CONTENTS

BRUTALISM: ORIGINS, USE, AESTHETICS & AFTERMATH

INTRODUCTION

On 24 March 2004, the Tricorn Centre in Portsmouth was demolished. Pimlico School in Westminster is currently (2009) being demolished. A few miles away in the East End of London, Robin Hood Gardens is scheduled for demolition. Park Hill in Sheffield, despite repeated calls for the same fate, has been awarded grade II* listed status, and, for now, has avoided the wrecking-ball. The majority of these buildings are only around thirty or forty years old. They were born during a period when British architecture assumed a harsh and heavy concrete mantle, an aesthetic that came to be known as Brutalism. It was an aesthetic conceived at the beginning of the 1950s, when the course of British architecture faced a crossroads. The dialectic was between a softer face of modern architecture, the Scandinavian influenced 'New Humanism', and a more primitive, 'brutal' architecture pioneered by Le Corbusier. The brutal form of architecture was to triumph, and 'New Brutalism' became the *lingua franca* of British urban design theorists and the most conspicuous form of new architecture of the 1960s and 70s.

Brutalism embodies everything that is popularly despised about mid-twentieth century British architecture: its monotonous hulks and grey, now stained, concrete a metaphor of inner-city deprivation and decay - and architectural egotism. Brutalism was, and still is, a controversial architectural form, arousing strong feelings on the part of its supporters and detractors. All the above buildings have inspired passionate campaigns for preservation in the face of fervent demands for demolition. 'Eyesore' and 'blight' are epithets used often by the antagonists of Brutalism, while 'monumental' and 'iconic' are the adjectives of choice for its

advocates. This paper, therefore, will examine the following issues pertaining to Brutalist architecture:

- Why such a harsh, popularly declared ugly, architecture became *de rigueur* among the architectural establishment.
- The success, or otherwise, of Brutalist architecture, particularly Brutalist social housing developments.
- Conservation: the current debate surrounding the preservation of 'ugly' and unpopular architecture.
- Aesthetics: what does it mean to dwell amongst 'ugliness'?

Chapter 1, 'Crisis', will consider the post-war, pre-Brutalist milieu. Without any definitive British style, architects and theorists debated what form future architecture should take. For a while, the 'human' face of modern architecture - as exemplified by the Scandinavian 'New Empiricism', the work of Tayler and Green in Norfolk, and the architecture of the Festival of Britain - appeared the way forward. I will discuss the development of this 'New Humanism', and its eventual demise.

Chapter 2, 'Brutalist Beginnings: Hunstanton', will discuss the rebuttal to the above 'effeminisation' of modern architecture in the form of Alison and Peter Smithsons' Hunstanton Secondary Modern School. The theoretical principles behind the 'first Brutalist building' will be examined and tested in detail, and the critical response to the school explored.

Chapter 3, 'Art: As Found', will examine the art theory that influenced the Smithsons', and thus, the Brutalist aesthetic. Dada and its anti-beauty ethos, and the Smithsons' work at the Independent Group, with collaborators Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi, will be assessed to establish to what extent they influenced Brutalist architecture.

Concrete is the dominant constructional material of Brutalism, so in Chapter 4, 'Béton Brut', I will explore why this utilitarian material became the material of choice for the Brutalist Architect. This inevitably leads to Le Corbusier and his Unité d'Habitation at Marseilles. I will discuss this building, its critical reception, and evaluate its influence upon British architects in the 1950s.

Any discussion of Brutalist architecture must analyse a built example, therefore, in Chapter 5. 'Case Study: Park Hill', I will explore the genesis, the history and the future of the Sheffield social housing project. In the field of social housing, Brutalism was promulgated not merely an aesthetic, but also an ethic. Park Hill was an experiment in preservation and stimulation of community through architectural design. I will assess the success or otherwise of this social ethic. Park Hill has also been the subject of recent fierce debate over its conservation. I will, therefore, explore the issues involved in the conservation of 'ugly' and unpopular architecture.

Chapter 6, 'Robin Hood Gardens' briefly examines the Smithsons' only built example of Brutalist social housing. Again, debate rages over the building's conservation. The east-London development provides a good example of the polarisation of popular and 'informed' opinion.

In Chapter 7, 'Beauty' I explore the aesthetic of Brutalism and what it means to dwell in an architecture of ugliness - especially as aesthetic considerations appear to be ignored in the contemporary debate over the future of Brutalist buildings. I approach this question by a consideration of the converse of ugliness – beauty. Philosophies and theories of beauty through the ages are discussed, and the effect of beauty upon the human psyche. I go on to discuss the aesthetic that results when prospective dwellers are involved in the design of social housing.

Much primary source material has been used in this paper. I have consulted the works and words of some of the key architects of Brutalism: Alison and Peter Smithson, Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith, Denys Lasdun, Le Corbusier. By the extensive study of architectural and trade journals, I have carried out a historiological survey of the writings of contemporary and current critics in order to trace the ebb and flow of critical response to Brutalism. I have paid particular attention to the critiques of Reyner Banham: if the Smithsons were the messiahs of British Brutalism, then Banham was their John the Baptist.

Much criticism of architecture is written by architects. I approach the subject of Brutalism not from the point of view of an architect (I have little technical knowledge), but as a user and one who experiences architecture. It is unlike other art form. Experiencing architecture is unavoidable. One can choose to read a novel, go to an art gallery or view a film, but we all must encounter architecture on a daily basis. The majority of these buildings one never enters.

Architecture is chiefly experienced externally. Therefore, while this paper evaluates the buildings in use, the form of Brutalism, its aesthetic, affects all who dwell in the urban environment. Brutalism, therefore, merits rigorous criticism.

CHAPTER 1

‘CRISIS’

At the beginning of the sixth decade of the twentieth-century British architecture was in a ‘moment of crisis.’[1] After the hiatus in wartime building and the unparalleled devastation – 475,000 houses had been obliterated or rendered uninhabitable and over a third of London alone had been destroyed during the war - there was a desperate need for new homes, schools and workplaces.[2] An acute shortage of labour, materials and funds, and restrictions due to building licences, which ensured scarce resources went to the priority projects of housing and schools, exacerbated the crisis.[3] This, however, was not the crisis that the editors of *Architectural Review* had in mind. In an article written to mark the beginning of the new decade, ‘The Next Step’, editor J. M. Richards reported that in the ‘the search for a contemporary idiom’, ‘the way forward is not clear’ and, notwithstanding an oblivious public, this was a ‘crisis.’ Architects, then, at the beginning of the 1950s were searching for a new aesthetic for British architecture.

With the new functionalist Modern architecture of the pre-war period, (not that it had thrived in pre-war Britain) there had been problems. The public were suspicious of such flat-roofed, rectilinear confections.[4] Even as late as 1955, during a discussion on aesthetics and popular taste, a contributor to *The Builder* could comment: ‘it seems various styles [of architecture] can co-exist provided none of

[1] J. M. Richards, ‘The Next Step’ *Architectural Review* (London) March 1950, p. 166.
[2] Robert Elwall, *Building a Better Tomorrow* (Chichester: Wiley-Academy, 2000), 41. Helena Webster (ed.), *Modernism Without Rhetoric: Essays on the Work of Alison and Peter Smithson* (London: Academy Editions, 1997), 17.
[3] Elwall, 12, 17.
[4] See Misha Black ‘Architecture, Art and Design in Unison’ in Mary Banham; Bevis Hillier (eds.), *A Tonic to the Nation: The Festival of Britain 1951* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), 82; and, John Summerson, ‘New Groundwork of Architecture’, in J. R. M. Brumwell (ed.) *This Changing World* (London: George Routledge, 1945), 183.

them is modern.'[5] Further, irrespective of its unfamiliarity and austere aesthetic, 'modern' architecture had left-wing, and thus Soviet totalitarian associations.[6] While acknowledging the need for a functional, serious, architecture, Richards also recognised that pure functionalism was not 'the way forward', writing that there was 'a clear danger of a total lack of quality' arising from the automatic use of 'routine functionalism.'[7] 'Posterity… may be puzzled to understand what was remarkable about many of the modern buildings that were hailed as epoch-making in their day', he continued, 'the functional routine, and the elementary practicality deriving from it, will be taken for granted and the architectural character be revealed as wholly negative…' Eventually, this would have 'a brutalising effect on the art of architecture'[8]

Dangerously for the future of the profession, in an increasingly technological age, there was the threat of functionalism sliding into mundane mechanisation: mass-produced architecture made from mass-produced components. By the end of the decade this tendency was still evident, and John Summerson could write: 'the architect's actual medium – the materials of building – is being drawn out beyond his control.'[9] Richards condemned this trend, alleging that it would lead to 'the dehumanisation of building, so that architecture becomes a framework for existence rather than an expression of human endeavour… the house becomes as non-committal as an egg-box.' Interestingly, he writes of the 'dehumanising of building', not of *a* building. Thus, such architecture would dehumanise not the occupants, but the architects. Mechanistic architecture would deny individual creative endeavour, becoming anonymous in design like any other factory-produced item - an egg-box, for example. 'The vagaries of the human spirit' would have to express themselves elsewhere. Richards concluded: 'We must… balance the economic benefits of further mechanisation against the possible losses on the human side…' and, 'leave a margin through which the imagination can the better express itself.'[10] Nevertheless, by the end of the decade the dangers of mechanised

[5] 'Aesthetic Control over Architecture', *The Builder*, 4 March 1955, p. 378.
[6] Anne Massey, *The Independent Group, Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-59* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 2, 6.
[7] Richards, 167.
[8] Richards, 167.
[9] Introduction to Trevor Dannatt, *Modern Architecture in Britain* (London: Batsford, 1959), 27.
[10] Richards, 179.

prefabrication were still present and Summerson could write that the architect 'stands in a challenged critical position.'[11]

Thus, British architectural theory in 1950 was searching for a new humanised architecture, humanised both for user, and for architect. But it had to be a mode of expression that did not throw the baby of the Modern movement's achievement out with the bathwater of functionalist excess. It also had to be an idiom that maintained architecture as one of the creative and imaginative 'fine' arts, an expression of the human spirit. According to Richards, the way forward seemed to be a choice between a new 'monumentality' that would express the spiritual and cultural needs of Britain, and a softer, more cosier form, already being practiced in Scandinavia: 'New Empiricism.'[12]

New Empiricism

Also called the 'New Humanism', the term implies, not an international, universal style, shackled to function and imposed upon any site, irrespective of notions of place, but an empirical approach that takes into account place, tradition and the human user. Richards called it a 'solution irrespective of style… a flexible, small-scale idiom with much more human content.'[13] The young architects who promulgated New Empiricism were sceptical about the accomplishments of the Modern movement in the 1930s and were reacting against the excesses of functionalism. The architect Sven Backström, writing in 1943, commented on such deficiencies: 'The "new objectivity" was not always so objective, and the houses did not function as well as had been expected.' Rigid functionalism denied 'many of the aesthetic values and the little contributions to cosiness that we human beings are so dependent on, and that our architecture and domestic tradition had nevertheless developed.'[14] Of the architectural atmosphere in Sweden in the 1940s Eric de Mare wrote in *Architectural Review*: 'Why, they ask [young architects], make windows larger than necessary just to show that we can create a wall entirely

[11] Dannatt, 27.
[12] Richards, 180. Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-war World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002), 42. See also Robin Boyd, 'A New Eclecticism', *AR*, September 1951, pp. 151-153.
[13] Richards, 177.
[14] In, Eric de Mare, 'The New Empiricism: Sweden's Latest Style', *AR*, June 1947, pp. 199-200.

of glass? Why flat roofs when they start to leak? Why avoid traditional materials if they do their job well and provide pleasant texture and colour… Why eschew fantasy and decoration for which in our hearts, we long?'[15] Backström had written in 1943: 'Man and his habits, reactions and needs are the focus of interest as never before', and these young Scandinavian architects now began to design 'for the sake of human beings rather than for the cold logic of theory'.[16] Looking at the architect Sven Markelius's own house in the outskirts of Stockholm, one can discern the characteristic features of New Empiricism. (FIG. 1) It is architecture of asymmetrical plan; of pitched roofs; overhanging eaves, chimneys, porches, small windows and window panes. It utilises traditional building materials, brick, stone and wood, and employs picturesque landscaping. Richards commented, 'In domestic work, cosiness is coming back…' and wrote of 'studied informality and an awareness of the charm of the near accidental… [the] use of motifs which create a sympathetic atmosphere by their associations rather than by their form'[17]

In an austere post-war Britain, this cosy, charming, sympathetic architecture chimed with popular taste. A contributor to the Mass Observation Diary in 1946 wrote: 'The dominant trend is away from utility. People are searching for something delicate and colourful that will not remind them of war-time products.'[18] Thus, in the late 1940s the New Empiricism of Sweden became the paradigm to follow as an alternative to rigorous functionalism.[19] Frederick Gibberd's mixed housing development at Somerford Road, Hackney (1947) is presented by architectural historians as an example of English New Empiricism.[20] Leaving aside the rather anonymous three-storey blocks, the Scandinavian humanisation can be detected in the traditional materials and the design of the pitched-roofed two-storey terraces with their delicate porch-work (FIG. 2). The Swedish influence is perhaps more obvious in the picturesque nature of the layout. The site is sensitively landscaped - mature trees are incorporated - and the overall design allows a series of

[15] Eric de Mare, 'The New Empiricism: The Antecedents and Origins of Sweden's Latest Style', *AR*, January 1948. p. 9.
Famously, Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, Poissy, 1931, did not perform the basic function of keeping the rain out – the roof had to be repaired soon after completion. – Alain de Botton, *The Architecture of Happiness* (London: Penguin, 2006), 65.
[16] De Mare, 1947, p. 200; De Mare, 1948, p. 9.
[17] Richards, 177.
[18] In Massey, 6.
[19] Bullock, 45.
[20] Bullock, 83, 84. Alan Powers, *Britain* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2007), 81.

vistas, from the intimate court, to the long-range vista of the terraced street, both laden with traditional and familiar, and therefore, human associations. A further example of this humanising trend in public housing of the late 1940s and 50s can be seen in East Anglia, in the work of two of Gibberd's friends, Herbert Tayler (1912-2000) and David Green (1912-1998).

Tayler & Green

In an age of monotonous urban sprawl, mundane speculatively built estates 'of bone-headed beastliness', and 'the galumphing rhythm of... pre-war semi detacheds', Tayler and Green built terraced housing in compact groups.[21] Tayler commented at the time, 'the simple long line of a terrace looks somehow less impertinent in the landscape than a row of pointed teeth with alternate teeth extracted.' Their developments were again empirical in that they responded to the housing needs of a specific place, tradition and people, and, as Tayler noted, without impertinence. To the untutored eye, it is hard to see why these houses in Norfolk have attracted such critical approval, but they have entered the architectural canon as paradigms of successful social housing. (FIGS. 3 & 4)[22]

Tayler and Green's Norfolk houses were functional – innovative even - as their through-passage design solved the problem of rear access traditionally associated with terraces. They had a certain modern, rectilinear aesthetic – the large, broad windows lending a non-traditional horizontality to the design[23] - and unusual features, such as mitred arches, seasoned the 'modern' flavour. Tayler wrote: 'The end should be this: an appropriate, functional, varied, realistic character within the modern style. A democratic architecture.[24] Interesting is Tayler's use of the word 'democratic.' In other words, theirs is an inclusive, human architecture, for which given the choice, people would vote. Nairn, in his approbatory review of Talyer and Green's work in *Architectural Review,* used that word laden with connotations of humanised New Empiricism: 'cosy.'[25] Richards, in 'The Next Step' recognised the need for such democratic architecture. Architectural content should

[21] Ian Nairn, 'Rural Housing', *AR,* Oct. 1958, pp. 227, 231.
[22] Further illustrations of Tayler and Green's work can be seen in Elwall, 47, and Powers, 82.
[23] Dannatt, 168.
[24] In Elwall, 21.
[25] Nairn, 232.

be ‘intelligible to everyone,’ he commented, ‘[which] will therefore allow architecture to take its place naturally as one of the popular arts and one of the vehicles of popular sentiment. There can be no quarrel with such an objective.’[26] Reflecting this sentiment, Tayler and Green built with traditional materials and used familiar elements: pitched roofs, overhanging eaves, trellising and porches. Although building in a ‘modern style’, Tayler and Green departed from one of the fundamental tenets of Modernism. They commented: ‘We realised that… people lacked decoration and enjoyment in the look of their houses and so we introduced all sorts of colours… brick patterns… Everybody liked it, people do like decoration.’[27] Other decorative details on the developments included pergolas and decoratively edged bargeboards. Notwithstanding the views of Loos and Le Corbusier, to whom ornament was anathema, this was architecture that took into account the views of the people, and if the people wanted decoration, then they should have it.[28] This, then, was not just a retreat from the strict functionalism of the thirties, but also a retreat from the paternalistic didacticism behind the Modern movement that imposed radical architectural change for supposed societal betterment - irrespective of the tastes of the users of such architecture. Far from being ‘impertinent,’ the architecture of Tayler and Green has a humble quality, born of respect for the human user, but also, and no doubt gratifying to Richards, without any lack of ‘creative imagination.’

The Festival of Britain

The enthusiasm for this lighter, more humane architecture reached its zenith in 1951 with the Festival of Britain. Held on the South Bank of the Thames, the Festival was a celebration of national identity and achievement founded on values of ‘heritage, tradition and individual enterprise…’[29] It was also a morale boosting demonstration of post-war recovery – ‘A tonic to the nation.’[30] *Picture Post*

[26] Richards, 1950, 168.
[27] In Powers, 82.
[28] The views of Alfred Loos and Le Corbusier on ornament are discussed later in this paper.
[29] Massey, 10.
[30] A term coined by the Director General of the Festival, Gerald Barry. – Mary Banham; Bevis Hillier (eds.), *A Tonic to the Nation: The Festival of Britain 1951* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), 26.

reported: 'It is not a boost for the government or any little artistic clique. It is a grand gesture to the world and to ourselves of the pride in what we are and what we have done.'[31] The Festival, however, was not merely a celebration of past achievements. It was visionary, presenting to the world the ideals and aspirations of a new society soon to be achieved through 'the Utopia of the Welfare State' and British science and technology.[32] Architecture was to play its part in this splendid future. The Festival of Britain executive committee stated: 'aided by the full use of our incomparable… architectural heritage, we can rediscover the face of Britain to ourselves and to the world.'[33] Away from the main site, at Lansbury in Poplar, East London, there was a 'Live Architecture Exhibition.' It was a suggestion of the way forward for social housing: 'Housing in terraces and low flat blocks form pleasant places on a human scale.' They were constructed of traditional East End materials of London stock bricks and purple-grey slates. The architect of the development, Frederick Gibberd, described the development as 'bright, cheerful and… exciting.'[34]

The *Architectural Review* devoted a whole issue to the Festival, with editor J. M. Richards assessing the architecture at the main South Bank site.[35] Certain individual words Richards used in his article convey the flavour of the Festival's architectural aesthetic: 'light', 'lightness' (used often), 'effortless', 'poise', 'intricacy' (used often), 'delicate', 'graceful', 'elegant', 'elegantly' (used often) 'beautifully finished', 'airiness', 'aesthetically satisfying', 'liveliness', 'charming', and 'sparkle'. With their curves and undulations, their glass, aluminium and tubular steel, their vibrant colours and their 'rather feminine elegance', the pavilions of the Festival of Britain were the humanised face of Modernism.[36] Jaunty and joyous - gay (in the old-fashioned sense of the word) - this was Modern movement tamed: innocuous, agreeable architecture that would not offend the public (FIGS. 5 & 6).

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[31] 'Festival of Britain', *Picture Post*, (London) 12 May 1951, pp. 25-27.
[32] Roy Strong in Gaskell, *Model Housing: From the Great Exhibition to the Festival of Britain* (London: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1986), 121.
[33] In Massey, 9.
[34] In Banham & Hillier, 140, 141.
[35] J. M. Richards, 'Festival of Britain: Buildings', *AR*, August 1951, pp. 123-134. This article contains illustrations of the various architectural works as does Banham & Hillier.
Dylan Thomas wrote in a contemporary piece: 'Perhaps you will think I am shovelling the colour on too thickly… and what a lot of pink - rose, raspberry, peach, flesh, blush, lobster, salmon, tally-ho – there is plastered and doodled all over this gay and soon to be gone Festival city' – in Banham & Hillier, 17.
[36] Elwall, 18.

There were a couple of exceptions to all the delicacy and elegance. Richards's comments on the Waterloo Station entrance gate (John Burnet, Tait & Partners) are most revealing. He appears to have been swept along by the charm of the Festival, and the aesthetic of the Waterloo Gate jarred. This concrete grid with brick infill was 'heavily handled', lacking 'delicacy', with 'coarse' detailing. Richards continued: 'The heavy, insistently rectilinear elevation… is reminiscent of the modernism of the 1930s, and provides an encouraging reminder of the warmth and sensitiveness that the modern movement has acquired since then. [37]

To a younger generation of architects, however, the populism of the Festival of Britain was sentimental and effete. It lacked gravity. The 'lightness' and 'airiness' were flimsy; the grace and elegance, anodyne; the charm and 'sparkle', mere whimsy.[38] The Festival of Britain was a betrayal of the purity and rigour of the Modern movement. There would inevitably be a reaction to this 'contemporary' style. It was reaction foreshadowed at the Festival itself by one of the minor architectural features. An exception to the surrounding frivolity, the roof over one of the main entrances was a heavy reinforced concrete slab. It appeared an anonymous, architectural afterthought, yet Richards was moved to comment that it was an 'example of the drama that can be extracted from modern methods of construction.'[39] As the decade unfolded the 'warmth and sensitiveness that the modern movement has acquired' would come under serious assault from this cold and unyielding, but more dramatic quarter.

One of the display managers was later to comment of the Festival, 'Far from initiating a period and a style, I believe, that the Festival summarized an epoch, it was an ending rather than a beginning.'[40] Judgment of the architectural influence of The Festival of Britain is divided, but, as the 1950s progressed, for the opinion-formers of *Architectural Review* and *Architectural Design*, the 'contemporary' architecture of the Festival became an embarrassing irrelevance. The humanity of New Empiricism faded into critical obscurity. The term is not mentioned in John Summerson's introduction to the exhibition 'Ten years of British Architecture: 1945 - 1955', and the examples of new modern architecture presented in the catalogue

[37] Richards, 1951, p. 131.
[38] Robert Maxwell, *New British Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 9. Elwall, 18, 26.
[39] Richards, 1951, p. 128, 131.
[40] James Holland in Elwall, 11.

show no Swedish influence.[41] Similarly, in Trevor Dannatt's survey of post-war British architecture published in 1959, apart from the work of Tayler and Green in Norfolk (which in any case can be regarded as a more rigorous interpretation of New Empiricism), New Empiricism is deemed worthy neither of mention nor illustration. In Rayner Banham's 1966 account of New Brutalism, New Empiricism is dismissed in one paragraph as irrelevant and sentimental; an architecture of 'window boxes… and pretty paintwork', a 'retreat from Modern Architecture.'[42]

Outside the critical coterie the spirit of New Empiricism did live on during the 1950s, influencing the architecture of the New Towns and some private houses.[43] Subject to economic and planning restrictions, however, in the hands of the local authority architects and town planners the style of 'fantasy and decoration for which in our hearts we long' degenerated into blandness (FIGS. 7 & 8). It was not the field of architecture where a young architect could build a reputation, where the 'vagaries of the human spirit' of the architect-artist could find expression and leave a monument to posterity. There was a need for a tougher, more formal mode of architectural design, a form of expression that went back to the basics of modernist philosophy. For Richards in 'The Next Step', 'monumentality' had been a possible route out of the crisis in architectural style. The challenge to the diluted and compromised Modernism of early fifties Britain was to come in a monument of unequivocal, ascetic, formal rigour that was the antithesis of 'cosy'. This gauntlet was thrown down in the English seaside town of Hunstanton.

[41] (London: Arts Council, 1956)
[42] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic* (London: The Architectural Press, 1966), 12.
[43] Royston Landau, *New Directions in British Architecture* (New York: George Brazillier, 1968), 23.

CHAPTER 2

BRUTALIST BEGINNINGS: HUNSTANTON

'This peculiar ruthlessness'[44]

Of Hunstanton Secondary Modern School (1954) the architects Alison and Peter Smithson (1928-93; 1923-2003) wrote: 'Only a person familiar with the pathetic figure of English functionalism supported since the war on crutch of pseudo-science can understand why it was necessary to make such an obvious statement and design such a didactic building.'[45] Hunstanton School, then, was 'didactic', an exemplar to show how British architecture must henceforth be executed. It is the built rebuttal of the cheerful and popular trend in British architecture of the early 1950s, and the work that established the reputation of the two young architects.[46] It was also the progenitor of New Brutalism (FIGS. 9 & 10).

