to have a tiny cabinet room as a space of her own that was also the 'Archive'. Hutton has pointed out how the archive room occupied a rather specific and most strategic place: 'a small cupboard-of-a-room just beyond the treshold of office-to-house', as she put it.<sup>79</sup> Alison's archive room was thus situated between the private life of the family and the working time of the office. Smithson would sit here, her chair facing the garden and her back turned toward the door, not to be disturbed but still conveniently in touch with the two different realms of the house. Here, she started to (re-) write the history of Team 10, the mat-building essay, where she would make preparations for the publication of the Royaumont meeting, where she would compile the AA school seminar and publication *The Emergence of Team 10 out of C.I.A.M.*, and much later the Team 10 Meetings book, just as all those other typoscripts of the so-called 'sensibility primers,' *AS in DS* and so on.

Those walled enclaves, of Upper Lawn and Cato Lodge, but also of the habitats of Saint Jerome, of Patio and Pavilion and the House of the Future, provided not just protection to the creative activity of the inhabitants, designing, writing or even the sewing of clothes (remember the Houes of the Future kitchen had a special place for the sewing machine). This creative activity also concerned ideas and values, ideas and values to be salvaged and saved, to offer the possibility of future revitalization and reactivation. This remained slightly implicit in *Saint Jerome* and the lectures on the idea of a fragment of an enclave; it was only foregrounded in the retrospective comments on the Independent Group years. Concerning the Patio and Pavilion exhibit the Smithsons claimed in their 'As Found' statement of 1990, that the exhibit was about 'taking position in the acquisitive society as it begun its run by offering in *gîte* a reminder of other values, other pleasures'.<sup>80</sup>

Another example of the enclave as a strategy for salvation comes from Alison Smithson's teachings as pointed out by Max Risselada. In her design classes at Delft and Munich

78 For a documentation of the Smithsons' own houses see: Dirk van den Heuvel, Max Risselada (eds.), *Alison and Peter Smithson – from the House of the Future to a house of today*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, pp. 136-165.

79 Louisa Hutton, 'Godparents' Gifts', in: Pamela Johnston (ed.), *'Architecture is not made with the Brain': The Labour of Alison and Peter Smithson*, Architectural Association, London, 2005, p. 55.

80 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The "As Found" and the "Found"', in: Robbins, 1990, p. 201. This notion of offering other values and pleasures was not mentioned as such at the time of the 1956 event. On the contrary, the Smithsons also stated at various occasions that they were not involved in the actual 'dressing' of the exhibit, since they were 'camping' on their way to the CIAM conference in Dubrovnik together with William and Gill Howell.

she used the allegory of Noah's Ark as a design assignment. She discussed the Ark and its inhabitants, Noah's family and all the couples of animal species on board, as a metaphor for the collectivity of housing. The Ark was nothing less but 'a withdrawal to survive, or the idyll in extreme'.<sup>81</sup>

The notion of re-activation – or regeneration, revitalization – holds a strong presence in the Smithsons' thinking. Books – produced in those enclaves of retreat – are very important here, as 'cultural parcels' that can travel through time spanning centuries. This notion is also present in their idea of the house and their notion of domesticity, also in the case of the story of Jerome as told by Smithson. From the movement between the two habitats of the saint, Alison eventually produced a third habitat: the cave in Bethlehem, in which Jerome is said to have lived the larger part of his life until he died. These two givens, the cave and the place of Bethlehem, offered Alison the possibility to connect Saint Jerome's story to another one most dear to her, namely the one of Christmas and the Nativity.<sup>82</sup> The Christmas tradition was important to Alison Smithson because of 'the idea of the joyous beginning', and was therefore an almost endless source of reflection, as evidenced by the annual production of Christmas cards by the Smithson office, the exhibition '24 Doors to Christmas' in the Cambridge Kettle's Yard gallery in 1979, and three compilations documenting the Western tradition, *Calendar of Christmas*, *The Christmas Tree* and *An Anthology of Christmas*.<sup>83</sup> In some of Peter Smithson's texts on inhabitation Christmas re-appeared as well, almost as a benchmark of collective domestic celebration and 'signs of occupancy' again: especially how the house accommodated room for Christmas decorations and their display, not just during the season itself, but also - perhaps equally important so – in terms of storage space when the Christmas season was over again.<sup>84</sup>

With regard to Saint Jerome and his third habitat Alison Smithson concluded her hagiography of the saint by stating that the third habitat of the cave presented the best of both worlds of desert and of study, that it accomplished the 'encapsulation of Desert within the Study'. And to Smithson this provided the basis for her assumption that it was possible to 'live closer to the idyll as represented in the Renaissance by Saint Jerome's two habitats' by way of the creation of 'fragments of enclaves that protect our inhabitation'.<sup>85</sup>

81 Max Risselada, 'Another Shift', in: Van den Heuvel, Risselada, 2004, pp. 51-58; this text is largely based on unpublished lectures by Alison Smithson.

82 According to Alison Smithson Saint Jerome intervened in the debate on the exact date of Christ's birth supporting the one of December 25, as opposed to the one of January 6; in her *Saint Jerome* essay, 1990, paragraph 'Saint Jerome and the "Grotto"', unpaginated.

83 Smithson Family Archive.

84 Peter Smithson, 'In Praise of Cupboard Doors' and 'Put-away Villa: Some Speculations Arising From the Axonometric Drawings of the Things Stored', in: Van den Heuvel, Risselada, 2004, pp. 217-218 and 221-222.

85 Alison Smithson, *Saint Jerome*, 1990; also in: Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, 1994, pp. 33-35.

## To Put Away

As noted the archive room occupied a special place in Cato Lodge, the Smithsons home-cum-office in South Kensington. The notions of domesticity, writing, and historiography collide here, once again. The archive room was not so much a storage space to file the documents of finished projects, it was also a place for writing and publishing, that is reflection, production and work. Shelves from floor to ceiling completely covered the one wall with the fireplace; on the shelves boxes with slides, negatives, maps of places visited, folders with the published and unpublished manuscripts, but mostly box files with colour coded backs of green, brown, red, and gold paperboards: for the built projects, the unbuilt projects, the ongoing projects for Tecta, and the tear sheets of publications. There was one silver coloured box called 'Magic'. It contained the unfinished thoughts and aphorisms, intuitions that needed more definition or just riddle-like word games – scribbled on scraps of paper, the back of an envelope, or the occasional napkin. Throughout the archive in various files one would find sheets and notes with 'File under Magic' written on them – the thoughts had then, moved from one box to the other.

To a large extent this magic box represents the Smithsons working method of finding processes and their creative thinking. It is part of the Smithsons' favourite game, the game of associations, an endless recombining and re-arranging from which new thoughts and designs would occur. The archive room is only one of the instruments necessary to play this game to the full, just as their own two homes, Cato Lodge and the Upper Lawn pavilion. During their lifetime they would set up various environments to play the game – among the first examples the exhibits they realized together with their friends, Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi. In a late homage to their friend, the 'old magician' and 'image finder' Nigel Henderson, Alison Smithson recreated the game of associations with her design for a small *Wunderkammer für Nigel*. It is part of the series of the so-called Cornell Boxes from 1989 produced for Axel Bruchhäuser. It was designed by Alison after visiting a show on the work of the American visual artist Joseph Cornell, who throughout his life made boxes for displaying all sorts of everyday items. The boxes by Smithson are another example of the celebration of the art of inhabitation that was so central to her and Peter's work; boxes for the purpose of storing all sorts of small things, displaying or

simply having close at hand a variety of personal trinkets, from jewellery to magazine cut-outs. To this end each box contains one or more other boxes, or a number of little shelves. The most elaborate version is the homage to Henderson resurrecting his wit in one more game of surrealist association between such items as a food parcel, postcards, letters and of course Henderson photographs. A mirror and turning cardholders complete this aid to play the game of associations.

In its turn, the archive room itself might be considered such a *Wunderkammer*, or magic box that is contained in the archive; an instrument or machine for associative thinking, quite like the Parallel of Life and Art installation or their Patio and Pavilion. Such 'machines' could also be other furniture pieces, like the Struwwelpeter Wall Cabinet for Bruchhäuser, or the Waterlily/ Fish Desk, but also childrens' stories, or a garden or a garden path, a bridge, a gateway, and so forth and so on. Ultimately, the Smithsons idea of the house, including the city which is always part of the idea the house in the case of the Smithsons, also revolves around this idea of regeneration by way of association.

To the Smithsons then, domestic order is not just about architecture as the built structure and its principles of ordering, it also concerns the order of things, in and around the house, and how this corresponds to a way of life. The house is a dynamic constellation made up by the very collection of things in and around the house and the house itself. As such it provides a framework for the routines and events of everyday life. The relationships between container and contained, between the parts and the whole are consistently renegotiated in the various designs as to provide the right environment for regeneration. We saw this in Alison's account of Jerome's life, and how it included descriptions of the saint's habitats in such terms, quite like the earlier text of hers on Beatrix Potter's children stories and the interiors of the tales of Peter Rabbit, but also in the articles on appliances and furniture for *Architectural Design*, or as in the *Herioc Period*.<sup>86</sup> The desert and the study as allegorical models not only concerned the various re-inventions of the country and the city, the 'place-apart-from-society' was to Smithson also an incubator (or 'energiser of the man-made' as she put it) in relation to 'the furniture of the habitat and its objects, clothing, equipment'.<sup>87</sup> Jerome's habitats were the representation of a 'timeless ideal' in Smithson's words. Especially, the Renaissance

86 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Concealment and Display: Meditations on Braun', in: *Architectural Design*, July 1966, pp. 362-363; Alison Smithson, 'Caravan, Embryo Appliance House', in: *Architectural Design*, September 1959, p. 348; Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The Appliance House', in: *Design*, no 113, 1958, pp. 43-47; Alison Smithson, 'The Future of Furniture', in: *Interior Design*, April 1958, pp. 175-178; the latter ones were also published together in *Architectural Design*, April 1958.

87 *Ibid*.

depictions of the study demonstrated to her how it contained: *'all conveniences ... cooled water, shapely wash bowl, fresh towel, growing flowers, birds and animals as man's companions, books, writing materials, cupboards, oriental carpet, warm clothes, wine.'*<sup>88</sup>

Jerome's study equated 'the machine for living in' and concerned nothing less but 'raising the minimal cell to an art'.<sup>89</sup>

Gathering things, as useful objects but also symbols, was as important to the 'art of inhabitation' as was the organization of territories. We find it throughout the Smithsons' writings. In *Changing the Art of Inhabitation* they described the Patio and Pavilion as:

*'a kind of symbolic habitat in which are found responses, in some form or other, to the basic human needs – a view of the sky, a piece of ground, privacy, the presence of nature and of animals when we need them – to the basic human urges – to extend and control, to move. The actual form is very simple, a "patio", or enclosed space, in which sits a "pavilion". The patio and pavilion are furnished with objects which are symbols for the things we need: for example, a wheel image for movement and for machines.'*<sup>90</sup>

In the 'This is Tomorrow' catalogue we read that those objects and symbols included among others:

*'the rocks & natural objects for stability & the decoration of man made space  
the light box – for the hearth & family  
artifacts & pin-ups – for his irrational urges.'*<sup>91</sup>

And in the same vein we read, as a caption to a picture of the Patio and Pavilion exhibit as published in *Urban Structuring*: *'We accept as basic the individual urge to identify himself with his surroundings – with familiar objects and familiar symbols.'*<sup>92</sup>

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, 1994, p. 109.

91 This is Tomorrow, 1956; one may consider to what extent a sexist prejudice comes through here, regarding 'his urges'; on the other hand the whole text is written in sexually neutral terms as far as language can be neutral of course, for instance, 'family' is mentioned as plain family, not 'his' family.

92 Alison and Peter Smithson, *Urban Structuring*, 1967, p. 21.

To retrace the way the Smithsons proposed to order the things in and around the house then is to follow their ideas on inhabitation and how an architectural order and its principles were also derived from this aspect of inhabitation. The As Found returns here, just as the New Brutalism, since as already argued for, it was at the event of the Patio and Pavilion exhibit that the As Found idea was transposed to the realm of inhabitation. We also encounter here, the Smithsons' early involvement in Pop and their admiration for Charles and Ray Eames. We see here, how they consistently reconsidered the manifold interrelationships between technology, consumer culture,



family life and the architecture of inhabitation, in such terms as select and arrange, concealment and display, decorations, dressing and layering, and ultimately in terms of glut and 'put-away' culture.<sup>93</sup>

After Alison died, Peter Smithson started to work on a final idea house: the Put-away House or Put-away Villa (1993-2000). The house is set in a spacious garden with a generous drive for the car added. All living spaces face the garden. Breakfast is laid in the morning sun while the living room catches the afternoon sun. The unusual shape of the roof results from the central position of the roof garden, allowing the generous application of skylights, as to ensure that all bedrooms catch light from the north as well as from the south. Although both the use of materials and intended construction were not explicitly given, the house's architectural language is closely related to that of the Bath University buildings: heavy, almost lumpish architecture, anticipating weathering and ageing.

The idea of such a Put-away House had been described by Alison Smithson as early as 1958 in her article 'The Future of Furniture', in which she mentioned that 'the 'Appliance House' is a move away from a furniture-appliance chaos towards a put-away house'.<sup>94</sup> The quotation explains the connection between the Smithsons' interest in the idea of an Appliance House as embodied by their House of the Future of 1956, and the much later design for the Put-away House and the problem of glut in a consumer society as Peter Smithson would define it in the 1980s and 90s.

The Put-away House as designed by Peter revolves around the idea of conveniently storing one's belongings in a central box room, thus enabling the living spaces to be free from unnecessary clutter. In various aphoristic comments on the house Peter Smithson said: *'To put away is of course an instinct in oneself ... for me to be able to see one thing at a time, the territory has to be clear.'*

93 For a more extensive discussion of this I refer to our publication on the Smithson houses: Van den Heuvel, Risselada, 2004, in particular my own essay 'Picking up, Turning over and Putting with...'.<sup>94</sup>

94 Alison Smithson, 'The Future of Furniture', 1958.

95 Taken from notes by Peter Smithson, subsequently titled 'Response to the Glut', and 'Put-away Villa: Some Speculations Arising From the Axonometric Drawings of the Things Stored', and 'Put-away Addendum'; published in Van den Heuvel, Risselada, 2004, pp. 219-223.

And:

*'In the Put-away Villa as shown in the drawings the living space is clear; the pieces of furniture remain themselves. Thus the maximum of space is available for the human drama: there is the sense of being protected in order to act.'*

*The space is, as Mrs Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel Flush observed in Florence ... "bare. All those draped objects of (his) cloistered and secluded days had vanished. The bed was a bed; the wash-stand was a wash-stand. Everything was itself and not another thing."*<sup>95</sup>

The central position of the box room, with the rooms built around it, ensures the elimination of almost all corridors and hallways apart from the spacious staircase. Apart from the central box room, the house is planned quite traditionally: the kitchen and the living room on the ground floor, bedrooms and bathrooms on the first floor, and laundry room in the attic, which gives access to the roof garden. Smithson speaks of the re-invention of the 'Edwardian (Wilhelmine) middle-class house ... with its flower-arranging room, cutlery cleaning pantry and so on ... the servant rooms of the living rooms'.<sup>96</sup>

How to deal with storage, why storage space is needed and needs proper attention was already addressed by Smithson in his aphoristic text 'In Praise of Cupboard Doors' of 1980 and his design for a House with Two Gantries of 1977.

Of the House with Two Gantries, the things and the way of life it contained, Peter Smithson said:

*'This particular house is intended for a man like myself who sometimes wishes to put things away that he is not at the moment using. A man in a family who get things out for festivals and home-comings and want to put them away afterwards.*

*This house allows them to do just that ... move things easily from room to room or into the storage loft with one of their gantries; and they can decorate the street facade, and clean their windows, from their other gantry. They can decorate the back of the house as well – and clean its windows – from the little balconies off the bedrooms.*

*The man can even make speeches, indoors from a balcony in his main room and outdoors from his back-porch roof (he is a bit of a show-off with his grand house). The house with two gantries is an infill house on a street, or a canal in an old metropolitan city ... Berlin, London, Amsterdam, or even Venice.'*<sup>97</sup>

In the text 'In Praise of Cupboard Doors' we read:

*'Cupboards are necessary since they bring simplicity of retrieval and ease of handling of miscellaneous contents.*

*Cupboard doors are necessary since these miscellaneous contents to the right level of attention amongst the thousands of things that surround us inside and outside the house.'*<sup>98</sup>

The cupboard and cupboard doors then are defined as an organizing principle or device, for life inside the house, but also outside since Smithson states that what the cupboard

96 Ibid., p. 221.

97 Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, 2001, p. 420.

