

Continuity in Rupture: Postmodern Architecture before Architectural Postmodernism

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PRELUDE: THE POSTMODERN HOUSE

WHEN JOSEPH HUDNUT RELATED the term “postmodern” to architecture in his 1945 essay, “The Post-modern House,” he described a kind of house (and owner) that (who) would fulfill the promises of interwar architectural modernism.¹ Both the house (as a building) and the home (as an institution) had become inseparable from the values and processes of industrialization and mechanization. Hudnut was sympathetic with the general direction of this development but uncomfortable with the compromises the factory demanded of the home and its architectural setting. He sketched out the figure of a “post-modern owner, if such a thing is conceivable,” who would maintain an “ancient loyalty invulnerable against the siege of our machines.” Comprehending this “ancient loyalty” and reconciling the “post-modern house” with the “collective-industrial scheme of life” was the peculiar task of the postmodern architect.² And so we have a house, its owner, and its architect, all postmodern: neither devotees of the rigors of the interwar modernism of the Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM) and the International Style nor heretics prepared to spurn its advances.

Hudnut wrote at the end of the war as a modernist standing before the initial bifurcations of the inheritance left by interwar functionalism. On one hand, the demands of postwar reconstruction in Europe had already hastened the industrialization and rationalization of architectural practice and the building industry. On the other, in the wake of a crisis of humanity, exponents of a modern humanism sought to restore the house as the natural locus of the human condition and at the heart of the familial paradigm of community. The postmodern house would, in one sense, be supermodern, as it attended to the demands of rationalism, mechanized production, and mass consumption. Applied to architecture, though, these principles operated instinctively against the ancient values of home and homeliness sustained—in Hudnut’s argument—by the postmodern owner. The home life of the postmodern house (as a locus) would anchor the family as it resisted the pull

toward mechanization and consumerism signaled by the postmodern house (as a product). "The factory-built house, as I imagine it, fails to furnish my mind with that totality of impression [with] which the word house (meaning a building occupied by a family) has always filled it: it leaves unexhibited that idea of home about which there cling so many nuances of thought and sentiment."³ The factory fails the postmodern house, Hudnut surmises, and in this assessment he lights upon a more general problem faced by architecture in this, the period of CIAM's postwar decline. How, he asks, can we be modern without being modernist, to "have mechanization" but not "allow mechanization to take command"?⁴ The quandary is to be modern without extending CIAM's influential, dogmatic brand of functionalist modernism to an indefensible extreme, but also not to resist the tendency toward advanced modernization to the extent of longing nostalgically for an unreconstructed past.

The postmodern home and its owner would emerge from the debris of architecture's interwar experiments to realize something richer, more fulfilling: an ameliorated modernism. "We are too ready," Hudnut observes, "to mistake novelty for progress and progress for art."⁵ His postmodernism succeeds the historical avant-garde by acknowledging its achievements and suppressing its ambition for perpetual reinvention. It holds a place for beauty, resists the seduction of "the novel enchantment of [the architect's] techniques," exceeds the "intellectual satisfaction" of architecture for the architect's sake, and dampens the febrile excitement of formal and structural manipulation.⁶ His position is neatly captured in the diagram Aldo van Eyck presented to the final CIAM conference in 1959: his famous *Otterlo Circles*, bearing the credo, "by us, for us," embracing the concept of "the vernacular of the heart," and calling upon architecture to "bring together opposite qualities and solutions."⁷ Van Eyck represents the ethic underpinning a multivalent humanist response to modern architecture after the war, including the systematic turn to spatial themes, landscape, and context as design values, and to history.

In this vein, Hudnut's "Post-modern House" addresses a series of issues that have had broad significance for international discourse on architecture in the years from postwar recovery to the present moment. He looks for invention within tradition, for attendance to immutable extra-architectural values, and for a resonance between architecture, its occupants, and its settings. Despite the advances that Hudnut sought to secure for architecture along lines that we now associate with interwar modernist orthodoxy, his position also seems conservative; he argues for progress while questioning the enduring authority that the historical avant-garde would have for the work of postwar architects. Crucially, he allows for a postwar modernism that grapples with the problem of historical continuity without regressing to a nostalgic romanticism. After World War II there could be no

clear choice between, as Hudnut had it, invention and devotion to the “ancient loyalties.” Although we would wisely hesitate before ascribing a simple choice between novelty and continuity to Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and other figures of the interwar canon, Hudnut’s view of the problem they pose is informative. His postmodern architecture extends the earlier modernism of these figures as it attends to the new social conditions of the postwar world. It is astylistic, antidoctrinal, reconciliatory, and humanist: an unsteady first step for a term that would, decades later, assume a much harder rhetorical position against the modern.