Yet, a rectilinear composition in welded steel, glass and brick, visually it appears to have little in common with what is now considered Brutalist architecture. It is not, as would later characterise Brutalist architecture, concrete that dominates the composition. The floors and roof-slabs are of pre-cast concrete, but these are not visible to the external viewer. Rather, its 'derivative design'[47] exhibits the austere linearity of the American mature International Style: Louis Kahn's Yale Art Centre (1951-53), Mies van der Rohe's Illinois Institute of Technology (1945-47) (FIG. 12), and Eero Saarinen's General Motors Technical Center, Michigan, (1948-

[44] Correspondent to *AR*, November 1954, p. 282.
[45] Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture* (New York**:** Monacelli, 2001), 41.
[46] The editorial, 'The New Brutalism', *AD* January 1955, commented: 'For many years since the war we have continued in our habit of debasing M. Le Corbusier and have created a style - 'Contemporary' – easily recognisable by its misuse of traditional materials and its veneer of modern details… The reaction appeared in the shape of the Hunstanton School, an illustration of the "New Brutalism"'. p. 1.
[47] John Jacobus, *Twentieth-Century Architecture: The Middle Years 1940-65* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1966), 118.

56). Nevertheless, writing at the time, the Smithsons called it 'the first realisation of New Brutalism,' and the critic Reyner Banham described it as the building that 'defined' New Brutalism.[48]

It is hard to think of an adjective more opposed to the 'cosy' of New Humanism than 'brutal'. So what is it that characterises Hunstanton School as brutal, or Brutalist? In his seminal article in *Architectural Review* introducing New Brutalism to the world, Banham continued: '[it is] uncompromisingly frank about its materials' and its 'boldly exhibited structural method.'(FIG. 11) His words are worth quoting in detail:

> What has caused Hunstanton to lodge in the public's gullet is… that it is almost unique in modern buildings in being made of what it appears to be made of… It 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…'[49]

Banham was attributing too much weight to Hunstanton's power to enter the public consciousness, but he went on to write of the 'Abstemious under-designing of the details', and that the programme of the building was clear and comprehensible: 'no mystery, no romanticism, no obscurities about function or circulation.'[50] The austere exterior was reflected in a stark interior - a warehouse aesthetic of bare concrete, un-plastered brickwork, RSJs, exposed ducting and pipe-work. The Smithsons insisted that the building be photographed completely empty to underline this honest expression of materials.

This, then, is the embryonic essence of British New Brutalism: a stripped down architecture of honesty to materials; 'an attempt to make architecture out of the relationships of brute materials.'[51] Banham went on to reduce New Brutalism to three key elements:

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[48] Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric – An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-1972* (London: Latimer New Directions, 1973), 6. Reyner Banham, 'The New Brutalism', *AR*, (London) December, 1955, 357.
The Smithsons were to retrospectively modify their view, writing of Hunstanton in 2001: 'thus the ground and seed of New Brutalism are already prepared', *The Charged Void*, 42.
[49] Banham (1955), 357.
[50] Banham (1966), 19.
[51] Banham (1966), 19.

1. Memorability as an Image.
2. Clear exhibition of structure.
3. Valuation of materials for their inherent qualities 'as found.'[52]

All these three key elements of Brutalism are evident in a project the Smithsons were working on contemporaneously with Hunstanton: Colville Place in Soho (1952, unbuilt). 'Memorabilty as an image' was perhaps difficult on such a 'tiny site,' but this house would clearly exhibit its structure, the Smithsons writing retrospectively of its 'crystallisation of an attitude to purity of structure; services that speak of their own disciplines.'[53] Colville Place would also value honestly expressed, 'as found' materials. Writing in 1954, the Smithsons announced that the house had 'No finishes at all internally… Bare brick, concrete and wood… It is our intention in this building to have the structure exposed entirely. The contractor should aim at a high standard of basic construction, as in a small warehouse.'[54] According to one critic, Kenneth Scott, the project was 'One of the Smithsons' highest poetic achievements', and 'a glimpse into the future of English architecture.' Scott writes of emotion. He was in awe of 'the unprecedented full emotional impact the Smithsons have created' in the tiny project, although he did not amplify the emotions evoked. Scott was quick to interpret the building as an expression of the nature of man, writing: 'Every part of the house seems to balance with the essential brutality of man', continuing that the house was, 're-establishing a sense of intimate brutality… re-integrating [brutality] in the creation of new geometrised matter.'[55] For the Smithsons, Colville Place was where 'New Brutalism is announced'.[56]

Banham's three criteria form the foundation of what was to become one of the most controversial architectural aesthetics of the 20th century. As such they deserve to be examined and tested. So I will briefly leave Hunstanton, before returning to examine the school's reception by critics and users. 'As found' will be discussed in

[52] Banham, (1955), 357, 361.
[53] Smithsons, *The Charged Void*, 96.
[54] In 'Future: The New Brutalism' (anon.) *AR*, April, 1954, pp. 274, 275. See also Peter Smithson, 'House in Soho', *AD*, December, 1953, p. 342.
[55] Scott in 'Future: The New Brutalism', *AR*, April, 1954, pp. 274, 275.
[56] Smithsons, *The Charged Void*, 96.

a separate chapter, but issues pertaining to 'image' and 'structure' will now be examined.

Memorability as an Image

Banham places 'Memorability as an image' at the top of his list, and this is the criterion that he goes on to explore most fully. In a departure from the fundamental modernist tenet 'form follows function'[57] it seems that now, the form of the building, its image, is becoming of primary importance. After all, as Peter Smithson commented: 'formal content [is] the architects particular specialisation.'[58] Banham is dealing with an architectural truism. Most architects would like to leave behind a memorable image, but clients' needs and budgets do not always permit a Taj Mahal or a Hagia Sophia. Furthermore, there are very few purely functional buildings; there are always choices as to form. Just as an object as simple as a teacup can take a number of forms, so a railway station or a school can perform their functions adequately in a variety of forms. Pure functionalism leaves the architect deprived of creativity, and architecture becomes the assemblage of box-like spaces in utilitarian materials. The Portakabin is functional. Thus, Banham explains that the 'Image' is the 'visually valuable', the 'immediately apprehensible visual entity.'[59] Hunstanton, and Brutalist architecture in general, are certainly striking and thus memorable as images. Robert Elwall, although acknowledging Hunstanton's structural and functional problems, can still write: 'Hunstanton strikingly underlines the potency of visual imagery in architecture.' [60] One thinks of other examples of powerful Brutalist images such as the Tricorn Centre (Luder & Gordon, Portsmouth 1966; FIG. 13) or the Barbican development in the City of London (Chamberlin, Bon & Powell, 1982; FIG. 14). Echoing the words of Le Corbusier, Banham then supplies the reason why having such a memorable image is

[57] Louis Sullivan, in *The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered* (1896), from *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (4th edn., 1996), 671
[58] In David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), 9.
[59] Banham (1955), 358.
[60] Elwall, 38.

vital: 'the image is what affects the emotions'.[61] Le Corbusier in his celebrated *Towards a New Architecture* wrote:

> But suddenly you touch my heart, you do me good, I am happy… That is Architecture… walls rise to heaven in such a way that I am moved… solely by means of shapes that stand in a certain relationship to one another… They are the language of architecture. By the use of raw materials and starting from conditions more or less utilitarian, you have established certain relationships that have aroused my emotions. This is Architecture.[62]

Therefore, architecture, and for Banham in 1955, Brutalist architecture, provokes not a cerebral, intellectual response, but an emotional reaction. As regards this matter of 'affect[ing] the emotions', Banham, alas, does not expand. But to assert that architecture can move the emotions needs qualification, because here Banham touches on a theme that would inform the debate on Brutalist architecture and the nature of the urban environment well into the 21st century.

To explore this, it is interesting that for Banham it is the 'image' that has an emotional effect, not inhabiting the building. It is certainly true that to behold a building may provoke feelings of pleasure or distaste. It is also true that certain personal associations with a building, or even an architectural style, can evoke emotion – one may have spent an idyllic childhood amongst Victorian gabled terraces, or shared a first kiss in the shadow of a Gothic cathedral - but Banham (and Le Corbusier) is asserting that by its visual worth, its aesthetic, a building can rouse emotion. There is (albeit rather literal) evidence for this. Much Brutalist architecture does have an impact, a shock value, provoking not always an intellectual response, but passion and anger, as will be seen from the critical responses to Hunstanton detailed below. Also, the recent debate over the future of the Smithsons' Robin Hood Gardens in Poplar, East London, has shown that Brutalist architecture excites the emotions - usually antipathy on the part of the users and enthusiasm amongst the architectural cognoscenti.[63]

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[61] Banham, (1955), 361. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (New York: Dover, 1986. Reprint, originally published: London: J. Rodker, 1931), 151.
[62] Le Corbusier, 153.
[63] I will return to this later.

The emotional impact of architecture is hard to assess. I can only offer some examples from personal research and experience. After reading Banham's (and Le Corbusier's) assertion, I asked a number of acquaintances from a variety of social groups this simple question: has a building ever had an emotional effect upon you? Most of the respondents said yes, but, as alluded to above, most of the emotions evoked were due to associating various life experiences with a building.[64] A minority of respondents did attribute an emotional response solely to the building itself. One had recently visited New York, and spoke of the feelings of awe and wonder she felt standing before the great skyscrapers. Another friend said she was moved by her first sight of Brunelleschi's Duomo in Florence, but could not pin down the exact emotion. An occasional visitor to the former East Germany reported feelings of sadness and depression at the sight of the monotonous concrete apartment blocks. A further negative response is from my own experience: there is a main road near my home, along which if at all possible, I avoid driving. Lining the route are the huge, grey monolithic sheds of an out-of-town industrial estate. To pass by these buildings depresses me. It may be argued that it is the promise of monotonous, poorly paid drudgery within that is dispiriting. No: it is the relentless drabness of the aesthetic. In light of the above, if it is true that the external apprehension of architecture affects the emotions, that the look of a building can make one happy or sad, disturbed or at peace, then this is a function, and in this Prozac-fuelled age architects need to take this (perhaps unacknowledged) function into account, and design with the emotional impact of their image in mind. [65]

Clear Exhibition of Structure

'Clear exhibition of structure' appears to be a simple and self-explanatory concept, yet it is an aspect of architecture that throughout the centuries became laden with

[64] One respondent replied that she cried at the sight of Leicester University's Attenborough Tower. (This was a positive emotion I hasten to add, linked to her life-changing achievements therein). Another felt waves of warm nostalgia at the sight of a suburban semi in the mock-Tudor style, because that was the type of house in which he was born.

[65] The British filmmaker Terence Davies on municipal architecture: 'dispiriting at the best of times, but when combined with the British genius for creating the dismal, makes for a cityscape that is anything but Elysian.' – *Of Time and the City* (2008), BFI.
Sheffield Liberal Democrat Councillor Paul Scriven on Brutalist Park Hill: 'it's grey, it's dull and it's boring… it makes me quite sad.' - *Saving Britain's Past: Streets in the Sky*, BBC2, 31 Aug. 2009.

concepts of morality. Again, Banham does not elucidate on this criterion, but we may conclude that it has two meanings. Firstly, taken literally, the way the building is constructed, the structural components and their disposition, must be evident - exhibited - to the viewer and the user. Secondly, an external apprehension of the building should reveal the internal structure and spatial arrangements. Ways to obfuscate structure would be the masking of materials, components and programme by superfluous facades, finishes, and ornament, and the introduction of members which appear to have structural purpose, but, in fact, have none.

One can find this theory of aesthetic fundamentalism in Plato. In *The Republic* Plato quotes Socrates thus: 'Are not the excellence, beauty and correctness of every manufactured article, or living creature, or action, to be tried only by a reference to the purpose intended in their construction…?'[66] Excellence, then, comes from a simple fitness for purpose without any extraneous, ornamental elements.

By the turn of the nineteenth-century, unnecessary ornament in design was being vilified. Alfred Loos preached that ornament was a crime perpetrated by moral degenerates, a disease injurious to man's heath. The truly educated and cultivated man should outgrow such primitive proclivities. Plainness and simplicity of expression was the way forward for the moral modern man of the industrial age.[67] The prime mover behind the Modern movement in architecture in the 1920s, Le Corbusier, believed that ornament in architecture was ridiculous: one ought no more place a statue on a building anymore than place a statue on the wing of an aeroplane.[68] After all, he famously asserted, a house is a 'machine for living in', and should therefore perform efficiently.[69] 'Clear exhibition of structure' is something different and more ascetic, however, than mere 'form follows function'.

It was a theme that exercised the mind of the nineteenth-century art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900). He was vehemently opposed to 'falsity of assertion respecting the nature of the material, or the quantity of labour', which, he contended, were a 'contemptible violation of truth.' Building was at its 'noblest'

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[66] Plato, *The Republic*, trans, I. A. Richards (Cambridge: CUP, 1966), 601, d.
[67] 'Ornament and Crime' (1908), in Ulrich Conrads, *Programmes and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), 19-24.
[68] *Towards a New Architecture*, 90-127.
[69] *Towards a New Architecture*, 4.

when structure was clearly exhibited and able to be discerned by the 'intelligent eye.' Any disguise or superfluous structural members were 'barbarism', 'corruption', 'direct deceit, and altogether unpardonable.' The Pallazzo Vecchio in Florence (Arnolfo di Cambio, 1310) was example of these crimes and, thus, warranted 'shame and suspicion.'[70]

Inspired by the writings of Ruskin, the practitioners in the Arts and Crafts movement of the nineteenth-century found beauty in design that exhibited structure and expressed the materials of construction. This was considered honesty. In furniture construction and metalwork, in contrast to the long craft tradition of concealment and disguise, jointing was often deliberately made obvious. Ornament in metalwork was used in such a way as to draw the eye to the plain surfaces of silver, copper and brass.

The series of lectures broadcast by the BBC in the autumn of 1937 by the British writer and art historian Anthony Bertram shows that this doctrine of clarity of structure and simple design was shaping British design and architectural theory in the twentieth-century. Honesty was a major theme in these talks. Quoting Plato (above), Bertram states: 'This reference to purpose immediately suggests the idea of honesty, which is fundamental to good design. A well-designed object should not only serve its purpose well but should look as if it were made for that purpose.'[71] Bertram then goes on to discuss the 'dishonesty' of many modern buildings, reserving particular contempt for mock-Tudor buildings with their applied, non-structural timbers which lied about their true structure. Presaging Banham by twenty years, Bertram reduced good architecture to three rules - all involving a confessional honesty: 'It must confess the purpose for which it was constructed, the method by which it is constructed, and the material of which it is constructed.' The reason for this architectural integrity, Bertram argued, was that there was no arbiter of beauty – it was all a matter of opinion and personal taste. Good taste could only be instilled through education, and the hoi polloi were lacking in this regard. 'The anger of the untrained must be braved' he decided, and cool, rational fitness for purpose and clarity of construction must decide architectural aesthetics.[72]

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[70] John Ruskin, 'The Lamp of Truth', in *The Lamp of Beauty: Selected Writings on Art,* ed. Joan Evans (London: Phaidon, 3rd edn., 1995), 201-208.
[71] *Design,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938), 12.
[72] Ibid, 13.

With the dawn of New Brutalism in 1954, we find Reyner Banham again preaching on the theme of clarity of structure. In his somewhat ambivalent article on Tecton's Hallfield Estate in Paddington (1954, project architects: Drake and Lasdun; FIGS 15 & 16), Banham is nevertheless dogmatic on clarity of structure: 'facades must be dealt with somehow… [but] we prefer that it should appear that these decisions were forced upon the designer by structural, technical or functional considerations… and feel embarrassed when we see facades like those of Paddington which have been treated like works of art in their own right.'[73] The dishonesty of the façade at Hallfield, with its rhythmic pattern of contrasting colours, balconies and brickwork,[74] evoked an emotional response from Banham – he was embarrassed, offended and angered by the design: the 'hit and miss uprights give considerable offence to those who cannot think away… the crosswalls within.' Of the fenestration he commented: 'Criticism should concentrate on whether this pattern is sufficiently easy to grasp, and whether the status of the mullions… has been made convincingly clear.' [75] That the internal arrangement of a building was not honestly expressed externally was a particular bugbear of Nikolaus Pevsner. Writing in 1966 on the current state of architecture, Pevsner was 'irritated by arbitrary rhythms of normal windows and slit windows, where there are just large rooms of even plan behind; irritated by the sudden jutting forward balconies, in an odd position here, an odd position there… where no functional accents correspond; irritated by the gargantuan chunks of concrete where less material would do structurally perfectly well.'[76] In the sixties, even the stark exterior of Brutalist Park Hill in Sheffield came in for criticism, as the regular grid-like frame failed to exhibit the true nature (maisonette) of many of the apartments within.[77]

All of the above begs the question: why? Why must 'good' architecture clearly exhibit its structure? That buildings should be plain and clearly demonstrate their structure honestly is opinion and assertion founded on subjective personal taste. Sixty years after Ruskin's assertions in 'The Lamp of Truth', another critic

[73] Reyner Banham, 'Façade', *AR*, November 1954, p. 303.
[74] The façade is similar to a more well-known Tecton project, Spa Green Estate, London, 1954.
[75] Ibid, 306.
[76] Nikolaus Pevsner, 'Architecture in Our Time', *The Listener*, 5 January 1967, p.9. Pevsner continued: 'The structure of major buildings is usually of the simplest grid kind, and what the architect of today does either hides or complicates that construction.' 7.
[77] Reyner Banham, 'Park Hill Housing Sheffield' *AR*, Dec 1961, p. 404.

with a contrary opinion, Geoffrey Scott, systematically dismantled his argument.[78] It is merely declared, from Plato to Pevsner, without evidence, that to build with functionality and clarity is the correct and only way. Yet, what is wrong with surprise and delight in a building? ***Why must a building openly reveal its structure, otherwise to be condemned as 'dishonest'?*** Is it immoral to be enchanted by a hidden courtyard or beguiled by a building's irrational eccentricities?

From the swell of a column in a Doric temple to the false brick lintel of modern construction,[79] the history of architecture is replete with dishonesty. The Baroque architects of the seventeenth century loaded their works with decoration and 'structural' members, many of which served no such purpose. At the church of Santa Maria della Pace, west of Piazza Navona in Rome (Pietro da Cortona, 1660; FIG. 17), classical motif – volutes, pilasters, pediments, capitals - is piled upon classical motif. As such elements are crammed together it is impossible to read the true structure of the building.[80] The infill between the pilasters of the upper storey speaks of stone, yet it lies; it is mere stucco made to look like massive masonry. John Ruskin condemned such dishonesty. A more famous church, Santa Maria della Salute (Baldassare Longhena, 1687; FIG, 18), an example of the high Venetian Baroque, he judged 'contemptible': 'The principal faults of the building are the meagre windows and the ridiculous disguise of the buttresses under the form of colossal scrolls; the buttresses themselves being originally a hypocrisy, for the cupola… is of timber, and therefore needs none.'[81] This is subjective personal opinion, and – as Baroque became the dominant architectural style for over a century - opinion not shared by the architects and clients of the time. Geoffrey Scott held a similar opinion of Santa Maria della Salute. The church was an 'ingenious' work of 'perfection': 'There is hardly an element in the church which does not proclaim the beauty of mass and the power of mass to give essential

[78] Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism* (London: The Architectural Press, 1980), in particular Chapt. IV 'The Mechanical Fallacy', 94-120.
[79] The load is carried by a steel lintel.
[80] Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture*, (Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 2nd edn., 1962), 71, 72.
[81] John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Vol III, eds. E. T. Cook, Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1904), 428.

simplicity and dignity even to the richest and the most fantastic dreams of the baroque.'[82]

Remaining in Venice, with their arcades and galleries the 'great' Gothic buildings of the city do not have their internal structure clearly exhibited. A perusal of the Palazzo Ducale's (14^{th} –15^{th} *c.*) arcades, screens and planes gives no clue as to the internal disposition of its spaces. Indeed, the lightness of the late medieval exterior lies about the heavy baroque interior. This lack of clarity applies also to the more prosaic housing of Venice. On an examination of many of the houses that line the canals one would conclude that each double window corresponds to an internal room. Yet, the opposite is true. Due to a Venetian penchant for broad expanses of wall and consequently widely separated windows, it is the 'mullion' of the window that expresses the internal dividing wall.[83] The external 'supporting' walls of many of these houses are no such thing; they are mere facades designed to move with their unstable mud base. Structural integrity is provided by internal walls.[84] Such 'deceit' is found in Britain. As one's eye follows the Corinthian columns of Kedleston Hall's south elevation (Robert Adam *c.*1761; FIG. 19) upwards, one might expect them to terminate in a heavy classical pediment. Rather, the sole purpose of this heavy masonry is to support statuary. Structural dishonesty is also evident in the Modern movement. The windows at Le Corbusier's Chapel of Notre Dame (Ronchamp, 1954; FIG. 20) bear no relationship to the internal spatial arrangement. The paradigm of the Modern movement, the Villa Savoye (1931; FIG. 46), has its rough concrete rendered and painted, and the blank walls give no clue as to internal programme. The flat planes of the structure, and the slender piloti lend the concrete an illusory lightness contrary to its known qualities. Further, no one, except a professional, would have any notion of the true structural components and internal arrangement of a Miesian steel and glass box. Indeed, the steel of the famous Lake Shore Drive Apartments (Chicago, 1951) and the Seagram Building (1958) is sheathed in bronze.[85] With regard to exhibiting their structure, all these buildings deceive. And yet People do not turn away in moral outrage, disgusted by their dishonesty. Rather, they flock to these sites to admire and wonder.

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[82] In Roger Scruton, *Beauty* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 121.
[83] For illustrations see Rasmussen, 130, 131 .
[84] *Kevin McCloud's Grand Tour*: 1, Channel 4, 20 September 2009
[85] Claire Zimmerman, *Mies van der Rohe* (Cologne: Taschen, 2006), 77.

The question arises, then: why should human concepts of moral probity be applied to a building? If, by means of a cladding of stone, a building 'lies' about its concrete and steel internal structure, nobody is hurt; society is not diminished. Furthermore, to what extent must honest expression and clarity of structure be taken? Followed to its logical conclusion, the steel reinforcing rods, without which many concrete modern buildings would collapse, must also be expressed in some way. From the caves of Altamira to the planned new facades of the Brutalist Park Hill, man adorns the plain and ordinary. Loos would have read this as primitivism. Another interpretation would be that the desire to decorate and embellish is simply human nature. Yet, according to some of its theorists, architecture must be different.

With regard to housing, a house is self-evidently not a machine. A building is a space, or series of spaces circumscribed by structural components – walls, floors and roofs – to create an environment for man to live and work. A house, more specifically, is not just a shelter from the elements and an assemblage of spaces. It functions psychologically; it is a place of refuge, security and comfort – a home.[86] It is a personal place, which one personal*ises*, becoming a declaration of identity, ideals, and economic status, externally as well as internally. One only had to stroll through a British council estate after the Conservative Government's right-to-buy policy in the 1980s and see the marks of individualisation – from hardwood front doors, through wrought-iron gates, reconstituted stone cladding, to lions rampant – in order to witness evidence of this. The Lord of Kedleston Hall, as he strolled through his garden towards the triumphal arch and statuary of the south entrance, perhaps before settling down to a page or two of Cicero, must equally have felt easy in his declaration of affinity with the golden Augustan age.[87] If a house performs in such a multi-levelled way, then it is not machine and it demands a different sent of criteria by which to be judged rather than functionality and 'clear exhibition of structure.'