98 Peter Smithson, 'In Praise of Cupboard Doors', in: Van den Heuvel, Risselada, 2004, p. 217.

is to the house, 'so the house is to the town', just as whole rooms can be cupboards, and cars are cupboards too. Picture frames are cupboards of a kind as well, according to Smithson. The importance of cupboards are ultimately summed up by the fact that the 'Host in the Roman Church is kept in a cupboard', while the Protestants keep their 'bibles in library cupboards'.<sup>99</sup>

The storing away and the storage space needed for all this is the natural counterpart of getting the things out again, the opening of doors and going out. This is part of domestic ritual as it is part of seasonal festivities, it also entails pleasure, just as it involves shame and trauma:

*'Behind cupboard doors there can be secrets ... concealed future pleasures. And the pleasures of anticipation are the sharpest of all: sweets for children, birthday presents, Christmas things.*

*Behind cupboard doors dangerous things can be hidden away.*

*Behind cupboard doors things can be stored in number, so that prudence does not appear to be gluttony.'*<sup>100</sup>

To sum up, as formulated here by Peter, for the Smithsons to 'put away' is to enable to see and think clearly, to act properly, in domestic, everyday life but equally so as an architect as they seem to imply. Apparently, the modernist ideal of transparency, to see things for what they are and 'not another thing', also requires some sort of suppression according to the Smithsons. And since the psychoanalytical subtext is perhaps all too obvious, one might add here, that eventually to put away, to suppress, is also to enable to dream. To put things away is necessary to regenerate that what was lost, what belongs to the past, or what one conventionally thinks of as belonging to the past, whereas it was there all the time, like all those bourgeois notions that immediately come to the fore when rethinking the issues of storage, closets, ritual and convention in the architecture of inhabitation. Enric Miralles commented on this in the most elegant and poetic way when he made a special montage out of Alison's writing desk, the Waterlily/Fish Desk of 1988, and Francisco Goya's famous etching 'The Sleep of Reason'. Miralles called the desk a 'machine of transformations' that works only because of the 'confusion' of things and ideas, of 'what is and of what one remembers'.<sup>101</sup>

Memory brings us back to the archive room in Cato Lodge, the boxes filed there and which to open first, since a piece of writing like this is, is necessarily limited, an all-inclusive *musée imaginaire* kind of approach, or Banham's idea of a 'total recall' seems quite

99 Ibid., p. 218.

100 Ibid., p. 217.

101 Enric Miralles, 'On the Trundling Turk', in: OASE, nr. 51, 1999, pp. 14-17.

impossible. How to select and (re-)arrange, what kind of 'picking up, turning over and putting with' might be proposed here as a conclusion? Naturally, there is an also most endless list of questions to be compiled, but three of those 'boxes' seem most important: one concerns the archive itself, the other concerns the language of architecture, and the final one the issue of inhabitation and the places of the house and the city.

The first thing is to see the archive of the Smithsons and their writing practice as a specific model for the workings of history and memory. Memory and history are then, not dead things of the past, they are always part of the here and now as sources for cultural regeneration, the formation of social identities, as well as new knowledge and new practices. The archive, storage space as such, memory in more general terms, they exist as a state of slumbering perhaps, by definition they are of an immanent or virtual nature (to refer to French theory). Yet, even when things from the past are put away, and we are not aware of them all the time, it doesn't mean they are gone, of course. They only operate most effectively by remaining within the realm of the subconscious. This is all implied by the very notions of regeneration and re-activation. The archive, its collection and how it is organized, how it is accessed and opened up – its very architecture so to speak – is in that sense a mnemonic device, not just preserving the past, neither 'remembering' it, but producing it in the first place. What becomes most evident – and this is why the Smithsons' example also receives much criticism I suppose – is the active management of their own archive and the recording of the events of CIAM, Team 10 and the Independent Group. The Smithsons remind us that there is an inevitable aspect of individual and institutional responsibility involved; there is a moral issue at stake here, as well, in terms of how the archive is maintained, kept, passed on, and then re-activated again. It boils down to a proper form of husbandry one might say, gardening perhaps (and every garden needs a shed).

The second thing concerns the unresolved issue of the missing language of architecture for a modern society or culture of modernity as formulated by John Summerson. Since architecture is part of our collective identity and culture, not just as an appendage, but as (partly) constituting these, this question won't go away. The case of Alison and Peter Smithson remains of a special and lasting interest here, as a micro-history of its own, since their career and lives coincided with the establishment

of the post-war welfare state and its demise from the mid-1970s onward. From today's perspective it situates them in between the heroic generation of modern architects who sought to deliver a unified, new style for the *Zeitgeist*, and the postmodernist moderns so to speak, architects such as Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas, who following Jencks seemed to have given up on any socio-utopian ambition for architecture altogether. With regard to this particular issue of a common language, one of the most important propositions by the Smithsons is the idea that a proper language of architecture doesn't have to be wholly new, or be based on the image of the new, neither does it have to be restricted to a project for autonomy, or the historicist position. The language of architecture too, just like the archive, is an accumulation of past experience to be re-activated within the specific architectural project. Through such re-activation the language of architecture is extended and renewed.

The third and final thing to be mentioned here, is the issue of inhabitation and the places of the house and the city. Behind the Brutalist project to revitalize the language of modern architecture there is also a project to reconnect the modern house with a life based on work to overcome the capitalist division of labour. This goes back to Alison and Peter Smithson's own upbringing and their parents, and how Arts and Crafts morals were a life example to the Smithsons. Yet, first and foremost it ties in with the problem of the Functional City and the planning of the suburbs and New Towns of the post-war decades as monotonous, mono-functional schemes under late-capitalist conditions of consumption and social reproduction. The Smithsons's Soho House of 1952, the design for which the name New Brutalism was put on paper for the first time, was not an industrially produced house for the masses, it was a private, domestic workshop of a 'warehouse aesthetic'. Here, work and living and their patterns defined each other mutually, a regenerative process in service of a way of living beyond the one of the consumerist welfare state. This question too, how work and living are to be combined, production and consumption, remains unresolved today. In the light of the new information technologies, their miniaturization and the new social media, which penetrate our everyday lives and houses, the concomitant environmental issues and social urgencies, it is as if Independent Group days and the Team 10 debates are more topical than ever before.



## IMAGES

The design production of Alison and Peter Smithson is well documented, not in the least by themselves. The most comprehensive overview can be found in the two volumes published by the New York Monacelli Press in 2001 and 2005: *The Charged Void: Architecture* and *The Charged Void: Urbanism*. Overviews compiled by others include Helena Webster (1997), Marco Vidotto (1991 and 1997), David Dunster (1982) and Jeremy Baker (1966). The Smithsons house designs are documented in our book *Alison and Peter Smithson – from the House of the Future to a house of today* (010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004). Their designs related to the Team 10 discourse are included in our book *Team 10 in search of a Utopia of the Present 1953-81* (NAi Publishers, Rotterdam, 2005). The illustrations included here are indeed what they are, illustrations of the textual argument as a reminder of the otherwise already documented. They are organized in an apparently simple way: following the order of Georges Perec's novel *Espèces d'espaces* the first space is the space of the empty white sheet, the words and text follow next, then the writing table, the room and its furniture, built-in or free-standing, the house, the street, district, city, networks, and so forth and so on. The ultimate space is the sky. There are various difficulties involved when trying such an arrangement. First, the space of photographs and drawings are much more inclusive than the one of text or literature, which was Perec's medium of course, or so it seems. So, in one image we often find many categories present. Second, the Smithsons were keen to focus on the spaces between other spaces. These then, are treated as a category of their own, and are inserted between the other spaces, which seems only logical.

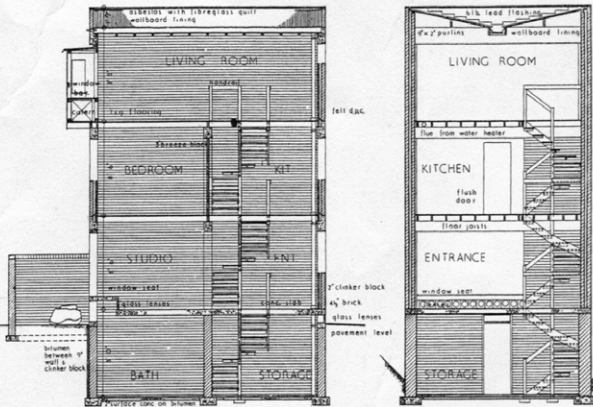
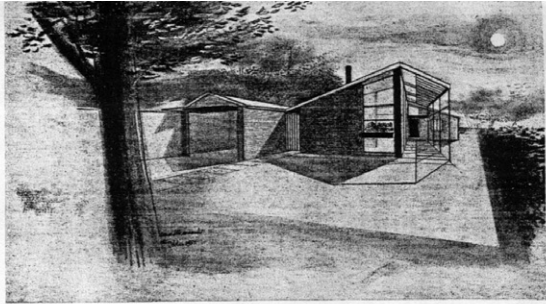




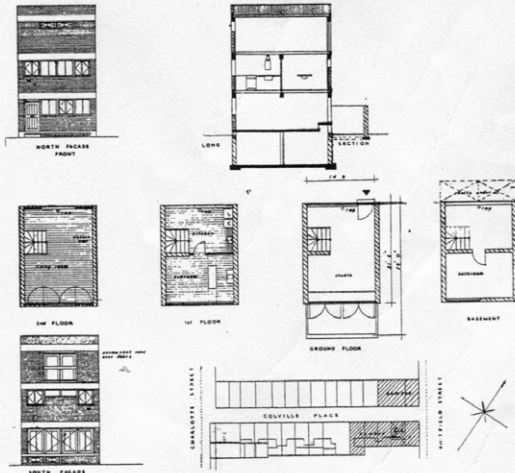
owners themselves. Roof rafters at maximum spacings with asbestos sheet at 15 deg. (end and side laps of sheeting sealed because of low degree pitch). Asbestos sheeting laid on felt on fibreglass quilting. Underside of rafters covered with insulation board distempered. Floors thermo-plastic tiles. All wiring exposed with ceiling pull switches throughout (apart from power points) to avoid vertical drops as far as possible. Windows softwood painted.

A large automatic solid fuel boiler is to be installed in the beginning, and the layout of full central heating is to be planned to allow for its installation in the future. The boiler will provide hot water only at first. Immediate room heating will be provided by an open fire in the living room, and a slow combustion stove in the study.

Perspective view of house in north London by L. Manasseh & Partners.



Above: Sections (scale 1/8 in. = 1 in.). Below: plans and elevations (Scale 1/4 in. = 1 in.)



### HOUSE IN SOHO, LONDON

Alison and Peter Smithson

'The attempt was made to build in Central London, and failed because of difficulty with adjoining owners. It seemed that a series of Trusts held the surrounding land (all bombed) but it turned out to be one man who intended to build kitchens to the left, W.C.'s to the right and restaurants to the rear—this contract was about to be signed after nine months' work.

On the normal city site costing between 15s. and 25s. per sq. ft. one can apparently do little different from the Georgian, but it was considered that a different internal order must be visualised. The air and sunlight of the attics in the daytime suggests that living quarters should be up top, with the bathroom in the cool of the dim basement.

It was decided to have no finishes at all internally—the building being a combination of shelter and environment.

Bare concrete, brickwork and wood. The difficulty of unceiled rooms was satisfactorily overcome by the disposition of rooms which were also placed high up or low down according to light-sunlight desired.

Brickwork may suggest a blue or double burnt or coloured pointing; but the arbitrary use of colour and texture was not conformed with, and common bricks with struck joints were intended. The bars and colour variation have some sort of natural tension when laid by a good bricklayer.

In fact, had this been built it would have been the first exponent of the "new brutalism" in England, as the preamble to the specification shows: "It is our intention in this building to have the structure exposed entirely, without internal finishes wherever practicable. The Contractor should aim at a high standard of basic construction as in a small warehouse." P.D.S.

Erratum: The four houses shown above were inadvertently incorrectly listed in the contents on the front cover of last month's issue of "A.D."

'House in Soho. Alison and Peter Smithson', first mention of the term 'New Brutalism' in print, in: *Architectural Design*, December 1953

### NEW BRUTALISM

Some confusion exists in England as to the link between the New Brutalism and a similar term which has been applied to ~~the~~ work by Scandinavian architects.

Several names are mentioned in this connection but there seems to have been no clear verbal or plastic statement.

The New Brutalism is the extension of the original functionalism (Constructivism and the Esprit Nouveau) in that it is the poetry of the natural order - a seizing on the essence of the programme, an attitude which is fundamentally anti-academic even in a period when anti-academicism <sup>has become</sup> ~~can be~~ academic.

Its expression was first apparent to us in the Beton Brut of the Unite, <sup>& subsequently</sup> ~~since then~~ in the houses of Le Corbusier <sup>at</sup> ~~beside~~ the church at Ronchamp, and <sup>in</sup> the Maison Jaoul in the Rue de Bonchamps, Neuilly, Paris.

This particular handling of materials has always been present in the Modern Movement (Garkau Farm - Häring). It can be seen in certain recent works by Aalto, in the work of Paul Rudolph in Florida.

Ralph Erskine, Moretti, and Walter Girard are not New Brutalists: ~~they are~~ <sup>those</sup> ~~not~~ facets of their work <sup>that</sup> appear to be Brutalist are rather the Contemporary style of our glossy magazines, an aspect of borax. This is not meant in an ~~allegory~~ <sup>allegory</sup> sense but to try and put the finger on the point where confusion arises. Because the '54 Cadillac is most certainly New Brutalist.

ams  
7-3-55

"THE RESTORATIVE PLACE IN NATURE"

„DIE NATUR ALS BELEBENDER ORT“

# HIERONYMUS

Die Wüste ♦ Das Studierzimmer



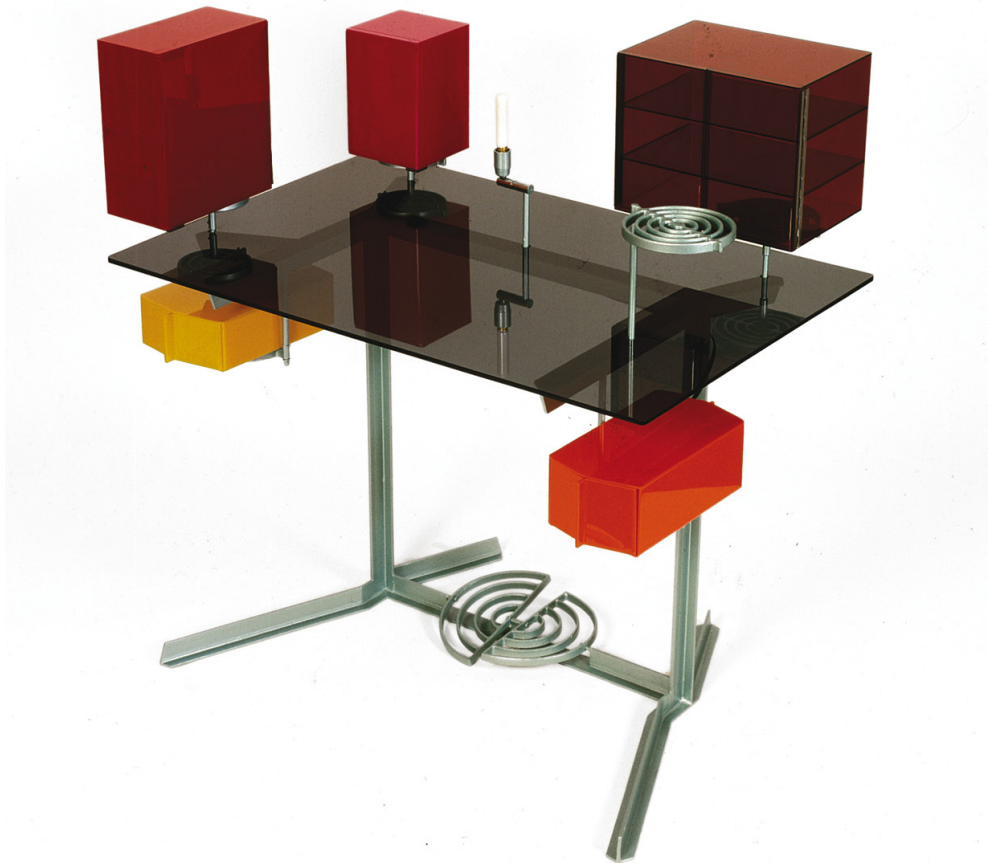
Alison Smithson, 'Saint Jerome. The Desert ... The Study', 1990



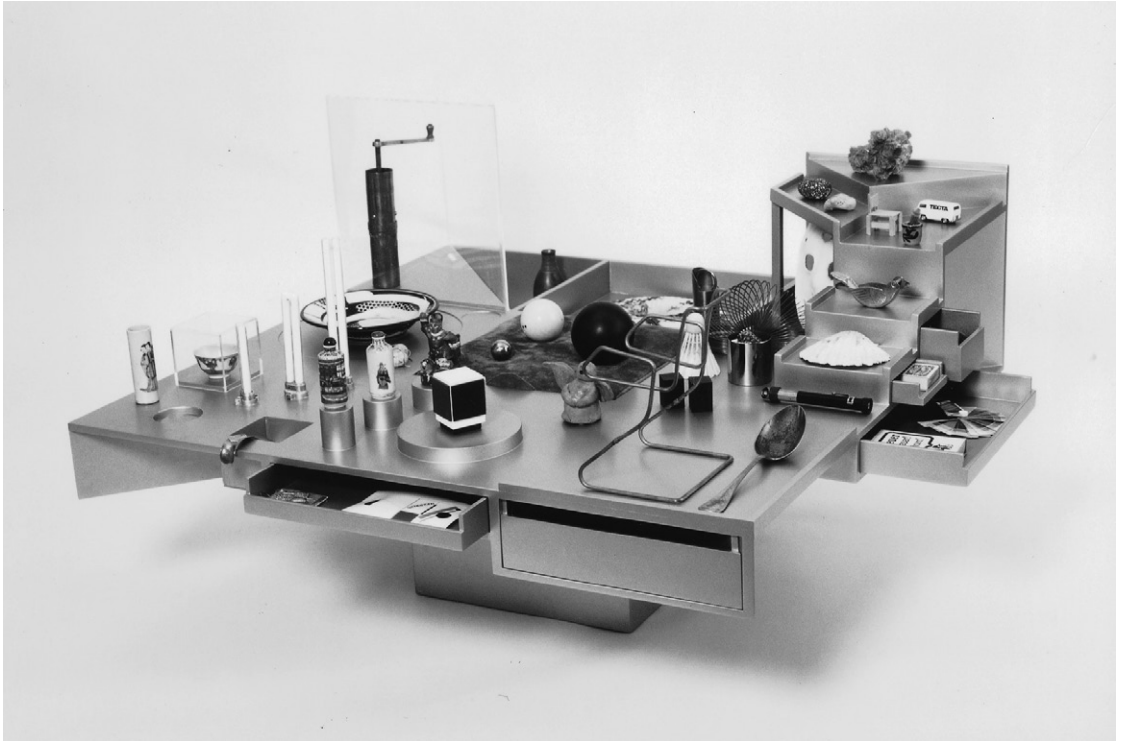
*The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture*, cover of the 1981 Rizzoli edition with Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe; originally published as a special issue of *Architectural Design*, December 1965