Well before Hudnut took it up for architecture, from early in the twentieth century the term “postmodern” was loosely applied to cultural and artistic currents and works. These uses were, for many decades, unrelated to the ideological and stylistic developments against which “postmodernism” gained currency in the 1960s as an analytical category and touchstone of artistic and architectural production.⁸ After World War I the term arose in discussions of literature and the visual arts to speak of the historical avant-garde and as distinct from those moderns who had ushered in the twentieth century. Hudnut applied the term “postmodern” to the problem of architecture’s deep continuities, following a period in which its loudest polemicists had, as a rhetorical gesture, rejected the authority and relevance of the past. Several decades later Charles Jencks famously called postmodern the various strains of another rejection, this time of modern architecture and its “univalency.”⁹

Both uses of the term, however, assume a certain homogeneity in the phasing and geography of twentieth-century architecture that is clearly unsustainable. The British case undermines such broad strokes by offering a seemingly less progressive counterhistory to the Continental cases of France, Germany, and the Low Countries, where CIAM and the International Style found fertile soil. In the relative absence of a local avant-garde, how could postwar British architecture be postmodern within Hudnut’s framework of a conditional continuity? (To be clear, Hudnut himself did not write directly on Britain in “The Post-modern House.”) In the 1970s Jencks rejected both modern and postmodern architecture—as Hudnut positioned them—in favor of an architectural postmodernism that was in Jencks’s estimation coming to supplant the values of all modern architecture, orthodox and ameliorated.¹⁰ It was construed as a neologism born in 1972 out of the destruction of Minoru Yamasaki’s Pruitt-Igoe housing scheme and the modern values for which it had been praised two decades earlier. Jencks’s postmodernism was an architecture of formal and semantic games, historical allusions, quotations, and metaphors, and of contextualism, vernacularism, and “radical eclecticism.” Michael Graves, Philip Johnson, Kisho Kurokawa, Charles Moore, and John Portman numbered among his postmodernists. Jencksian postmodernism, however, as

much as it described a new trajectory in later twentieth-century architecture, rallied 1970s and 1980s architectural culture behind a term of some decades' currency. Well before Jencks, the first phase of the British discussion on postmodern architecture had pursued the term neither as continuity nor rejection, but as a stylistic development within modern architecture, though against the International Style. To this discussion we will now turn.

A POSTMODERN STYLE

Among the earliest attempts to historicize modern architecture was Nikolaus Pevsner's 1936 classic *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*.¹¹ Pevsner famously constructed a teleology of technological, formal, social, and ethical development in architecture spanning the later decades of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth. He favored the functionalism and modernity promised by the string of inventions and clarifications running from the Great Exhibition of 1851 to the Arts and Crafts movement and fulfilled in the Bauhaus and its functionalist fellow travelers. "It is the creative energy of this world in which we live and work and which we want to master," wrote Pevsner in the book's conclusion, "a world of science and technique, of speed and danger, of hard struggles and no personal security, that is glorified in Gropius's architecture."¹² Pevsner was a polemicist as well as a historian, and through his involvement with the progressive British journal *Architectural Review* he advanced the cause of modern architecture in Britain at a moment when it and its criticism lagged, in his assessment, behind that of North America and Europe. Pevsner understood that modern architecture could be acceptable to a British audience when couched as a natural extension of, say, eighteenth-century British values; the modernism for which he argued drew openly on British, indeed English, precedents in picturesque planning and visual organization, and in the social implications for artistic practice explored by William Morris and his contemporaries. He did not promote a German modernism without first claiming its English roots. In Pevsner's hands the deeper (English) heritage of the architecture that emerged in Europe's progressive arenas was more modern than Britons themselves understood it to be. This formed a paradox in the emergence of a modernist architectural idiom in Britain itself, one in which modernism was bifurcated by indigenous and imported strains.¹³

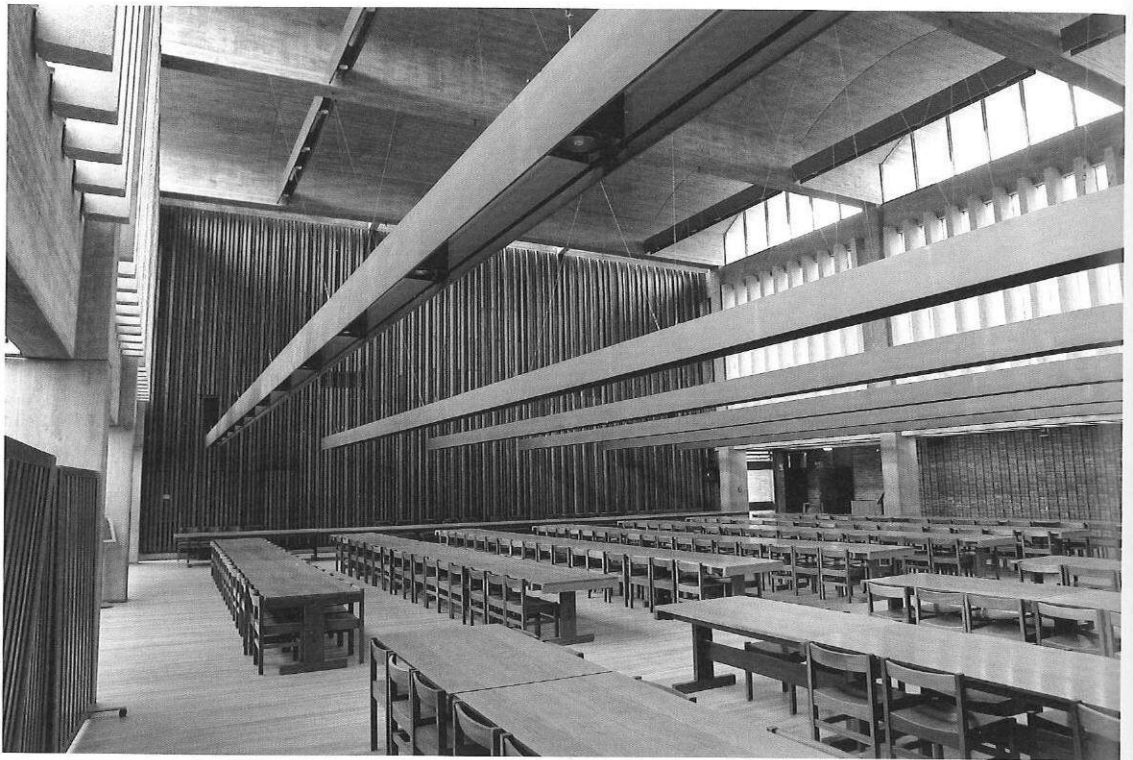
Pevsner promoted the reconciliation of modern architecture, functionalist in ethic and appearance, with a deeply English context that prized visual experience. The works of Gustav Eiffel, Josef Hoffmann, Victor Horta, and Louis Sullivan demonstrated to the generation of architects and designers who realized the