It may be concluded, therefore, that there is no right or wrong way to build, solely the dominant, Zeitgeist-expressing, styles of the architectural establishment of any given period - styles then imposed on the user. Yet the field of architectural

[86] The architect and writer Christopher Day calls houses 'places of healing' of the hurly-burly of the modern world. – Places of the Soul (London: Architectural Press, 2nd edn., 2004), 219.
[87] De Botton, 131.

aesthetics is subjective: there are no right answers, only ephemeral opinion and personal taste. I have my own opinion, for example, as to what constitutes a pleasing building (as it happens, in the St Pancras v King's Cross debate I prefer the structural clarity of King's Cross Station over the Gothic fussiness of its neighbour), but my opinion is worth no more than any other. Clear exhibition of structure – honesty - in building is a conceit invented by architects and critics to bolster personal taste or justify a new style, a conceit shored up by a specious 'emperor's new clothes' intellectualism. Of Banham's three laws of Brutalism it is the one most frequently ignored. As Pevsner observed, 'the gargantuan chunks of concrete' of Brutalism lie about internal programme and structural need. Indeed, it conflicts with the image-making intent of Banham's first law. Structural clarity does not by itself make a memorable image. 'Clear exhibition of structure' is a stylistic straightjacket that denies surprise, excitement and delight, and produces mundanity, leaving discrimination in matters of architectural aesthetics only to structural engineers. Observed to the letter, Hagia Sophia, King's College Chapel and Sydney Opera House would not exist. And is it not immoral in itself to deny the 'fantasy and decoration for which in our hearts, [many] long'?[88]

Hunstanton: Criticism

Returning to the first British example of Brutalism, critical opinion was divided over the 'clarity and viciousness' of the new architectural ideology at Hunstanton.[89] For some, the school was a triumph of 'ruthless logic.'[90] 'I think it is precisely the elimination of humanistic frills which makes this building', commented a critic in *Architectural Design* in 1957, adding, 'Glass, brick and steel can form an environment as human and as satisfying as any other materials.' He offers no built examples as evidence for this assertion, however. The 'stark and barren' interior was cause for censure from other critics: 'Surely [the children] need some softening of the environment,' lamented a contributor to the same debate, 'after all, the demands of a human being and a bale of cloth are not the same. A human being

[88] Eric de Mare, *AR*, January 1948. p. 9.
I will deal with Banham's third rule of Brutalism, valuation of materials 'as found', in the next chapter.
[89] Cook, 37
[90] Banham (1955), 358.

should not be asked to… learn in a small warehouse.'[91] In an enthusiastic letter written shortly after Hunstanton's opening generally praising the 'peculiar ruthlessness' of the school as an example of 'purity of style much needed in this country', one correspondent of *Architectural Review* still commented: 'The only pity is that such a splendid building should be such an unfriendly one… I should hate to go to school there. The stairs give a grim promise of canings and theoretical physics… Puritanism in the choice of materials makes for brutality.' Another correspondent lambasted the building as: 'A piece of barely animated engineering… Lacking in grace, charm and beauty… blind man's architecture'.[92] Of more critical weight is the editorial of the *Architects Journal* of September 1954: 'This building seems to ignore the children for which it was built… It is a formalist structure which will please only the architects, and a small coterie concerned more with satisfying their personal design sense than with achieving a humanist, functional architecture.'[93]

All the above criticism points to the fact that, although a triumph of radical, formalist design, the architects had forgotten the human users of the school. 'A formalistic architecture is always attractive to the architects and always inconvenient to their clients' wrote Herbert Tayler in 1957.[94] Teachers grew to dislike the inhuman austerity of the school. Practical difficulties ensued: the vast glass panels led to the classrooms being uncomfortably cold in winter and unbearably hot in summer, and the exposed materials produced a noisy environment, as any sound, let alone the clamour of hundreds of schoolchildren changing classes, reverberated around the bare interior.[95] Banham wrote that 'the form grasped by the eye should be confirmed by experience of the building in use…'[96] This was true at Hunstanton. In an inversion of the Modernist tenet, 'form follows function', the form dictated the way the school functioned: high heating costs and woollens in winter, open windows and drowsy children in summer. Writing in 1960, Peter Smithson inadvertently admits that it was a failure in their

[91] Anonymous panel discussion, 'Thoughts in Progress: The New Brutalism' *Architectural Design*, (London) April, 1957, pp 111-113.
[92] 'Correspondence', *AR*, November 1954, p. 282.
[93] 'The New Brutalism', *Architects Journal*, 16 September 1954, p. 336.
[94] In Elwall, 21.
[95] BBC Open University, 'Hunstanton School', *From Here to Modernity* < http://www.open2.net/modernity/> accessed 21/6/2009. Elwall, 38.
[96] Banham (1955), 358.

design that caused the ambient deficiencies of the school: 'It is no good looking to the climate and physical environment to give the form of the building. Technically the glass box and a mass concrete cave can produce the same comfort conditions.'[97] Thus, the user-comfort problems of the glass box are solvable through technical means. This is a tacit admission that at Hunstanton they omitted to design-in such comfort enhancing features. In the drive to repel the onslaught of the 'New Humanism' through a ruthlessly austere image, the user was of secondary consideration.

Despite the deficiencies and the negative comment, most criticism by the architectural establishment remained (and remains) positive.[98] The American architect Philip Johnson (b. 1906) wrote a contemporary piece praising the Smithsons' radicalism and their adaptation of rigorous Miesian principles to a British provincial school.[99] Hunstanton entered the canon, and through the late 1950s and 1960s, and indeed to this day, architecture critics appear to have developed a herd mentality in their praise of Hunstanton; it is hard to find anyone of consequence in the literature of the period willing to put their head above the parapet to challenge the panegyric critical orthodoxy. Refreshing, therefore, are the comments of Anthony Jackson writing in 1970:

> Hunstanton school is functionally inadequate, technically naïve, noisy, cold and dirty. It contributed nothing to the evolution of school building design and is expensive to maintain… Its elemental image and ostensibly robust honesty gratified the ever-present hope in many architects that the developing complexity, and presumed, consequent devitalisation of architecture could be turned aside by purity much in the same way that the simple-minded were once believed to possess supernatural powers.[100]

Nevertheless, in spite of, or perhaps because of, Hunstanton's 'elemental image' and 'robust honesty', the Smithsons became the torchbearers for a new generation of architects.

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[97] 'The Function of Architecture in Cultures in Change', *AD* April 1960, p. 150.
[98] See the entry for Hunstanton School in Pevsner, Nikolaus, *The Buildings of England: Norfolk, North-west and South* (London: Yale University Press, 2nd edn. revised, 1999).
[99] Hunstanton School', *Architectural Review* (London), September 1954, p. 153.
[100] Anthony Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture* (London: The Architectural Press, 1970), 184.

Twenty Years On: Pimlico School

It is interesting that just as one observes New Brutalism in its nascent stage at Hunstanton, one also sees the embryonic problems that in later decades would be associated with Brutalism. Brutalism, by some, would come be seen as inhuman, the triumph of an architect's personal vision over the needs of the user. As seen at Pimlico School, (GLC, Sir Hubert Bennett, project architect John Bancroft, London, 1970;) this tendency was still evident almost twenty years after the completion of Hunstanton. At Pimlico, rather than glass and steel dominating the design, here it is glass and concrete - raw, in-situ concrete, with a finish straight from the shuttering - the type of concrete that became the dominant motif of 60s and 70s Brutalism (FIG. 21). 'Strongly modelled' in form and materials, its design was in deliberate contrast to the mainly Victorian architecture of the surrounding area.[101] This stylistic isolation ensured the Brutalist image-impact, and consequently, comments regarding Pimlico School's image in the architectural press were effusive. As 'architectural sculpture' Pimlico was a 'tour de force', an 'ancient monument of the future.' For some, the image was martial, paradoxically both nautical and terrestrial: it was like a 'battleship', and 'its aggressive qualities… prompt… comparisons with fortresses.' In 1972 Pimlico won a RIBA award, the committee commenting on the 'outstanding… originality of approach.'[102]

For the human user, however, there were problems. Some were mooted in 1966 at the time of the school's conception. 'The exposed concrete walls and ceilings will echo again and again', remarked the *Architects Journal*.[103] Five years later, and with the building then in use, the *Journal*'s reviewers commented that there was little privacy and peace. Even, the library, the traditional haven for quiet study, functioned poorly in this regard because of design flaws. The glazing, and the visible, constant movement around the library caused noise and distraction.[104] Doubts were expressed about the ambient effects of the large areas of glazing.

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[101] John Bancroft, 'Pimlico School', *AJ*, 14 April 1971, p. 826.
Michael Foster commented: 'Its scale, style and materials make little concession to the scale and pattern of the surrounding streets.' - 'Building Revisited: Pimlico School'. *AJ*, 31 March 1976, p. 628.

[102] 'The Westminster Tradition', *AJ*, 28 October, 1970, p.992.
John Bancroft et al, 'Pimlico School', *AJ*, 14 April 1971, p. 825.
Foster, p. 638.
'Architecture Awards 1972', *RIBA Journal*, July 1972, p. 286.

[103] 'Pimlico Secondary School', *AJ*, 9 March 1966, p. 644.

[104] R. Coltman; J. Hanson, 'Pimlico School', *AJ*, 14 April 1971, p. 837.

Michael Foster in a reappraisal of Pimlico written in 1976 reports that the building was expensive to heat, while in 1971, the *Architects Journal* had expressed reservations about the ventilation system on the south side and its ability to cope with summer conditions.[105] This was confirmed by Foster, who reports that simple cord-pull extractor fans had been fitted in the south facing windows – ruining the aesthetic.[106] Parents and ex-pupils report that excessive summer heat, and it consequent deleterious effects on the students' ability to study, was a perennial problem. Eventually, during hot weather the school introduced a policy that contracted the school day: the lunch break was abandoned and (much to their delight) the pupils were sent home early.[107] It appears that in the architects' pursuit of a memorable image, little had been learned from the Hunstanton experience, and the user continued to suffer. Further problems ensued. A design flaw – the method by which the sloping windows were attached to the concrete – rendered the structure dangerous to the user. Windows began to fall out, crashing to the internal floor as early as 1973, the problem continuing into the 1980s.[108]

In December 2007, notwithstanding appeals by architectural establishment heavyweights such as Richard Rogers[109] and RIBA President Sunand Prasad, Westminster Council lost patience with Pimlico School and voted that the 'ancient monument of the future' be demolished. Prasad had admitted the building's 'shortcomings' in terms of environmental comfort and weather-proofing performance, but argued that the school was historically significant and should be refurbished. Chairman of the planning committee, councillor Robert Davis, called the Bancroft school an 'awful' building which needed to be bulldozed. 'It is an absolute eyesore', he lambasted, 'and has been a problem since day one.'[110] In 2009 Pimlico School still functioned, but was in the process of being demolished in a piecemeal manner. Its squat Brutalism was being gradually effaced, to be replaced

[105] Foster, 628. Coltman & Hanson, 637-40.
[106] Foster, 633.
[107] Private conversations with parents and an ex-pupil.
[108] Denise Searle, 'Crashing Panes Worry a Winner', *BD*, 20 February 1981, p. 5.
[109] Baron Rogers of Riverside (b.1933), architect, is perhaps most famous for the Pompidou Centre, Paris (1977), and Lloyds of London Headquarters (1986).
[110] Will Hurst, 'Westminster Council Votes to Demolish Pimlico School', *BD*, 14 Dec 2007 < http://www.bdonline.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=426&storycode=3102274> accessed 01/09/2009.

with a lighter, more user friendly-design, reminscent of the International Modern style of the 1930s (FIG. 22).[111]

In concluding this chapter a question arises: what led Banham to preach, and the Smithsons to practice, this severe, 'anti-beauty' architectural doctrine seen at Hunstanton and Colville Place, and which eventually matured with Bancroft's 'aggressive' and 'oppressive' work at Pimlico?[112] A clue can be found in Banham's third rule of Brutalism: 'valuation of materials for their inherent qualities "as found"', and a critique of Hunstanton School in *Architectural Review,* of September 1954. Commenting on the philosophy behind the project it stated: 'Materials must be valued for the surfaces they have on delivery to the site… a valuation like that of the *Dadaist* who accepted their materials as found' (italics mine).[113] This 'Dadaist' art- that profoundly influenced Brutalist architectural theory will now be explored.

[111] City of Westminster, 'Pimlico Academy Design', < http://images.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://www.westminster.gov.uk/image/0/uploads/images/pimlico_3_071121 1242082730.JPG&imgrefurl=http://www.westminster.gov.uk/services/educationandlearning/schools andcolleges/schoolsinformation/bsf/pimlico/pimlicoschooldesignproposal/&usg=__MAbVgXtXKcd py8IebPV_Si4hHAY=&h=203&w=367&sz=24&hl=en&start=5&tbnid=GwUoqs7LDubygM:&tbnh =67&tbnw=122&prev=/images%3Fq%3DPimlico%2BSchool%2BNew%2BDesign%26gbv%3D2% 26hl%3Den%26sa%3DG > accessed 5/09/2009.
[112] Banham (1955), 358. Foster, 638.
[113] 'Hunstanton School' *AR*, September 1954, p.153.

CHAPTER 3

ART: 'AS FOUND'

Many architects, including the Smithsons, view themselves not as mere designers and builders but as artists. The Smithsons were members of the Institute for Contemporary Art,[114] an institution founded in 1946 to promote the cause of modernism in London. Massey describes it as 'an elitist organisation – a lonely outpost for avant-garde experiment in dour post-war Britain.'[115] The ICA was not avant-garde enough for the younger generation of artists however, and the Smithsons went on to co-found a sub-group, an experimental cultural laboratory of 'young Turks' known as The Independent Group.[116]

Active between 1952 and 1955, 'Impossibly glamorous', and filled with 'arrogant young beatniks', the IG was permeated with the spirit of Dada.[117] 'A new generation of Dadaists has emerged today', wrote a key member of the IG, the pop-artist Richard Hamilton, 'as violent and ingenious as their forbears… Son of Dada.'[118] Another member of the IG, the writer and critic Lawrence Alloway, wrote an article for *AD* in 1956 lauding Dada, asserting: 'The post-war atmosphere of the 1950s is probably more congenial to Dada than the period between the wars.'[119] Named by opening a dictionary at random, Dada is art that gives validity to the 'found object', the 'ready-made', the ordinary and the raw - an art that

[114] For a concise account of the IG see: Bullock, 96, 97.
[115] Massey, 31.
[116] David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990), 125. Marco Vidotto, *A & P Smithson: Works and Projects* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1997), 86. Elwall, 18.
[117] Tom Dychoff, 'Ordinary Beauty', *The Guardian*, 20 April 2002, < http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2002/apr/20/weekend.tomdyckhoff> accessed 15/06/2009. Henceforth, The Independent Group will be abbreviated to IG.
[118] Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-2000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 743.
[119] 'Dada, 1956' *AD*, November 1956, p. 374.

despises craft (FIGS. 23-26).[120] For Alloway, art was 'the everyday… A work of art can be made of bus tickets… or it may be an ad'.[121] Of his famous urinal, dubbed 'Fountain', Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), the foremost Dada artist and theorist, wrote that he 'took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object.'[122] Dada was conceived early in the twentieth-century from resentment and contempt towards a greedy materialistic society, a society in which art was just another commodity to be bought and sold in the marketplace, and the artists merely artisan labourers serving to prop up the bourgeoisie.[123] It was born in the aftermath of the carnage of World War I, the death rattle of that society. A nihilistic reaction to societal corruption, it was an art that denied the capitalist degenerates that perpetrated such butchery the right to impose aesthetic standards. 'Beauty is dead' wrote the painter Tristan Tzara (1896-1963), editor of *Dada* in 'Dada Manifesto 1918', qualifying the remark by stating: 'A work of art is never beautiful by decree, objectively and for all.'[124] Thus, Dada is defiant and iconoclastic, not only undermining, but holding up to ridicule canonical standards of 'fine art' and beauty.[125] 'We pounded with all our might on the big drum of Dada, and trumpeted the praises of unreason,' wrote the painter Jean Arp (1887-1966) in 1948, continuing, 'Dada gave the *Venus de Milo* an enema and permitted *Lacoon* and his sons to relieve themselves after thousands of years of struggle with the python'.[126] Now, as Alloway acknowledged, the post-Auschwitz, cold war 'atmosphere' of strontium-90 laden mushroom clouds was new and fertile soil for Dada rage, and it grew in the hothouse of The Independent Group.

Hamilton was a disciple of Marcel Duchamp. He recreated Duchamp's work and curated the largest retrospective exhibition in the artist's lifetime.[127] Without a trace of irony he wrote of the reinvigorated Dada spirit of that period: 'It

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[120] The Smithsons even made their Christmas cards out of 'found' 'ephemera.' - Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Shift* (London: Academy Editions, 1982), 9. See also p. 55 for further reference to the influence of Dubuffet.
[121] Alloway, 374.
[122] In Harrison & Wood, 252.
[123] Dawn Ades, 'Dada and Surrealism', in Stangos, Nikos (ed.), *Concepts of Modern Art* (London, Thames & Hudson, 1994), 111.
[124] In Harrison & Wood, 253.
[125] Alloway, 374.
[126] Ades, 114.
[127] Sarat Maharaj, '"A liquid, Elemental Scattering": Marcel Duchamp and Richard Hamilton', Tate Galleries, *Richard Hamilton*, exh. cat. (London: Tate, 1992) 40-48. See also pp. 12, 46.

is positive Dada… creative where Dada was destructive. Perhaps it is Mama…'[128] Of the photographer Nigel Henderson (1917–1985), his friend Colin St John-Wilson said 'here was a man who could introduce you to Duchamp'.[129] During his youth Henderson had moved in a rariefied cultural atmosphere, counting, along with Duchamp, Max Ernst among his acquaintances. Henderson's mother was the manager at Elizabeth Guggenheim's London gallery, and when Duchamp came to London in the late thirties to exhibit, Henderson helped him to install the works.[130] The young architects, Peter and Alison Smithson, were no exception from this passion for Dada. 'It is necessary to create an architecture of reality', they wrote in 1954, 'An architecture which takes as its starting point… de Stijl, Dada and Cubism.'[131] They called Dada 'the cult of simplicity.'[132]

A practitioner of Dadaist art and a personal influence on the Smithsons was another IG founder, Eduardo Paolozzi (1924-2005). Looking at Paolozzi's work from the late 1940s and 1950s one can agree with Michael Middleton's words: 'At the core of his art has lain the ambiguous magic of the *objet trouvé* and the ready made' (FIGS. 27-30).[133] 'Here is a list of objects which are used in my work', Paolozzi wrote in 1958, and proceeded to itemize objects such as a dismembered lock, a rubber dragon, a broken comb and a bent fork. 'Car wrecking yards' were his 'hunting grounds.'[134] Middleton adds that Paolozzi had a 'contempt for elegance' - an understatement - his crude and rough creations, many with an architectural quality, scorn traditional ideas of grace and beauty.[135] Paolozzi once stated, '…a wheel, a jet engine, a bit of a machine is beautiful', but many of his conglomerations of industrial detritus have a nightmarish ugliness, intended to

[128] In Harrison & Wood, 743.
[129] In Dychoff.
[130] Robbins, 76.
[131] Smithsons quoted in 'Future: The New Brutalism' *Architectural Review,* (London) April, 1954, pp. 274, 275. Later they referred to the, 'great period of cubism, and dada and de Stijl', Alison Smithson (ed.) *Team 10 Primer* (London: Studio Vista, 1968), 84.
[132] Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light* (London: Faber, 1970), 84-87. The Smithsons used to make their Christmas decorations out of 'found' objects, - Smithsons, *The Shift* (London: Academy Editions, 1982), 9. They were also admires of Jean Dubuffet (1901-85 - invented the term 'Art Brut, which includes 'found' objects, graffiti, and the work of the insane, prisoners, children, and naïve or primitive artists) and Jackson Pollock (1912-56), 'Abstract Expressionist'.
[133] *Eduardo Paolozzi* (London: Methuen, 1963), un-paginated.
[134] Robbins, 184.
[135] Middleton sees an aesthetic link between Paolozzi's *Town Tower* (1962) and Le Corbusier's monastery, Sainte Marie de La Tourette (1960).

disturb and challenge.[136] Further, writing in 1956 Lawrence Alloway commented on the 'appearance of casualness', and how Paolozzi 'avoids virtuosity and competence'.[137] For Paolozzi, craft had been usurped by modern mass-production methods. In 1958, in one of the more coherent passages in what are cryptic, almost nonsensical writings, he commented: 'Modern polythene toys, due to the combination of plastic injection methods and steel dies, have a microscopic precision impossible to the hand-craftsman of the past.'[138] Thus, here again we encounter the Dada contempt for craft: Dada is the art of despair, the art that surrenders skill to the all-conquering mechanistic age. Paolozzi was the artist with whom the Smithsons shared a 'common ground… felt a certain mutuality.'[139]

A further close associate of the Smithsons during the IG years was another artist with a penchant for Dada: Nigel Henderson. A traumatic war – he was a pilot in Coastal Command, his duties resulting in a nervous breakdown – did not diminish his interest in the 'found' and the ordinary. During the late 1940s and early 1950s Henderson delighted in photographing the everyday and the ordinary in the streets around his house at Bethnal Green in London's bombed-out East End (FIGS. 31-34). He made photographic collages – 'Hendograms' – using debris from bomb-sites, vegetables, scraps of advertisements and other found items. Indeed, his obsession with the leftovers of ordinary life earned him the nickname, 'the John Betjeman of rubbish'.[140] (Figs) Henderson uncovered the reality of modern life in the banal and the inconsequential – he even took close-up photographs of concrete. Years later he wrote to Paolozzi: 'I wish… that I had been better technically; that I could have sung the song of every blotch and blister, of every patch and stain on road and pavement surface, of step and rail and door and window frame.'[141]

Much has been written about the extent to which the members of the IG were mutually influential. Richard Hamilton denies that there was ever any 'aesthetic brotherhood' among the members; rather he admits a vague 'sense of mutual purpose'. The exception he acknowledges was the 'bond' between

[136] Tate Galleries, *Eduardo Paolozzi*, text: Frank Whitford, exh. cat., (London: Tate, 1971), 46.
[137] Alloway, 374.
[138] Robbins, 183.
[139] Robbins, 124, 124.
[140] Dychoff. The best account of Henderson's work is Victoria Walsh's profusely illustrated *Nigel Henderson: Parallel of Life and Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001)
[141] In Robbins, 76.

Henderson, Paolozzi and the Smithsons who held a 'common vision (FIG. 35).'[142] The Smithsons themselves wrote later about the quartet's 'shared values… from Marcel Duchamp, from early Dubuffet and so on…' It was this quartet alone that organised the IG's first manifesto: *Parallel of Life and Art.*[143]

'Parallel of Life and Art' and 'Patio and Pavillion'

Denied their opportunity to produce an exhibition comprised of objects scavenged from a government surplus shop, Paolozzi, the Smithsons and Henderson organized *Parallel of Life and Art* in the autumn of 1953.[144] This walk-in exhibition was simple and small in scale (and budget), consisting of photographs on coarse grainy paper randomly hung at a variety of unusual angles, or suspended on wire (FIGS. 36 & 37). Henderson's photographs of the mundane formed much of the vocabulary of *Parallel of Life and Art*'s symbolic language. It was a highly polemical and controversial show. The 443 visitors who viewed the exhibition at the ICA were enveloped not only in 'ordinariness', material 'so completely taken for granted as to have sunk beneath the threshold of conscious perception… visual by-products',[145] but also in shocking representations of ugliness. They were confronted with images of violence, car-crashes, Pompeii victims, benign tumours, rats – certainly not art that accorded with traditional conventions of beauty (FIGS.).[146] Students at the Architectural Association alleged that the exhibition promoted a 'cult of ugliness' and 'den[ied] the spiritual in man'.[147] Nevertheless, the 'shoe-string operation' that was *Parallel of Life and Art* proved to be a 'historically momentous' exhibition that belied its modest size.[148]

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[142] In Robbins 188. Massey calls them 'something of a clique' within the IG, 99.
[143] Robbins, 201.
[144] Robbins, 193.
[145] Smithsons, in Robbins, 129.
[146] Kingston University, London, 'The Independent Group', <http://images.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://www.independentgroup.org.uk/images/popups/parallels2.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.independentgroup.org.uk/contributors/smithson/index.html&usg=__0G23ELhIu4Qe6G6b4J3e7Flcttk=&h=441&w=600&sz=81&hl=en&start=1&tbnid=dEF7wu1KCanqYM:&tbnh=99&tbnw=135&prev=/images%3Fq%3DParallel%2Bof%2Blife%2Band%2Bart%26gbv%3D2%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DG> Accessed 18/03/2009.
[147] Ibid. Banham (1955), 356. Banham in *The New Brutalism* (London: The Architectural Press, 1966), 41, said that the exhibition was 'deliberately flouting… conventional ideas of beauty'.
[148] Robbins, 125, 193.

Crucially for this analysis of the development of New Brutalism, Reyner Banham, writing in 1956, called *Parallel of Life and Art* the *locus classicus* of New Brutalism.[149] This confirms the view the Smithsons expressed in their contemporary writings on *Parallel of Life and Art.* They compared their own post-war period to that in which Le Corbusier had flourished: 'the first great creative period of modern architecture'. Then, with astonishing audacity, they went on to declare that *Parallel of Life and Art* - an exhibition that scorned traditional ideas of beauty, promoting instead ordinariness and ugliness - 'proclaimed' the 'second great creative period of architecture.'[150]

Three years later, the quartet reunited for their exhibit 'Patio and Pavilion' at the *This is Tomorrow* (1956) exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. This was a work that again evidenced the Smithsons' interest in 'anti-craft', the 'raw' and the 'ordinary'.[151] Looking back over the decades it is perhaps easy to sneer at these 'angry young men' (and a woman) and their interpretation of the fundamentals of human need. The academic and architectural historian John Summerson, writing in 1959, did indeed sneer, writing, among other things that TiT (the acronym given by the IG members themselves) was 'Dada idiocy'.[152] But for the Smithsons, Henderson and Paolozzi, 'Patio and Pavilion' was where 'The architects' work of providing a framework for the individual to realise himself in, and the artists' work of giving signs and images to those stages of this realisation, meet in a single act (FIG. 38).'[153]

The 'Pavilion' of 'Patio and Pavilion' was a shed made from second-hand wood, roofed with plastic corrugated sheeting. It was 'furnished with objects which are symbols for the things we need': space, shelter, privacy and creative activity. Wheels symbolised movement and machine; sculpture: the need for contemplation, while Henderson's collaged human head symbolised man himself as an infinitely complex being, his bewildering true nature currently being discovered in the new scientific age. Outside, the patio was a layer of sand, on which were placed other symbolic objects. The objects, inside and out, were ordinary. The wheels were

[149] Banham (1956), 356.
[150] Quoted in Robbins (ed.), 129.
[151] Constructed with Paolozzi and Henderson.
[152] Dannatt, 28.
[153] Smithsons, *The Charged Void*, 178. The *Architectural Review* commented: The synthesis of the major arts is a consecrated theme in the modern movement', 'This is Tomorrow', *The Architectural Review*, (London) September, 1956, p. 186)

old, tyre-less bicycle wheels. Tiles, bits of tile, rocks, bricks, mangled wire mesh, plastic sculptures - in other words, ready-mades and found objects – served to symbolise human need.[154] It was a work entirely devoid of craft.