Alison Smithson writing in the Upper Lawn garden, June 1964;  
according to grandson Hugo Target the desk was originally Peter's wash stand from his time in Burma



Alison Smithson, Waterlily or Fish Desk for TECTA / Axel Bruchhäuser, 1986-1989



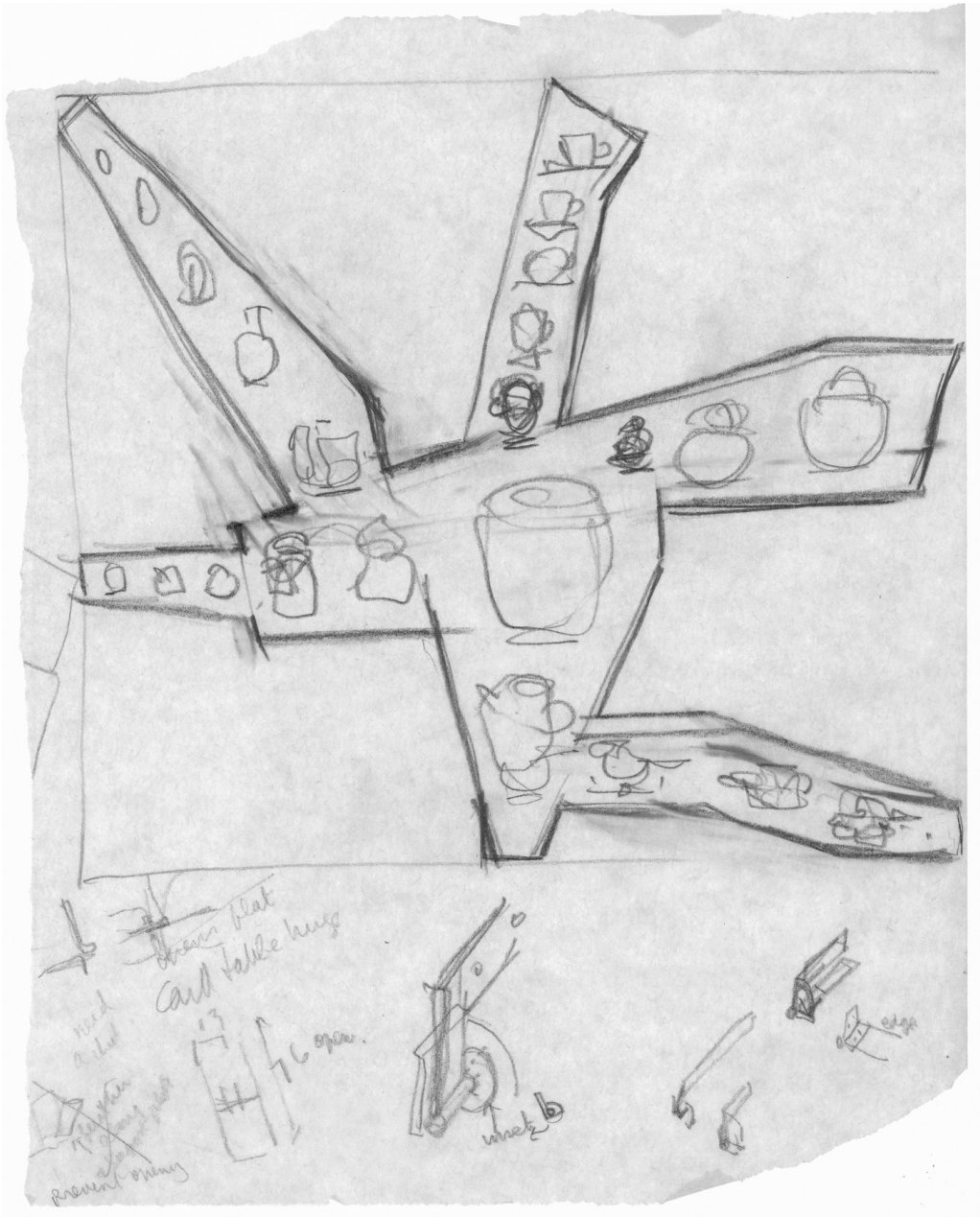
Alison Smithson, Collector's Table for TECTA / Axel Bruchhäuser, 1986-1989



House of the Future, Ideal Home Show, 1956; living room with table and trolley set for dinner







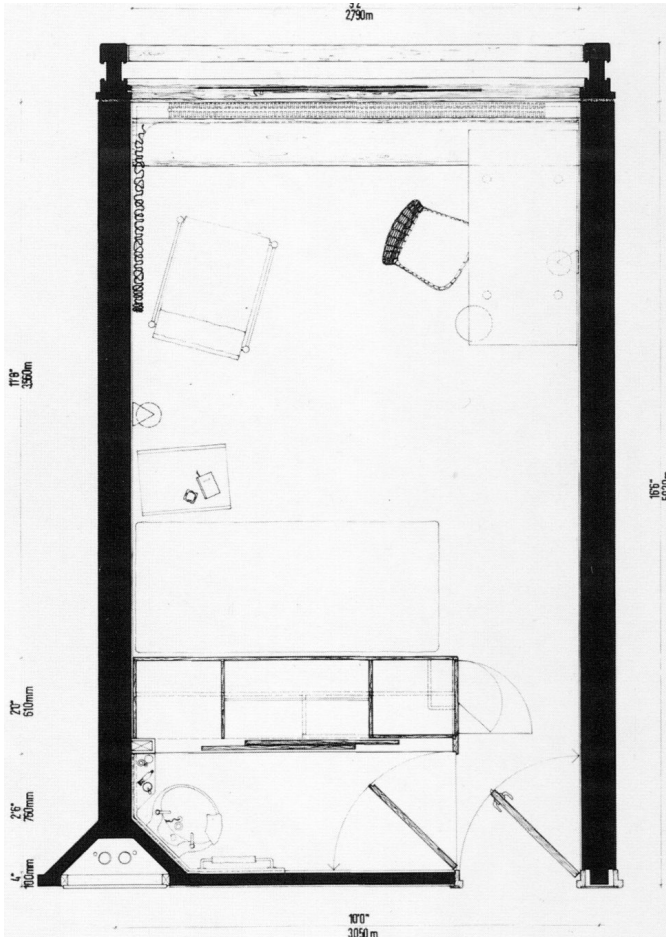
Alison Smithson, Struwelpeter Wall Cabinet for TECTA / Axel Bruchhäuser, 1986-1989



House of the Future, Ideal Home Show, 1956; bath tub shaped to hold the human body



Cato Lodge, Alison Smithson's archive and writing room  
photo: Sandra Lousada



Student room, St Hilda's College, Oxford, 1967-1970



Cato Lodge, drawing room of Alison and Peter Smithson  
photo: Sandra Lousada

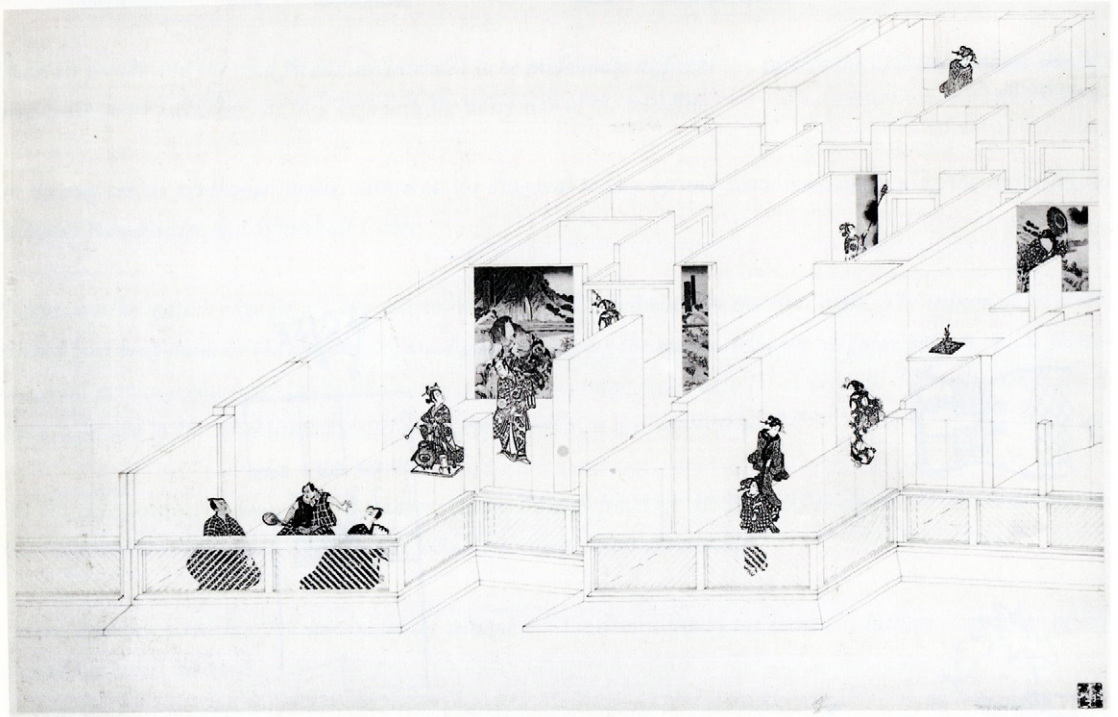


Alison and Peter Smithson at Cato Lodge in their drawing room



Economist, London, 1959-1964, bank room interior





Riverside Apartments, Millbank London, 1976-1977, isometric drawing of interior rooms.  
The pasted figures are sometimes called Japanese, sometimes Chinese, while 'Delicate inhabitation' is one of its captions



House of the Future, Ideal Home Show, 1956; kitchen cabinets



Sugden House, 1956, kitchen counter  
photo: David Grandorge



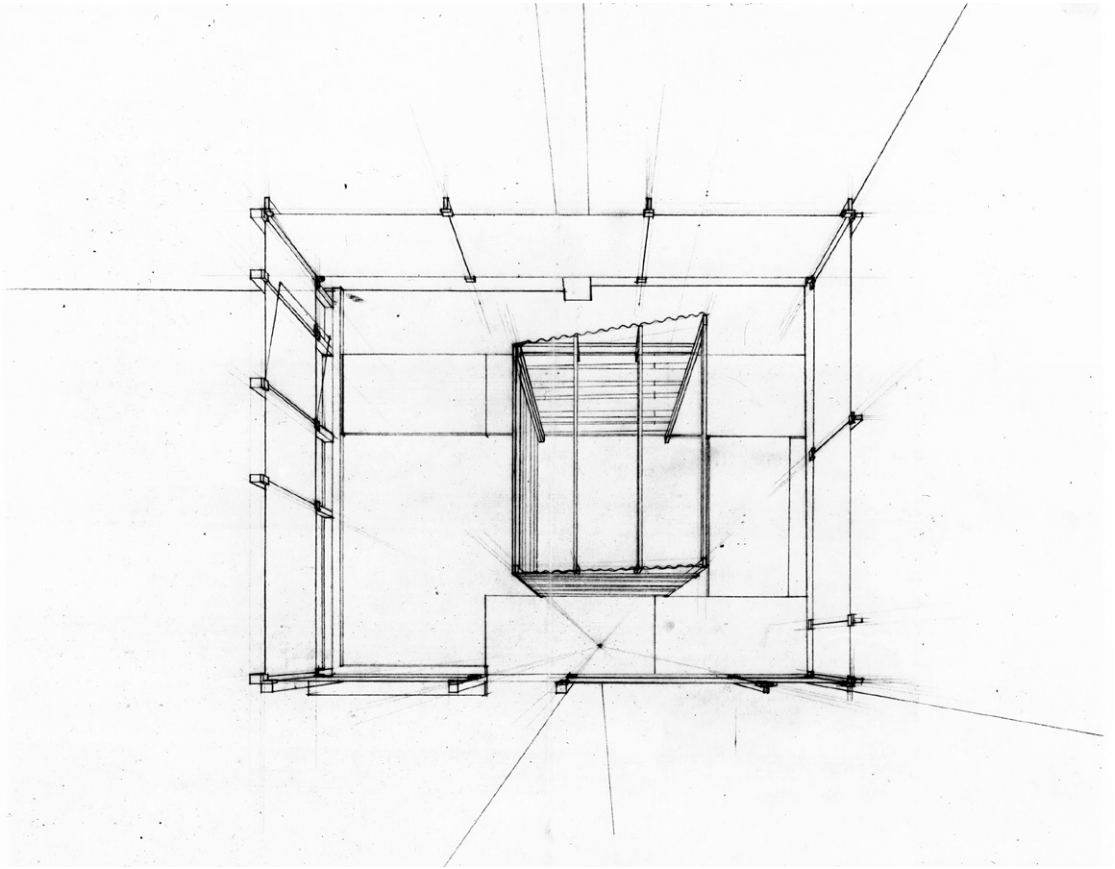
2 Priory Walk, London, kitchen on the upper floor with display of the As Found and re-used marble slate for table



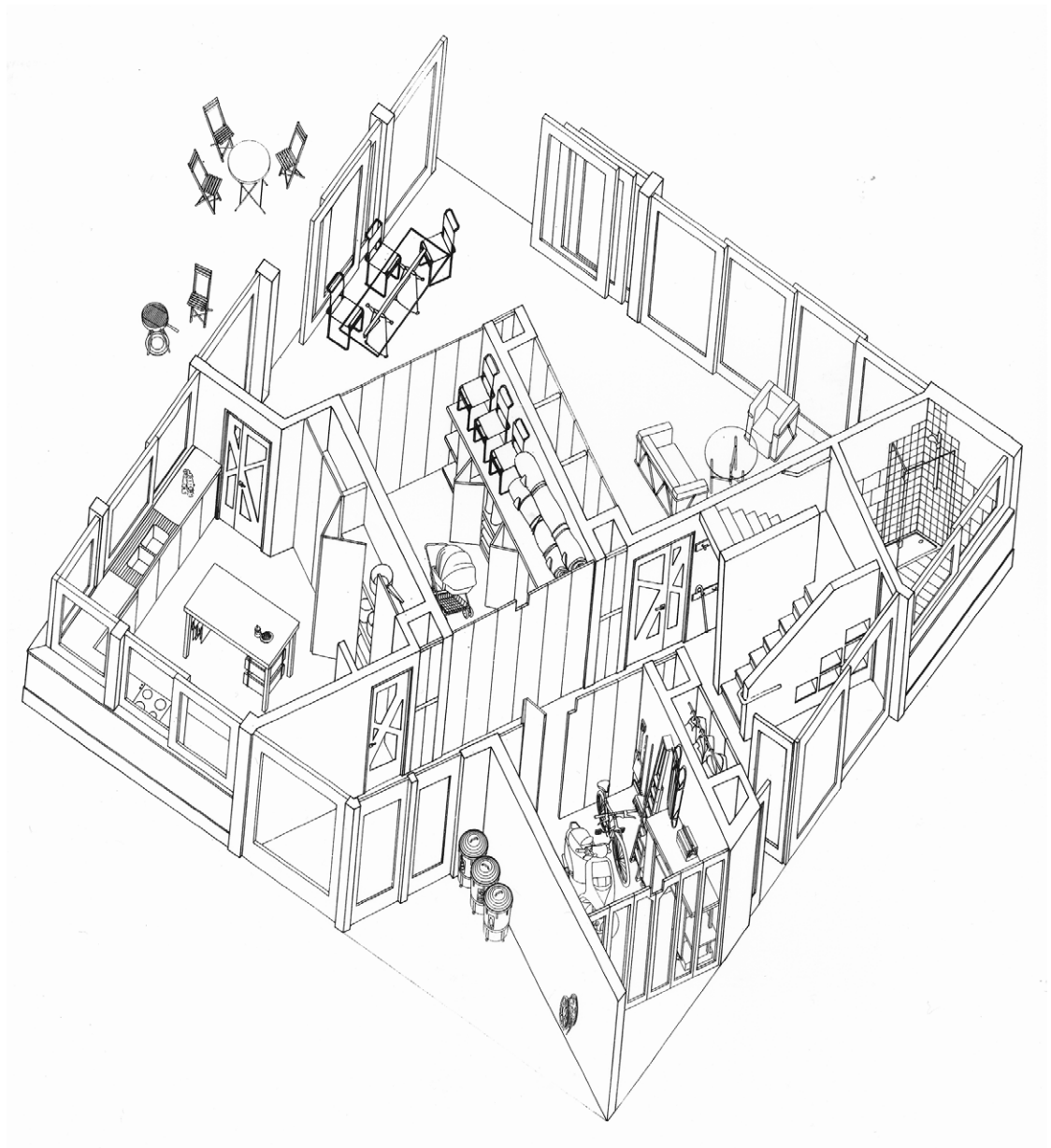
Patio and Pavilion, This is Tomorrow, 1956, together with Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi; interior of shed with 'Head of a Man' photcollage by Nigel Henderson



Hunstanton Secondary Modern School, 1949-1954, view into one of the two inner courts  
photo: Nigel Henderson