27. Richard Sheppard, Robson and Partners (architects), Churchill College, Cambridge (1959–65), aerial view (ca. 1980s).

Deutsche Werkbund and the Bauhaus at Dessau that, if designed sensitively and intelligently, functionalist architecture need not shy away from contemporaneity in favor of a formal historicism. Conversely, it need not enact the rejection of historical values that underpinned vast swathes of interwar modernist rhetoric. The deeper values embedded in modern architecture's settings, in cities, villages, and countryside alike, allowed for an evolving heritage accommodating novelty. The richness of history would be preserved into the future while allowing the contemporary to be contemporary. Writing at this moment, Pevsner saw Bauhaus-mode functionalism as the next link in a secure, unbroken chain of aesthetic and social values extending from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through to the twentieth.

Three decades later the modern movement had found its way in Britain. As Pevsner admitted, however, speaking on BBC Radio toward the end of 1966, "architecture in our time" had come to favor Brutalism over the rationalism for which he had argued in *Pioneers* and for which he felt such a strong affinity.¹⁴ Symptomatic of this architectural trend was the new Churchill College complex at Cambridge



28. Richard Sheppard, Robson, and Partners (architects), Churchill College, Cambridge (1959–65), interior of the dining hall.

University, built by Richard Sheppard, Robson, and Partners (figs. 27, 28). The commission followed a 1959 competition among twenty-one invited firms that together spanned the range of British approaches to modern architecture at that moment.¹⁵ (Indeed, several of the entries, such as those of Stirling and Gowan and Alison and Peter Smithson, may well be more famous than Sheppard's realized buildings.) Several stages of the college had been completed early in the 1960s—residential flats, the North and East Courts, the central buildings, and (most recently, 1964–65) the library and assembly hall—and to these Pevsner took specific exception in his on-air remarks. He dismissed the buildings of Churchill College as a ruthless response to their design brief, which was to accommodate 540 students and 40 fellows, largely residential, in a manner that would follow the typological patterns of the traditional Oxbridge college (with a hall, chapel, service buildings, boathouse, rooms, and so forth) while being “designed as buildings for their own time.”¹⁶ The architecture of Churchill College was expressionistically rather than

rationally modern, operating against Pevsner's teleology and the taste established in *Pioneers*. The result was yet another instance, as the historian Mark Goldie puts it (reflecting Pevsner), of an architecture that is "massy, messy, demonstrative, in which the architect succumbed to artistry, seduced by the possibilities of concrete." Yet, as Goldie further observes, "Pevsner let the juggernaut of history license that for which he did not personally care."¹⁷ Pevsner admitted:

But I am an historian, and the fact that my enthusiasms cannot be aroused by [Le Corbusier's] Ronchamp or Chandigarh [or the Unité d'Habitation, or Maisons Jaoul, or] by Churchill College . . . does not blind me to the existence today of a new style, successor to my International Modern style of the 1930s, a post-modern style, I would be tempted to call it, but the legitimate style of the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁸

Both Hudnut in 1945 and Pevsner in 1966 used the term "postmodern" to differentiate postwar developments in architecture from the rationalism and functionalism of architecture's historical avant-garde. Yet where Hudnut's postmodern described the values addressed by modernist humanists in the wake of the war, courting an extension of the aims and innovations of the interwar modern movement, Pevsner's postmodern style heralded a decisive shift away from the values of what he had called his International Modernism—a close cousin to the International Style institutionalized by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1932.¹⁹ That he calls postmodern what we might now, even circumspectly, call Brutalism is beside the point; his realignment of the term offers the history of postwar architecture this gloss: in the postmodern could be found a historically explicable break with the modern, a rejection of its formal, and by implication social and artistic, values.