So far in this chapter we have discussed The Independent Group, of which the Smithsons were founders and active members. We have seen that the members of the IG with whom they were most closely associated were enthusiasts for, and practitioners of, Dadaist art, an art-form that tramples on traditional and hierarchical canons of beauty. The Smithsons during the mid-1950s were clearly thinking about collaging 'found' objects to create an architectural aesthetic. Of Hunstanton School they wrote: 'it… assembles existing components from families-of-components already available in industry – steel sections, bricks etc – into architecturally finite elements.'[155] They had turned to the master from 'the first great creative period of modern architecture' for precedent. Of Le Corbusier's 'Maison Citrohan' conceived in the early 1920s they wrote: 'Two popular art devices – the arrangement of a small zinc bar at the rear, with a large window to the street of the café, and the close vertical patent glazing of the suburban factory – were combined and transformed into a fine art aesthetic. This architectural mechanism… produced the Unité d'Habitation.' [156] This, then, is something more creative than mere building: Here, found, ordinary objects were being transformed into fine architecture, a 'fine art aesthetic.' And there were already successful examples in Britain of such convention flouting buildings:

> By fine art standards the modular prefabricated building, which of its nature can only approximate to the ideal shape for which it is intended must be bad building. Yet generally speaking the schools and garages which have been built with systems of prefabrication lick the pants off the fine art architects operating in the same field. They are especially successful in their modesty… The best post-war office block in London is one that is virtually all curtain wall. As this building has no other quality apart from its curtain wall, how is it that it puts to shame other office

[154] Smithsons, *The Charged Void*, 178
[155] Smithsons, *The Charged Void*, 42. (One is tempted to ask the question here: is not that what all builders do?)
[156] Smithsons, *Without Rhetoric*, 10. The final sentence is of crucial importance and I will return to the Unité d'Habitation later.

> buildings which have been elaborately worked over by respected architects and the Royal Fine Arts commission.[157]

Notably, the Smithsons do not explain *why* buildings with elements of pre-fabrication 'lick the pants off' and 'put to shame' other contemporary buildings. They merely assert, that they are superior. It is subjective opinion, founded on Dada. Writing in the late 1980s the Smithsons confirmed how Dada had affected their architectural sensibilities: 'The "as found" was a new seeing of the ordinary, an openness as to how the prosaic "things" could re-energise our inventive activity… you reached for what there was, previously un-thought of things.' Echoing Banham's words on the defining characteristics of New Brutalism they continued: 'We were concerned with the seeing of materials for what they were: the woodness of wood, the sandness of sand. With this came a distaste for the simulated.'[158]

It follows, therefore, that such validation of the 'ready-made' and 'the found', the raw and the ordinary when applied to architecture produces a particular aesthetic. It is the aesthetic of the steel girder, the glass panel, standardised window frames, curtain-walling, and ultimately, the pre-cast concrete slab of, for example, the Smithsons' Robin Hood Gardens.[159] It produces 'New Brutalism', an architecture that 'has nothing to do with craft'.[160]

For the Smithsons and the other artists of that period, this was not the pursuit of ordinariness and ugliness just for the sake of pursuing an artistic fad and rebelling against a previous generation. Rather, 'Architecture is a statement of a way of life' they wrote,[161] and, 'When an urgent idea has to be expressed, it can often only be done by not tampering with the rough object, by letting the object itself bear, without any interference, the full significance of the idea… the Brutalist recall to first principles'.[162] In an austere, post-war Britain, the 'urgent idea' to be expressed, the 'way of life' to be stated, was the gritty reality of working class life, the brutal nature of modern existence in an impersonal, industrialised society, immortalized by

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[157] Smithsons, 'But Today We Collect Ads' (1956), in Robbins, 186.
[158] In Robbins, 201.
[159] See Lyall Sutherland, *The State of British Architecture* (London: The Architectural Press, 1980), 111-113.
[160] The Smithsons in, 'The New Brutalism', *Architectural Design*, (London) January 1955, p. 1.
[161] Smithsons, *Without Rhetoric*, 6.
[162] In 'Thoughts in Progress: The New Brutalism', *Architectural Design*, April, 1957, p. 113.

their colleague Henderson.[163] The Smithsons wrote: '…Brutalism attempt[s] to be objective about 'reality' – the cultural objectives of society, its urges, its techniques… 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.'[164] The heavy, concrete members that would soon become the characteristic feature of New Brutalism would express the brutal nature of modern existence. Even the wood-grain pattern in the unfinished concrete – left by the wooden shuttering – would serve as a symbol of the rough grain of modern urban life (FIGS. 39 & 40).[165]

During the 1960s, and 70s raw concrete, grey and unadorned, sprouted in the urban landscape of Britain. But where did this enthusiasm for a utilitarian industrial product used in such an unmitigated manner come from? As we have seen, the first building to be dubbed 'Brutalist' was Hunstanton School. But the Miesian steel and glass of Hunstanton was a stylistic aberration in the Smithsons' careers – they never built in like manner again. From the early fifties onwards the Smithsons became interested in the use of raw concrete. What was it that had such a radical effect on their architectural aesthetic and that of Brutalism? It is to the South of France and the city of Marseille that we must turn to answer that question.

[163] Helena Webster (ed.) *Modernism Without Rhetoric: Essays on the Work of Alison and Peter Smithson* (London: Academy Editions, 1997, 24. William Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (London: Phaidon, 3rd edn., 1996), 443.
[164] 'Thoughts in Progress: The New Brutalism', *Architectural Design*, April 1957, p. 113.
[165] BBC Open University, 'Brutalism', *From Here to Modernity* < http://www.open2.net/modernity/> Accessed 1/4/2009.

CHAPTER 4

‘BÉTON BRUT’

For the structural engineer Felix J. Samuely writing in *Architectural Review* at the dawn of the new decade in 1950, concrete was the material for the future. Technological advances had given the utilitarian material exciting new structural possibilities of combining strength with slenderness: ‘The material; is now considered… more productive of elegance than monumentality’, Samuely wrote.[166] The Penguin Pool at London Zoo (Lubetkin and Tecton, 1934) is the most oft-quoted example of this slender, curvilinear, almost space age aesthetic, but projects around the world assumed a new grace in moulded aggregate.

And yet in the mid-1950s architects around the world discovered a passion for using reinforced concrete in a massive, raw and unfinished manner. Not only was this concrete used in a heavy, clearly expressed members, but even in detail it was left as a harsh ‘as found’ material. Cement drips that had oozed through gaps in the formwork remained intact. Lines where the wooden shuttering had met were left unrendered. The grain and knots of those unplaned planks were retained as a mirror image in the surface texture of the concrete. It was an aesthetic that could be expected, perhaps, in industrial or utilitarian projects, but such brutal textures began to appear in public housing and even in prestigious commissions. At the Yale University Art Gallery (Louis Kahn, 1953; FIG. 41), the shutter-pattern of the concrete and the marks of the fixing studs that held the formwork together are all left on display. The latticework of the ceiling, though intricate, is as the day the labourers removed the shuttering. Banham called Yale a ‘demonstration of absolute Brutalist truth to one method of construction.’[167] Its concrete is internal, however,

[166] ‘Concrete up to Date’ *AR* May, 1950 p.331.
[167] Banham (1966), 44.

contributing nothing to the external 'image' of the building. In Vittoriano Vigano's Isitituto Marchiondi, (Milan, 1957; FIG. 42), rough, massive concrete members are expressed externally, creating a striking image.[168] In Britain in the late 1950s boldly expressed raw concrete can be seen in the work of Erno Goldfinger at an office block at Shirley, Birmingham, (1958); the annex to the Old Vic, London (Lyons, Israel and Ellis, 1958); and flats in Lambeth (Creed, 1958). [169] The Smithsons unbuilt project, a design for a huge new complex at Sheffield University (1953), also shows a passion for this brutal material. The inspiration of this passion lay in a new direction taken by the work of the doyen of the Modern movement: Le Corbusier (1887-1965).

His Unité d'Habitation at Marseilles (1952; FIGS 43 & 44) has entered the architectural canon as one of the most significant buildings of the post-war era. Banham called it 'the sign under which the real post-war architecture was to be born[170], and the Smithsons described it as: 'The most significant building of our time, existing in space but outside time, like the Temple of Poseidon at Paestum.'[171] The Unité is a massive slab apartment block of seventeen storeys containing over 300, mainly duplex dwellings. With its internal streets, its shops, hotel, meeting rooms, gymnasium, crèche, rooftop paddling-pool and running track it was designed to function as a self-contained community, a vertical garden city.

As they were refining the theory of New Brutalism in the 1950s the Smithsons wrote: 'The nearest thing to what we were looking for was then being built in Marseille by Le Corbusier'.[172] Le Corbusier wrote in *Towards a New Architecture*: 'The business of Architecture is to establish emotional relationships by means of raw materials (*matières bruts*)', and the Unité had just such an emotional effect upon the Smithsons.[173] They enthused: 'In the Unitè for the first time we have a modern building of inch by inch interest, a building that grows

[168] Further examples of the increased use of raw concrete during this period can be seen at Royan, France, in Gillet's Church of Notre Dame, (1959); in Milan at La Chiesa della Madonna dei Poveri, (1953) by Figini and Pollini; in Japan, in Kunio Makeywa's Metropolitan Festival Hall, Tokyo (1961), and Kenzo Tange's Kurashiki City Hall (1960); in the US: Breuer and Smith's Annunciation Priory of the Sisters of St Benedict, Bismarck, N, Dakota, 1963.
[169] Illustrations in *AR*, Sept, 1958, 153; *AR*, Dec 1958, 361; *AR* Sept 1958, 192'
[170] Reyner Banham, *Guide to Modern Architecture* (London: The Architectural Press, 1962), 92. See also, William Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (London: Phaidon, 3rd edn., 1996), 437; Jürgen Joedicke, *Architecture Since 1945* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 36.
[171] Smithsons, *Ordinariness and Light*, 89.
[172] Smithsons, *Without Rhetoric*, 4. Curtis, 443, 444.
[173] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, (New York: Dover, 1986), 151.

greater in time and does not storm the eye and leave the heart unmoved. The factory-made parts, the pre-cast elements, the patterns of shuttering are arranged with consummate skill for ends new to architecture.'[174] The roof even contained a Dadaist sculpture park, as the service elements became a 'tray of individual "objects"' - concrete 'ready-mades' (FIG. 45).[175]

The building material of the Unité, and a material that Le Corbusier was to concentrate on in later works, was *béton brut* - raw concrete. For Le Corbusier concrete had always been the building material of choice. It leant itself to the machine-like functionality and mass production ethos so beloved of the Modernists. With the Unité, however, perhaps due to a loss of faith in the machine after the carnage of World War II, a radical shift is seen from the purist, lean, aesthetic of his early work (FIGS. 46 & 47) to a raw primitivism.[176] The concrete work at the Unité displays this rawness, particularly the 'in-situ' concrete work a low levels with its board marks and wood-grain. In works such as the Chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Haut (Ronchamp, 1954; FIG. 20) the Monastery of Le Tourette, (Lyons, 1957; FIG. 48), and projects at Chandigarh in India (1951-56) (FIGS. 49 & 50), Le Corbusier continued to use concrete in this crude and colossal way. 'Crude' and 'rough' are adjectives used repeatedly to describe Le Corbusier's architecture of this period,[177] but these qualities evidence his search for perennial and unchanging values.[178] The *béton brut* of the Unité was the modern counterpart of the unadorned stone comprising the timeless, monumental Doric of the Parthenon and the Temple of Poseidon at Paestum (FIG. 51).[179]

The critic Lewis Mumford, writing in 1957, described the Unité as 'a piece of sculpture in high relief', executed at the artist's 'flamboyant best'.[180] Indeed, contemporary critical opinion is unanimous about the success of the Unité as sculpture. Coming from New York, where the current trend was for the glass-

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[174] Smithsons, *Ordinariness and Light*, 89.
[175] Ibid, 77.
[176] Banham (1966), 16. Curtis, 417.
[177] Contributors to a contemporary discussion of the Unité in *Architectural Review* commented: 'The bad finish of the pre-cast concrete work is deplorable', 'the poor craftsmanship in the handling of the concrete was very evident', and, 'the constructional methods being almost medieval in their crudity.' – May 1951, pp. 294, 296.
Also, Curtis, 417-435. Interestingly, Curtis refers to the Monastery of le Tourette as 'a collage of "found objects"', 424.
[178] Bullock, 102, 103.
[179] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 134, 135, 139, 140, 147, 204 - 211
[180] Lewis Mumford, *The Highway and the City* (London: Secker & Warburg, revised edn., 1964), 72.

shrouded steel cages of Lever House and the Seagram Building with their inherent reflected light, Mumford was struck by Le Corbusier's attention to relief and texture, a 'rhythm' that produced a vibrant display of light and shadow as the sun crossed the face of the building.[181] For the group of LCC architects assembled by *Architectural Review* to discuss the Unité shortly before its completion, the 'aesthetic conception' was 'beyond dispute.' It was an 'exciting and beautiful building', a 'very lovely building' by 'a very great artist.'[182] However, this judgement was made while considering this 'man-made mountain' from a distance.[183] A consideration the Unité at close-quarters divided opinion. 'The construction methods [were] almost medieval in their crudity', displaying evident 'poor craftsmanship.' The finish of some of the pre-cast concrete work was 'deplorable.' Nevertheless, if for some so much exposed concrete leant a 'dead character' to the building, for others the crudeness of the concrete was effective in avoiding the potential monotony of smooth pre-cast slabs – a 'great contribution to the architectural handling of concrete.'[184] For Mumford, 'considered abstractly as a visual experience' the building was impressive. 'Open to a nearer view' however, 'the coarseness seems carelessness and the strength becomes brutality.'[185] In this essay, 'The Marseille Folly', Mumford saved his most vitriolic criticism for the interior. Echoing the contemporary criticism of Hunstanton, it was an interior that did not pay enough consideration to the human user, and 'since it is architecture and not sculpture that is being considered,' Mumford continued, 'the value of [Le Corbusier's] achievements on the outside is seriously diminished.' The internal streets were merely corridors, with a 'sinister emptiness', 'stressing gloom and innerness'.'[186] The 'bottle-rack' construction of the Unité meant that each apartment was as deep as the Unité itself, creating a gloomy interior: a 'third of the floor space lacks daylight, view, or direct air', an ambience accentuated by the oppressively low ceilings (seven feet) and narrow width of most of the bedrooms (six feet).[187] A lack of privacy for the inhabitants was also a problem for Mumford, as was the denial of life-enriching views of the surrounding natural grandeur by

[181] Mumford, 71-73.
[182] Kenneth Easton et al, 'Le Corbusier's Unite d'Habitation', *AR*, May 1951, p. 296.
[183] Mumford, 70.
[184] Easton, 295, 296.
[185] Mumford, 72.
[186] Mumford, 75, 78.
[187] Mumford, 76, 77.

concrete barriers. And the omission to provide a laundry room for the users was to backfire on Le Corbusier's exercise in image-making: as soon as the residents arrived they immediately began to hang their washing out on the balconies, thus ruining the rhythmic play of surface and texture, shadow and light. As was the case at Hunstanton, the rule with Brutalist buildings at this stage is that they function better as a work of art, empty, without the human user. The contributors to *Architectural Review* also had concerns for the user, worrying that the self-contained nature of the Unité would become insular. Rather than contributing to the social welfare of man, such a self-contained community, where most needs are provided for, would lead to the impoverishment of the wider community, and, as they no longer need to leave the Unité for daily essentials, a narrowing of neighbourly contact for the inhabitants.

Thus, one encounters the same early criticism of Brutalism as made at Hunstanton: the notion that personal artistic statement – image making – took precedence over the needs of the user. Mumford's article is eloquent and insightful on this point: 'Like the old Greek innkeeper who chopped off his guests' legs or stretched their frames to fit his beds, the architect of Unity House [the term Mumford insists on using for the Unité de Habitation] seeks with violence to accommodate human beings to the inflexible dimensions of his monumental edifice…' For Mumford, Unity House was an exercise in human disregard:

> With the audacity of genius, Le Corbusier has succeeded in nullifying almost every advantage he started out with. For here in an open site, a free-standing building is designed as if a minimum of land were available, as if the building had no view worth bothering with, as if the sun and the air and the outlook could be excluded from a third of the living space without loss. Only those who are willing to sacrifice the internal contents of architecture to the external impression, who are ready to deform life, in order, as Emerson said, to create a death which they can call art, can regard Unity House as a model to be praised and copied.[188]

There were also hints that the *béton brut*, rather than being an inspired stroke of artistic genius, was a fortuitous accident. The building was originally intended to be a more conventional, steel-framed structure, but post-war shortages of materials

[188] Mumford, 77, 78.

necessitated the use of cheaper and more widely available concrete.[189] And it seems that much of the rough quality of the *béton brut* was the result of inept workmanship. Peter Collins, writing in the late 1950s sees Le Corbusier as an opportunistic self-publicist as he turned such rawness to his advantage: 'it is but another example of Le Corbusier's flair for creating publicity; of his brilliant technique of verbally transmuting by means of retrospective commentaries, every aspect of his own buildings (whether accidental, unavoidable or positively erroneous) into a manifestation of his inspired originality and creative genius.'[190] Mumford saw Le Corbusier as more of a salesman, using the brutality of the Unité as a gimmick to publicise and sell a product.[191]

Despite such negative contemporary criticism, the 'rugged poetry' of the Unité continued to be lauded in the architectural press and by fellow architects.[192] The 'building stand[s]… in the psychological history of post-war architecture, with an authority granted to few other concepts', wrote Banham in 1966. The wood pattern of the concrete was an expression of Brutalist honesty to materials: solid forms created from liquid could not exist without the use of such wooden formwork.[193] From John Jacobus, writing in 1969, the image of the Unité evoked, not an emotional, but a spiritual response: 'The primary visual impact of the external appearance of the Unité, its striking shaping of abstract form and the creation of a lyrical concantenation of stimulating, suggestive shapes out of supposedly refractory materials – raw, unfinished concrete – is so profound… There is something inescapably spiritual about this secular building.'[194] The architect Philip Johnson in 1963, was enthusiastic about Le Corbusier's use of concrete: 'The way to handle concrete…is the way Corbusier does it with great, deep shadows, extraordinary rough, enormous overhangs, and deep cuts in black and white in a brutal fashion'. He added this caveat however: 'As much as I admire Le Corbusier, my last visit to the Marseilles building was quite a shock because of the ugliness of the rough materials… I had to struggle to enjoy the forms'[195]

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[189] Banham (1966), 16.
[190] Peter Collins, *Concrete: The Vision of a New Architecture* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2nd edn., 2004), 335.
[191] Mumford, 79.
[192] Jürgen Joedicke, *Architecture Since 1945* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 36.
[193] Banham, (1966) 16.
[194] John Jacobus, *Twentieth-Century Architecture: The Middle Years 1940-65* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1966), 59.
[195] John Peter, *The Oral History of Modern Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 31.

A ‘must see’ on the Grand Tour of any aspiring young architect with a motorbike, and any older architect with a plane ticket, the image of the Unité quickly impacted upon architectural practice.[196] ‘Of course I am under the influence of Le Corbusier, as we all are these days,’ confirmed Philip Johnson.[197] The Swiss architect Alfred Roth commented on Le Corbusier’s ‘theory of rough concrete’ in 1961: ‘Here in Europe… among the younger generation they are a little bit blind with these things. Rough concrete has become extremely popular.’[198] Two young British architects, Ivor Smith and Jack Lynn, thought the Unité a solution to the current crisis in British architectural style, and a possible aesthetic for a project in its embryonic stage in the north of England: ‘Jack Lynn and I were of course influenced by Le Corbusier. We were impressed by the robustness of the Marseilles Unité d’Habitation, which seemed more appropriate to Sheffield than the delicacy and thinness of the Festival of Britain.’ [199] Smith was to say late on in his life: ‘Le Corbusier was our greatest inspiration.’[200]

The rough and raw image of the Unité is the paradigm for the development of New Brutalism in Britain. Banham wrote: ‘Behind all aspects of New Brutalism… lies one undisputed fact: the concrete work of Le Corbusier’s Unité’.[201] We have already noted the emotional impact the building had upon the progenitors of New Brutalism in the UK: the Smithsons. Now, rather than the Miesian steel and glass of Hunstanton it was the concrete of Marseilles that would define the image of New Brutalism in the coming decades. ‘Mies is great, but Corb communicates’ wrote the Smithsons.[202] Raw concrete, massively expressed, is now the fourth rule of Brutalism to be added to Banham’s list of 1955, and this type of Brutalism was the only way forward for the image making architect. In 1955 the Smithsons wrote: ‘from the knowledge that Le Corbusier is one of its practitioners (starting with the béton brut of the Unité)’, New Brutalism ‘is the only possible development *for this moment* for the Modern movement.’[203] The Smithsons, despite their zeal for the

[196] John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2007), 32, 33.
[197] In Peter, 31.
[198] In Peter, 34.
[199] Andrew Saint, *Park Hill: What Next?* (London: Architectural Association, 1996), 66.
[200] In *Saving Britain’s Past: Streets in the Sky*, BBC 2, 31 Aug. 2009
[201] Banham (1966), 16.
[202] *Team 10 Primer* (London: Studio Vista, 1968), 32.
[203] ‘The New Brutalism, *AD*, January 1955, 1.

New Brutalism, did not complete a Brutalist building until 1972. But in the early 1950s it was to Marseilles and the Unité that the Sheffield City Treasurer was taken by the City Architect, Lewis Womersley, and two ambitious, young project architects, Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith.[204] Soon the 'robustness of Marseilles' would be transferred to gritty Yorkshire, in the form of Park Hill.

[204] Saint, 13.

CHAPTER 5

CASE STUDY: PARK HILL

The housing development at Park Hill in Sheffield (1961; FIGS. 52 &53) certainly obeys Banham's first rule of Brutalism, that of 'memorability of image'. At his first sight of the structure in 1961, the correspondent of *Architectural Design*, David Lewis, was moved to write that Park Hill was 'one of the most remarkable buildings in England, yet one's first impact-image is hard to accept. It is like a medieval wall.'[205] The passing years have not diminished Park Hill's sensational image. In 1996, the architect and critic John Allan thought it massively geological in nature, an 'inhabited outcrop', an 'escarpment with windows.'[206] Perhaps it is its vicinity to the railway station, but a mention of the development to anyone of passing acquaintance with Sheffield invariably prompts an instant and knowing reply. Park Hill is famous, if not infamous.