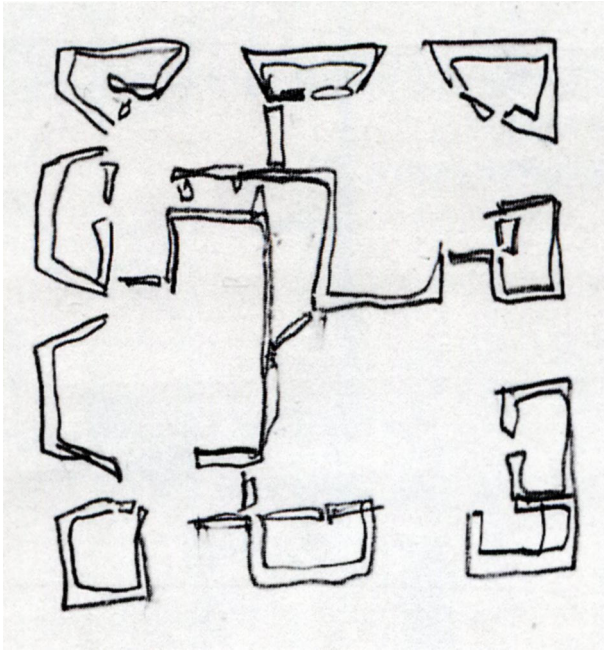


Patio and Pavilion, This is Tomorrow, 1956, together with Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi; drawing of empty structure

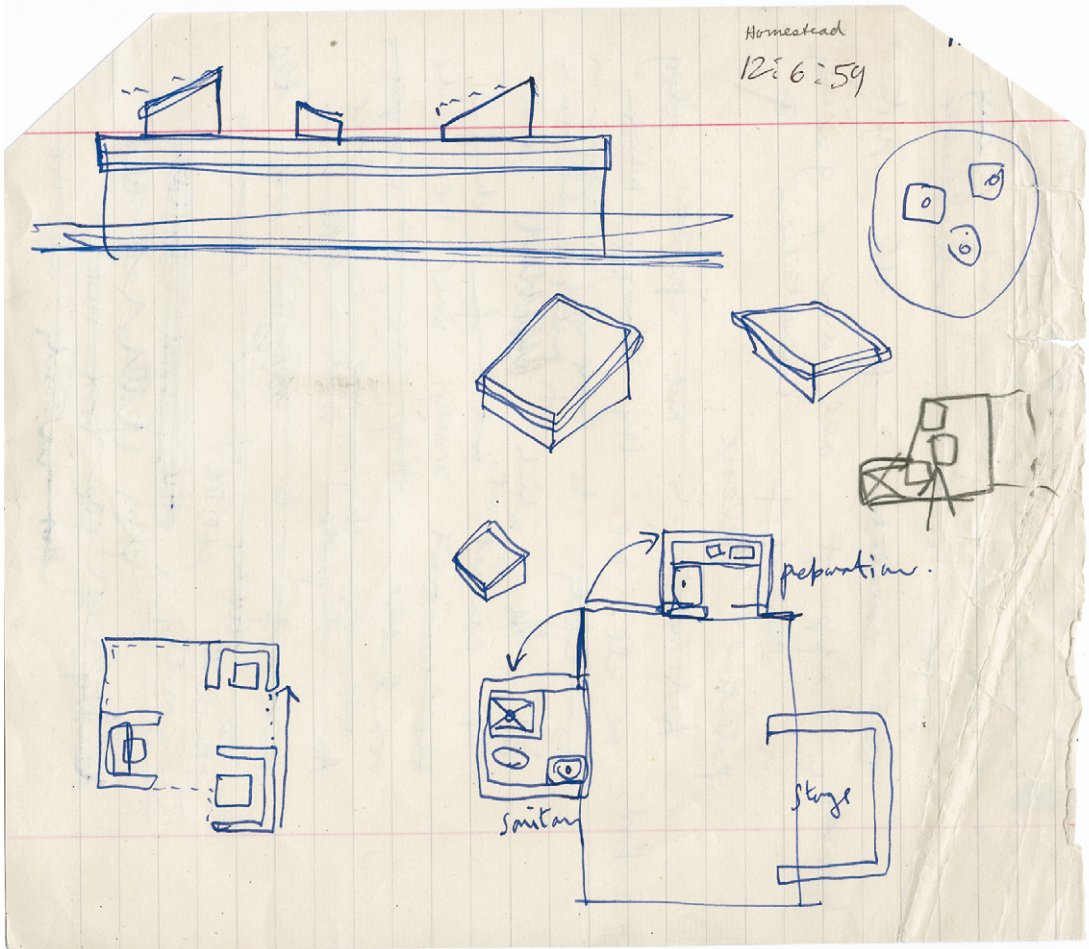


Peter Smithson, Put Away House, 1993-2000; axonometric of ground floor spaces and storage room

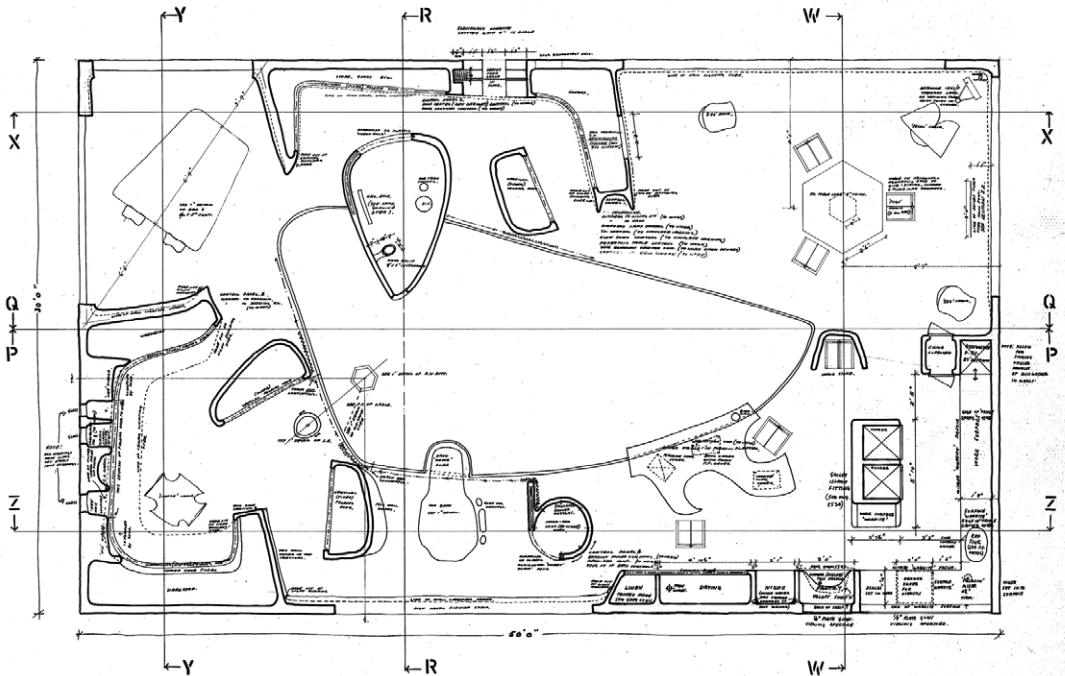




'An idea for the standard house with extra ground-floor room with its own entrance and atmosphere: studio, drawing room, study, surgery ...' Alison Smithson, Cubicle or Cupboard House, 1956-1957



Peter Smithson, Retirement House in Kent, 1959; idea sketch dated 12 June 1954



1/2"

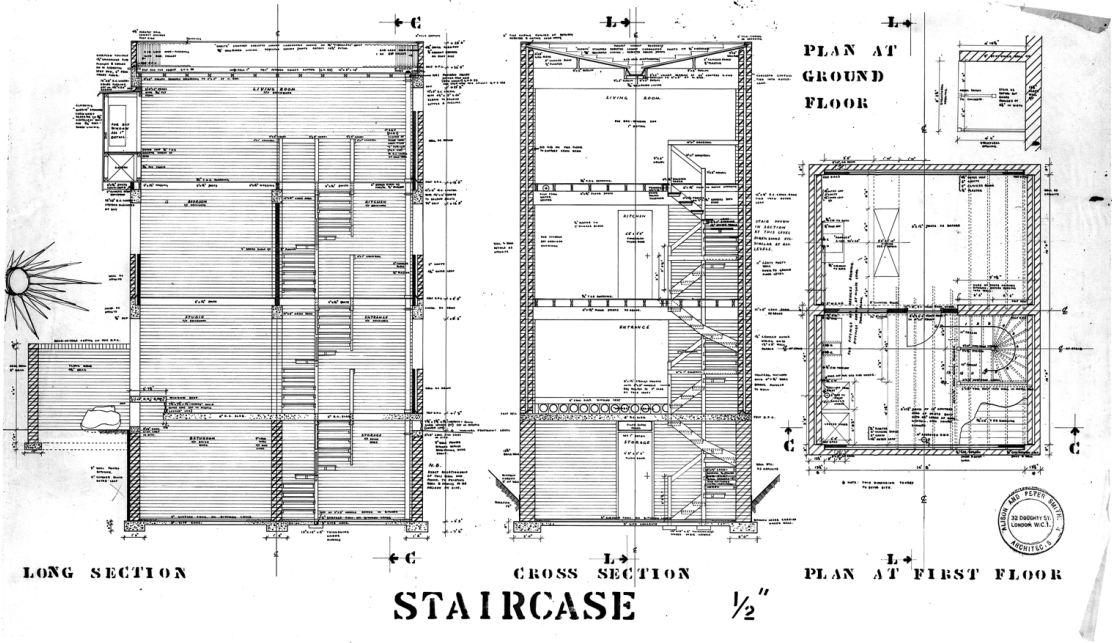
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 & 200.00 IN HOUSE STAFFS EQUIPMENT