Here we encounter a distinction between a strategic and a stylistic postmodernism.²⁰ The first comprises an attitude and theory that pursue the tenets of the historical avant-garde while recognizing its limitations. The second supplants modern architecture, defined formally, materially, organizationally, and socially (as Jencks, in other words, would have it), in favor of a new formal and linguistic order. Neither Pevsner nor Goldie would identify their use of the term "postmodern" with the neo-avant-garde or postmodernism as explored in the 1970s and 1980s by Jencks or the New York Five (Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, Richard Meier, Charles Gwathmey, and John Hejduk). Yet these two implications for the term "postmodern" describe a complex set of problems faced by modern architecture at the end of World War II. How could architects start to reconcile the return of a humanist attention to the individual within society with the functionalism and

rationalism left by the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment as a twentieth-century legacy? And how could architects invent and progress beyond a culturally and temporally conditioned moment of teleological fulfillment? As Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno famously observed in 1944, the deep problems of twentieth-century culture were brought into painfully sharp relief by the dialectical relations of progress to industrialized destruction, of reason to the Holocaust.²¹

If the interwar path of modern architecture exposed problems that inhered in its basic premises, Hudnut used the term “postmodern” to describe the search for the modern movement’s enduring good at the expense of its failings, a pursuit of the basic tenets of what Pevsner called International Modernism, but under new social and technological conditions. Conversely, if modern architecture represented a good unto itself, Pevsner’s categorical and stylistic postmodernism stands for the rejection of his International Modernism as its mainstay, and the rejection, therefore, of the heritage brought into the present day by modernist invention. Pevsner acknowledges the generational passing of a torch—both architectural and critical—and recognizes the historicity of the moment in which he encounters this postmodern style.

Hudnut’s term disagrees with that of Pevsner; and yet both uses of “postmodern” have a place, albeit ambivalent, in its uptake in the late 1970s by Jencks—widely, but wrongly, appreciated as a neologism to account for architecture’s late twentieth-century formal transgressions, its historicism, nostalgia, signification, excesses, and insolence. In lieu of any clear historical position on how the architecture of postwar Britain responded to the modernist inheritance of Europe’s interwar years, Hudnut and Pevsner help us mark out the terms of a discourse on modern architecture’s historicity and contemporaneity. The British case—the line pursued, as we shall see, by Reyner Banham—is interesting for privileging a progressive approach to historical continuity as it emerged from World War II, an approach honed by its attention to the parallel national example of Italy. In a country with a deep national heritage, the Britons asked of Italy in the pages of *Architectural Review*, how modern can modern architecture be?

EPISODES IN THE BRITISH CONSTRUCTION OF ITALY

The key to Pevsner’s reconciliation of International Modernism and the contextualist intentions of the Townscape campaign launched in the pages of *Architectural Review* was a productive visual tension between invention and tradition, object and context, that did not require contemporary architecture to disguise its contemporaneity.²² He appreciated the historicity of modern architecture and planning,

even when the fulfillment of his functionalist teleology was superseded by the newer architecture of the postwar decades. Insofar as Pevsner claims this problem for Britain, all the while invoking the views of Camillo Sitte and the late nineteenth-century discourse of *Stadtbaukunst*, he renders British a problem faced throughout Europe. Among the paths of critical and attentive traffic passing between Britain and its interlocutors, Italian architects and writers were particularly drawn to the British experience of postwar modernism. Both countries maintained a strong sense of national coherence in matters of tradition and history, and both had entered the second half of the twentieth century with an ambivalent attitude toward rationalist architecture and planning, despite being faced, after 1944, with the quintessential modernist planning problems of reconstruction, urban expansion, and the satellite town. It follows that Britain paid a degree of critical attention to Italy, and vice versa.

The *Architectural Review* contribution to this critical relationship is worth our brief attention. Among the most widely read architecture journals in Britain and the Commonwealth, *Architectural Review* paid close attention to the most pressing issues of architecture and urbanism in the postwar decades, while attending to a larger mission to broaden the architect's cultural horizons by discussing the visual and decorative arts and the history of architecture—a salon in print. Its values were embedded in the Townscape program and were regularly rehearsed in the editorial pages.²³ In this setting, *Architectural Review* writers intermittently treated new Italian buildings and monuments in articles of the 1950s and 1960s and attended occasionally to Italian discussions on heritage and planning. A 1949 report on a Bolognese apartment block by A. Persichetti and Giulio Sterbini took interest in the work as “the first building to be erected under the town development plan approved by the Bologna City Council.”²⁴ Alan Ballantyne's 1952 “tour” through the Italian centers took in contemporary architecture through the lens of reconstruction. He presents a complaint that “overall planning is non-existent,” highlighting the efforts of “many prominent Italian architects who appreciate the urgency of the planning problem of their country, and make their own individual contributions towards its solution.”²⁵ In 1957 Hilde Selem presented a series of Italian housing schemes realized in regional rural settings. “One must understand,” she writes, “that planning of this kind is a new and strange thing in most parts of Italy.” In contrast to the “social habits and relationships that enable the [English] planner and architect to work efficiently,” the activities of their Italian counterparts “may be met with suspicion or even hostility, because planning is either unknown, or has been known only as part of an oppressive political regime.”²⁶ She surveys a number of low- and medium-density housing projects in San Basilio, La Martella, and Cutro, with which the editors invite us to compare village housing in Suffolk