Occupying an entire hill overlooking Sheffield city centre and housing 3,500 people at a density of 200 per acre, Park Hill consists of several huge snake-like blocks comprising 995 flats and maisonettes. The blocks increase in height from four to fourteen storeys as they descend the hill, meaning that as the decks cross the development they maintain the same level, and all except one of the decks run out at ground level. The whole development is knitted together by generous, twelve-foot wide galleries that came to be known as 'street-decks'. The construction is of a reinforced concrete frame, similar to the bottle-rack of Marseilles, into which the dwellings are slotted, with concrete balustrades and brick-clad infill that change from a dark to a light colour with the height of the structure. It is important to note that Park Hill is no system-built tower block typical of those thrown up by local

[205] 'Criticism', *AD*, September 1961, pp. 397, 398. Later Lewis describes Park Hill as being like a 'medieval hill-town'.
[206] In Saint, 44.

authorities in the early 1960s to meet housing targets. Indeed, it was a unique project, meticulously designed by a group of visionary architects specifically to address not only the problem of slum clearance, but also the problems posed by the new high-rise developments.[207]

While the project was still at the developmental stage *The Builder* commented on the form of the building: 'Several factors have contributed to the ultimate physical form of the development… to provide a high density scheme, with an ample amount of open space at an economic price.'[208] Perhaps one factor that *The Builder* was unaware of at the time is that the project architects, Ivor Smith (b. 1926) and Jack Lynn (b. 1926) had brought the Constructionist sculptor John Forrester into the team as an aesthetic consultant. According to Jack Lynn, Forrester helped them to 'work out problems of flexibility in combination, of extension outwards from a single theme, of equilibrium.' Less cryptically, Lynn reports that Forrester contributed ideas to the 'modelling and colouring of the facades.'[209] Despite the budgetry constaints placed upon them by Sheffield City Council, therefore, Smith and Lynn were still interested in this public housing project as a work of art – in the building as an image. Nevertheless, the image of Park Hill was a product of budget and programmatic considerations as much as any Brutalist sensibility. As *The Builder* continued: 'The primary economy of the scheme lies in the use of a standard repetitive structure, in reinforced concrete',[210] a point reiterated by *Architectural Design* in their special issue of 1961: 'The budget available was strictly limited and required the maximum possible use of structural repetition as well as minimal finishes.'[211]

For the young Charles Willis, a trainee architect working for Birmingham Corporation in the late 1950s, the image of the half-built Park Hill evoked doubts: 'The design seemed heavy and ugly and they seemed likely to degenerate into tenements if neglected.'[212] The correspondents of *Architectural Review* regarded the repetition and the 'unassuming vigour of the concrete work' positively: 'The team were right to go for unity and continuity… and for regularity throughout.'[213]

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[207] Susan MacDonald, *Preserving Post-War Heritage* (Shaftesbury: Donhead, 2001), 20.
[208] 'High Density Development, Park Hill, Sheffield', *The Builder*, 22 April, 1955, p. 666.
[209] Jack Lynn, 'Park Hill Redevelopment, Sheffield' *RIBA Journal*, December 1962, p. 454
[210] 'High Density Development, Park Hill, Sheffield', 668.
[211] Pat Crooke (ed.) 'Sheffield', *AD*, September 1961, 393
[212] In Gold, 32.
[213] 'Park Hill Housing Sheffield' *AR*, Dec 1961, pp. 403, 404

In the adulatory architectural press of the period negative comments about the overall appearance of Park Hill are hard to find. However, the rough detailing of Park Hill did cause concern. The architecture correspondent of *The Times* reported: 'Some of the architectural details and surface finishes are, it is true, on the grim side, but these are not unsuited to the character of a northern industrial city, and the buildings are saved from being overpowering by the imagination shown.' He went on to describe Park Hill as 'A highly stimulating environment.'[214] The *Architects' Journal* also had to admit: 'the surface quality of the concrete frame is very poor, as are finishes to the ceiling and floor of the decks.[215] For the correspondents of the *Architectural Review*, however, the timeless *béton brut* of Marseilles had found its way to the slopes of the Yorkshire Pennines: the crudeness of the concrete was evidence of deliberate Corbusian under-design. The façade was 'remarkably free from fashiony touches… dateless in its detailing.'[216]

Rather than deliberate under-design, however, the crude appearance of the concrete was also a consequence of poorly developed construction technique. In his account of Park Hill written shortly after its completion, Jack Lynn describes how architect and builder worked hard to achieve a satisfactory finish and how they engaged in a series of experiments to try and improve the the crude surface.[217] In the initial stages of the build, smooth-faced plywood shuttering was used, but this formwork left bubbles and obvious joints. Dissatisfied with the appearance, the architects tried rough-sawn shuttering, hoping that the woodgrain would camouflage these blemishes and imperfections. On the final stages of the build, plastic faced plywood shuttering was used which gave a smoother result. It seems that Smith and Lynn were less concerned with a Dadaist 'as found' aesthetic than the Smithsons. Ceilings and walls that were originally intended to be left un-finished were eventually deemed too ugly, and to mask the imperfections of the concrete the walls were plastered and the ceilings covered in a mixture of paint and vermiculite.[218] Indeed, that the concrete was deemed too harsh in detail is evidenced in the neighbouring development, Smith and Lynn's Park Hill phase II, Hyde Park (1965),

[214] Anon, 'Impressive Planning for Rehousing in Sheffield' *The Times*, 15 September 1961.
[215] 'Park Hill Redevelopment', *AJ*, 23 August 1961, p.272.
[216] 'Park Hill Housing Sheffield' *AR*, Dec 1961, p. 404.
[217] Lynn, 'Park Hill Redevelopment, Sheffield' *RIBA Journal*, December 1962, pp. 447-469.
[218] Lynn, 'Park Hill Redevelopment, Sheffield' (1962), p. 456.

begun just after Park Hill. Here, the lessons of Park Hill were learned, and the finish of concrete was smoother and more refined.[219]

Already in this paper comment has been made about Brutalist architecture being the triumph of an architect's image-vision over the needs of the user. At Park Hill we have noted the the archtects' concern with, and success in, creating a memorable image. For David Lewis in *Architectural Design*, the no-nonsense, stolid image of Park Hill was an expression of Sheffield community spirit: 'it springs from an assessment objective, compassionate, ideological – of the character of the community itself; its structure, its resilience.'[220] And yet, as we shall see, the Modern movement stood accused of destroying the character of communities. At Park Hill, however, Smith and Lynn addressed the preservation of the working class community. By doing so, Brutalism became not just an exercise in Brutalist image making, but an attempt to serve the needs of the user. This is where, for Banham, Brutalism became not just an aesthetic, but an ethic. I will now go on to discuss the success of this attempt at community conservation

'Streets in the Air'

The housing that Park Hill replaced, The Park Estate, or 'Little Chicago' had been designated a slum area, what the *Architects' Journal* described as 'the scrofulous mass of nineteenth-century building', and was in desperate need of improvement.[221] The poor were housed at a density of 400 per acre in back-to-back terraced housing around courtyards containing a standpipe and a WC. It was notorious not only for its squalor and lack of sanitation – in the nineteenth-century 400 people died in a cholera outbreak, including the Lord Mayor - but also for its high levels of crime, as implied by the above moniker.[222] But, as Jack Lynn noted, the Park Estate was also recognized for its 'strong local community sense', engendered by its streets, street-corners and courtyards, its pub, corner shops, and other small businesses.[223] The

[219] Michael Webb, *Architecture in Britain Today* (London: Hamlyn, 1969), 90.
[220] In Pat Crooke (ed.) 'Sheffield', *AD*, September 1961, p.397.
[221] Elain Harwood, *England: A Guide to Postwar Listed Buildings* (London: Batsford, 2nd edn., revised, 2003), 52. 'Park Hill Redevelopment', *AJ*, 23 August 1961, p.272.
[222] Jack Lynn 'Park Hill', in David Lewis (ed.), *The Pedestrian in the City (Architects' Yearbook XI)* (London: Elek Books, 1965), 57.
[223] Lynn, 'Park Hill Redevelopment, Sheffield' 1962, p. 447.

English working-class housing tradition was, according to Lynn, just this type of 'open street approachable from either end, and of which every house was entered by its own front door.'[224] In an age of slum clearance, and high-density housing built on a tight budget, high-rise blocks of flats were increasingly seen as the solution to the problem of low-cost workers' housing.[225] Corbusian-style blocks of flats, however, set in parkland in self-contained isolation, distanced people from points of normal social contact, the pub, the post office and the corner shop. Internally, with their corridors, lifts and stairwells, as Lynn commented, they imposed 'ambiguous' inhuman spaces, 'an indoor no-man's land through which the inhabitants must pass.' In short, such high-rise developments were destroying long-established communities.[226] Lynn concluded that the community spirit of the Park Estate must somehow be preserved: 'A structure of friendliness and mutual aid… had to be salvaged from the demolition.'[227] The problem was how to achieve this in high-rise developments. To solve this, at Park Hill Smith and Lynn decided to adapt one of the access options available for the high-rise: the street-deck.

The main options for solving the problem of access to high-rise development are threefold: stairs or lifts onto landings; internal access corridors (served by stairs or lifts); external balconies. The first is expensive and anonymous; the second gloomy and impersonal; the third is open to the elements and imposes a horizontal aesthetic to the building. Smith and Lynn opted for the third option, but crucially widened it, which they considered a key factor in maintaining community cohesion.

It is hard to disentangle from the literature who was the first to formulate the idea of street-decks. Reading the literature, one is left with the impression that the idea was entirely the Smithsons'. Among young British architects of the 1950s, however, high-level circulation routes were theoretical *de rigueur*. Both the Smithsons and Jack Lynn included street-decks in their competition entries for workers' housing at Golden Lane in the City of London in 1952.[228] The theoretical roots go back at least to the Renaissance. In his notebooks, Leonardo da Vinci

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[224] Ibid, 447. See also, Ivor Smith, 'Architects' Approach to Architecture', *RIBA Journal*, July 1967, p. 274.
[225] High rise developments were unpopular with the tenants, particularly families. In a survey carried out in 1955, two-thirds of residents of tower blocks said they would prefer a 'little house and a garden', 'High Flats' *The Builder*, 4 March 1955, p. 387.
[226] Lynn (1962), 448; Smith (1967), 274.
[227] Lynn, 'Park Hill', in Lewis (ed.), 57, 59. Lynn also negatively comments that 'this form of development enforced a community life from which there could be little escape.'
[228] Banham (1966), 42.

shares his thoughts on town planning, in which he proposes a town with a split-level circulatory system of high and low-level roads. It appears, however, that this system was more about segregation than integration: 'The high level roads are not to be used by wagons or like vehicles but are solely for the convenience of the gentle-folk. All carts and loads for the service and convenience of the common people should be confined to the low-level roads.'[229] The first built example of a deck access circulatory system is at the Spangen Estate, Rotterdam (1918). This prefigures Park Hill in that the deck system links different blocks within the estate. High level circulation routes can also be seen in the theories of Le Corbusier – the Ville Verte of the Radiant City (1928-30), and the Plan for Algiers (1931-32). The Narkomfin Apartments in Moscow (1928-30; Ginzburg & Milinis), with their long, broad balconies, have similarities with Park Hill, both in design and social intent. These also were intended to nurture communities in which the Soviet citizen could fully realise himself.[230]

As noted, perhaps because they won few commissions, the Smithsons were the most prominent British theorisers and proselytisers of the theory. It is to them we must turn, therefore, in order to understand the sociological principals behind the street-deck, before returning to Park Hill to see how the theory was applied.

The Street: 'the enriching sense of neighbourliness'

In addition to considering themselves artists, many architects, particularly of the Modern movement, view themselves also as visionaries and social reformers.[231] If Le Corbusier pronounced: 'Architecture or Revolution. Revolution can be avoided', the Smithsons stated: "Only through construction can Utopias of the present be realised.'[232] Although being avowed modernists, many young architects of the 1950s felt a 'monumental dissatisfaction' with the housing and urban

[229] *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. Irma A. Richter, (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 213, 214.
[230] Saint, 25.
[231] 'Le Corb is a great visionary', Peter Smithson in, Alison Smithson, *Team 10 Primer*, 34.
The Smithsons were called 'Prophets of the movement' of New Brutalism, 'The New Brutalism', *Architectural Design*, (London) January, 1955, p. 1.
J. M. Richards in 'The Next Step' refers (pejoratively) to architects of a previous generation as 'High Priests' and continues the religious metaphor throughout the article – *Architectural Review*, March 1950, pp. 165-168, 179-181.
See also Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning* (New York: Dover, 1987), 150.
[232] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 289. Alison Smithson (ed.), *Team 10 Primer*, 4.

planning of the mid-twentieth century.[233] Rigid systems of zoning, sterile new housing estates, emasculating suburbs, were damaging society by destroying a sense of community and belonging.[234] In 1953 the Smithsons wrote: '"Belonging" is a basic emotional need - its associations are of the simplest order. From "belonging" – identity - comes the enriching sense of neighbourliness', and they added, 'The short narrow street of the slum succeeds where spacious redevelopment frequently fails.'[235] Perhaps influenced by Henderson's photography of East-end street-life, their writings in the early 1950s paint an accurate picture of the working-class 'socially vital life of the street':[236]

> In the suburbs and slums the vital relationship between the house and the street survives, children run around, people stop and talk… the shops are around the corner: *you* know the milkman, *you* are outside *your* house in your street… 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 microcosm world in which the street games change with the seasons and the hours are reflected in the cycle of street activity.'[237]

The problem was how to recreate the community of the city street in a time of austerity, housing shortage and increasing road traffic, and yet remain faithful to the Modernist tenet of high-density housing in which urban sprawl was anathema and the semis of suburbia were viewed with horror.[238] The answer was to put the streets in the air. 'As the builders of Bath decided that the terrace house format would work for them,' they announced, 'we think that the street-deck format will serve for the city housing of today.'[239]

The visual representation of their street-deck theory came in the form of competition entry for a housing project on a bombsite in the City of London:

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[233] Peter Smithson in *ibid*, 82. 'We live in Moron-made cities', Smithsons quoted in 'Future: The New Brutalism' *Architectural Review,* (London) April, 1954, pp. 274, 275.
[234] The Smithsons lamented the 'dwindling identity' of urban areas, and their Team 10 colleague Aldo van Eyck wrote: 'the material slum has gone… but what has replaced it? Just mile after mile of organised nowhere, and nobody feeling he is somebody living somewhere', - Alison Smithson (ed.), *Team 10 Primer,* 30; 44.
[235] Quoted at: < http://www.open2.net/modernity/4_7.htm> and, <http://www.open2.net/modernity/2_4_2.htm > accessed 31/03/2009.
[236] Alison Smithson (ed.), *Team 10 Primer,* 80. Smithsons, *The Shift*, 28.
[237] Smithsons, *Ordinariness and Light,* 43, 45.
[238] see *ibid*, 48, and, Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow*, p. 96, where he advised: 'the wretched existing belts of suburbs must be abolished.'
[239] Smithsons, *Without Rhetoric*, 77.

Golden Lane (unbuilt, 1952) (FIGS. 54 - 56). The project would emulate the tight-knit form of the east-end 'slums', but instead of terraced housing the dwellings would be stacked six storeys high in a megastructure of blocks, and, anticipating Park Hill, 'linked together in a multi-level continuous complex' that snaked across the site. Further blocks would intersect orthogonally.[240] In notes made at the time Peter Smithson wrote: 'Our aim is to create a true street-in-the-air, each 'street' having a large number of people dependent on it for access, and in addition some streets are to be thoroughfares – that is, leading to places – so that they will each acquire special characteristics. Each part of each street-in-the-air will… become a social entity… Streets will become places.'[241] Everything a traditional street provided would be there: shops, post boxes, telephone kiosks etc. So much so that, 'going to the ground would be like a small event, like going to the cinema… a special journey for a special purpose.'[242] At Golden Lane living high would mean living in an idyllic community, 'with added views, privacy… and safety of movement… our immediate neighbours are increased not decreased.'[243] Where the blocks intersected the cross-streets would be of triple height, 'inviting one to linger and pass the time of day' becoming 'places' of chance encounter and casual conversation reminiscent of the East End street.[244] The development would be executed in Unité inspired raw concrete.

The Smithsons' Golden Lane project failed to win the competition, as did Jack Lynn's. The street-deck theory was, however, to assume concrete form at Golden Lane writ large: Park Hill.

The Times called the street decks of Park Hill 'The most remarkable feature of the layout.'[245] To give them a sense of identity, each deck had its own 'street' name, in order to provide a reassuring and familiar reference point for the new residents. Further, the Council took great care to re-house people on a street-by-street basis, keeping neighbour next to neighbour. The blend of maisonette and single bedroom

[240] Alison Smithson (ed.), *Team 10 Primer*, 78. See Banham (1966), 73, for the influence of Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin and Ville Contemporaine on Golden lane.
[241] Smithsons, *The Charged Void*, 86
[242] Smithsons, *Ordinariness and Light*, 59, 35. At Park Hill, due to financial constraints, Smith and Lynn departed from the theories of the Smithsons in this regard. All the amenities were placed a ground level.
[243] Ibid, 34.
[244] Vidotto, 34. Smithsons, *Ordinariness and Light*, 51.
[245] 'Impressive Planning for Rehousing in Sheffield' *The Times*, 15 September 1961.

flat opening onto the street would contribute to a mix of family types so typical of traditional streets, and thus engender a more natural community.[246] The key feature of the decks is that, at twelve feet wide, they are unusually generous (FIG. 57).[247] This was intended to allow space for traditional children's games, for neighbours to come out and chat, and for old people to sit on deck-chairs and pass the time. They would also permit the non-motorised traffic of the traditional street. 'Milk trolleys' are mentioned *ad nauseam* in the literature about Park Hill. They assume almost totemic significance, evoking the garrulous, jolly milkman as the glue that binds the community together.

Lynn stated that Park Hill was designed for the 'dominance of the pedestrian.'[248] He envisaged the decks as promenades, recommending a stroll along the decks, not just to enjoy the view over city and fell, but to experience the changing shapes of the concrete, and the play of light and shade on the facades (FIG. 58). He announced: 'Walking in the city has acquired some of the quality previously found on the fells or on cliff-tops by the sea.'[249] Lynn hoped the residents would walk along the decks past each other's front doors, exchanging pleasantries, to the 'street corners', - the larger spaces at the ends of the blocks where the decks switched sides. Banham optimistically called them 'small piazzas.'[250] Here, the rubbish chutes were located, and Lynn saw them as the equivalent of the village pump where people used to congregate and gossip. The blocks at Park Hill are not, however, self-contained, as in the theory of the Smithsons at Golden Lane or the practice of Le Corbusier at Marseille, and, thus, there are no shops or post offices 'in the air' to which one could stroll. The residents have to use the lifts or stairs to descend to ground level in order to obtain their victuals.

Park Hill: Critical Response

This experimental community-building exercise at Sheffield was initially judged an outstanding success. *The Times* reported that 'Sheffield has become an object of

[246] Smith (1967), 274, 275.
[247] See the copy of the DCMS decision on Park Hill in Appendix 1, p.1
[248] Jack Lynn, 'Park Hill', in Lewis (ed.) *Architects Yearbook 11*, 1965, p. 65.
[249] Lynn, 'Park Hill', in Lewis (ed.) *Architects Yearbook 11*, 1965, p. 69.
[250] (1966), 132.

pilgrimage', as young architects came from all over the world to see what Banham called '[a] most imaginative and advanced community building gesture.'[251] Banham saw the development not as a group of blocks but one building, one community bound together by the street-decks. David Lewis in *Architectural Design* was almost dewy-eyed in his appraisal of the community preserving ethos behind Park Hill. The kick-about he describes on the tarmac of one of the community areas assumes emblematic status of the successful transferal of sacred community from squalid slum to modern high-rise.[252] The lauditory, if patronizing, tenor continued in much of the contemporary architectural press. Park Hill is presented as a much longed-for working-class social Utopia, the decks populated by bosomy ladies in hair rollers and floral tabards swapping gossip at the rubbish chutes; cloth-capped steelworkers mending bicycles while discussing the prospects for the 'Blades'; and tank-topped scamps playing with Dinky toys.[253]

Writing in 1962, Jack Lynn, as one might expect, was equally positive about the community-preserving prospects of Park Hill. 'On the whole', he writes, 'the comments of the residents are very favourable', noting that the residents especially liked being so close to the town centre. He also comments how the new tenants had taken to placing pieces of coloured linoleum outside their front doors. Lynn appears a little disappointed here. A small, bare concrete threshold had been deliberately left in the hope that the residents would polish or whiten it, in the manner of the brick doorsteps of their previous terraced houses. Nevertheless, Lynn saw it as a sign that the residents were feeling at home - the pieces of lino were means of self-expression and possession. Lynn does mention a couple of problems, however, one of which, coming from the architect of the social experiment, is astonishing. Firstly, he notes that the bare concrete led to a noisy environment. As we have seen, the development was designed solely for pedestrian use, yet the footsteps echoing around the harsh surfaces were leading to problems, especially for night workers. Then, writing of the new residents, almost as an aside, Lynn mentions that 'they see less of their neighbours than they did in the older areas they left'.[254] After one year, then, the architect of Park Hill was already noting problems with the major social intention behind the scheme. It appears that the residents were not

[251] 'Park Hill Housing Sheffield' *AR*, Dec 1961, p. 403.
[252] 'Criticism', *AD*, September 1961, p. 397.
[253] Banham (1962), 134.
[254] Lynn (1962), 461.

promenading along the decks to enjoy the views and enjoy chance converstations, or renewing acquaintances at the rubbish chutes, but were using the decks as thoroughfares to get to the nearby town centre.

A lone voice amongst the critics was the editor of *Architectural Design's* special issue on Sheffield, Pat Crooke. Again, for the most part, Crooke writes positively of the achievement at Park Hill, but he is wary of excessive claims for the estate's community conserving capabilities. Of Park Hill's much-vaunted circulatory system, he wrote:

> [this] ambivalent, harsh framework of routes connecting thresholds… provides no functional location whatever. Only front doors line the deck, and it promotes no grouping of neighbours on the scale of hanging out washing, mending a bike, buying a newspaper: the errands that can really bring neighbours together. The decks seem to stop just short of providing a real social dimension to the dwelling.'[255]

The crude Brutalist aesthetic is clearly a factor here, as Crooke mentions the 'harsh framework of routes.' Even in Reyner Banham's contemporary eulogy, there were murmurings of doubt about scale and the 'plain and blunt' detailing - 'not all of it will stand very intensive study in isolation.'[256] And the simple fact of the Yorkshire climate – the blocks were designed so that the living-rooms always enjoyed the sunny aspect, meaning that the decks were always in shade – was also a factor in deciding whether residents would choose to linger on the exposed decks.

Such doubts were dismissed, and throughout the early 1960s among the architectural critical establishment Park Hill remained a paragon of Brutalist image making and community conservation. Of the harsh detailing, such things were said to 'dwindle into insignificance' when one considered the whole image – from a distance.[257] Any problems with the development were glossed. Typical of this attitude is an article on Park Hill in the November 1967 issue of *Architectural Review,* the year in which Park Hill won the Department of Environment 'Good Housing' award.[258] The discrepant nature of theis article is remarkable. It begins with the customary plaudits: Park Hill is 'the finest achievement of the 50s in

[255] 'Sheffield', *AD,* September 1961, p. 403.
[256] *Guide to Modern Architecture* (1962), 134.
[257] Banham (1962), 134.
[258] 'The City Regions: Sheffield Park Hill', *AR,* November 1967, pp. 350-352.

community building', in which 'Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith were inspired to penetrate beyond the surface of the Unité's concrete to the essence of community thinking.' The article then goes on to mention 'an all too rare case of feed-back' – a survey of tenants carried out by Park Hill's first resident, the social worker Joan Demers. The survey proved, according to *Architectural Review,* that the street-decks were well-liked. But in reality, according to Demers's survey, only a little over 32% of the residents expressed approval of the decks – and the reason why? Because they were 'dry and sheltered.' Only a meagre 9% said they liked to stand on the decks and take in the view, and a paltry 4% remembered that the decks made it possible to talk to the neighbours. Even the *Review* had to admit, 'this discounts a good deal of romantic nonsense.' The *Review* ascribed the problem to a 'lack of doorstep space', reporting that 'even the doormat has been suppressed.' Due to the uniform and repetitive nature of the dwellings and their doorways - they were not recessed and were without porches – despite the squares of linoleum, residents found it hard to identify with the space outside their front door. According to this account, it appears that, notwithstanding the best efforts of Smith and Lynn, this space, the social experiment of the broad street deck, was failing, and the architects had created yet another 'indoor no-man's land through which the inhabitants must pass.'[259] In radio interviews carried out by BBC Radio Sheffield in 1975, the community creating intent of Park Hill is not mentioned. Rather, Park Hill's proximity to the shops was deemed important, as were the play-areas for the children. Athough according to a survey two-thirds of the residents liked the flats themselves, residents said they said they would 'rather live in a nice house' with a garden.[260]

Demers's survey did elicit one majority opinion, this time on the image of Park Hill. Although they were happy with the internal quality of the flats, a massive 70% of the residents registered disapproval of the external appearance of Park Hill. They said that it gave a false impression of the attributes of their individual homes, and that the repetitive nature of the design produced the feeling of living in a barracks. The *Review* itself had to acknowledge: 'only at ground level does the concrete come to life.' Thus, here the Brutalist, monotonous 'warehouse aesthetic'

[259]Lynn (1962), 448.
[260] BBC Radio Sheffield Interview, 1975. http://www.bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/content/articles/2007/12/31/park_hill_audio_video_feature.shtml> accessed 02/07/2009

massively deployed, was deadening and de-individualising, as the residents were racked up in the raw structural frame. Even the *Review* had to admit: 'Direct expression without prettiness can be successful only in smaller units', and it praised the earlier Hemsworth Estate (1955) nearby, which had 'its austerity mitigated by the delightful humanity of their landscaped grouping.' [261] We have already noted that the excessively crude finish of the concrete was rectified and refined at Hyde Park. Now, as the *Review* recognized, the cliff-like image of Park Hill was harsh, monotonous and depressingly horizontal. This too was emended with the more compact and vertical Hyde Park.

After the squalor of the Park Estate, however, many residents were overjoyed with their new, modern, well-equipped flats. One of the original residents, Sylvia Langan, commented: 'We moved to 130 Norwich Row on New Years Day 1961 and I thought the flats were absolutely fabulous. We had our own bathroom and separate toilet, a waste disposal unit in the sink.' Gratifying to Messrs Lynn and Smith no doubt, Ms Langan comments, not only upon the community preserving aspects of Park Hill, but also upon the view:

> 'There was a fantastic view of Sheffield - when England won the World Cup we could see crowds everywhere from our vantage point. When our family first moved in the flats there were lots of people we knew because we'd all moved together from the same area. There was a big social life - all the children played together and stayed out late because it was safe.' [262]

Ms Langan's remarks are perhaps tinged with nostalgia, and she goes on to hint at problems, some that arose in the seventies and eighties: 'I loved it on the flats. My older sister didn't like it because she liked to have a garden and stuff, but my mum and dad lived there for about 20 years, until the early 1980s. They eventually came to not like living there, and they left just before they died.'