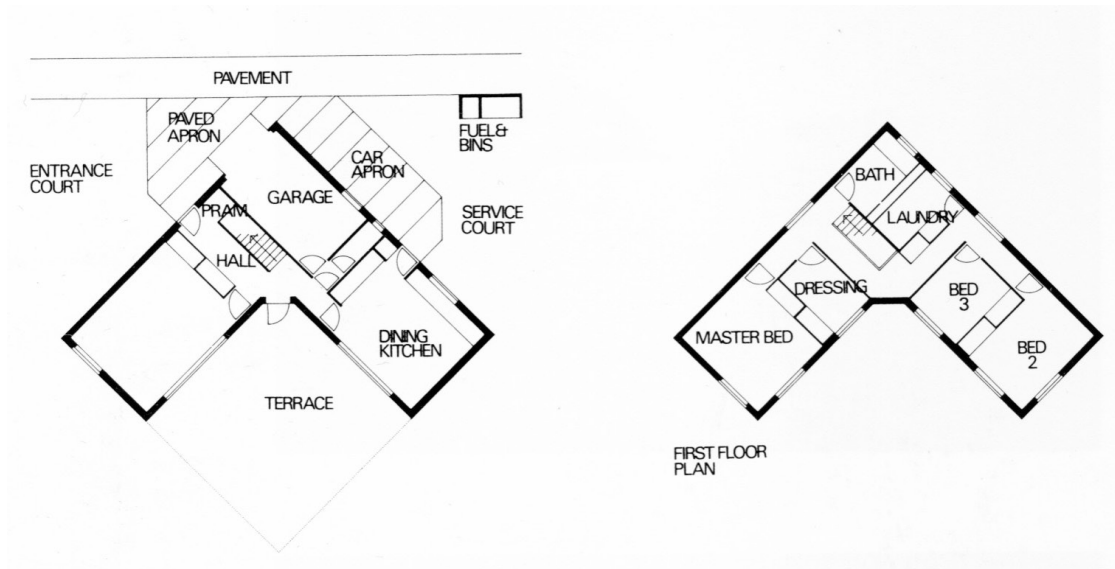


House of the Future, Ideal Home Show, 1956





Soho House, Colville Place, London, 1952



New Model House or Burleigh Lane Houses, Street, 1965-1966



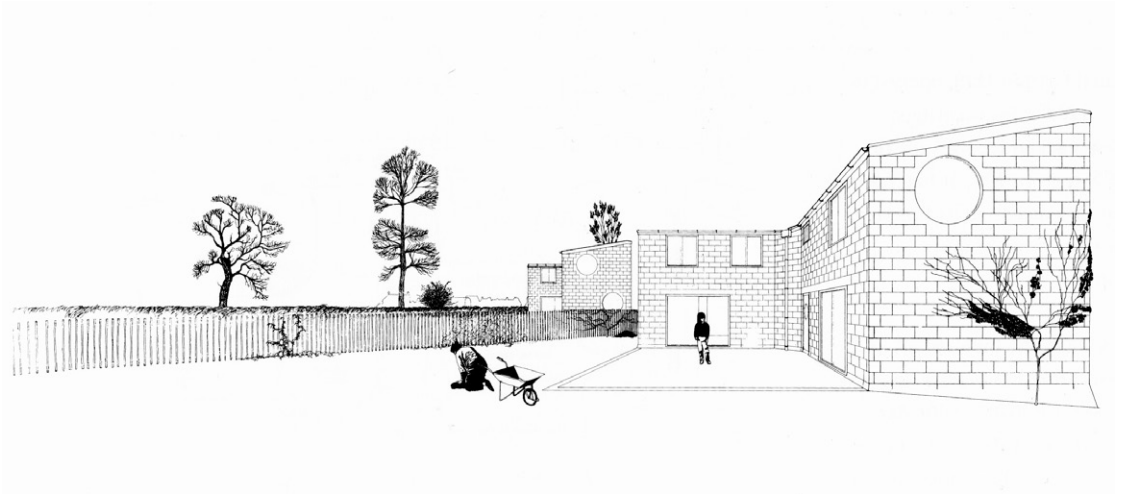
Solar Pavilion, Upper Lawn, 1959-1962



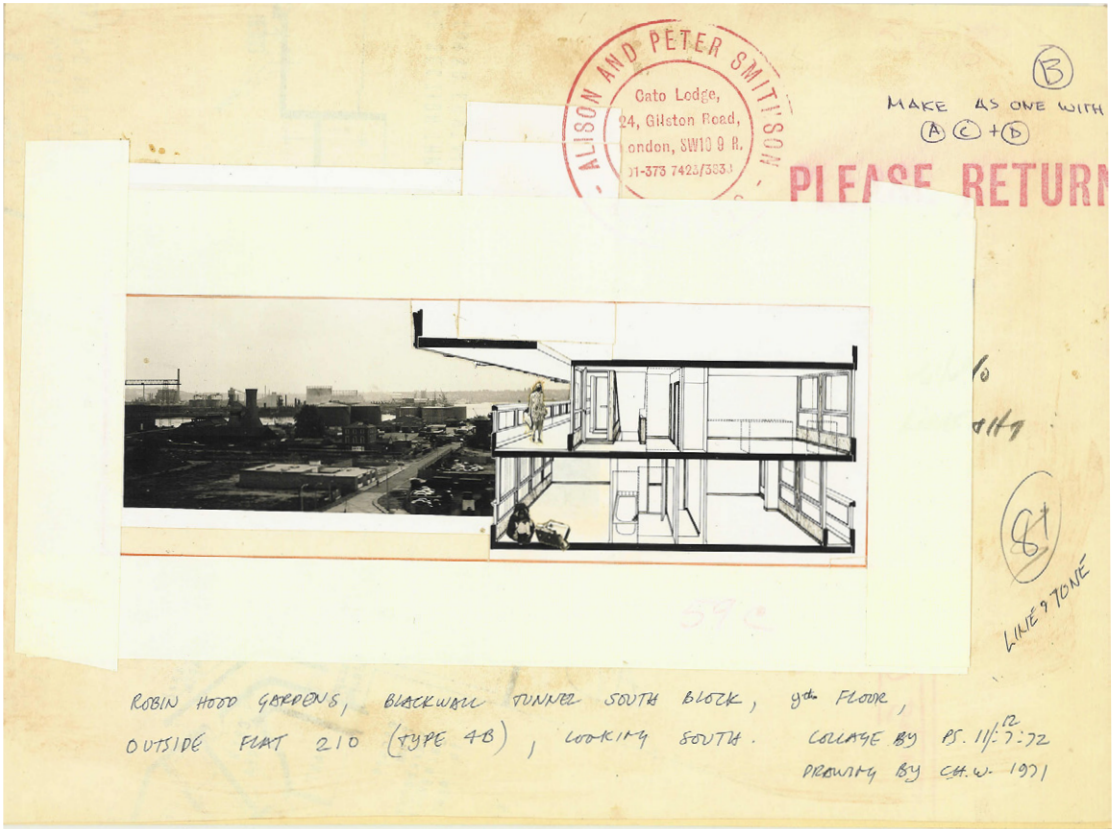
Sugden House, Watford, 1955-1956



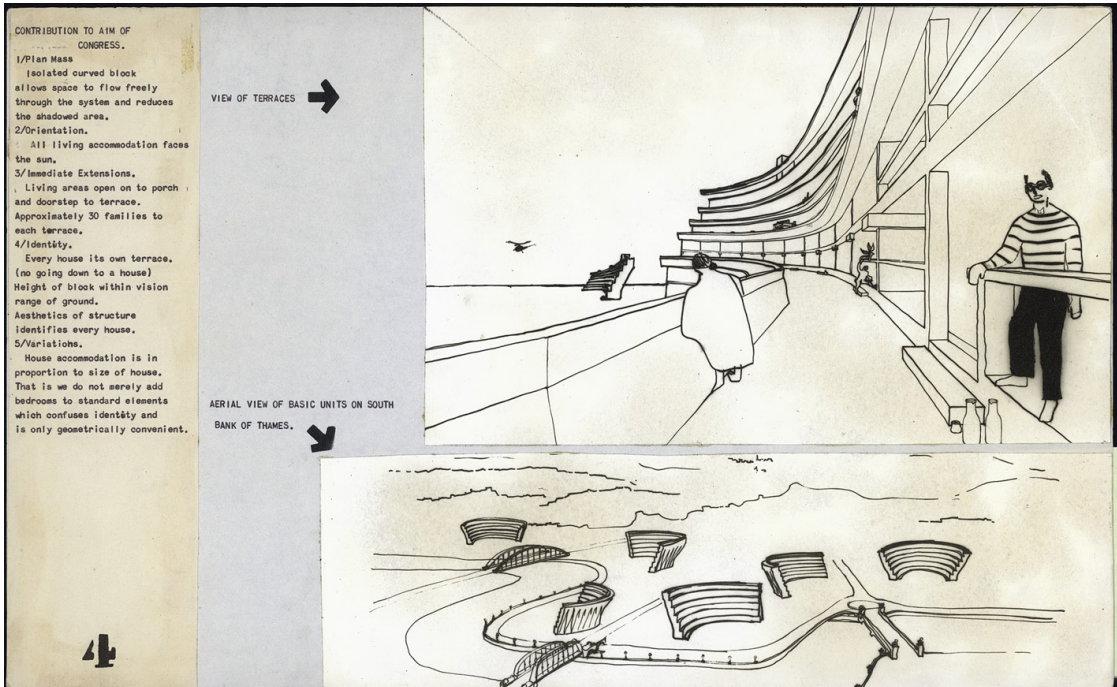




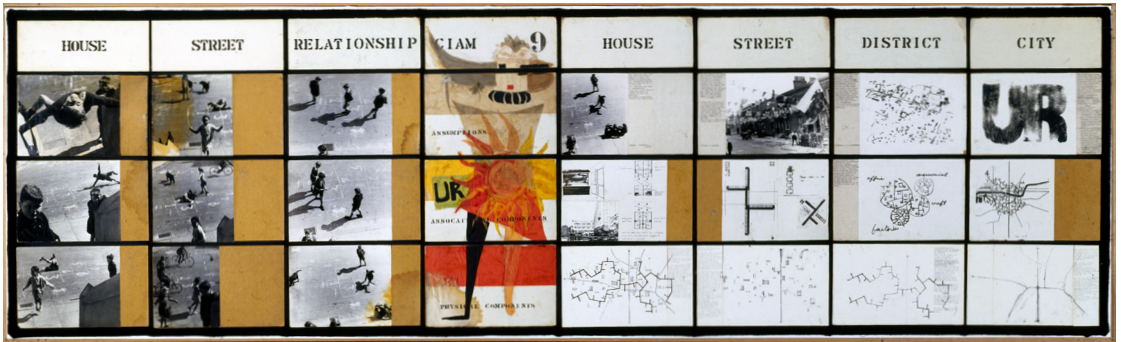
New Model House or Burleigh Lane Houses, Street, 1965-1966, private garden space



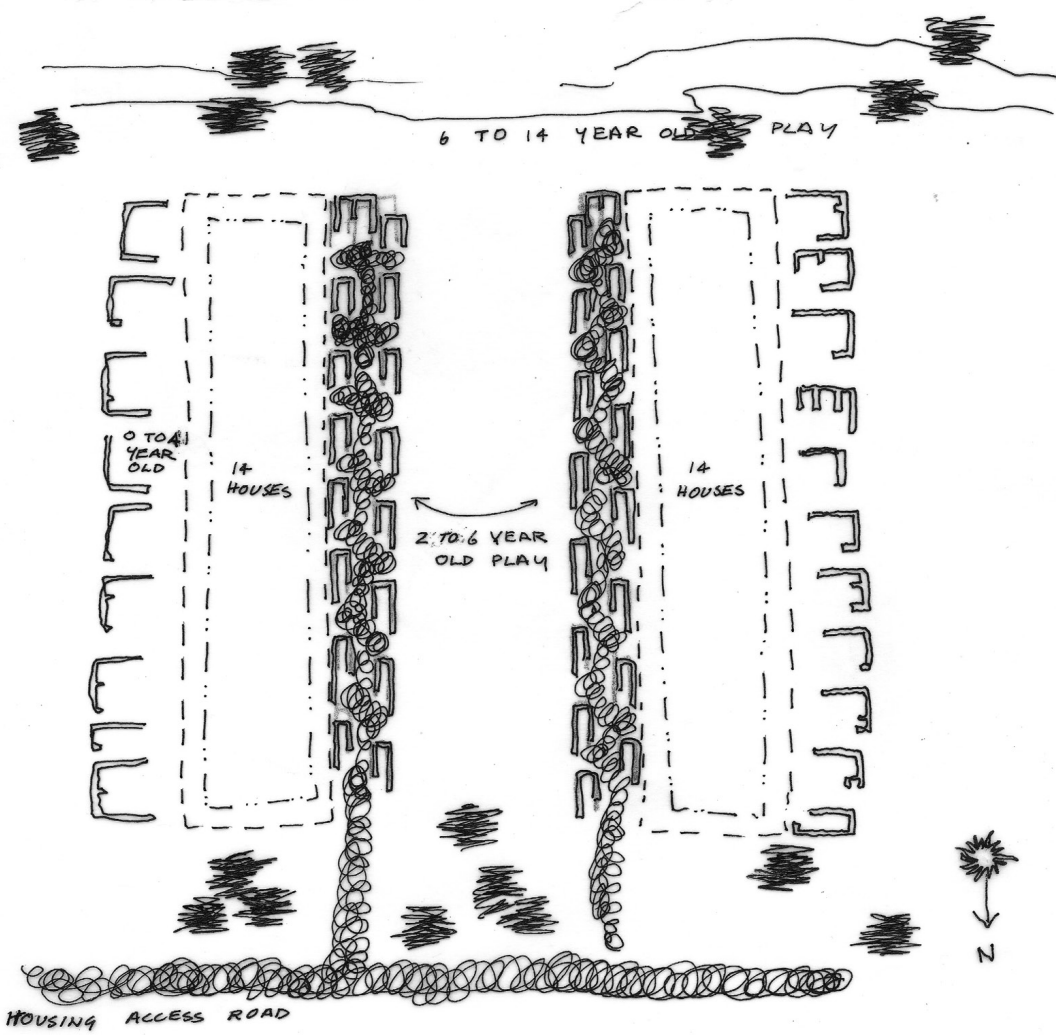
Robin Hood Gardens, 1966-1972; collage showing relation between cityscape, street-in-the-air and flats



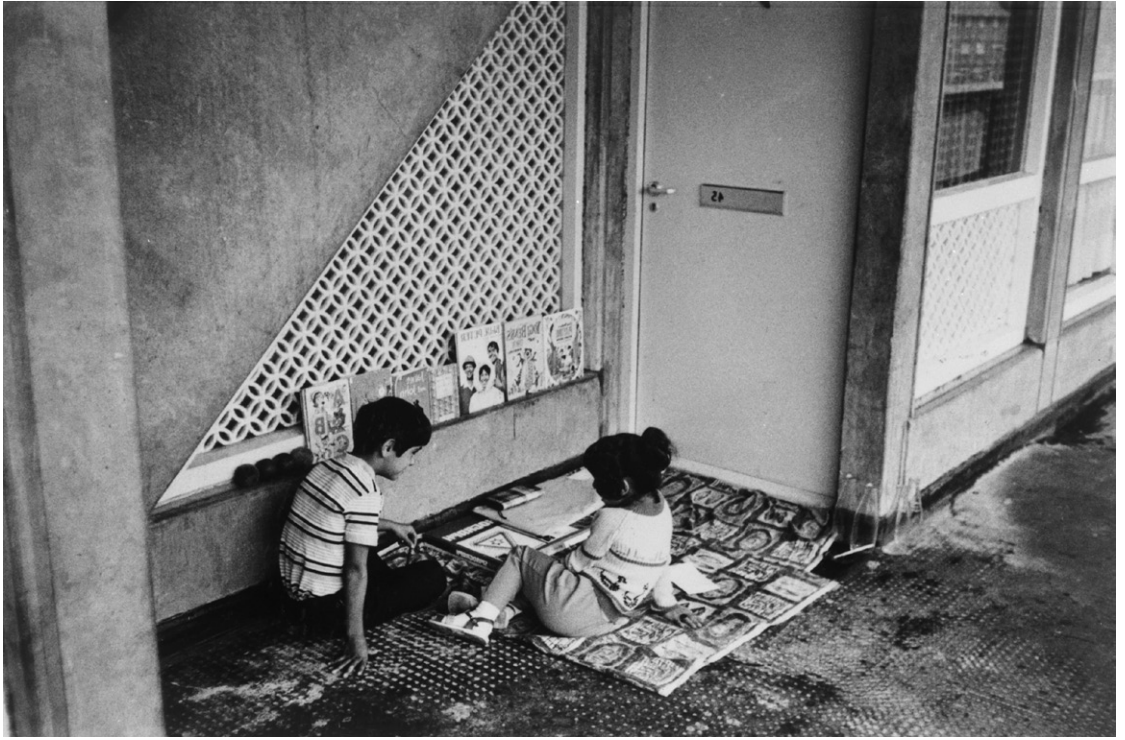
Terraced Crescent Housing, panel of Valley Section grid, 1955, for CIAM 10 in Dubrovnik



Urban Re-identification Grid, 1953 for CIAM 9 at Aix-en-Provence, with photos by Nigel Henderson



Portico Row houses, 1957; with indication of places to play for specific age groups

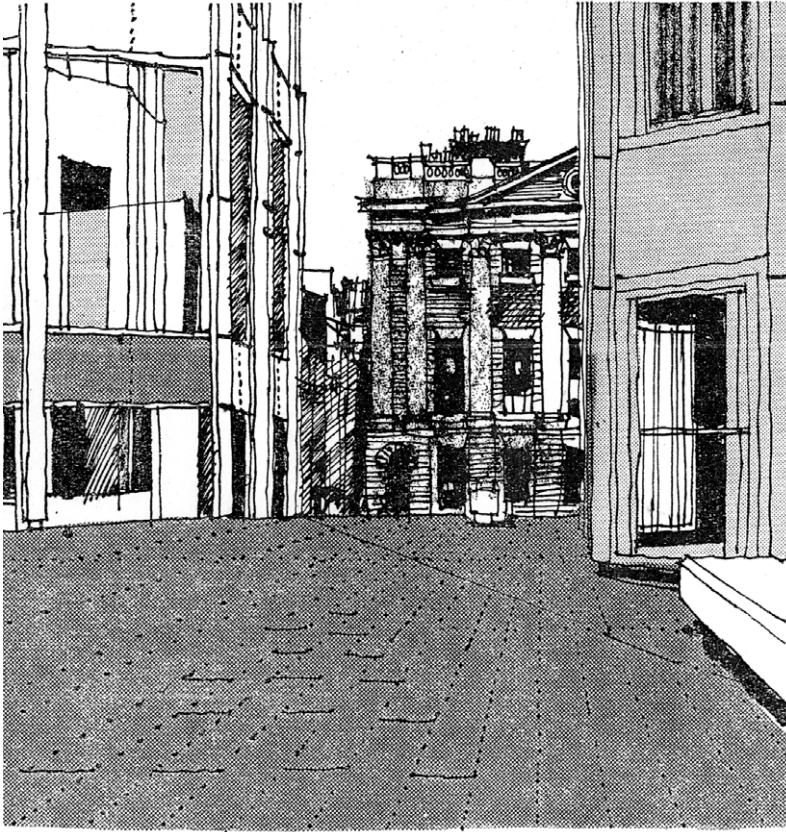


Children playing in the Robin Hood Garden street-in-the-air, 1972  
photo: Sandra Lousada