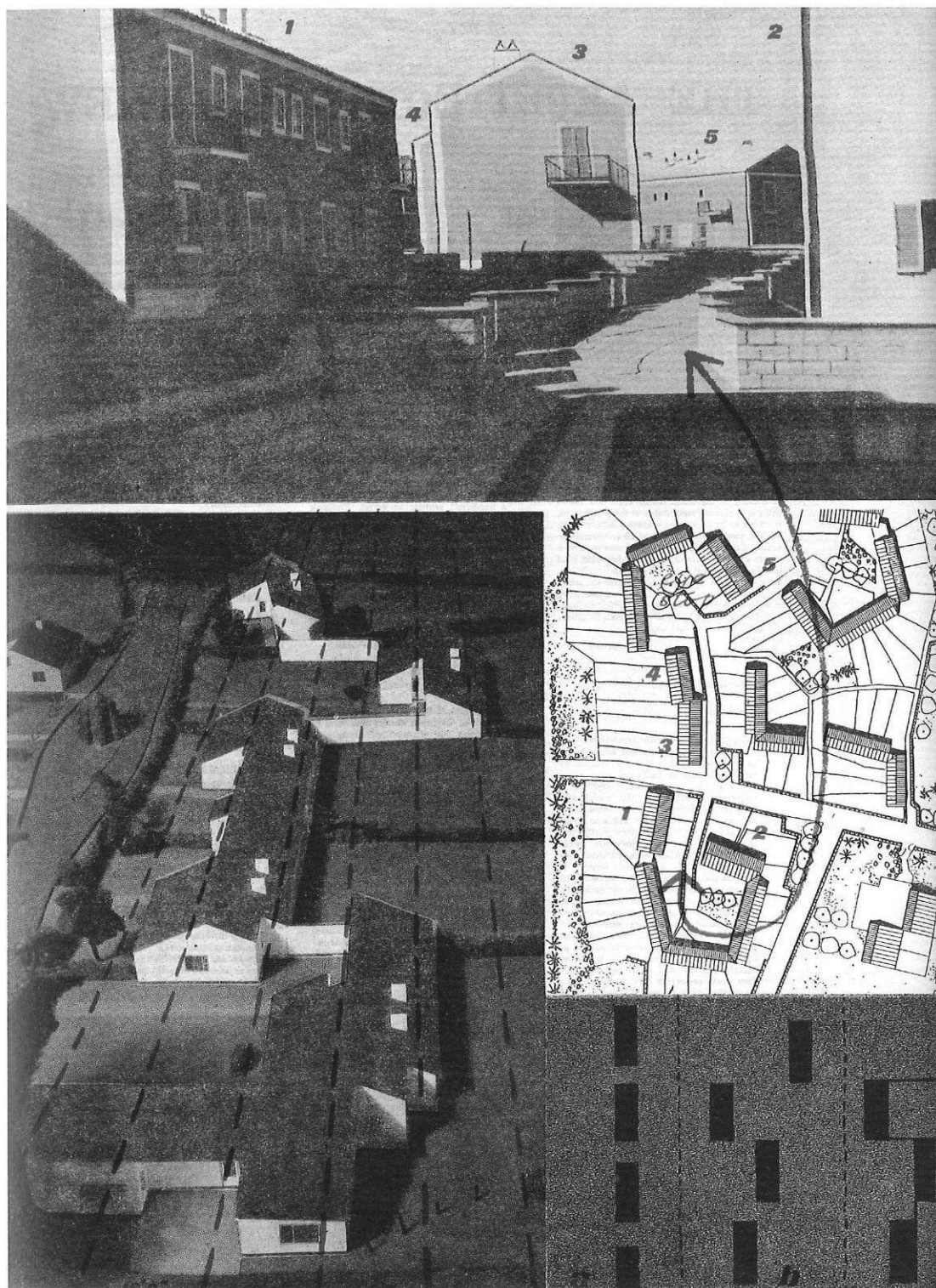
and a training college in Wimbledon (fig. 29). Elsewhere in the issue articles treat historical Italian curios. The following year, in 1958, Georgina Masson reported on the efforts of the widely subscribed historic preservation society Italia Nostra, an organization whose interests had (naturally) turned to contemporary issues of planning at a crucial moment in debates on public recreational space.²⁷

Pevsner's longtime collaborator and *Architectural Review* editor, Hubert de Cronin Hastings, was particularly attuned to Italian planning issues. Writing in 1961 as Ivor de Wolfe, for instance, he picked apart plans to exploit the touristic potential of the Lago di Bolsena waterfront.²⁸ While critical of the country's planning professionals, he nonetheless remained enamored of Italian cities. A monographic "Italian Townscape" issue of *Architectural Review* appeared in 1962 ahead of an eponymously titled (but more expansive) book in 1963—both edited by Ivor de Wolfe, illustrated by Kenneth Browne, and with photographs by Ivy de Wolfe, who was likely Hastings's wife, Hazel (fig. 30).²⁹ In a typically lyrical editorial, de Wolfe describes his topic:

For the obligation here is to look for a period and place where townscape, if not a certified and licensed art, has been practiced on the impulse by men who built what they loved and loved what they built. Could one in that case expect to fare better than in the sector of Europe where, by a strange miscalculation of destiny and business men and despite all that the Lambrettas can do to destroy them, many splendid towns have survived almost intact? Even now, though little she deserves it, Europe still possesses a great heritage of townscape, most of which has significance for the modern planner.³⁰