The oft-interviewed resident, the ex-caretaker Grenville Squires, is equally positive about Park Hill:

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[261] 'The City Regions: Sheffield Park Hill', *AR*, November 1967, p.351.
[262] 'Park Hill', BBC South Yorkshire, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/content/articles/2007/07/25/park_hill_sylvia_langan_feature.shtml> accessed 21/07/09.

> I remember when we moved here 20-odd years ago, by the end of the first week everyone knew who we were. It was that kind of place. A lot of people who wanted it torn down had never even been here, they didn't know how the place worked. People would sit outside on the landings on dining room chairs chatting to their neighbours about nothing in particular. You had to be pretty aloof not to feel included. We moved out because I didn't want people knocking on my door to tell me water was coming through the ceiling at three in the morning…[263]

Even admirers of Park Hill have had doubts about the streets as community catalysts, however.[264] We have noted the early comments of Jack Lynn regarding the neighbours seeing less of each other than previously in the slums of 'Little Chicago'. The scarce evidence that exists from the residents is anecdotal and inconclusive regarding the success of the social intent behind the decks. Residents comment positively on the internal quality of the flats, and (repeatedly) about their proximity to the city centre, just 10 minutes walk away. Only occasional comment is made about neighbourliness. 'Evidence' from the architectural press amounts to assertion.[265]

If the decks did fail, then it is perhaps because they lacked, though design failings and financial constraints, certain key features of traditional streets. Commenting in 1996, Ivor Smith regretted the lack of windows looking out onto the decks.[266] Windows allow the type of 'surveillance' that became a significant concept with the publication of Oscar Newman's book *Defensible Space* (1972). Surveillance not only increases a sense of security – one can see intruders and keep an eye on the children playing outside - but also contributes to neighbourliness. The fact that one can see who is passing is positive: potential intruders turn out to be neighbours and one can choose to go out and chat. The windows create an intermediate space between public and private, and thus add a sense of identification with the area outside the front door. The residents clearly wanted to personalise and

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[263] Sarah Freeman, '£130m later, will anyone love Park Hill flats?' *Yorkshire Post*, 7 February 2008, <http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/video/130m-later-will-anyone-love.3753125.jp> accessed 18/07/09.
[264] Saint, 32.
[265] Interestingly, in their decision approving the listing of Park Hill (this will be discussed later), the Department of Culture Media and Sport praise the street decks as community catalysers, remarking that Park Hill has 'been regularly studied by sociologists ever since it opened, and is one of the most successful of its type.'(p. 2) Despite extensive research I have found none of these surveys. Andrew Saint's concise account of Park Hill, which is comprehensive and authoritative, makes no mention, and the DCMS report itself references only trade journals. See Appendix 1.
[266] In Saint, 66.

identify with the space outside the front door, as can be seen from Lynn's observation in 1962 about the coloured pieces of linoleum. With the uniformity of the doorways, however, as the *Review* noted in 1967, this sense of identification is lacking at Park Hill. Writing thirty years later, John Allan was astonished at the absence of exterior 'humanising tenant embellishment', as was Dan Cruickshank. [267] As he passes through the few inches that constitute the doorway, the tenant at Park Hill moves instantly from a highly personal space to 'a no man's land'.[268] The tenant has no choice but to share that space. Ideally, gardens, driveways, or even yards create intermediate spaces on lower density estates - spaces that intrinsically promote neighbourly contact.[269] In a survey carried out in 1955, two-thirds of the residents of high-rise flats said that they would prefer a 'little house and a garden.'[270] Many casual conversations are initiated while gardening or washing the car. Such spaces are clearly impossible at Park Hill, but the inclusion of sizeable windows would have contributed to a sense of possession, and thus use, of the deck space immediately beyond.

The decks also lack a another fundamental element to a street: varied amenities. Streets function as areas of casual contact not because they contain a certain number dwellings, and not because they are thoroughfares (this would make them roads) but because of these mixed amenities. Many chance encounters and ensuing conversations take place in the queue for the Post office or the butchers. They may have had their rubbish chutes, but, unlike the Unité, to go to the shops, the hairdressers, the pub or the Post Office, the resident of Park Hill had to descend from the decks, usually by lift, to ground level, and mix, not with inhabitants of your own street, but impersonally with the other 3500 inhabitants of the blocks.

I can contrast this to the working-class area of Stoke on Trent where I grew up. The Park Estate in Burslem was an area entirely of terraced housing, some rented, others owner-occupied. Within 50 yards of my home there was a corner shop. Within a radius of 450 yards there was a chemist, a butcher, a post-office, a chip-shop, a draper, an oatcake shop and two more corner shops. This pattern was

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[267] In Saint, 44. Cruickshank: 'the strips of lino are still there, but the appropriation of the deck space has gone no further', 58.
[268] Mike Bower, Leader of Sheffield City Council, commented that the flats have 'a front door that opens directly on to the street' - in Cruickshank, 60.
[269] This space increases in proportion to one's wealth, from non-existence at Park Hill, through the gardens of the suburban semi, to the immense driveways of the stately home.
[270] 'High Flats', *The Builder*, 4 March 1955, p. 387.

repeated throughout the estate. These had not been imposed by planners - indeed some were conversions of terraced houses which retained the original parlour windows. Such close proximity increased the possibility of chance encounters with ones immediate neighbours, and thus, neighbourliness.[271] The shopping precinct, the supermarket, the car and the out-of-town retail parks are to blame for destruction of community as much as any other factor. Further, traditional streets and communities grow organically over time. Amenities spring up as and when there is a need. The decks and ground-level amenites of Park Hill are artificially imposed by the architects to a rigid plan. By the early 2000s, even many of the units in the shopping precinct were empty. Perhaps it was the very proximity to the town centre that was the Park Hill street's downfall as the decks became mere thoroughfares.

Furthermore, it is not only the street-facing front doors with their polished thresholds that contributed to the community of 'Little Chicago'. As noted, the slums Park Hill replaced backed onto courtyards with communal facilities. This produced a limited range of close neighbours, but closer, more intense relationships (inevitable, if not desirable, if one is sharing a toilet). A more complex hierarchy of relationships was thus created: house, *courtyard*, street, town. Denys Lasdun tried to recreate this courtyard effect in a high rise development at Bethnal Green (Keeling House, 1959; FIGS. 59 & 60). This 'cluster' block – a slab block divided into four parts which meet each other obliquely - consisted of 'two up - two downs' piled vertically on top of each other. In an attempt to recreate the neighbourliness of the East-end, the maisonettes were linked by small-scale balconies that looked across to other similar balconies, all of which led to 'mini-backyards' by the lift shafts.[272] The blocks, however, were not successful, being 'condemned as a social failure though a sculptural triumph'[273] although they have recently been refurbished and are now desirable dwellings for private clients.

Finally, returning to Park Hill, the aesthetic contributes to the failure of the decks. Cruickshank in his advocative piece on Park Hill called them 'dispiriting places.'[274] They create a harsh environment. The coarse concrete – 'plain and blunt' - the low ceiling, the chunky, square balustrades (not to mention the wind

[271] Christopher Day, *Places of the Soul* (London: Architectural Press, 2nd edn., 2004), 245.
[272] Gold, 208-11.
[273] In Powers, 90.
[274] Cruickshank, 58.

whipping off the Pennines on the always shady side of the blocks) do not create an environment where one wants to linger.[275]

DECLINE

As time has passed, critical opinion of Park Hill by the architectural establishment has become less positive. Michael Webb's 1969 review of the development is non-comittal. Without offering any evidence he states that the residents 'seem generally satisfied', while admitting that the 'repetitive horizontal development' is 'coarse' and 'bleak' and 'has weathered badly' and may be viewed by some as a 'Kafkaesque nightmare.' Nevertheless, echoing Banham et al, the coarse 'detailing is absorbed within' the image – 'the total composition.'[276] Anthony Jackson in 1970 again emphasises image: Park Hill as 'an original urban image', dominating the city, which at night provided a 'sparkling backdrop.' Jackson is, however, the most caustic of the critics encountered so far: 'Unfortunately, as built, they are also ugly and ill-shaped with doorways stunted in scale, and quasi-doorsteps. Swept with wind and echoing with noise, they have a meaner character than the East End slums of London whose street life was much admired by the Smithsons and some of their associates.' Jackson sees Park Hill as the architectural establishment's reaction against the Scandinavian humanised architecture of the early fifties which bore British fruit in the 'Contemporary' style at the Festival of Britain: 'Overeacting to a supposed prissiness associated with the architecture of the older generation, the architects have sought a tough aesthetic that has simply degenerated into squalor.'[277]

Robert Maxwell, writing in 1972, saw Park Hill as an example of how the public are excluded from the contract between client and architect. At Park Hill 'ordinary people' had a social experiment imposed upon them by 'experts', albeit with the best of sociological intentions. Maxwell does not comment on the success or otherwise of the experiment; rather, like many critics he returns to Park Hill's success as an image. Praising their tough dignity, their under-design - 'void of "the shallow pathos of any trimmings"' - he writes: 'Like Regency terraces at bath or

[275] Banham, *Guide to Modern Architecture*, 134.
'Daily life is full of little activities that, in welcoming surroundings, encourage meetings between strangers. In Hostile surroundings they won't.' – Day, 250.
[276] Webb, 88-90.
[277] Jackson, 188.

Bristol, they produce magnificent skylines… Uncomfortably we are impressed by their grandiosity. As architecture, they are formidable. Can we deny that they embody… a tradition of rhetoric which goes back through Le Corbusier to Fourier and through Nash to Ledoux.' Maxwell supplies the reason for his discomfort: 'Yet we must wonder if they constitute a human environment for ordinary people… Unlike the Regency terraces, they were not freely chosen by the people who live in them.'[278] Thus, here again 'memorabilty of image' resurfaces as the defining element of Brutalism, and doubts continue over the suitablity of Brutalist architecture for the human user.

Jackson had commented on the 'squalor' of Park Hill in 1970, just nine years after completion and three years after the development received the DoE Good Housing award. Throughout the seventies and eighties as the steelworks and mines closed, the comunities associated with such industries disintegrated, and, in times of economic constraints, Sheffield City Council failed to invest adequately in the maintenance of the estate. Park Hill became a symbol of decline and inner-city deprivation, 'horribly dystopian as it was once boldly utopian.'[279] Horror stories abounded: it became associated with drug gangs and muggings, and even sniper-style air-gun shootings of children in a nearby primary school playground. Local butcher Royce Dixon, whose shop looks out onto Park Hill commented in 1996: 'It's a fortress all right. Kids are always throwing things from the battlements. Televisions, bits of concrete, you name it ... Quite a few of the flats are empty and the council doesn't seem in too much of a hurry to fill them. And the concrete is crumbling. Men abseil down the buildings, removing the loose concrete about twice a year.'[280]

The scarce evidence from residents confirms this picture of decline. Christine Karma, a tenant for 18 years, commented in 1996: 'The people who first lived here kept the estate in an immaculate condition, but they have grown old and moved away. Now the estate is troubled by vandals and it has become run down.'[281]

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[278] Maxwell, 20.
[279] Stephen Bayley, 'You Want the Brutal Truth? Concrete Can be Beautiful', *The Guardian*, Sunday 2 March 2008,< http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/mar/02/architecture.communities >accessed 12/06/2009.
[280] Esther Leach and Charlie Bain, 'Sheffield's Fortress Flats Stand the Test of Time' *Independent*, Monday, 2 September 1996 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/sheffields-fortress-flats-stand-the-test-of-time-1361437.html > accessed 21/05/09.
[281] Ibid.

The increasing unpopularity of Park Hill is evidenced by this single fact: by the early 2000s only six of Park Hill's over 1000 residents had exercised the right to buy.[282]

PARK HILL: CONSERVATION?

By the mid nineteen-nineties Park Hill seemed to be in terminal decline. During the same period, however, English Heritage and pressure groups such as the Twentieth-century Society were becoming increasingly concerned that few post-war buildings were being considered for listing and consequent conservation. According to these groups, a large amount of British historical heritage was being bulldozed because the significance of these buildings was not yet understood or appreciated. In particular, concern was expressed that few post-war housing developments were being preserved. Although much post-war public housing had a reputation for poor design and construction, and associations with deprivation and crime, some of the housing estates of the 1950s and 60s were emblems of a Welfare State zeitgeist, of a renewed vigour to create clean and healthy workers' homes driven by an altruistic social philosophy. It was argued that these symbols should be preserved; they were just as significant and worthy of conservation as those symbols of wealth and power: the great edifices of Church, State and landed gentry.[283] In the mid-1990s, however, listed public housing was rare. 'If you live in a listed, post-war housing estate, you live in an exceptional place', commented English Heritage in their literature of 1996, *Something worth Keeping*, continuing, 'Yours is one of less than twenty listed modern housing developments in the country – a status only bestowed on buildings of special architectural or historic importance.'[284] English Heritage began a process of identifying certain post-war housing estates that would meet their stated criteria for listing. In considering urban housing English Heritage stated: 'Key considerations will be architectural interest; intactness of design;

[282] Christine Rose, 'Dealing With Mega-scale: Park Hill', *Cabe: Design Task Group 3 & 4 Report* Sheffield, 17 February 2004,< http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/hmr02.pdf > p. 13; accessed 16/07/09.
[283] Rosalind Bayley, *Celebrating Special Buildings: The Case for Conserving Postwar Public Housing* (London: The Twentieth-Century Society, 2002), 15.
[284] English Heritage, *Something Worth Keeping*, < http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.19027> accessed, 2/08/09.

whether the design was influential; or a particularly good example of a development in housing.'[285]

In their literature the Twentieth-Century Society list similar criteria: 'Historical and Architectural Significance; Quality of design [they then confusingly add 'i.e. aesthetic judgement']; Quality in terms of long-term performance; Attitudes of residents [if the development is fundamentally disliked – it should not be listed]; Future feasibility [may involve change of use]; History of change to the development' - how much it has been altered since the original design.[286]

A building that for English Heritage and the Twentieth-century Society fulfilled their criteria was Park Hill, and in late 1996 application was duly made to the Department of Culture Media and Sport to approve the listing of Park Hill. Although the Labour-controlled Sheffield City Council voted in favour of the move, opposition members expressed reservations, describing Park Hill as 'an eyesore that deserves the same fate planned for other council follies' – demolition. [287] Nevertheless, much to the amazement of the citizens of Sheffield, Park Hill was recognised as an 'exceptional place' of 'special architectural importance' when on 22 December 1998 the DCMS granted Park Hill Grade II* listed status – making it the biggest listed building in Europe. The DCMS summed up the reasons for their decision thus:

> Park Hill is of international importance. It is the first built manifestation of a widespread theoretical interest in external access decks as a way of building high without the problems of isolation and expense encountered with point blocks. Sheffield and the London County Council had the only major local authority departments designing imaginative and successful public housing in the 1950s, and this is Sheffield's flagship. The decks were conceived as a way of recreating the community spirit of traditional slum streets with the benefit of vehicular segregation… the impact of the long, flat-topped structure rising above the city centre makes for one of Sheffield's most impressive landmarks. The result was Britain's first completed scheme of post-war slum

[285] English Heritage, *The Modern House and Housing* < http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/upload/pdf/Domestic_4_Modern_House_and_Housing.pdf?1248062831> accessed 1/08/09.
[286] Rosalind Bayley, 7.
[287] 'Lofty idea or just pure folly?', *Sheffield Star*, 21 October 2003 http://www.thestar.co.uk/news/Lofty-idea-or-just-pure.678723.jp accessed 12/08/09.

> clearance and the most ambitious inner-city development of its time. Listing NGR: SK3606487093.[288]

The DCMS, then, stress the historical importance of Park Hill as a monument to a social theory of the mid-1950s. Later reports from English Heritage not only stress the historical significance of the street-decks, but also the Brutalist concrete aesthetic, Park Hill being one of the first developments in England to use concrete in such a crude manner:

> Park Hill's significance comes from a very strong architectural design which, amongst other features, is expressed through… its exposed concrete structure… It is also a very important part of what makes the building special. The concrete structure and balustrades form the grid which defines the entire form of the building and embodies the Brutalist ethos of the scheme as a whole.'[289]

Importantly, both the DCMS and English Heritage indirectly refer to the 'memorability of image' of Park Hill. Park Hill is one of Sheffield's 'most impressive landmarks' an 'iconic landmark', although, especially in the light of the 'eyesore' comment of the opposition members of Sheffield Council, it is not stated whether this 'iconic land mark' is aesthetically pleasing.[290]

With the achievement of listed status it appeared that a bright new future was opening up for the residents of Park Hill. But simply granting listed status does not guarantee the financial future of a building, and at first the development remained in dilapidated limbo, awaiting funds.[291] It became increasingly hard to find tenants – 10% of Park Hill was permanently vacant, with the figure approaching 50% in the less popular north block.[292] The idea was mooted that one of the blocks could be sold to Sheffield University for student accommodation.[293] In 2003 the City Council was still 'confident a secure future can be found for Park

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[288] See Appendix 1. This portion was accessed from 'Lofty idea or just pure folly?', *Sheffield Star*, 21 October 2003 < http://www.thestar.co.uk/news/Lofty-idea-or-just-pure.678723.jp> accessed 12/08/09.
[289] English Heritage, *Park Hill, Sheffield* < http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.20604 accessed 07/07/09.
[290] Ibid.
[291] 'The major drawback of the listing system is that money is not made available automatically' – Rosalind Bayley, 13
[292] Rose, p. 12; < http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/hmr02.pdf > accessed 21/07/09.
[293] Harwood, 52.

Hill', and in that year a 'strategic partnership' of private and public bodies was set up to provide funds and plan the future for Park Hill.[294] The way ahead would not be straightforward, however, and despite listing, there was still the possibility of demolition. Christine Rose of Sheffield City Council conceded: 'There is a risk that the scheme will founder in planning, through an inability to find a suitable developer partner or through inadequate funding. A 'plan B' exists, but it would certainly be regarded as a last resort. This would be to go back to English Heritage and negotiate either complete or partial demolition.'[295] A DCMS report of November 2004, however, shows that planning were becoming more concrete in nature and the threat of demolition was fading. Future plans were,

> designed to achieve the extensive refurbishment of Park Hill… The nearly 1,000 units of council accommodation for rent will be converted into one third for sale, one third for rent and one third for commercial use. Resources of around £3.6 million from the Government's Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder initiative will allow the relocation of the existing tenants and businesses, some preparatory demolition of unlisted buildings, and commencement of environmental works. Pathfinder resources will allow this early stage work to be completed, prior to investment from English Partnerships and a private developer/Registered Social Landlord consortium. The desired vision is to create a mixed use iconic building on the most prominent site in Sheffield.[296]

Somewhat paradoxically, then, although the DCMS decision to preserve Park Hill was based on the its iconic status of an experiment in community building, with only a third of the flats available for rent, the existing community would be broken up.

The attainment of listed status and such forward planning only served to intensify debate over the image of Park Hill among the residents and rulers of Sheffield. Plans for the future of Park Hill still needed approval from the council, and the appearance of the building was a positive debating point for the opponents - mainly Conservative and Liberal Democrat - of Park Hill. In 2005 Conservative

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[294] 'Lofty idea or just pure folly?', *Sheffield Star*, 21 October 2003 <http://www.thestar.co.uk/news/Lofty-idea-or-just-pure.678723.jp> accessed 12/08/09.
[295] Rose, p. 14; < http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/hmr02.pdf > accessed 21/07/09.
[296] Government Response to ODPM Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee Report on the Role of Historic Buildings in Urban Regeneration < http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/govresponsodpmCm6420.pdf> p. 2. accessed 5/06/09.

Councillor Anne Smith called it a 'monumental monstrosity' and 'a blot on Sheffield's landscape' and said that it should not have been listed. She urged: 'Apply to get it de-listed then knock it down and use it as hardcore for motorways.'[297] The Liberal Democrats were no less vehement. As plans were approved in 2006, Councillor John Hesketh commented: 'Park Hill is not quality building, despite its listed status… Park Hill is an eyesore that long ago should have been torn down, not refurbished.' Councillor Bob McCann added: 'The vast majority of people in Sheffield will be disappointed… It means that the prospect of the much-loathed Park Hill site hanging over Sheffield for another 30 to 40 years is one step closer.'[298] This loathing of Park Hill also spread outside the city limits. A poll carried out by the Channel 4 programme 'Demolition' placed Park Hill at number five on a list of 'Britain's most hated buildings'.[299] Eyesore' is the word used most commonly by critics of the aesthetic of Park Hill. In an online survey run by *The Star* in 2009 it is the epithet that occurs most frequently. The majority of the respondents to the survey wanted Park Hill to be demolished, viewing it as a blight on the city of Sheffield.[300] Only those who appeared to have had knowledge of architectural theory wanted Park Hill preserved, as an example of community building, and no one commented positively on its appearance. It is interesting that most of the people who comment negatively on Park Hill live outside the development. As *The Star* commented, its brooding presense over the gateway to the city gives visitors the first impression of a city caught in a 60s 'concrete jungle time-warp.'[301] It appears that in 2009, for the majority of Sheffield residents the image of Park Hill is a superannuated embarrassment.

In 2005, the property developer Urban Splash was taken on by the strategic partnership to develop and implement detailed plans for the refurbishment of Park

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[297] 'Flatten the Flats Plea' The Star, 22 September 2005, < http://www.thestar.co.uk/news/Flatten-the-flats-plea-.1197606.jp> accessed 3/07/2009.
[298] 'Approval for Upgrade of an Eyesore', *The Star*, 22 August 2006, <http://www.thestar.co.uk/news/Approval-for-upgrade-of-39an.1711568.jp> accessed 3/07/2009.
[299] According to *The Guardian,* it was dubbed 'San Quentin', *Guardian Unlimited* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/pictures/image/0,8543,-10304251730,00.html, accessed 05/04/2009. Channel 4 Television, 'Demolition' < http://www.channel4.com/life/microsites/D/demolition/> accessed, 02/04/2009
[300] 'You say: "Knock down Park Hill"' *The Star***,** 03 March 2009, http://www.thestar.co.uk/headlines/You-say-Knock-down-Park.5031252.jp > accessed 7/07/2009.
[301] It is interesting that in the *The Full Monty*, (1997) a film set in Sheffield with themes of social deprivation and community breakdown, Park Hill only appears in the opening credits as a symbol of 1960s regeneration and optimism. The producers preferred locations such as council estates consisting of semis, and terraced housing to evoke an atmosphere of urban decline. Dir. Peter Catteneo, Redwave Films.

Hill. Urban Splash has extensive experience in the regeneration of redundant inner-city sites. Specialising in old industrial buildings, such as mills and warehouses, it has successfully completed projects in the north of England, particularly in and around Greater Manchester. In 2001 Urban Splash won the RIBA Award for Architecture for the redevelopment of the derelict Britannia Mills in Castlefield, a former Victorian emery cloth factory, and in 2003, the same award (and numerous others) for a social housing project in the same area, Chorlton Park.[302]

Viewing Urban Splash's promotional video for Park Hill, the word that immediately comes to mind is 'funky.'[303] Against a pop soundtrack, young people are shown enjoying the environs of Park Hill. Rainbow colours dominate as, sipping red wine, the kids picnic in the newly landscaped grounds. They drink alfresco cappuccinos at chic cafés; frequent trendy bars, and occasionally take time out for a game of basketball. For the less energetic there is an art gallery. Colour is also the theme on the decks, repainted and furnished with modern deckchairs and contemporary fixtures and fittings. This multicoloured vision of middle-class youthful vibrancy is in stark contrast to Park Hill's current image as working-class, grey and moribund.

Placing the publicity on one side, Urban Splash's plans for Park Hill involve reducing the number of units down to around 850, while still maintaining the original refurbishment concept of a third for rent and the rest for private dwellings or commercial use. The building will be stripped to its skeletal concrete frame, Smith, Lynn and Forrester's original brick infills will be removed, to be replaced by coloured glass and metal panels (FIG. 61). With its relatively light concrete grid, its façade more void than solid, Park Hill was never a 'heavy' building, but these rhythmic coloured planes will serve to lighten the aspect further. The 'medieval' fortress-like wall of Park Hill will be breached, and a huge gateway into the development will be created, allowing better access and opening out the scheme. In 2002, the Twentieth-century Society had called for a 'bold restoration', and this seemed to be it.[304]

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[302] Urban Splash, 'Britannia Mills', < http://www.urbansplash.co.uk/documents/FS_BritanniaMills.pdf > accessed 22/07/2009. 'Chorlton Park', <http://www.urbansplash.co.uk/documents/FS_ChorltonPark.pdf > accessed 11/09/09.
[303] Urban Splash, 'Park Hill Sheffield' < http://www.urbansplash.co.uk/projects/park-hill > accessed 08/07/2009.
[304] Rosalind Bayley, 29.