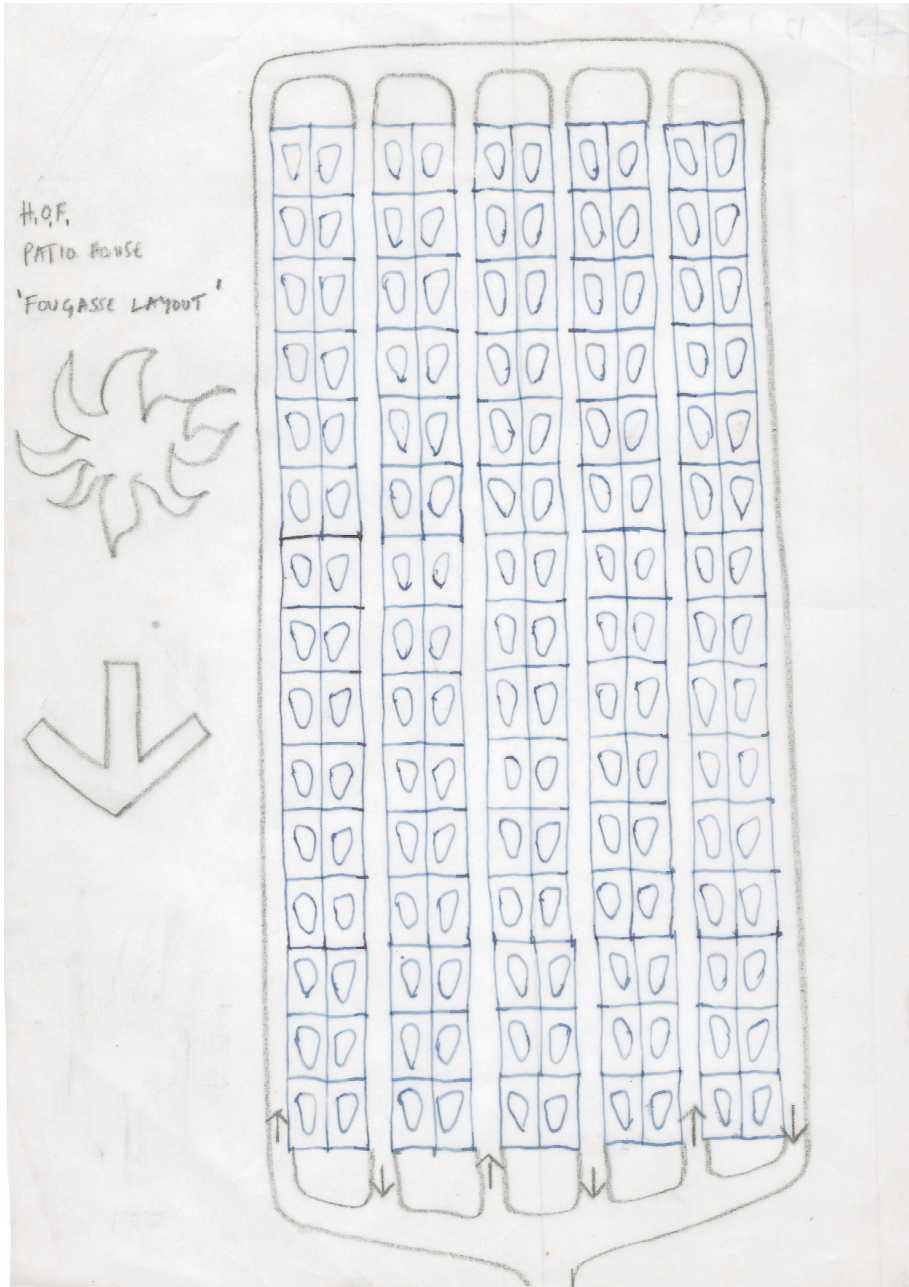


Economist, London, 1959-1964  
photo: Michael Carapetian

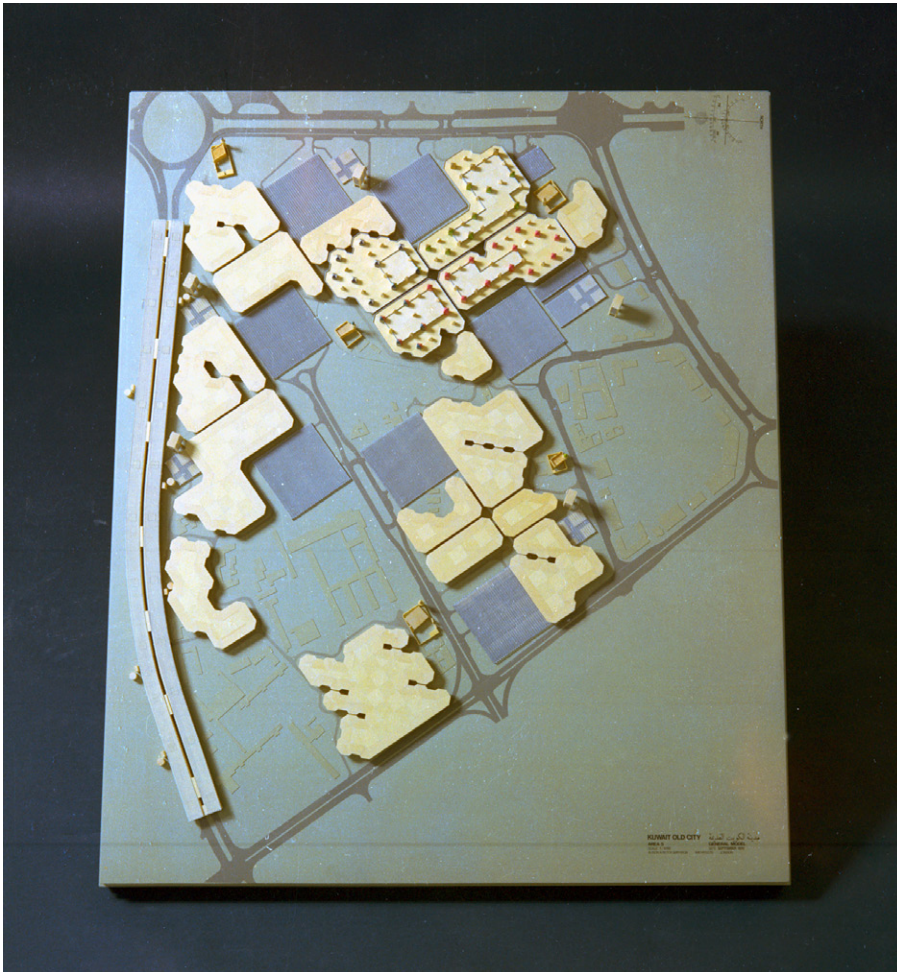




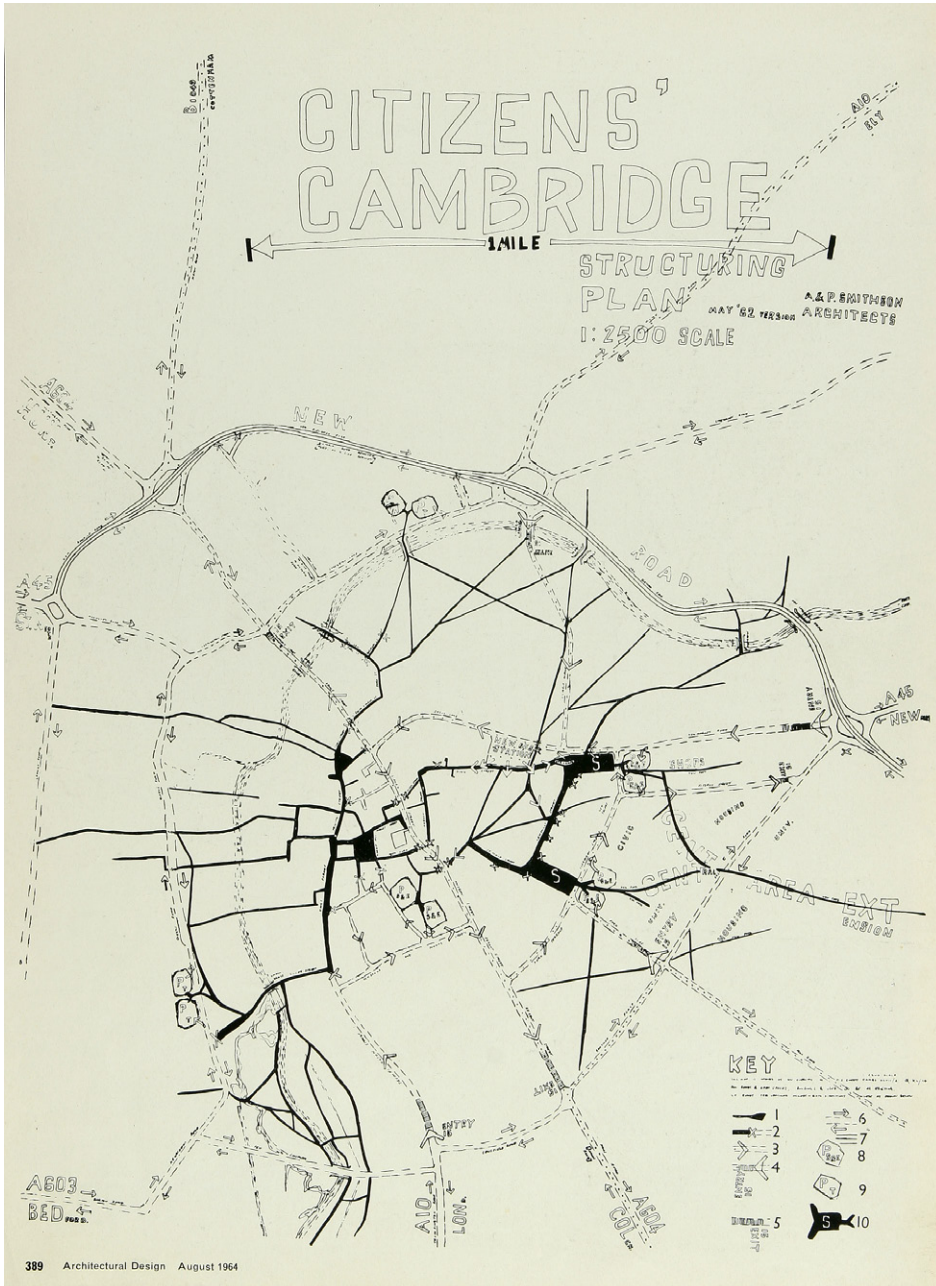
Economist Plaza, drawing by Gordon Cullen, from his article in the *Architectural Review*, February 1965



House of the Future, Ideal Home Show, 1956; proposal for urban lay-out



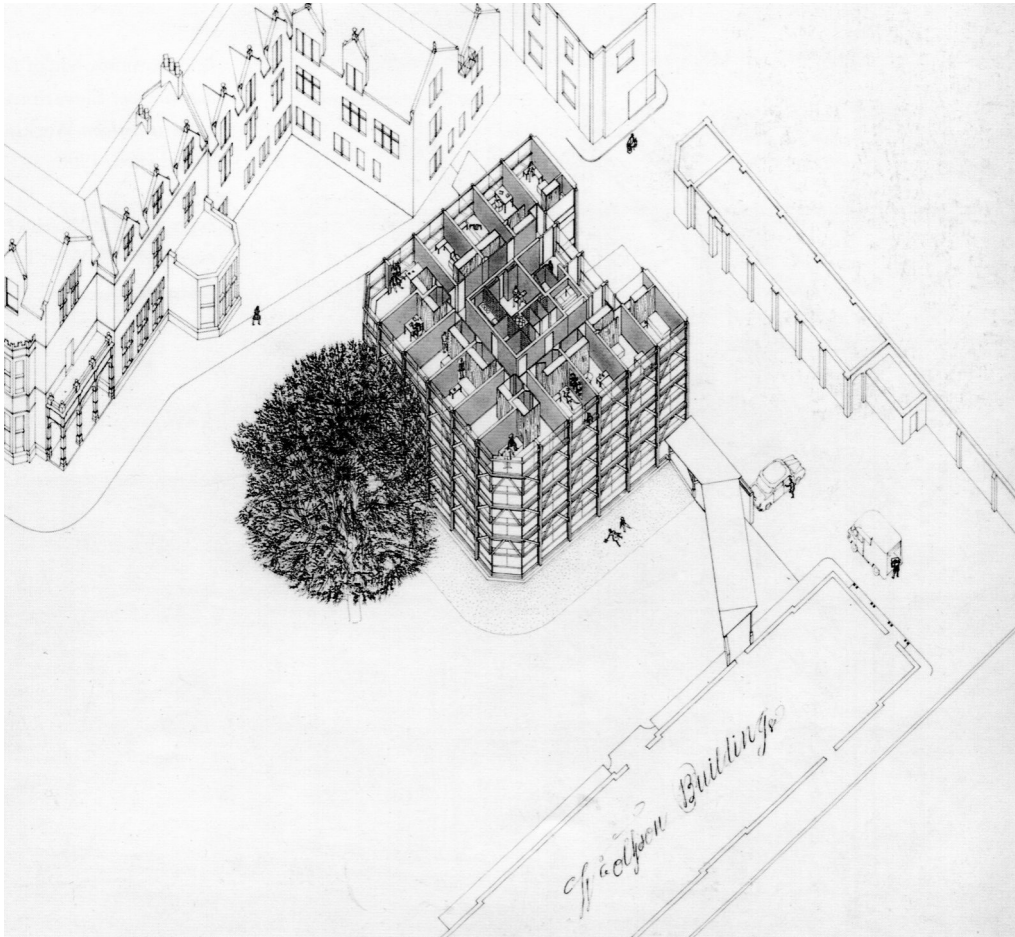
Kuwait City, 1968-1970; model of mat-building with souk galleries and office buildings



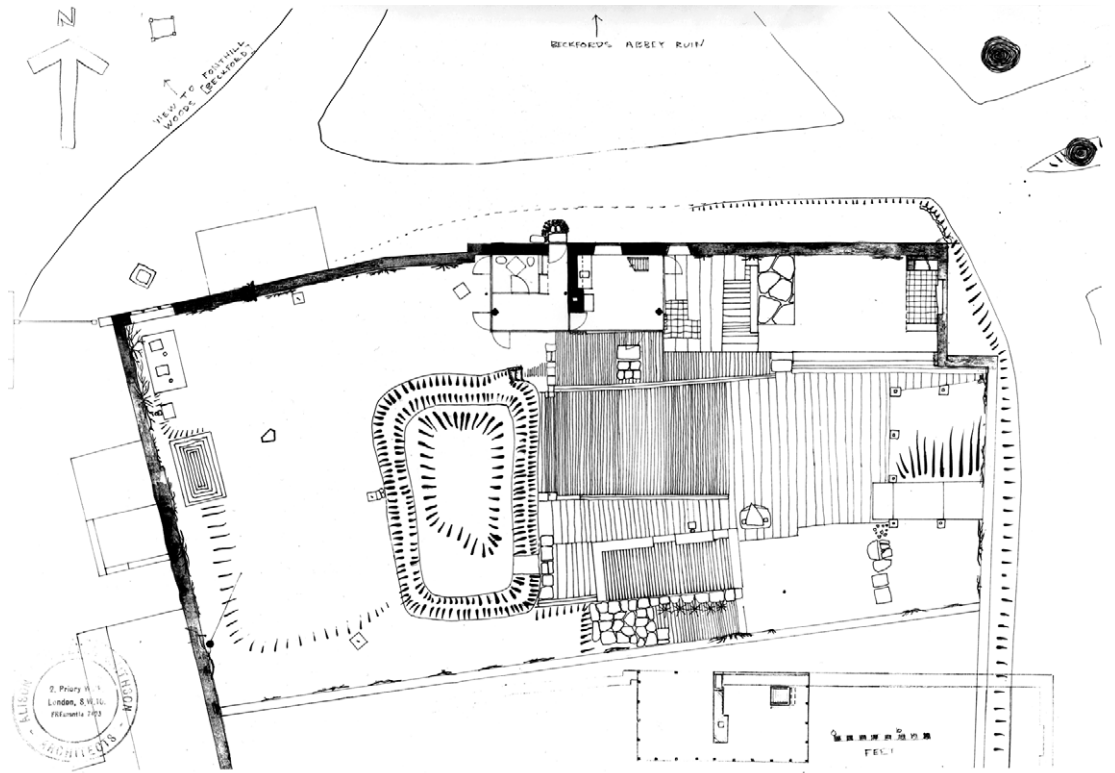
Citizens's Cambridge, 1962; proposal for replanning of the inner city including by-pass



Robin Hood Gardens, Poplar, London, 1966-1972, landscape of inner court  
photo: Sandra Lousada



Garden Building or dormitory for St Hilda's College, Oxford, 1967-1970



Solar Pavilion, Upper Lawn, 1959-1962

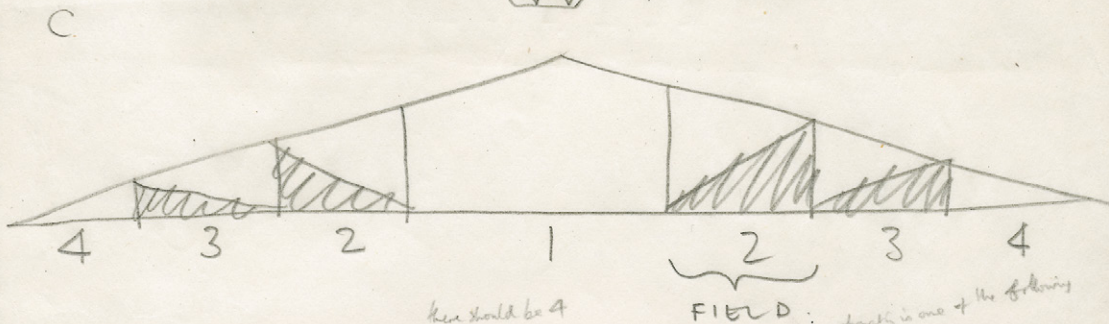


Losey House, Minffordd, Wales, 1959-1960, the site



In order to make this comprehension possible, we propose to study Urbanism as communities of varying degrees of complexity. <sup>2</sup> in order that the Congress may form itself into several working groups of reasonable size

These can be shown on a Scale of Association as shown below:-



We suggest that working parties operate each, in a field (not a point) on the Scale of Association, for example 1/City (Metropolis)  
 2/Town  
 3/Village  
 4/Isolate dwelling

This will enable us to study particular functions or forms in their appropriate ecological field. Thus, a housing sector will be considered or satellite of a city will be considered at the top of the Scale (under City I), and can in this way be compared with development in other Cities, or contrasted with numerically similar developments in different fields of the Scale of Association.

This method <sup>is intended to</sup> induce a study of human association as a first principle, and of the four functions <sup>pl</sup> and as aspects of each total problem. <sup>others (or any functions)</sup>

# CLUSTER CITY

## A NEW SHAPE FOR THE COMMUNITY

*Throughout the last quarter of the present century, from its first congress at La Sarraz in 1928 to its virtual dissolution last year, the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) has brought together the masters of Functionalist Architecture—Le Corbusier, Gropius, van Eesteren and many others—in discussions on the problems of their art, and of city planning in particular. Their findings, formulated in methodically drawn up documents, the most notable being the Athens Charter of 1933, now begin to appear too diagrammatic, formalistic and legalistic, and here, Alison and Peter Smithson, who have participated in much of CIAM's post-war activity, set out a case for rephrasing CIAM's functionalist tenets on a more humane and pragmatic basis.*

The modern architect is interested in the implications of his building in the community and in the culture as a whole. His first concern is with the general problem, from which the specific solution in the particular situation is evolved. The Declaration of the first Congress for Modern Architecture (CIAM) in 1928, was concerned not only with the throwing over of outmoded formulas and the Academies, but with the actual functional basis of the new architecture with economics, with the rationalization of building, and also with town planning, for the Functional City was the natural extension of a Functional Architecture.

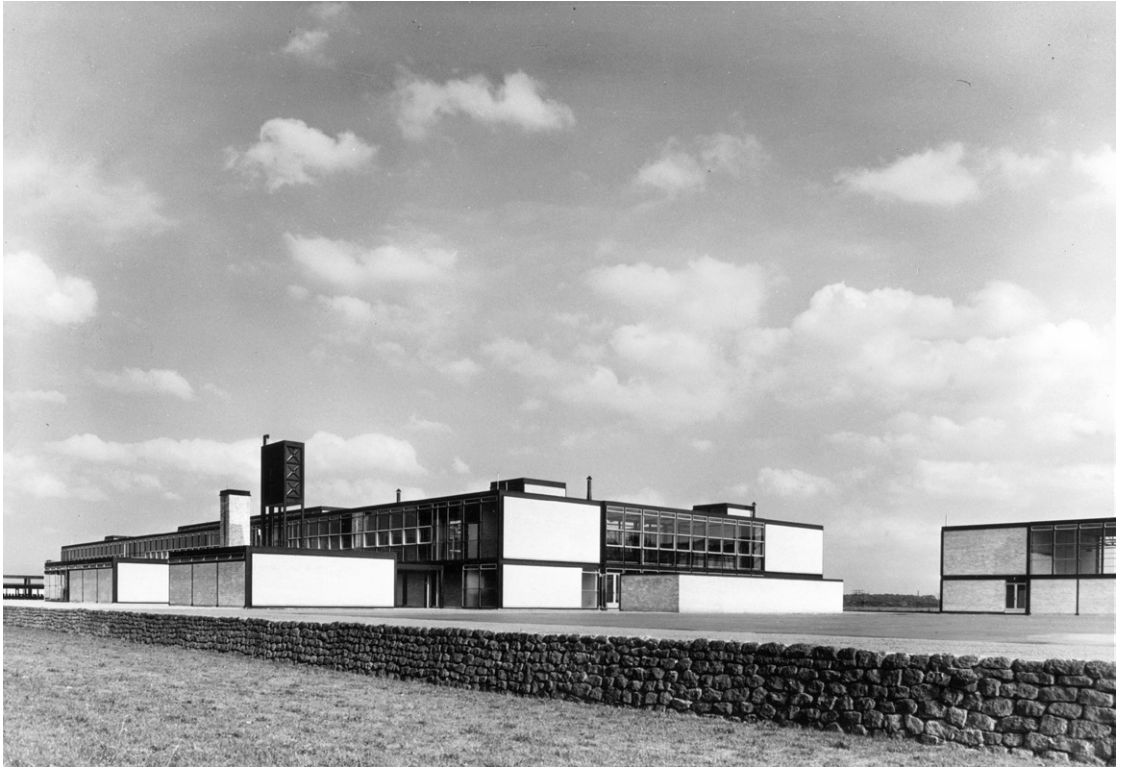
The situation for the modern architect today is fundamentally the same, we are still functionalists and we still accept the responsibility for the community as a whole, but today the word functional does not merely mean mechanical, as it did thirty years ago. Our functionalism means accepting the realities of the situation, with all their contradictions and confusions, and trying to do something with them. In consequence we have to create an architecture and a town planning which—through built form—can make meaningful the change, the growth, the flow, the *vitality* of the community.