The peninsula is explored through the photographer's lens, Hastings (as de Wolfe) thematizing the images and abstracting them as lessons for the British Townscape discussion. Under the title "Open Space as Enclosure," for instance, he meditates on violence, remoteness, flatness, hurly-burly, outrage, theater, waxworks, multiple use, enclosure, leaks, baffles, and "the big leak" (flooding).³¹ The Italian town is less the subject of his reflections than a mirror in which to appreciate the day's planning issues in Britain. Elsewhere in the issue, "The Street as Enclosure" analyzes urban street scenes under typological categories, demonstrating the fruitfulness of the study of Italian cities for *Architectural Review*'s ongoing search for design models sensitive to townscape as a practice aligned with architecture and planning.³²

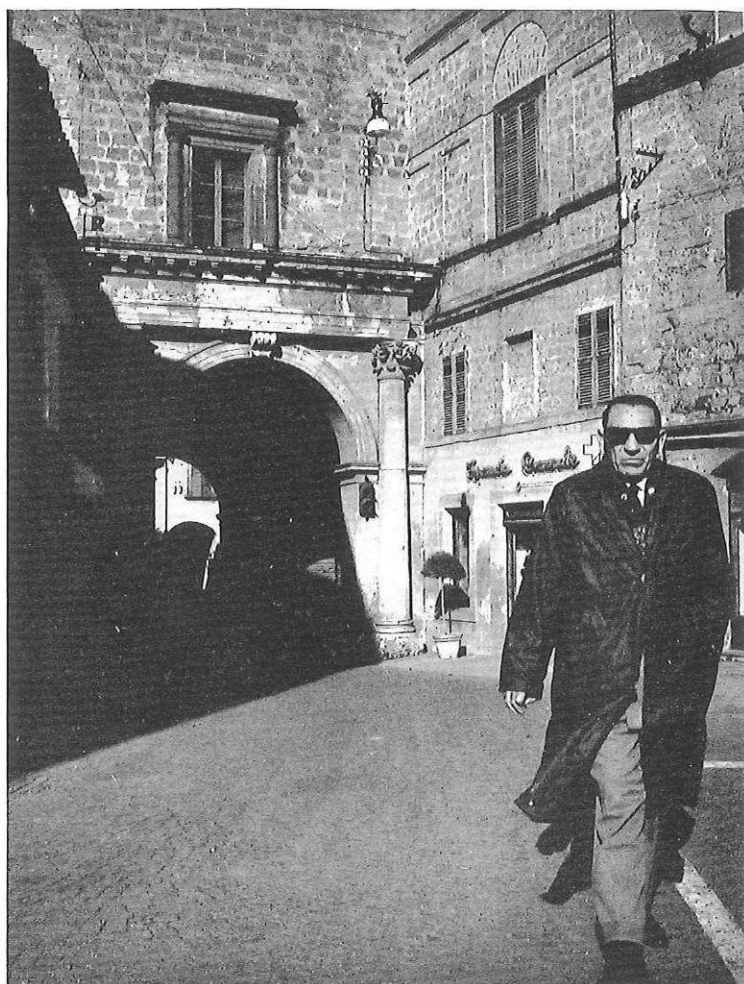
If "The Italian Townscape" offers one model of British attention, Banham's criticism of contemporary Italian architecture is another. Among his articles on Italian works, two attend closely to the fragile ambitions and values of the modern movement after World War II. For example, his 1952 review of Luigi Vagnetti's



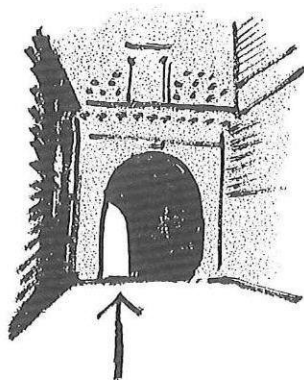
29. Comparative study of San Basilio, Rome, and Rushbrooke, Suffolk, *Architectural Review* (August 1957).

Key-hole

The Street



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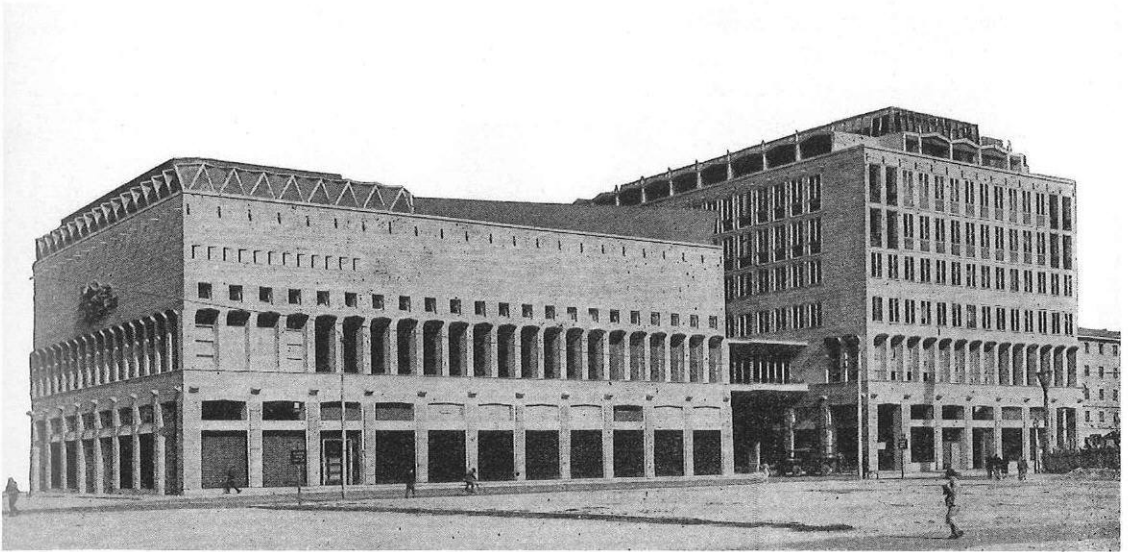