After much argument at Sheffield City Council, the plans were approved in 2006 and on 7th December 2007 work commenced - just as the 'credit crunch' began to bite. Since then the project has been dogged by financial problems and work has stuttered. Funds earmarked for the future have had to be brought forward to allow the work to continue. From an initial estimated cost of betweeen £20-30m in the early 2000s,[305] the projected cost is now between £140-150m. Work is progressing, however. At the time of writing (2009) the north block was skeletal, reduced to its concrete grid, and work is beginning on the other blocks – all overseen by English Heritage.

In 'Something Worth Keeping' of 1996, English Heritage had stated: 'Listing also brings new responsibilities… to ensure [a building's] special qualities remain unspoilt.'[306] For English Heritage, the 'special qualities' of Park Hill are the street-decks and the crude concrete frame. These are the very 'essence' of the building and must be preserved: 'Our approach is to respect the original design intention for this building as much as possible and to pay special attention to these aspects. By comparison, the external cladding and the internal partitioning were of secondary interest.' Of the concrete grid, English Heritage have said that it is the 'focus of the conservation efforts' and have provided a grant of of £500,000 specifically for its repair.[307] They are taking great care to reproduce the crudeness of the original concrete, painstakingly recreating the board-marks and the woodgrain in the surface texture with pieces of rough shuttering so that the material appears 'as found.'

The conservation of Park Hill raises interesting questions about conservation practice and the appeal of Brutalist architecture. Just what does one do with a historically significant yet ugly and unpopular building? Urban Splash is a property developer, in business to make a profit. A balance sheet in the black counts, not image making or the preservation of monuments for their own sake. Two-thirds of the units at Park Hill will be on sale to private buyers, and unlike the workers of the 1960s who had Brutalism foisted upon them, the new occupants will have choice.

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[305] Rosalind Bayley, 29.
[306] English Heritage, *Something Worth Keeping*, < http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.19027> accessed, 2/08/09.
[307] English Heritage, 'Park Hill Sheffield', <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.20604> accessed 07/07/09.

Urban Splash know that unmitigated Brutalism will not sell. In this clash of conservation and market-driven refurbishment, Park Hill cannot be preserved as it stands; compromises must be made. So the brutal image is softened: a gaping hole is knocked through the bastion-like walls; the facade is adorned with multicoloured panels; steel and glass extensions break up the monotony, and the decks are 'cosyfied' with funky furniture: 'the fantasy and decoration for which, in our hearts, we long?'[308] Apart from the meticulously restored crude concrete (which will surely be dominated by the new facades), little will be left of the identity of Park Hill: the Brutalist image that was to poetically express the brutal life of the working man. In their statement on Park Hill, English Heritage state: 'The… estate is exceptional. As a grade II* listed building, it is in the top 7% of the most important buildings in the country, making it as architecturally and historically significant as the Royal Academy of Art or the Harrods building in London.'[309] Leaving aside the somewhat bizzarre choice of buildings with which to compare Park Hill, a hole could not be knocked in the frontage of Harrods or the RA be clad in multicouloured panels and *their* identity remain intact.[310]

One is tempted to ask what will be left of Smith and Lynn's original conception of community preservation by street-deck. Mixed use developments are viewed positively by critics as diverse as Jane Jacobs and Prince Charles, but will this create or conserve a community? The decks will still be there, but the vast majority of the units will be given over to private buyers, and modern private apartment blocks are notorious for their neighbour anonymity. What ties communities together is not the happenstance of living in the same street, but commonalities such as working at the same steelworks or factory, and children attending the same schools. Society has changed, and, as noted, traditional working class communities have vanished. Aspirations have altered. In the early sixties the flats of Park Hill were a vast improvement on the slums of the Park Estate, and workers were overjoyed to be housed in such modern, well equipped flats. Now people are more demanding. 'Better' housing is more attainable and government policy encourages owner-occupiers rather than tenants. Poor families want the

[308] Eric de Mare, 1948. p. 9.
[309] English Heritage, 'Park Hill Sheffield', <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.20604> accessed 07/07/09.
[310] Of Park Hill's neighbour, Hyde Park, Dan Cruickshank writes that it 'has been wrecked visually by the addition of inappropriate cladding' – 'Park Hill, Sheffield 1960-1995', *RIBA Journal*, October 1995, p. 55.

'house with a little garden' like everyone else. Workers, then, are itinerant, and work more disparate; the population is more aspirational and choosy. To survive, Park Hill must cater for a more transient and anonymous population and, perhaps, take on a new role as short-term housing. The concept of Park Hill as catalyst of community is now naïve and should be relinquished.

Two of the major criteria for listing Park Hill, therefore, are no longer valid. A changed society means that the concept of Park Hill as community catalyst is obsolete. In a capitulation to the realities of the housing market Park Hill's Brutalist image will be bowdlerised and disguised. What is left is its historical significance as an icon of 1950s experimental municipal socialism. Rather than expensive total refubishment, two options still remain: part of the development could be demolished, retaining the 'fortress'- like facades as monuments to dominate Sheffield's south-western approachs; or it can be admitted that Park Hill is ugly and redundant, and consign the development to the history books and the bulldozer.[311]

[311] See John Allan in Saint, 47.

CHAPTER 6

ROBIN HOOD GARDENS.

The Smithsons finally had the opportunity to convert their Brutalist vision of social housing into reality with a commision from the GLC in 1966 for Poplar in London's Docklands. Robin Hood Gardens (completed 1972; FIGS. 62 & 63) was finally the built expression of their cherished anti-beauty aesthetic and social theorising. Covering a site in of about two hectares, Robin Hood Gardens consists of two long, cranked blocks, one of ten storeys, the other of seven, built from unfinished precast concrete slabs and standardised windows. The blocks enclose a landscaped green area. The complex contains 213 flats which are a mixture of single-storey apartments and two-storey maisonettes. The Smithsons continued to believe in the efficacy of street decks as community catalysts - Park Hill had been completed for five years; residents seemed happy and major problems were yet to be reported - and so the blocks have galleries, the 'streets-in-the-air', on every third floor.

To the untutored eye, Robin Hood Gardens symbolises everything that is bad about Brutalist architecture: heavy and lowering, the grey, stained concrete a metaphor of inner-city deprivation. Surrounded by the new steel and glass buildings of the new Docklands developments, it now appears oddly out of place and anachronistic. The Smithsons considered it 'heroic', a 'bold statement', a building that 'takes its stand alongside the heroisms of what had been before'. It was 'universal, greater than our little state – related to greater laws.'[312] For the compilers of *Britain: Modern Architecture Guide*, it was 'A very drab, oversize chunk of concrete.' Pevsner called it 'rough, tough… and inhumane.'[313]

[312] Smithsons, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, 296.
[313] Peter Murray; Stephen Trombley, *Britain: Modern Architecture Guide* (London: Architecture Design and Technology Press, 1990), 52. Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London East* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), 647, 648.

In 2008 a fierce battle was raging over the future of Robin Hood Gardens. Tower Hamlets Council wanted the development to be demolished and replaced by more humane lower-rise accommodation. After consultation, 80% of the residents voted for with the Council's proposal.[314] The champions of Park Hill, English Heritage, advised against listing. The Twentieth-century Society, the trade journal *Building Design*, and the architectural establishment embodied in The Royal Institute of British Architects are currently (2009) campaigning to have the development listed and preserved. They argue that Robin Hood Gardens is architecturally and historically significant as the only built expression of the social theories proposed by the progenitors and foremost proselytisers of Brutalism: the Smithsons. So, for Richard Rogers, Robin Hood Gardens is a 'seminal' building', 'an important and extraordinary piece of modern architecture,' 'a work that 'combined a heroic scale with beautiful, human proportions'.[315]

Among the architectural cogniscenti, however, unlike the unanimity that surrounded the listing of Park Hill, voices of dissent have been raised. The architect and critic Robert Sakula called it 'a dog of a building,' lamenting its 'grim-faced miserableness'.[316] One of its advocates, Peter Cook, wrote that Robin Hood Gardens 'makes no sortie into the sky and so remains a beached whale.'[317] Chairman of The National Trust Simon Jenkins wrote 'Never have the rich been moved to dump so much concrete ugliness on the heads of the poor.'[318] John Allan, in material used by English Heritage to support their recommendation against listing, is critical of the development - and the Smithsons: 'the Smithsons arrive in their own cul-de-sac – a system of urban morphology that bore no practical relation to existing city fabric, local people, implementation programmes or municipal

[314] London Borough of Tower Hamlets, 'Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project' <http://www.blackwallreach.co.uk/eventinfo.html -> Accessed 23/05/2009.
[315] Richard Rogers, 'Open Letter to Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP' (Department of Culture, Media and Sport), 27 February 2008, at < http://www.bdonline.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=3116519 > accessed 15/03/2009. See Appendix I for the full letter. Baron Rogers of Riverside (b.1933), architect, is perhaps most famous for the Pompidou Centre, Paris (1977), and Lloyds of London headquarters (1986).
[316] Robert Sakula, 'Should the Government List Robin Hood Gardens?' < http://www.bdonline.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=3108123> Accessed 20/03/2009.
[317] 'Regarding the Smithsons', *AR*, July 1982, p.42.
[318] Jenkins, 'This icon of 60s New Brutalism has its champions. So let them restore it.' *The Guardian*, Friday 20 June, 2008 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jun/20/architecture > accessed 12/06/2009.

budgets'[319] Even Alan Powers, chairman of the Twentieth-century Society, damned the development with faint praise: 'It is not just any old concrete slab block.'[320]

With regard to a major criterion of listing, a building being architecturally and historically significant, Robin Hood Gardens was not declared so at the time of its completion. In the main, silence pervaded the architectural press. Of the principal British journals, only *Architectural Design* - always a Smithson devotee and the Smithsons' preferred organ - deemed the development worthy of coverage. The *Review*, the *RIBA Journal*, and the *Architects' Journal* all ignored the development. Anthony Pangaro's account in the American magazine *Architecture Plus* is the only other English language appraisal of the project. Recently, English Heritage, advising against the granting of listed status, condemned the development thus: 'as a piece of community architecture, it fails as a place for human beings to live – and did so from the start.'[321] The contemporary criticism presaged this view. The architect and academic Peter Eisenmann writing in *Architectural Design* commented: 'Robin Hood Gardens sacrifices the revolutionary idealism of Golden Lane', adding, 'the "building as a street" and the connectivity of the pedestrian decks are gone'.[322] Unlike Golden Lane, seventy per cent of the dwellings had garages, and for Eisenmann the increasing dominance of the motor car had destroyed the Smithsons' Utopian community dream. Gone were the street-deck intersections where the residents could casually interact; now rapid access to the car was deemed crucial. Eisenman concluded: 'the primary pedestrian connection is now thought of as being vertical to the motor car.'[323]

Pangaro was equally critical of the 'streets-in-the-air'.' The galleries were mere 'circulation spaces and are only incidentally available for neighbour exchange… The thing that remains is only a corridor… the real action is on the ground.'[324] As at Park Hill, the design meant that supervision of the decks was a

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[319] English Heritage, 'Robin Hood Gardens', p.8, <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/upload/pdf/Robin_Hood_Gardens_-_EH_web.pdf?1252399734> accessed 05/09/09.
[320] 'Robin Hood Gardens: For and Against', *The Times*, 29 May 2008, <http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/architecture_and_design/article4023353.ece> accessed 21/03/2009)
[321] Lord Bruce-Lockhart, 'Robin Hood Gardens Statement' <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.13783 >accessed, 28/03/2009. English Heritage, 'Robin Hood Gardens'< http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.18980 > accessed 28/03/2009.
[322] Peter Eisenman, 'Robin Hood Gardens', *AD*, September 1972, p. 561.
[323] Ibid, 558.
[324] Anthony Pangaro, 'Beyond Golden Lane: Robin Hood Gardens', *Architecture Plus*, (New York) June 1973, p.41.

problem. Initially, the Smithsons had intended that the kitchen would overlook the deck 'to make possible the supervision of small children playing outside the front door; and somehow normalise the dwelling.'[325] Ultimately, however, only a small lobby or stairwell overlooked the decks, rendering supervision incidental. Thus Pangaro comments: 'The outdoor areas adjacent to the dwelling units miss their chance to serve as front porches because they allow no sense of occupant ownership.'[326] This echoes criticism of Park Hill: the residents were unable to identify with the space outside their front door and the space remained an uninviting 'no-man's-land.'

According to English Heritage, Robin Hood Gardens 'does not compare successfully' with Park Hill.[327] The nature of the decks was one of the 'serious shortcomings' of the development that led to their rejection of listing (FIGS. 64 & 65). Size was a factor: 'The decks themselves - perhaps because they are not particularly generous [2 metres] and overlook constant traffic - never did fulfil their brief and work as community-fostering "streets in the sky"'.' English Heritage go on to descibe the access routes to the decks as 'uncomfortable' and 'threatening'.[328] Furthermore, for English Heritage, Robin Hood Gardens 'was neither innovative nor influential.' By the time the project was completed in 1972, Brutalism was in its dotage. The raw concrete aesthetic combined with 'streets-in-the-air' had already been done, and at Park Hill was beginning to be discredited.[329] Society had changed; theories as to how society and communities functioned had changed, but the Smithsons had been clinging to their 1950s austerity-driven Dadaist architectural vision in 1960s affluence. As Allan commented: 'Robin Hood gardens was obsolete even before the first tenants moved in.'[330]

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[325] A & P Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 194.
[326] Pangaro, 41.
[327] Lord Bruce-Lockhart, 'Robin Hood Gardens Statement'. English Heritage, 'Robin Hood Gardens'.
[328] In their guide to modern British architecture Murray and Trombley refer to the 'tawdriness of its many indefensible spaces', 52.
[329] Writing about Park Hill in 1970 Anthony Jackson commented: 'The stacked decks are… ugly and ill-shaped… the architects have consciously sought a tough aesthetic that has simply degenerated into squalor', *The Politics of Architecture* (London: The Architectural Press, 1970).
[330] English Heritage, 'Robin Hood Gardens', p. 9. Earlier on in this document Allan comments: 'What we see therefore is a housing project that is cloaked in the rhetoric of a decade and a half earlier being presented as if it proposed the way forward, but which most of their acolytes, and probably even some of their peers, were too loyal or to trusting to criticise an idea whose time had past.' p.7. < (http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/upload/pdf/Robin_Hood_Gardens_-_EH_web.pdf?1252399734 > accessed 05/09/09.

In 2008, the DCMS aquiesced with the advice of English Heritage and denied listed status to Robin Hood Gardens. The decision was appealed by the aforementioned groups, however, and the fate of Robin Hood Gardens is uncertain.[331] Similarly to Park Hill, the economic recession of 2008/09 has impeded Tower Hamlets Council's plans, in this case, rather than for refurbishment, for demolition.[332] As at Park Hill, to help fund the new proposals, a proportion of the new dwellings was to be for private sale, but the current depression in the housing market has led to a postponement of the Council's plans and thus a serendipitous reprieve for Robin Hood Gardens.

English Heritage also condemn Robin Hood Gardens as 'bleak', 'prison-like', 'uncomfortable', 'threatening' and 'isolated.'[333] Murray and Trombley condemn its 'tawdriness'. 'Drab', 'awful' 'rough' and 'barren' are epithets given to the complex by residents and critics alike.[334] As seen above, even its advocates do not defend Robin Hood Gardens on the grounds of visual appeal. The 2009 exhibition at RIBA, 'Robin Hood Gardens: Revisions', was an exhibition extolling the virtues of Robin Hood Gardens. Yet the accompanying literature contains this astonishing comment: 'It is not an easy building to photograph… you are not meant to look at the building so much as experience the spaces.'[335] Apparently, then, the building is visually so awful –it is best not to look. Rather, it must be 'experienced' on a more elevated plane. Surely, if one is 'not meant to look' at the building, then this

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[331] Peter Smithson argued that RHG should be conserved because of its uniqueness: 'If there is one of something it should be preserved as a curiosity. Stonehenge is the obvious example.' - Peter Popham, 'Brutalist, Original, but a Slum' *Independent,* Monday, 2 October 1995, < http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/brutalist-original-but-a-slum-1575542.html > accessed 03/04/2009

[332] For the new proposals see, < http://www.blackwallreach.co.uk/pdf/04jun_blackwall_panels.pdf>

[333] English Heritage, 'Robin Hood Gardens', p. 9. . < (http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/upload/pdf/Robin_Hood_Gardens_-_EH_web.pdf?1252399734 > accessed 05/09/09.

[334] 'It's a good location but it's just the way it looks. It's awful,' commented a resident recently - Fiona Hamilton, 'Robin Hood Gardens: Heritage Icon or Concrete Slabs' *The Times*, May 29, 2008 <http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/architecture_and_design/article4023384.ece > Accessed 12/04/2009.
Peter Popham, 'Brutalist, Original, but a Slum' *Independent,* Monday, 2 October 1995, < http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/brutalist-original-but-a-slum-1575542.html > Accessed 12/04/2009.
On my visit to Robin Hood Gardens I was accompanied by someone who had grown up on south London council estates, therefore, someone with much experience as a resident in social housing. Without any prompting from me, her first words on seeing the development were: 'What a shit-hole.' (Apologies for the language)

[335] RIBA; Twentieth-century Society, *Robin Hood Gardens Revisions*, exhib cat. (London: RIBA, 2009), unpaginated.

removes one of Brutalism's fundamental precepts, that of 'memorability as an image.' Later on in 'Revisions' they again recognise the aesthetic problems with Robin Hood Gardens, recommending that with any refurbishment work, the building should be 'made more attractive.' Notwithstanding the comments of the RIBA literature, one's first sight of Robin Hood Gardens does deliver an image-impact that is memorable. Indeed, Murray and Trombley praise the work as a 'piece of sculpture.' With its unadorned concrete, its bulky, oppressive monotony, however, it is simply an image-impact of ugliness.

It is important to remember that the Smithsons would not have viewed the 'ugly' epithet as pejorative. David Dunster, in his foreword to the Smithsons' *The Shift*, comments: 'their work has at times an almost deliberate ugliness', and their pursuit of 'ordinariness' and anti-beauty has already been noted in this paper with their installations at the Independent Group and designs for unrealised projects.[336] Robin Hood Gardens is an entirely appropriate 'rough poetry', expressing a brutal society. It is 'art brut' made manifest in architecture. Its denizens are living in a Dadaist construct.[337] Thus, the question needs to be posed: what does it mean to dwell in an architecture of 'deliberate ugliness'?

[336] Dunster, foreword to Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Shift* (London: Academy Editions, 1982), 7.
[337] Murray and Trombley praise RHG as 'a piece of sculpture', 52.

CHAPTER 7

BEAUTY

High-rise public housing developments have frequently been associated with social problems. As Alice Coleman has shown, vandalism, crime, squalor, family breakdown, anomie, and mental health problems are associated with such developments. These problems she links with design flaws in high-rise developments, some inherent, some avoidable. For example, the number of storeys, the type of corridor employed, the number, type and placement of exits and entrances, whether the block is raised on stilts or has a conventional base, will, if badly executed, cause social problems.[338] One factor, however, that is never taken into account when assessing such social problems is the way the building looks. That the appearance of a building was still an important factor in the Brutalist period is evident from a Government report, the findings of the Parker Morris Committee, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, published in 1961, the year Park Hill was completed. It recommended: 'Good layout and landscaping, together with the use of good and well-chosen external materials and colours throughout an estate, go nine-tenths of the way towards creating beauty instead of ugliness, and it is in these broad and not necessarily costly ways… that housing development can be made pleasing to the eye.'[339] Yet the quality that Robin Hood Gardens, Park Hill and much Brutalist architecture have in common is that they are popularly declared ugly. This, of course, would not be an insult to the early proponents of Brutalism, as they pursued their particular brand of anti-beauty expressionism. Of Park Hill's concrete, Cruickshank writes that it 'is far from a pretty sight. But that is the

[338] Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London: Hilary Shipman Ltd., 1985), 15, 31-54; see also, Pangaro, 41.
[339] Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (*The Parker Morris Report*) (London: HMSO, 1961), 37.

point.'[340] So I propose to explore the question: what does it mean for the user to live in architecture of deliberate ugliness? This will be done by a consideration of the converse of ugliness: beauty.

Through the ages beauty has continually resisted philosophical attempts to define its nature. Argument has raged as to whether beauty is inherent to the thing itself, irrespective of the human viewer - as suggested by Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas and Vischer - or as David Hume wrote (endorsed by Voltaire, Goethe and others), 'exists merely in the mind that that contemplates' the thing.[341] For some, from Socrates to the moderns, beauty lies simply in fitness for purpose. Xenophon (5th - 4th *C.* BC) reports the following dialogue:

> Socrates: 'In general all things capable of being used by men are considered at once beautiful and good with respect to the things they happen to be useful for'
> Aristippus: 'And so even a basket for carrying rubbish is a beautiful thing?'
> Socrates: 'For sure, and a golden shield may be an ugly thing, if the former is well suited and the latter ill suited to their respective purposes… If, therefore, a thing is well suited to its purpose… it is beautiful and good; and should the contrary be the case, then it is bad and ugly'[342]

The notion that function is the progenitor of beauty has for others been a narrow and nonsensical notion. In the eighteenth-century Edmund Burke (1729-97) offered the following rebuttal: 'For on that principle, the wedge-like snout of a swine, with its

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[340] Cruickshank, 57.
[341] Hugh Bredin; Liberato Santoro-Brienza, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 27, 60, 82. Oxford Art Online, 'Beauty', *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, 2, 7. <http://rooms1.library.le.ac.uk/rooms/jsp/FramedRedirect.jsp?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.groveart.com&open_in_popup=yes&CMS_REFERER=http%3A%2F%2Frooms1.library.le.ac.uk%2Frooms%2Fportal%2Fmedia-type%2Fhtml%2Fuser%2Fanon%2Fpage%2FLeic_reference.psml%3Bjsessionid%3DEF78E7114FCBF94E1BD7F91970DF3265.tomcat1&banner_height=110&container_skin=z1 > accessed 20/08/09. Charles Harrison; Paul Wood; Jason Gaiger (eds.), *Art in Theory 1648-1815* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 551. Harrison, et al (eds.), *Art in Theory 1815-1900* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 75, 682.
David Hume (1711-76), Scottish philosopher and Historian.
[342] From *Memorabilia III*, in, Umberto Eco (ed.), *On Beauty*, trans. Alistair McEwen (London: Secker & Warburg, 2004), 48.

tough cartilage at the end, the little sunk eyes, the whole make of the head, so well adapted to its offices of digging, and rooting, would be extremely beautiful.'[343] Novelist and poet Théophile Gautier (1811-72), the promulgator of the phrase 'art for art's sake', wrote: 'The useless alone is truly beautiful; everything else is ugly, since it is an expression of a need… ignoble and disgusting.[344] In Architecture, beauty has been declared to be the synthesis of qualities such as proportion, symmetry, harmony and decorum.[345] This also, particularly in the Modern period, has been denied by other philosophers. In light of the above therefore, I do not propose to say what beauty is, which has defeated many fine minds, but what beauty does.