There must be inherent in the organization of every building the renewal of the whole community struc-

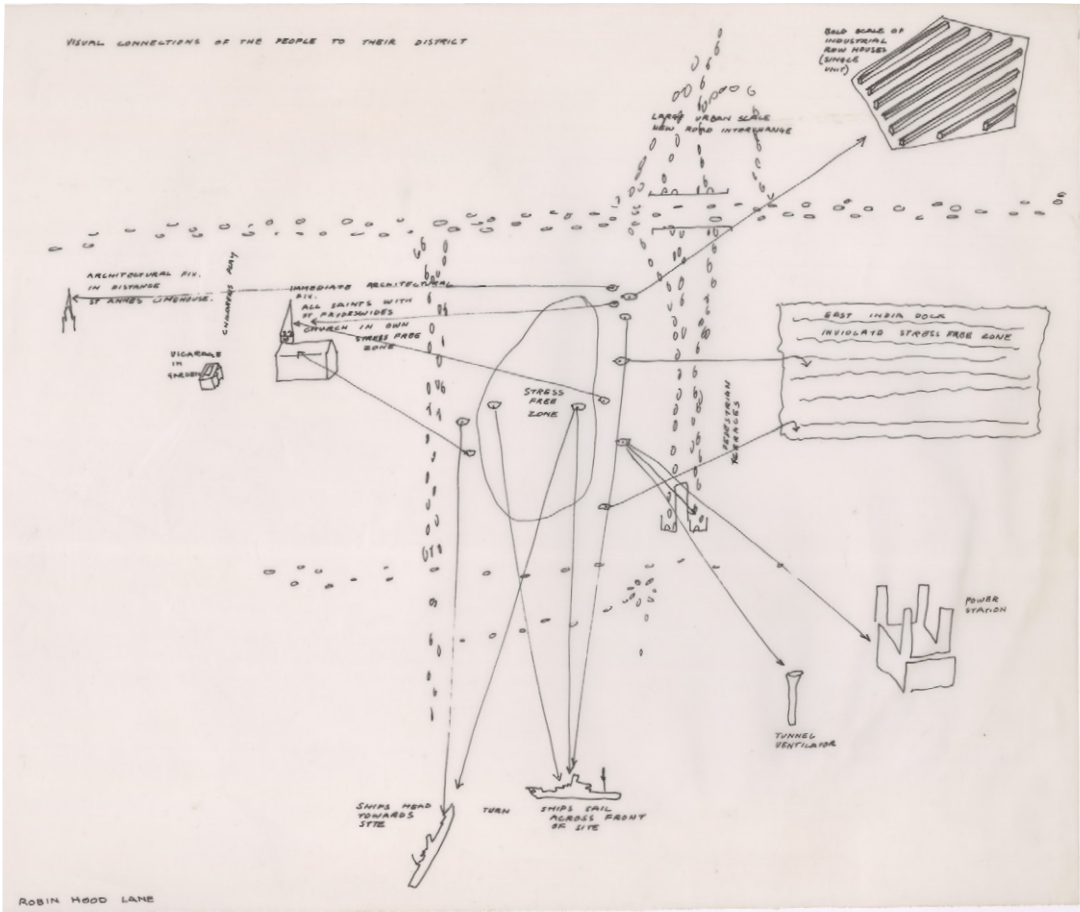
aus  
CIAM

Poussin's vision of the classical city is an image of a consistent hierarchy of building forms, that runs from the high temple on the hill to the local temple and the profane buildings around it. Can modern architects create an equally convincing image of a city, without being caught in some similar closed hierarchy?

'Cluster City. A New Shape for the Community', in the *Architectural Review*, 1957, opening page with fragment of Nicholas Poussin painting 'Landscape with the Ashes of Phocion'



Hunstanton Secondary Modern School, 1949-1954, view from the street with annexes and ha-ha in front  
photo: John Maltby



Robin Hood Gardens, Poplar, London, 1966-1972, analysis of vistas and routes



*Parallel of Life and Art*, 1956, installation at the ICA in London, together with Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi



**66-68a**  
Climbing up to the point where the two meet we find that Widcombe Crescent and Widcombe Terrace (by Harcourt Masters, 1805, Pevsner p. 125) are extraordinarily nice. Widcombe Terrace faces south-west, the ground falling away before it, making possible the 'raised pavement or 'access-deck' spoken of earlier. Under this paved 'access-deck' one passes from the houses into the gardens **66-68a**.

Only six houses long, quite unassuming, this terrace is original, civilized, and beautiful. From the end of its pavement, after a suitable hesitation of steps and an iron arch, one is slid across the road onto the pavement of the Crescent **69**.

Widcombe Crescent is just as original in another way, and just as good. Paired doors with the centre window or window group over them false (it is over the party-wall line). Bizarre really, but gentle and unassuming **69a, 70**.



all (210ft aggregate length)—the other way round from Southcot Place looking steeply down from their fronts into the valley.



**73**

### Walk 3

Start looking at the back of Nelson Place West **202, 201, 203, 204**, discussed during Walk 2. Back better than front on this occasion. Originally no windows in the projecting towers, large-stone ashlar walls with simple string courses, upright and military in its regularity. Neglect suits it. (Does it remind one of those Roman multi-storey tenements? Is this why one likes it so?) Notice the original common lead hopper-heads and down-pipes still in place.



**69, 69a, 70, 72**

On the way back into Bath down Widcombe Hill look at Cambridge Terrace **72** and Hatfield Buildings **73**, both stylistically outside the focus of these Walks, but both very livable. Cambridge Terrace, only ten houses long (190ft), Hatfield Building an open-cornered 'L' only 11 houses in



**202, 201, 203**



**204**  
Now enter through Nile Street **80a** the main space lying in front of Norfolk Crescent (1810, Pevsner, p. 120) **81**. In this case the word 'space' seems justified, for the flat grassed area between the buildings and the river is somehow abstract and unconnected—public open-space, not the garden of the houses. But it is difficult to judge whether this effect is just a consequence of minimum maintenance gardening.

The architecture's thinness has been made mean by neglect. Notice the very large first floor sashes. Original window shutters much in view in the poorer streets from now on (especially in Green Park, Walk 4).

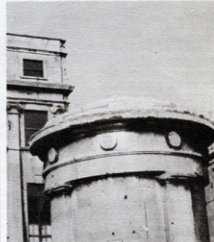
At the entrance corner to the Norfolk Crescent space, a round kiosk **80**, oddly not shown on the Ordnance Map. Somehow touching. I have a feeling if these houses were cleaned up, small adjustments made to the open-space, and genteely occupied (that is, with connection and care), it would be a very nice place to live in. The houses of Nelson Place West face south, and those of Norfolk Crescent slightly north of west, but their open-space is effectively open for a thousand feet along the river to get the late afternoon sun.

Leave the Norfolk Crescent space through theicket between Nelson Place West and Nelson Villas **82**, cross the Bristol Road and cut up through the car-park (once allotment gardens) into Crescent Gardens. Keep to the right of the bandstand and the first glimpse of Royal Crescent will be in front of you.

Royal Crescent is the undoubted masterpiece of Bath. The Circus is a slightly lesser one. All others, including Queen Square are somehow journeymen compared to these.

I am now of course talking about the ultimate architectural values—of the highest level of intensity, of completeness of statement. In Bath these two have it, in spite of what has been said about those backs, and maybe one other (in Walk 4). This set of values is superimposed on those we have been using so far. If we were in an ancient Rome, as complete as Bath, the need for assessment by these values would similarly only rarely be felt.

Royal Crescent, (1767-74 by John Wood the Younger, Pevsner, p. 130) stunningly regular, unmistakably a collection of separate houses, is self-assured and complete in a way that makes Versailles appear arriviste **85**. The comparison with a palace



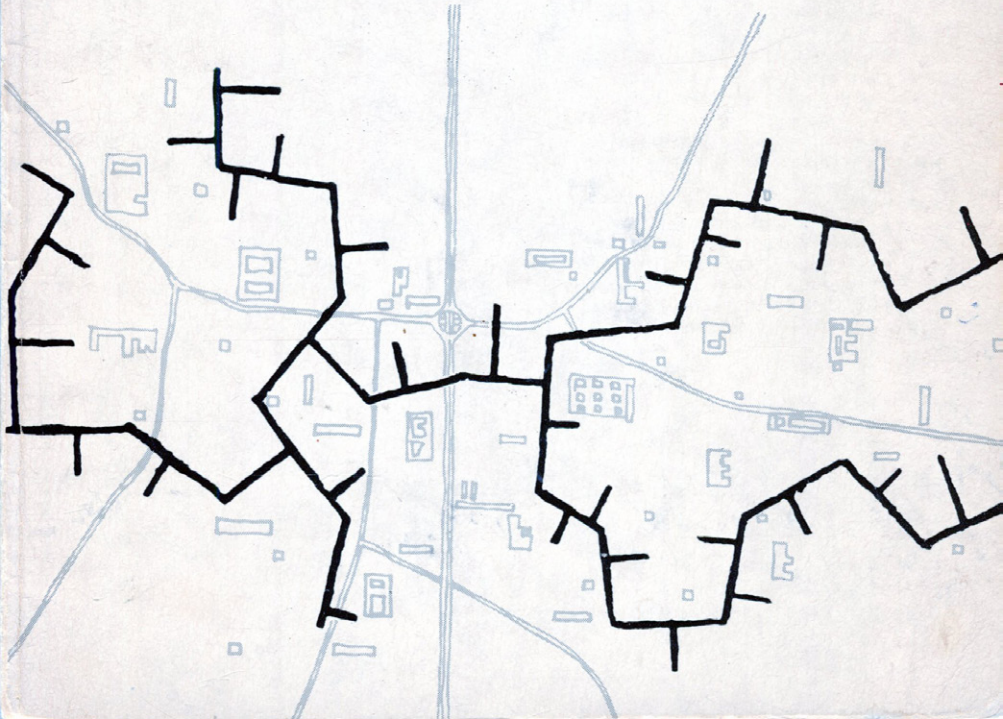
**80, 82**



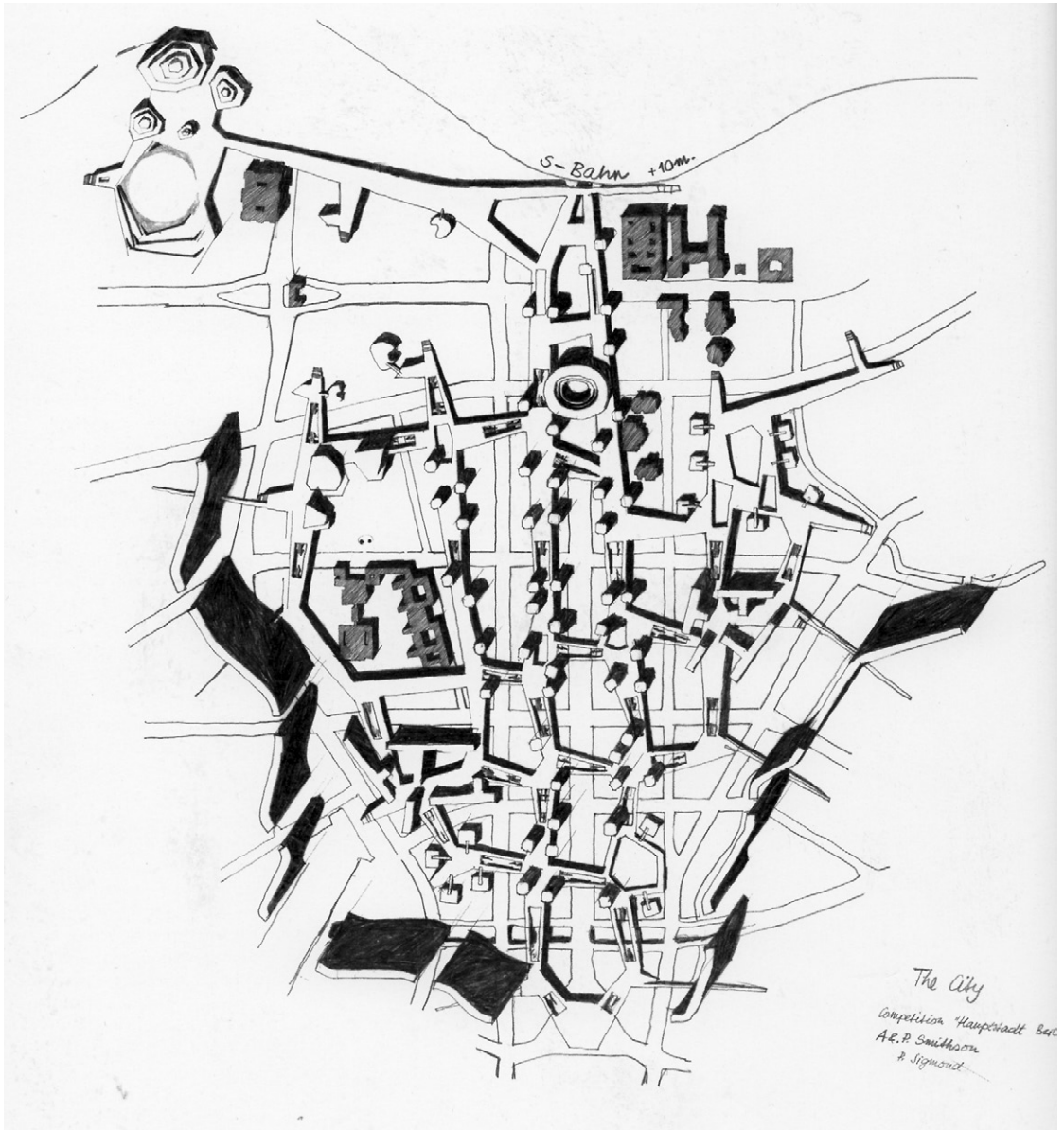
**80a, 81, 85**

# URBAN STRUCTURING

STUDIES OF  
ALISON & PETER  
SMITHSON

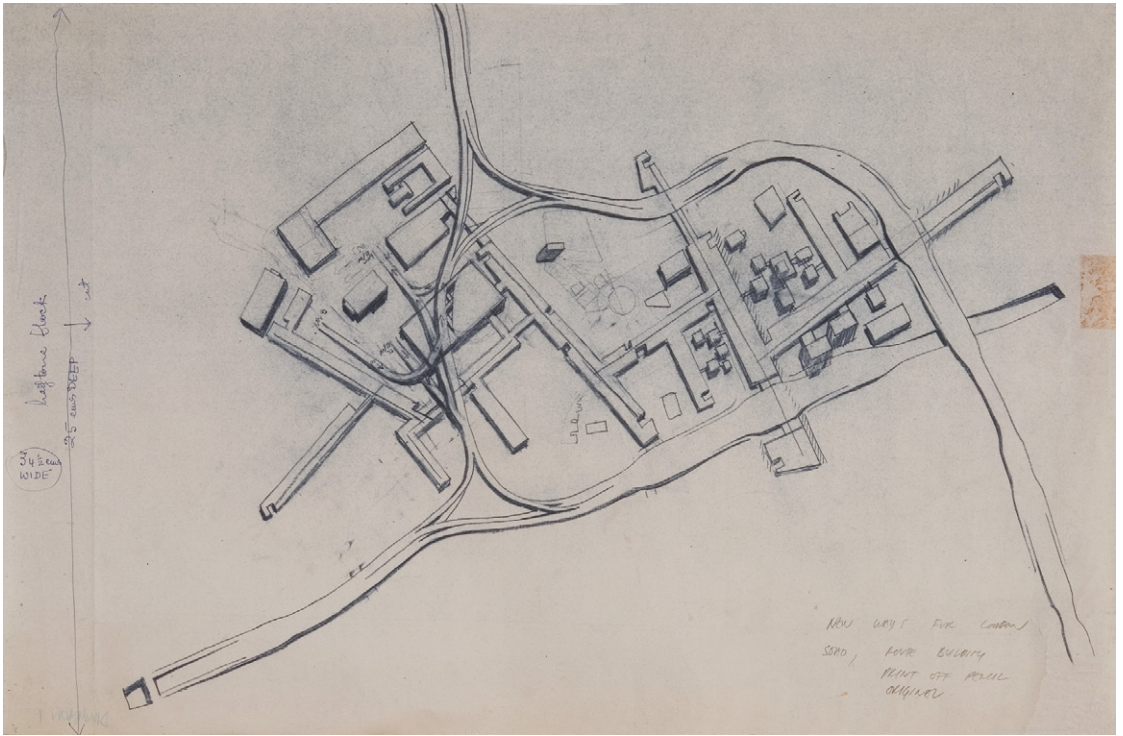


*Urban Structuring, 1967*



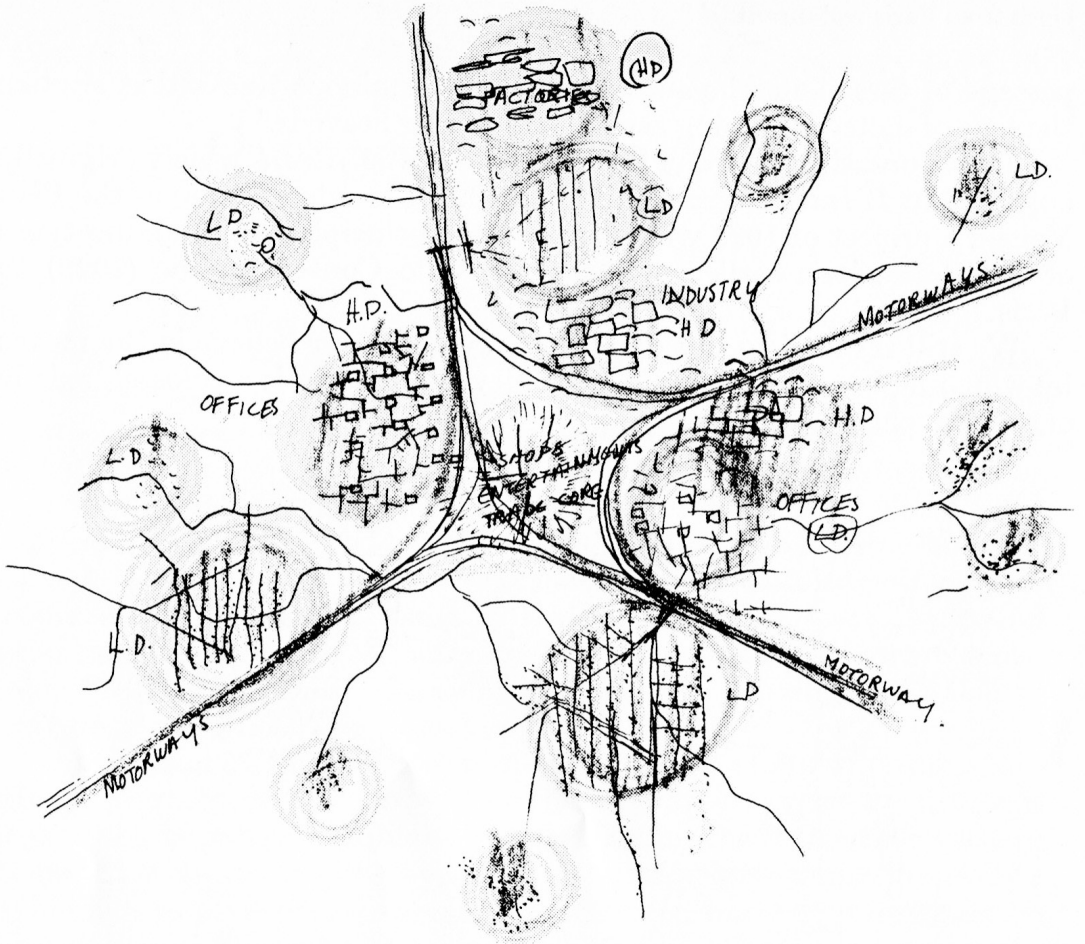
Hauptstadt Berlin, 1957-1958, competition entry together with Peter Sigmund





Route Building, Soho, as part of New Ways for London competition, or London Roads Study, 1959, together with Christopher Dean and Brian Richards



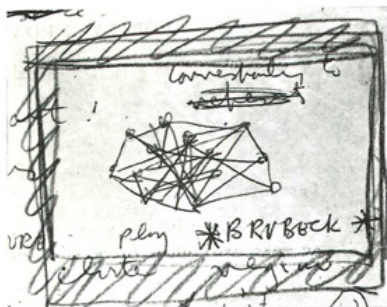


Cluster City diagram

The form of the city must correspond to the net of human relations as we now see them.