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key-hole

definable as the rabbit-warren concept, seen here in its most primitive form as a hole, rabbit- or key-, but at Sabbioneta well illustrated in the canyon effects of the Via Prato Raineri, 135. The secret lies in treating the street as a *way through* instead of a through-way by emphasizing the burrowing rather than the bulldozing nature of the thing. Once conceived as a *dive* it becomes a cave, with towering sides which rise up to enclose it, so introducing a second important concept, that of the picture frame or

30. "Key-hole," a study of the street, photograph by Ivy de Wolfe (Hazel Hastings?), sketch by Kenneth Browne, as published in Ivor de Wolfe (Hubert de Cronin Hastings), *The Italian Townscape* (1963).



31. Luigi Vagnetti (architect), Palazzo Grande, Livorno (1952), *Architectural Review* (October 1952).

Palazzo Grande at Livorno registers conceptual problems in the definition of modern architecture within the British reception of Italian buildings (fig. 31). His criticism of the rise of the historicist style called Neoliberty by Paolo Portoghesi records how British hopes in a new Italian path were confounded by the postwar realities of Italian architecture.³³ Of the Palazzo Grande, Banham asks: "To what extent does contemporary Italian architecture proceed from the supposed tenets of the modern movement?" This building belongs to a category of works, he suggests, "that render inescapable the tendencies in a style or period which generally held theory has preferred to ignore or suppress." Vagnetti, in this case, has given cause to "a certain disquiet and misgiving" that tempered British enthusiasm for Italian architecture.³⁴ Banham writes:

This building cannot be isolated from Italian contemporary architecture; stylistically it represents one wing of a coherent movement whose other extreme is indistinguishable from the International Style. No more than in Holland can a precise line be drawn between eclectics and purists, a general style embraces both, and all intermediate manners as well.³⁵

For all the features, technological and formal, cementing the Livorno building's place in the modern movement, its Mannerist and medieval allusions, the architect's

insistence on extending the signature arcade around the complex—"ignoring functional requirements, and having its aesthetic effect severely compromised in places where they could not be overridden"—together confound the categorical modern movement. This is not the architecture of Pevsner's International Modern, but rather a foretaste of what he would call postmodern when it appeared as Brutalism in Britain. Banham observes that these objections "would extend far across the contemporary Italian scene, and might even touch some of the classic buildings by which the International Style is defined."³⁶ Vagnetti's work fails, Banham asserts, because it evidences eclecticism built upon eclecticism. He makes, though, a concession to the critical voice of Luigi Moretti:

[He] could express the opinion . . . that we are living in one of those periods when no universal and authoritative style can arise, when an abyss continually yawns between symbol and reality, and it is permitted to doubt whether the expressive vocabularies of the past are, in fact, dead. For him, the twentieth century is one of continual eclecticism, with all the arts borrowing from one another and the past. Though his conception of eclecticism is both elevated and rather abstract, it represents the kind of thinking which underlies and justifies the work of an architect like Vagnetti.³⁷

Banham allows Vagnetti an uneasy relationship with past references, but by 1959 he accuses the Neoliberty turn in the Italian north of "infantile regression"³⁸ (fig. 32). "The present baffling turn taken by Milanese and Torinese architecture probably appears all the more baffling to ourselves, viewing it from the wrong side of the Alps, because of the irrelevant hopes, the non-Italian aspirations of our own, that we have tended to project on Italian architecture since the war."³⁹ The "mythic architecture" of "social responsibility" and "formal architectonic purity" was an invention of British eyes. To these same eyes a number of other Italian trends "call the whole status of the Modern Movement in Italy into question," including the editorial direction of Ernesto Nathan Rogers's magazine *Casabella Continuità*, the historicism of his architectural firm BBPR, and that of a string of younger architects and their polemicist Aldo Rossi.⁴⁰

Importantly, Banham frames his reprimand for British readers: "Historically, the modern movement has always had a meagre foothold in the Peninsula, and has depended on flukes of patronage."⁴¹ The movement's middle-class patrons value modernism's aesthetic over its ethic. Neoliberty, it follows, retreats to what Rossi called "the forms of a middle-class past." (Here, he is quoting Rossi.) Banham is less surprised that architects might recall so directly and uncritically the styles of the *fin-de-siècle* than that architects might allow the *borghese* to direct taste



32. Gae Aulenti (architect), stable block at San Siro, Milan (1956), *Architectural Review* (April 1959).

so immediately as to have it invoke “the *Tempi Felici* . . . the good old days when the northern cities were growing fat on the proceeds of the industrial expansion of the early nineteen-hundreds.”⁴² Banham’s apprehension of Neoliberty’s repercussions for Britain and British taste in architecture is palpable.