The Effect of Beauty

In ancient Greece, beauty was bound together with notions of divinity, goodness and the ideal. 'All that is good is beautiful' wrote Plato,[346] and the contemplation of beauty led to the contemplation of the Divine: 'But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty – the divine beauty, I mean pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colours and vanities of human life.'[347] The words for beauty, *kallos* and *tokalon*, were often used interchangeably with the words for good, *agathon* and excellence, *aretē*: 'Are you not aware that with regard to the same things all things are both beautiful and good?' asked Socrates.[348] Thus, being good, beauty gives pleasure and elicits praise, as the muses sang: 'What is beautiful is loved; what is not beautiful is not loved.' Beauty could have an eternal quality: 'What is fair is ever dear'.[349] Beauty stimulated the mind to enquire, to

[343] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: OUP, 1990), 95. To suggest a modern example, the Black and Decker 'Workmate' is entirely functional, but would never be declared beautiful.
[344] In Charles Harrison et al, *Art in Theory 1815-1900* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 99.
[345] Bredin; Santoro-Brienza, 191. Bernd Evers, et al, *Architectural Theory from the Renaissance to the Present* (Cologne: Taschen, 2006),12, 13.
[346] *Timaeus*, 87 c. In Bredin; Santoro-Brienza, 28.
[347] Plato, *Symposium*, 211,e, in Eco, 41.
[348] In Eco, 48.
[349] In Eco, .39.

ascend to knowledge, and so Plato concluded: '[the] life above others which man should live [is] the contemplation of beauty'.[350]

At the dawn of the medieval period, Plotinus (c. 205-270AD) judged that beauty, with its origins in the Divine, could transform: 'No eye ever saw the sun without becoming sun-like, nor can a soul see beauty without becoming beautiful. You must become first all godlike and all beautiful if you intend to see God and beauty.'[351] The anonymous fifth-century writer now known as the Pseudo Dionysius ascribed similar powers to beauty: 'For beauty is the cause of harmony, of sympathy, of community. Beauty unites all things and is the source of all things.'[352] Throughout the medieval period, beauty continues in its role as an emblem of divinity and gratifier of the human: 'When we admire the beauty of visible objects, we experience joy certainly' wrote the medieval thinker Hugh of St Victor, and St Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) wrote: 'But we call something beautiful, when the simple apprehension of it gives us pleasure.' Beauty could satisfy longing and lead to contentment: 'It is a part of the nature of beauty that, in seeing or knowing it, the will and desire come to rest.'[353]

In the following centuries, beauty maintains its lofty status.[354] 'The true, the good and the beautiful are very closely allied', wrote a major thinker of the Enlightenment, Denis Diderot (1713-84).[355] In the aftermath of the French Revolution, Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), in his letters *On the Aesthetic Education of a Man,* decided that beauty was of crucial importance to human existence, as evidenced by his introductory remarks: 'I shall be treating of a subject that which has a direct connection with all that is best in human happiness, and no very distant connection with what is noblest in our moral nature.'[356] In the second letter, given the nature of the times, he made this astonishing claim for beauty: 'It is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom.' One finds an echo of these

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[350] Plato, '*Symposium', The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. II, trans. Benjamin Jowett (London: Sphere Books, 1970), 211c-d. Oxford Art Online, 'Beauty', *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, 4. Bredin; Santoro-Brienza, 26.
[351] Bredin; Santoro-Brienza, 50.
[352] In Bredin; Santoro-Brienza, 53.
[353] De Botton, 149. Bredin; Santoro-Brienza, 60.
[354] When God at first made man, / Having a glass of blessings standing by, / 'Let us', said he, 'pour on him all we can / … / So strength first made a way; / Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure… - *The Pulley*, George Herbert, (1593-1633). *The New Oxford Book of English Verse 1250-1950*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: OUP, 1972), 258.
[355] Harrison, et al (eds.), *Art in Theory 1648-1815,* 615.
[356] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, eds. E. M. Wilkinson & L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: OUP, 1967), 3.

words in an anti-totalitarian piece by the Nobel Prize wining Algerian writer and philosopher Albert Camus (1913-60): 'In upholding beauty, we prepare the way for the day of regeneration when civilisation will give first place… to this living virtue on which is founded the common dignity of man.'[357] Even in the middle of the nineteenth-century beauty was still associated with the divine. John Ruskin, in *Modern Painters*, wrote that the man of 'perfect taste' derived pleasure 'from that which God originally intended should give him pleasure.'[358]

A distillation of the thoughts of the great thinkers through the ages, then, leaves us with this conclusion: beauty is a good thing. Beauty pleases. It is associated with the following qualities: excellence, love, virtue, truth, pleasure, nobility, worth, dignity, freedom; the transcendental, the Eternal, the Ideal.[359] Thus beauty is ennobling and uplifting, a quality that contributes positively to the well-being of mankind. For a human to be complete, he must have beauty in his life. Now the preceding may seem like a series of banal truisms, yet they are truisms ignored by the architects of Brutalist housing projects. The dwellers in such developments are forced to live in buildings of deliberately ugliness, and if beauty pleases and uplifts, then surely the converse is true, and ugliness displeases and debases.

One of the characteristics of beauty through the ages is that it is not always discerned immediately. In matters of aesthetics it takes education and training to acquire discrimination. Thus Aquinas wrote: 'But we call something beautiful, when the simple apprehension of it gives us pleasure.' Aquinas uses the latin *apprehensio*, not *visio*, (sight) here. *Apprenhensio* carries the flavour of understanding that comes from knowledge. So the argument follows that it is not merely sensation, not merely initial image-impact, that consitutes beauty. Knowledge and understanding contribute to perceiving beauty and enable discrimination.[360] Knowledge can cause us to see beauty where previously we saw none or vice-versa. This can apply to seeing beauty in humans, for example, this passage from Austen's *Emma*. Jane Fairfax: 'Oh as for me, my judgement is worth nothing. Where I have a great regard, I always think a person well-looking'.

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[357] 'Creation and revolution', in Harrison & Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-2000,* 629.
[358] Harrison, et al, *Art in Theory 1815-1900,* 202.
[359] Shakespeare: 'Beauty lives with kindness'. - *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, act iv, scene 2.
[360] Scruton, *Beauty,* 121.

Regard requires knowledge.[361] To provide a further example of the role of knowledge in the judgement of beauty, while walking through the streets of Berlin, an observer with an education solely in ancient Greek and Roman architecture may be struck by the Neo-classical buildings. He may dwell on the fine proportions and harmony of the columns, entablatures and pediments; enthuse over the subtle swell of a Doric column; laud a well-turned volute. He may find beauty in such overt use of the architectural vocabulary of the ancient world. An observer schooled in German history of the 1930s would find such architecture repellent. Conversely, knowledge can lead us to see beauty in the most unlikely of settings. E. E. Cummings in his collection of ironic anti-war poems *IS 5*, provides this extreme example: 'Why talk of beauty what could be more beau / tiful than these heroic happy dead / who rushed like lions to the roaring happy slaughter.[362]

In the case of Brutalist architecture, it is mainly those with education who find the style – even they never use the word beautiful – acceptable. The supporters of developments such as Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill never use the pleasing appearance of the building as reason for their preservation. Rather, it is knowledge, knowledge of art or social theory, knowledge of a particular and unusual construction method that renders the edifice, if not beautitful, then perhaps an associated quality: virtuous or worthy.

As noted by Ruskin and Bertram, judgement, therefore, can be cultivated; discrimination inculcated in the unlearned. For the majority of the disenfranchised residents of public housing projects, however, the fact that their homes are the product of avant-garde architectural theory preached by a group of 'young Turks' in the remote 1950s is of low priority. '…Brutalism attempt[s] to be objective about 'reality' – the cultural objectives of society, its urges, its techniques…', the Smithsons wrote in 1957, '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.'[363] After a hard day working as porters, cleaners, care-workers and security guards, etc (work that those seeking to preserve Robin Hood Gardens have no desire to do), the predominantly immigrant residents of Robin Hood Gardens do not want to return to an artist's poetic response to a society of which they are at the brutal

[361] Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. Fiona Stafford (London: Penguin, 2003), 166. Scruton, *Beauty*, 7.
[362] E. E. Cummings, 'next to of course god america I' <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/next-to-of-course-god-america-i/._ >accessed 27/09/2009.
[363] 'Thoughts in Progress: The New Brutalism', *AD*, April 1957, p. 113.

cutting edge. They want to return to a pleasing home, a refuge from that society. Education in matters of aesthetic taste is of secondary consideration. Thus, with regard to public housing projects, rather than the expression of an architect's personal vision, such developments should express empathy. They ought to be visually pleasing, not to those with theoretical education in aesthetics, but to those who have no choice other than to live in them. This means when deciding the appearance of social housing one should consider popular taste. J. M. Richards had written in 'The Next Step' that architectural content ought to be 'intelligible to everyone, [which] will therefore allow architecture to take its place naturally as one of the *popular* arts and one of the vehicles of *popular* sentiment. There can be no quarrel with such an objective.' (italics mine)[364]

Clearly there is a popular human consensus as to what is pleasing in architecture. The existence of planning laws is evidence of this general agreement of what is visually acceptable in the urban environment. Further, one might suggest a day-trip to Edinburgh, Lincoln, Bath or York, but to propose a similar trip to Cumbernauld or Milton Keynes would be met with derision by all but the hardiest of urban-planning enthusiasts. Similarly, one might visit the Royal Crescent at Bath, the Lloyds building in the city of London, but Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill are solely for aficionados of modern architecture.[365]

Concrete, well designed and well maintained, can be visually pleasing, and not only to the educated. One only has to consider Louis Kahn's Salk Institute for Biological Studies, (1965, La Jolla, California) or Kenzo Tange's Kurashiki City Hall (1960) and his Tokyo Olympic Pool (1964) to acknowledge this. However, it is not the construction material in itself that renders these buildings pleasing, but the overall design. Popularly, and specifically in the realm of public housing, concrete is not deemed visually attractive. It is the cheap, utilitarian stuff of the motorway flyover and the multi-storey car park. Residents around the world comdemned to dwelling in the raw concrete aesthetic have taken measures to alleviate the inherent dourness of the material. Works by the pioneer of *béton brut*, Le Corbusier have been softened and humanised – sacrilege to the architecturally informed (FIGS. 66 & 67). Many designers now accept the oppressive ugliness of heavy, raw concrete members. That icon of Brutalism, The Brunswick Centre, (Bloomsbury , 1973) has

[364] Richards, 168.
[365] de Botton, 170.

recently been refurbished, the concrete masked by a coat of paint.[366] To lighten the bulk of its concrete frame, the 'crude… disappointingly drab'[367] Leicester University Library (1974) has also undergone a major remodelling, including estensive use of decorative wood panelling to soften the concrete interior. The concrete frame of Hyde Park has been refurbished 'beyond recognition' (FIG. 68),[368] and Park Hill is undergoing a similar softening of appearance. Even Robin Hood Gardens has had its share of facelifts over the years, mainly with the addition of colour to the communal ground floor 'furniture'.

Cost will always be a factor in public housing projects, but it is not impossible to design developments that are economical of construction, appropriate and functional, but also visually pleasing to the residents. Tayler and Green achieved it, albeit in a rural context, in East Anglia. To design new public housing that is attractive to the majority requires humility on the part of the architect. Public housing is not the field in which an aspiring architect ought to create his monument to posterity in a shocking new style. It requires him to relinquish a certain amount of control and take into account the views of the prospective residents.[369] The risk of vulgarity may be present; but what is vulgar is subjective. It is, however, a problem that needs to be addressed and negotiated, as recognised by J. M. Richards in 1950: 'The need is to find a way of utilizing… the sympathetic reaction to popular styles, without having to accept its aesthetic and ethical vulgarities; to find a way of grafting its vitality on to the sound stock of contemporary functionalism.'[370] Popular taste, as Richards recognised, need not always have negative connotations, it can have 'vitality.' And here, rather than 'popular' perhaps one should return to the word used by Herbert Tayler to refer to his own work: 'democratic'.[371] To witness what happens when architecture is democratic, the results when the aesthetic is chosen by the residents rather than imposed from on high by an architect with motives varying from the paternalistic to the megalomaniacal, we need to go

[366] Steve Rose, 'Scrubs up beautifully', *The Guardian*, Monday 23 October 2006, < http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2006/oct/23/architecture.communities > accessed 21/04/2009.
[367] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Leicestershire and Rutland* (London: Penguin, 1992), 258.
[368] Rosalind Bayley, 29.
[369] In 1955 a contributor to the article 'Aesthetic Control Over Architecture' in *The Builder* implored: 'Architects must subject them selves to the will of the people.' 4 March 1955, p. 378.
[370] Richards (1950), 168.
[371] See footnote 23.

again to London's South Bank, and the work of the Coin Street Community Builders.[372]

Coin Street Community Builders

In the first half of the nineteenth-century, a period in which the population of London trebled, the South Bank became an area of tiny terraced houses crammed in alongside factories and wharves. One is reminded of the Park Estate in Sheffield, as, although being a poor area, it, nevertheless had a reputation for a close-knit community spirit where families and neighbours supported each other. During the Second World War the area suffered significant bomb damage, and much of the housing that survived was demolished when the South Bank was chosen as the site for the Festival of Britain in 1951. After the destruction of the war and the dismantling of the Festival of Britain, the area was left radically altered. Warehousing, and in the late 1950s and 1960s, new office blocks were erected on this prime inner-city site. Many of these, however, were large and anonymous, and although the office blocks incorporated shops and facilities, these were internal, leaving dead street frontages. By the early 1970s, the residential population of the Coin Street area had fallen from 50,000 to just 4,000 and the community had all but vanished. Schools and shops closed and the area was described as 'bleak'.

In 1977, after a developer had announced plans to build Europe's tallest hotel and over 1 million square feet of office space in the area, local people drew up a planning strategy to reverse what they saw as the destruction of their community. The Coin Street Action Group was set up, principally for the construction of new homes, but also for a new riverside park and walkway, managed workshops, and shops and leisure facilities. The housing developments are small-scale and low-rise, totalling 220 homes at present, from five-bedroom houses to one-bedroom flats. The first of the housing developments, Mulberry, was opened in 1988, followed by Palm (1994) (also known as Broadwall), Redwood (1995), and Iroko (2001) (FIGS. 69-72). The project is ongoing, with further sites earmarked for future development. Interesting are the names of the various projects, names evoking nature, warmth and

[372] Coin Street Community Builders, 'About Us' < http://www.coinstreet.org/aboutus.aspx> accessed 15/08/2009.

cosiness. However, it is the aesthetic of these homes that is of interest for this chapter on beauty.

The image-impact that one experiences at first sight of these developments is twofold: one of scale, the developments are not high-rise and are, thus, more human in scale; and one of colour, and, in contrast to the cold grey of raw concrete, they are the warm colours of hand-made brick and timber.[373] Familiar and natural materials, tactile and warm, they are visually pleasing to humans, and thus, beautiful. They are juxtaposed pleasingly with the greys and blacks of the roofing materials and metallic features of balconies and windows. These metal features, while functional, also add aesthetic interest and liveliness to the elevations, in contrast to the chunky monotony of Brutalism. Colour is also present at the recently completed, award-winning Neighbourhood Centre (architects: Haworth Tomkins), here with the yellow and orange panels of the façade. A variety and balance of colour has pleased humans from time immemorial and is considered a constituent of beauty. Grey, the colour of raw concrete, is popularly thought a depressing and negative.[374] Colour is one of the first elements added to soften the appearance of Brutalist buildings.[375] (FIG. 73)

The developments are not ruthlessly modern, eschewing all trace of tradition, but neither do they possess a sentimental historicism.[376] Particularly with the Palm/Broadwall development (architects: Lifschutz Davidson), with its repeated pitched roofs, gables, exposed ducting that hint at Victorian chimneys, its verticality, one is presented simply with a suggestion of tradition, in an entirely modern building. The brick, and particularly the timber cladding at Iroko (Haworth Tomkins) are not structurally honest and they do not express the internal structure with clarity. Rather, they serve to soften the steel and concrete frame construction. The concrete frame is expressed, but is not part of the initial image-impact – indeed it is hardly noticed. Architectural Puritans may denounce the functional dishonesty

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[373] Samantha Hardingham comments that the CSCB 'addressed an ingrained scepticism towards… tower blocks' – *London: A Guide to Recent Architecture* (London: Batsford, 2002), 114.
[374] Sayings with negative associations with grey: 'What a grey day'; 'You are looking very grey today', etc.
[375] As already noted, at Robin Hood Gardens and the new plans for Park Hill. Colour is one of the first things one notices in a summer visit to the Barbican – the window ledges are adorned with flower-filled window boxes.
Christopher Day points out that colour can affect human behaviour. Colours chosen for classrooms have been shown to affect / stimulate / support learning ability, 32-33; different colours stimulate different glands: yellow thyroid; blue pituitary; red male sexual; violet, female sexual, 72.
[376] Kenneth Powell, *New London Architecture* (London: Merrell, revised edn., 2005), 171.

of the claddings, but they function to provide a visually pleasing environment to the human user, a factor that adds to the quality of life. Seen particularly in the Iroko development, there is humility in these buildings; no architectural egos are being expressed here. Rather, the housing communicates empathy for the user.[377] Each dwelling has its own private open space as well as a communal one. Here then is 'the house with a little garden' we have seen repeatedly called throughout this paper by families housed in social developments.

Care and attention have been paid throughout to the quality of the finish in these developments.[378] The reason for this is clear, and is gleaned from this simple statement from the CSCB's website: 'Local people drew up a planning strategy'.[379] Local people – residents - initiated and now manage the developments. The designs are winning competition entries, the results decided by members of the cooperative. The design of the buildings is, therefore, the product of a democratic process, and the result is popular, an 'architectural vocabulary... to be understood by residents and passers-by.'[380] The visual appearance of these homes demonstrates the gulf that exists between the dour aesthetic judgement of the educated architect of the 1950s and 60s, arbitrarily imposed, and the vitality of popular, 'ignorant', democratic taste.[381] The developments are not devoid, however, of image-impact, but it is subtler, less impertinent image than Brutalism: 'a powerful image of genuinely creative community action.'[382] Certain words spring to mind on viewing these developments: variety, lightness, poise, sparkle, liveliness – words never associated with Brutalism and its obsession with ordinariness and the 'as found'. They are words that look back half a century, to J. M. Richards's observations on the architecture that briefly existed, on the same site, at the Festival of Britain. The Coin Street developments are not the architecture of the Festival of Britain, but they have a similar popular aesthetic, a simple, democratic beauty, entirely fitting to public housing.

[377] Hardingham remarks that the structures 'are not here to dazzle, but to provide a safe place.' – 118.
[378] Hardingham, 116.
[379] CSCB, 'History', <http://www.coinstreet.org/history_background.aspx> accessed 25/08/2009.
[380] Hardingham, 116.
[381] CSCB has still 'incurred critical censure' from the architectural establishment, 'for its unimaginative approach to new housing.' - Kenneth Powell, 10.
[382] Powell, 171.

CONCLUSION

At the dawn of the 1950s there was a move towards a more democratic, 'popular' modern architecture, architecture, 'for the sake of human beings rather than for the cold logic of theory'.[383] It was an unpretentious, empathetic direction, with which, according to J. M. Richards, there could be 'no quarrel'.[384] The New Humanism sought to re-introduce 'the fantasy and decoration for which in our hearts, we long';[385] The Festival of Britain brought a cheery notion of beauty to a grim post-war Britain: 'On that first morning when I first saw the Festival looking across the river from Charing Cross Station, it was so utterly beautiful and exciting that I wept.'[386] This gaiety and excitement was smothered by the wet blanket of Brutalism.

Although Brutalism was a conspicuous, and has become the most controversial, architecture of the period, it would be wrong to conclude that it was the dominant architectural form in mid-twentieth century Britain. In Maxwell's survey of modern British architecture carried out at the close of the golden age of Brutalism in 1972, only a quarter of the examples may be characterised as Brutalist.[387] Furthermore, in this quarter there are no private houses and no prestigious corporate headquarters. Included in Maxwell's survey is a major private commission the Smithsons landed during that period: The Economist Building (St James's, London, 1964; Figs. 74 & 75). It may be a memorable, but The Economist Building is no Brutalist image. This was not social housing for the disenfranchised, but a prestigious commission in the West End for respected clients. Thus, the Smithsons compromised their 'as found', 'ordinary' principles. The corners of the building are chamfered, and so softened; the windows and stone spandrels are recessed, lending the work elegance. The construction material is not valued for its

[383] De Mare, 1947, p. 200; De Mare, 1948, p. 9.
[384] Richards, 1950, 168.
[385] Eric de Mare, 'The New Empiricism: The Antecedents and Origins of Sweden's Latest Style', *AR*, January 1948. p. 9.
[386] Visitor to the Festival, interviewed in Banham and Hillier, 17.
[387] Robert Maxwell, *New British Architecture*.

'as found' qualities; the struture is not clearly exhibited: the steel-reinforced concrete structure is clad, hidden, in expensive fossilised Portland stone.[388] This example illustrates the clientele of Brutalism. Rather than in prestigious edifices that wish to communicate high status, Brutalism appears in municipal buildings: schools, libraries, car parks and social housing. It was popular on university campuses, befitting tradition-bound institutions seeking to portray a 'hip' image. Brutalism was an imposed architecture - architecture for other people to use. Those who commissioned and designed such buildings did not spend much time in them - the Smithsons lived in a whitewashed Victorian property in Kensington.[389]

Brutalism is the triumph of the architects personal vision over the needs of the user. It was no longer function that gave form, but rather the expression of the architect's own aesthetic taste.[390] Thus it is an arrogant, impertinent, architecture in which image forming and monument making take precedence. The Smithsons' bombastic and at times nonsensical writings show how far removed they were from the ordinary user of their buildings. We may qualify the above remarks with regard to Park Hill, however. While remaining an exercise in image making, it also embodied altuistic social intent. The clean, well-equipped flats slotted into its concrete grid ordered the chaos of the Park Estate, and replaced its squalid slums. Then it was a social imperative, and the tenants were grateful. Now, as the plans of Urban Splash demonstrate, people demand and (rightly) expect more than to be racked up in concrete monotony. Regarding its success as community catalyst, the evidence is inconclusive, and in any event, communities were to be assailed by social dynamics that street-decks were powerless to mitigate.

Albeit a display of arrogance, Brutalism was also the result of collective psycophancy. Architects made the pilgimage to Marseilles to venerate the latest creation of the master, just as the faithful in medieval times travelled to stare goggle-eyed at the latest image of a miracle-working saint. The subsequent mimicing of the *béton brut* by the herd of Corbusian disciples in the UK is

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[388] Webster, 53-64.

[389] Peter Popham, 'Brutalist, Original, but a Slum' *Independent,* Monday, 2 October 1995, < http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/brutalist-original-but-a-slum-1575542.html > accessed 03/04/2009

[390] Pevsner in 1967 at the height of Brutalism: **'**Today, nearly all that is being designed… is designed not for an individual client whose taste may respond immediately to that of an architect, but for groups of anonymous clients. What right has the architect, then, to make monuments to himself instead of serviceable environments for the users?' 'Architecture in Our Time', 7.

staggering. Again, one might excuse Park Hill here - its rough concrete a result of economic constraints and the imperfect handling of in-situ concrete - as much as any adherence to Dada or Corbusian art theory. Indeed, Brutalism as a movement was serendipitous: the fashion for 'as found', 'primitive' architecture coincided nicely with post-war shortages, economic strictures, and the need for rapid construction.

As seen from the writings of Vitruvius, Alberti, Palladio, Ruskin etc, for most of architectural history it was simply a given that one of the principal tasks of the architect was to create beauty: the 'virtue on which is founded the common dignity of man.'[391] Brutalist architecture denied beauty. Beauty was judged indulgent and effete, and popular notions of beauty as exemplyfied at the Festival of Britain were dismissed as irrelevant and vulgar. The modern, technological age required a more brutal and rigourous mode of expression, even in the field of social housing – architecture for the disenfranchised. Yet, as this paper has shown, beauty is crucial to human well-being - the beauty not of some dry academic discussion of aesthetics, but as the natural human desire for a quality that nourishes one's spirit, or simply gives pleasure.[392] 'One of the ends of architecture is to express certain needs of the human spirit', commented Richards in 1950.[393] Apt here are the words of Gustave Flaubert: 'Human life is a sad show, undoubtedly: ugly heavy and complex. Art has no other end… than to conjure away the burden and the bitterness.'[394] Economic constraints aside, therefore, art, including the architecture of social housing, ought to provide what one lacks in life, not be a permanent, jolting, reminder of that lack. Tenants of social housing lack status, a lack that is then reinforced by stacking them up in 'inhuman' buildings of mean, utilitarian materials. Art, on the other hand, should bolster the 'worthwhileness of being human'.[395] Beauty speaks of a better life, it is, 'an absolute manifestation of potential', an 'escort descended from the world of the ideal.'[396]

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[391] Bredin; Santoro-Brienza, 191. Evers, 12, 13. Camus, 'Creation and revolution', in Harrison & Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-2000,* 629.
[392] Ruskin: 'Beauty… fills, hallows, exalts the mind', 'Ideas of beauty are among the noblest which can be presented to the human mind, invariably exalting and purifying it according to their degree' – Harrison et al, *Art in Theory, 1815- 1900,* 203
[393] Richards (1950), 180.
[394] Gustave Flaubert, *Complete Works: Correspondence*, Vol. V (Paris: Louis Conard, 1929), 146.
[395] Scruton, *Beauty*, 129.
[396] Friedrich Schiller, in De Botton, 137.

Defining the nature of beauty has defeated the greatest thinkers in human history. Creating life-enhancing beauty, therefore, in social housing calls for the democratisation of beauty. Throughout the research of this paper one voice has been lacking: the voice of the dweller in Brutalism. As witnessed at Coin Street, given a voice, residents of social housing possess a different concept of the visually pleasing than that of architects. Successful social housing requires 'putting away stylistic and individual preferences in favour of listening to what the place… and the community ask for'.[397] This gives tenants control of their built environment where they usually have none. Having control brings added, proven emotional and psychological benefits.[398] This requires the architect to be humble and empathetic, not arbitrary and didactic. As Ivor Smith once commented: 'As architects we have a built in facility for form making that we have to control.'[399]

To return to the Economist Building, it is a work that conveys refinement, a care and attention to detail; it communicates respect for its prestigious clients and its surroundings. Social housing, too, should respect its clients, and seek to confer worth and dignity upon an individual. Successful Brutalist housing does exist, one thinks of the Barbican or the Brunswick centre, but these are successful despite their Brutalist aesthetic not because of it. Debate will continue over the preservation of Brutalist buildings, and Brutalist edifices will (rightly) be preserved. But Brutalism was an experiment that ought not be repeated; for, to adapt the words of Lewis Mumford: 'Only those who are willing to sacrifice the [function] of architecture to the external impression, who are ready to deform life, in order… to create a death which they can call art, can regard [Brutalism] as a model to be praised and copied.'[400]

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[397] Day, 13, 14. Day adds, 'it makes a lot of difference whether things are designed *for* people or *together with* them', 17.
[398] Winifred Gallagher, *The Power of Place* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 11.
[399] Ivor Smith (1967), 271.
[400] Mumford, 77, 78.

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