The changing arrangements of this net are caused by constantly changing standards of value operating on a field of communications.

The architect can act directly in this situation. He can control systems of physical communication and he can offer new concepts which change standards of value. And, in fact, the two things are wrapped up with each other, for putting increased emphasis on physical communications involves throwing over traditional aesthetic values which were mostly concerned with fixed relationships; and, on the other hand, rejection of Cartesian aesthetics, since they are incapable of carrying the cultural loading of our time, inevitably leads to an 'aesthetic of change'—the plastic resolution of the problems of mobility. A. & P. S.



Above: the diagram illustrates that the net of human relations is more like a constellation with different values given to different parts in an immensely complicated web crossing and recrossing the system. The implication of 'Ernst's' is that patterns can emerge in spite of complexity. When Ernsbock plays it seems as if it is impossible to hold the musical structure together, but at the end he always manages to gather up the threads and loom them.  
Right: Social mobility and physical mobility are related; and a car of your own is a symbol for them both.

### MOBILITY Road systems

Alison and Peter Smithson

Mobility has become the characteristic of our period. Social and physical mobility, the feeling of a certain sort of freedom, is one of the things that keeps our society together, and the symbol of this freedom is the individually owned motor-car.

Mobility is the key both socially and organizationally to town planning, for mobility is not only concerned with roads, but with the whole concept of a mobile, fragmented, community. The form and aesthetic of such a community has already been presented in the article on 'Cluster City',\* and this paper is concerned more specifically with the actual problems of physical communications, of road systems, which are implicit in the 'Cluster City' idea but were not dealt with in detail before because it was felt to be more important to present the concept as an ideal, and as an aesthetic, first.

The roads, together with the main power lines and drains, form the essential infra-structure of the community. The most important thing about roads is that they are physically big, and have the same power as any big topographical feature, such

\* Architectural Review, November 1957

(continued overleaf)



Are you this woman?

you can be the woman you yearn to be with

a Plymouth all your own

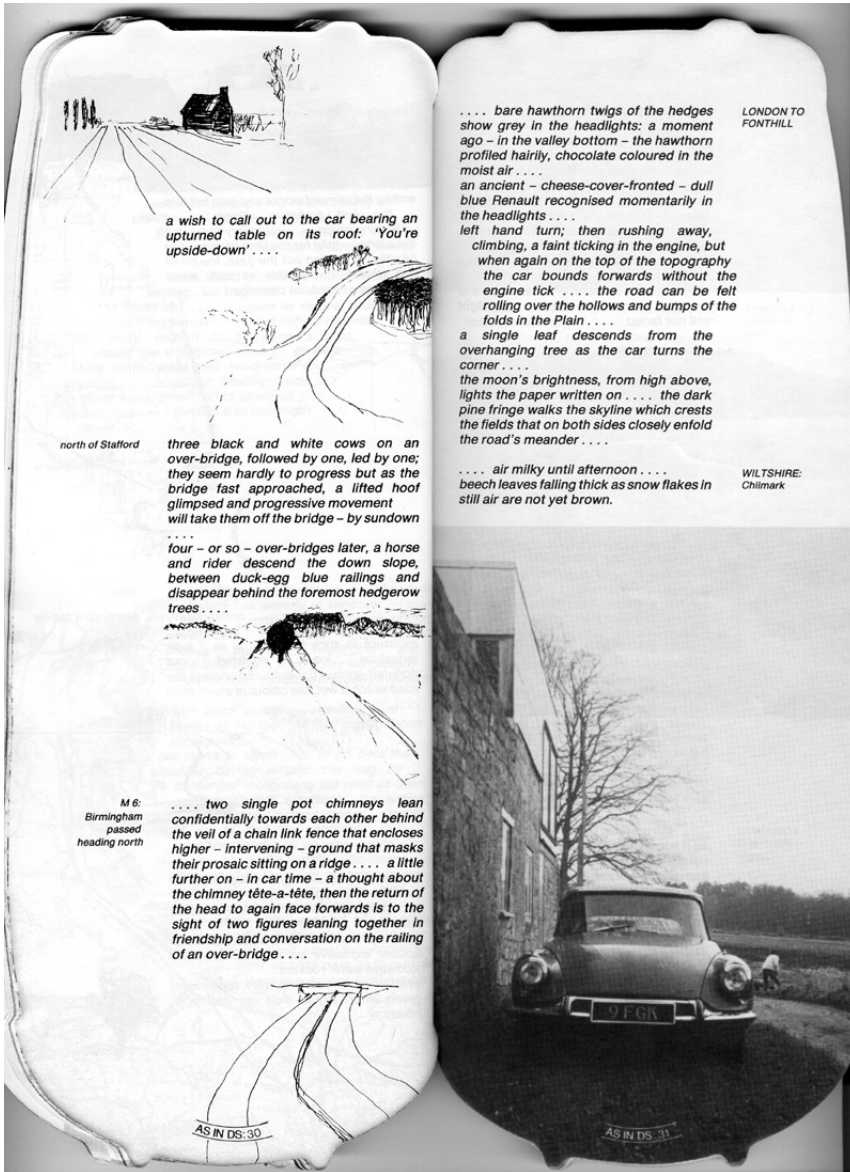
There's no question on your mind... it's the time of your mobility... a beautiful Plymouth that's yours and nobody else's. It's as simple as owning your own mobility... and here.

Push an engine and steering in gear. No shifting, no unnecessary machine. Stop quickly without braking, and back the truck with ease and firmness. Control it with the most perfect in the world. Even that's hardly possible.

So with the little, no-frills, no-fuss Plymouth you can get a car that does exactly what you need. It's yours and nobody else's. It's yours and nobody else's. It's yours and nobody else's.

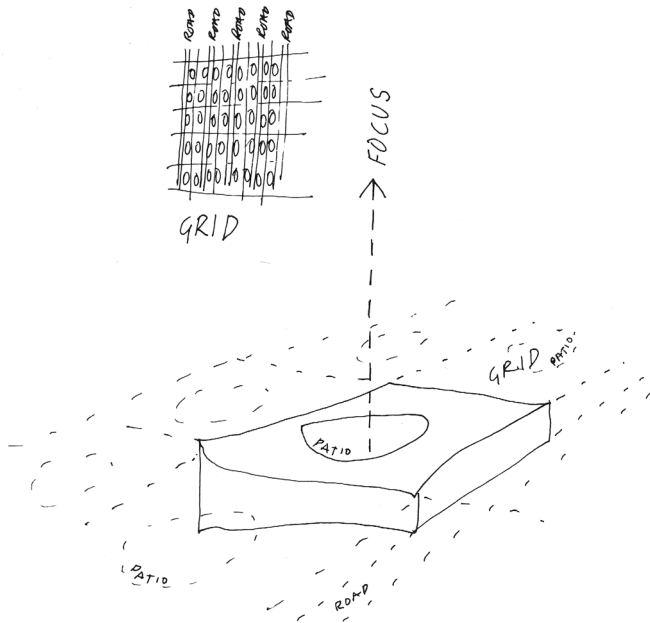
Get it now, with the Plymouth that's yours and nobody else's. It's yours and nobody else's. It's yours and nobody else's.



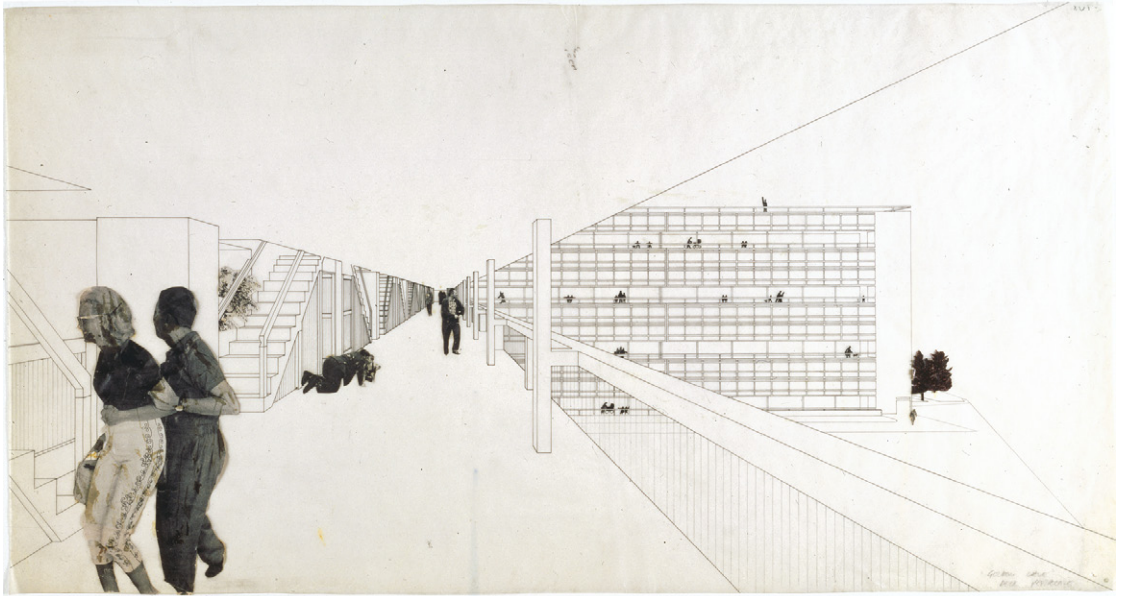


Alison Smithson, *AS in DS. An Eye on the Road*, 1983

# VERTICAL TUBE OF UNBREATHED PRIVATE AIR



'Vertical tube of unbreathed private air' House of the Future, Ideal Home Show, 1956



Golden Lane, 1952, 'street-in-the-air' collage with supposed Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio



View up into the trees from Axel's porch, Hexenhaus, Bad Karlshafen, 1986



Durch das kontinuierliche Himmelsband, das durch die Stadtautobahnen geöffnet wird – durch die Dinge, die in die Stadt kommen und sich mit deren Rändern verbinden –, wird eine Himmelsstruktur offengelegt, die wie das Kinderspiel „Fäden abheben“ mit der Stadt umgeht. Ein Effekt, der vielschichtiger ist als die weiten Ausblicke auf den Himmel, die Olmsted<sup>3</sup> durch Parkwege im letzten Jahrhundert in die Stadt einführte (48).

Zu den Eigenschaften von Gebäuden der *konglomeraten Ordnung*<sup>4</sup> gehört es, mit dem Himmel zu kommunizieren. Wir haben damit eine architektonische Ordnung, die die Verbindung zwischen Gebäude und Himmel bestimmen kann.

Der Himmelsraum über der Stadtautobahn ist schließlich etwas, das wir auf die unterschiedlichste Weise wahrnehmen: als Beifahrer, als Fahrer, beim Gehen durch die Stadtteile, auf den Oberdecks der Busse, auf dem Rücken liegend durch die Fenster des Rettungswagens.

3 Olmsted entwarf den Central Park in New York. Er war der Erbkasser von Parkwegen als Mittel zur Stadtstrukturierung, und er entwickelte die Richtlinien für die Planung von Soldatenlehnanstalten zur Bewirtschaftung von Bodenlehen, z. B. von Cornell, nach dem amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg. Nach Jefferson ist er der einzige nennenswerte amerikanische „Architekt“.

4 „...alle Fassaden sind gleichermaßen von dem, was vor ihnen liegt, in Anspruch genommen; das Dach ist eine weitere Ansicht.“ Alison und Peter Smithson, *Italienische Gedanken. Beobachtungen und Reflexionen zur Architektur*, Braunschweig/Wiesbaden 1996, S. 116

48  
Der Himmel über einer Stadtautobahn.  
Die Autobahn öffnet die Stadt zum Himmel.  
Durch den Himmel nehmen wir das Wesen der Stadt wahr.



'Sky over the motorway. The motorway opens the city to the sky ... through the sky we sense the nature of the city'  
Peter Smithson, 'Sky', in *ILA&UD Annual Report 1994-1995*, 'Reading and Design of the Territory',  
republished in *Italienische Gedanken, weitergedacht*



## SOURCES AND REFERENCES

### Archives

The largest collection of original materials can be found at Harvard University: the Alison and Peter Smithson Archive at GSD Special Collections in the Frances Loeb Library, due to a gift of Peter Smithson. It neatly sits next to the Josep Lluís Sert Collection and the CIAM Collection based on gifts of Sert and Jaqueline Tyrwhitt. The inventory can be accessed online via the Loeb Library web pages.

Personal archives include the Smithson Family Archive in Stamford, UK and Axel Bruchhäuser's collection at TECTA, Lauenförde, Germany.

The Centre Pompidou in Paris holds a wonderful collection of the most famous of the Smithsons' drawings and diagrams of their ideas on the city, mostly from the 1950s, including the UR-grid of 1953 made for the CIAM conference in Aix-en-Provence.

CCA in Montreal holds the drawings of the House of the Future. DAM in Frankfurt holds a great set of drawings of the many Smithson projects for Berlin, including their Hauptstadt Berlin competition proposal.

The RIBA Drawings Collections holds a handful of specific items, such as drawings of the Economist, beautiful silver panels of the InterDesign 2000 furniture series and the handsome model of the Smithsons' competition entry for Coventry Cathedral.

The NAI Archive in Rotterdam (per 1 January 2013 part of The New Institute) holds the Smithson correspondence regarding CIAM and Team 10, just as it holds the Bakema Archive, including Jaap Bakema's papers of CIAM and Team 10 days.

GTA/ETH Zürich has of course an extensive archive of the post-war years of CIAM.

Tate Britain holds materials of the Independent Group, including the archive of Nigel Henderson.

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There are various extensive bibliographies of the Smithsons' writings available:

Max Risselada (ed.), *Alison & Peter Smithson. A Critical Anthology*, Ediciones Polígrafa, Barcelona, 2011;

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Dirk van den Heuvel (born 17 July 1968, Apeldoorn) received his VWO diploma from the Stedelijk Gymnasium, 's Hertogenbosch. He received his graduation as bouwkundig ingenieur and architect from the Faculty of Architecture, TU Delft. Before returning to the Delft Faculty of Architecture in November 1999 to pursue an academic career, he worked for various firms: Steigenga Smit Architecten in Amsterdam, Neutelings Riedijk Architecten in Rotterdam and De Nijl Architecten in Rotterdam. Dirk van den Heuvel has worked in various capacities at the Delft University, first as Assistent-in-Opleiding, as Researcher (2004), Assistant Professor (2007), and since October 2008 as Associate Professor.

Dirk van den Heuvel is an editor of the publication series *DASH* – Delft Architectural Studies on Housing (nai010 Publishers, Rotterdam), and he is an editor of the online journal for architecture theory *Footprint* (TU Delft and Techne Publishers, Amsterdam); from 1993 to 1999 he was an editor of the journal *OASE* (SUN Publishers, currently nai010 Publishers, Rotterdam).

Together with Max Risselada he published two books, which accompanied the exhibitions of the same name: *Alison and Peter Smithson – from the House of the Future to a house of today* (010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004); and *Team 10. In Search of a Utopia of the Present 1953-1981* (NAi Publishers, Rotterdam, 2005). He has published his research on Alison and Peter Smithson and post-war modern architecture in numerous international journals, among others *AA Files*, *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *Archis*, *Volume*. He presented his research at various universities and international conferences, among others ETH Zürich, KU Leuven, NAI Rotterdam, Princeton University, Columbia University NY, Docomomo, SAH, EAHN, V&A Museum and ICA London, Twentieth Century Society, Alvar Aalto Academy Helsinki, Akademie der Künste Berlin.