ITALIAN CRITICISM OF POSTWAR BRITAIN, CA. 1968

Where English interest in Italy was, in part, a matter of cultural habit, this curiosity was reciprocated in the 1960s by a generation of Italian architects and polemicists with a new appreciation for the way that British architects were “cautiously attempting new paths.”⁴³ If *Architectural Review* documents a somewhat idiosyncratic view of the reception in Britain of Italian architecture and townscape, later in the decade an issue of the Italian journal *Zodiac* dedicated to England (1968) provides an equally particular view on the Italian reception of British architecture and urbanism and, more revealingly, of British criticism of the Italian scene. Maria Bottero wrote in her introduction to the issue that Britain was “substantially on the outside of the modern European movement between the two wars”—a position she recognized as shared by Italy.⁴⁴ In both countries could be found strong representatives

of avant-garde rationalism and expressionism, but the architectural cultures of Britain and Italy both grappled with the deep historical problem of invention within tradition. Pevsner's *Pioneers* had argued the historical bases of modern architecture, but his enthusiasm for "International Modernism" was tempered by the view that while England had given rise to the modernist ethos, modernism—however international—should not exceed the context of its origins. This view could also be found in Italy, where the advent of the new was itself no new thing. Despite any international tendencies, the Britishness of modern British architecture and the *italianità* of modern Italian architecture were consistently reinforced in critical discourse. Acts of invention, in this sense, could react against tradition, history, and contexts physical and intellectual, but more often than not they operated within tradition and with full consciousness of their history and setting.

A case in point was the 1968 "England" issue of the twice-yearly review *Zodiac*, an Italian architecture journal founded by Adriano Olivetti in 1957. It included as many British and Anglophone contributions as it did Italian. An essay by the American art historian (and *Zodiac* contributing editor) Henry-Russell Hitchcock surveyed "English Architecture in the Early 20th Century"; Michael Gold presented a range of industrial and commercial buildings by Owen Williams; James Stirling published a lecture on "Anti-Structure," delivered in Bologna during celebrations of the academic career of Giovanni Michelucci; Joseph Rykwert wrote on campus architecture; and John Taylor considered the architectural and planning work by local authorities in England. Alongside these articles the issue surveyed recent British projects in a 125-page dossier largely comprising visual documentation of new works accompanied by brief descriptive notes.⁴⁵ A section called "English Brutalism" included a series of extracts on the theme from articles published by Alison and Peter Smithson and Reyner Banham in the pages of *Architectural Design* and *Architectural Review* between 1955 and 1960, and a passage from Banham's 1966 book *The New Brutalism* concluded the selection.⁴⁶ The "England" issue shared with *Zodiac* monographs on the United States and Spain a balance between local and Italian perspectives. Given the conceptual problems outlined above, some attention to the Italian commentary on British work will be informative.

Bottero poses the question unambiguously: "From what point of view is Great Britain interesting?" And she answers: "Chiefly because the disciplinary approach in this country seems complex and not confined to the contribution of a few isolated figures." From the Italian perspective, she continues, "the debate on the themes emerging is non-stop and extra-disciplinary aspects of a social, political order, etc, are involved." The British planned New Towns, of which more than twenty were developed in the years after the 1946 New Towns Act, attracted particular interest in *Zodiac* in 1968 by way of a reflection on the program's aims

and consequences.⁴⁷ In social and political terms, Bottero noted, and despite their problems, they “have stood for an exemplary effort of total planning (political, economic, sociological, as well as urbanistic-architectural), which has involved the whole nation.” Similarly, the proliferation of university buildings and campuses in the postwar decades has led to “national interest . . . in this problem,” to “criticism and hence to a re-thinking of the institutional role of the University in general basic terms.” Those cautious, British “new paths” of which Bottero writes are realized by architects shifting between architectural types and “environment,” and by conducting, albeit at a domestic scale, a morphological research through architectural design. She singles out Colin St. John Wilson as someone straddling Britain and the modern movement, writing of “his skill at transferring and re-interpreting the modules of European rationalism within the British tradition.”⁴⁸

Given how they position the Italian reception of two of the key British discourses noted above, the articles by Alberto Ferrari (“La Lettura dell’Ambiente Fisico nella Cultura Inglese”) and Francesco Tentori (“Phoenix Brutalism”) are particularly apt to our broader themes.⁴⁹ Within a longer discussion on “environment” in British architecture and in the *Architectural Review* discourse particularly, Ferrari writes of Pevsner’s promotion of townscape as a revival of the picturesque as “an English vision of things.” Surpassing, in Ferrari’s view, the academicism of Camillo Sitte, Pevsner’s perspective is “at one and the same time original and integrated in British tradition, to the problems of the development of modern architecture, for an alternative to the contrast between rationalism and organicism.”⁵⁰ He proposes a precedent for the *Architectural Review*-dominated discussion of the visual organization of towns for modern architecture in the postwar era in Patrick Abercrombie’s *Town and Country Planning* (1933),⁵¹ the salient demands of which Ferrari summarizes as

the awareness of the value of British environmental patrimony and the cultural inheritance to which the existence of this patrimony is connected; the unity with tradition, that is to say the aspiration to build up an almost analogous patrimony, without any loss or upheaval in quality, even though through the disruptive action of industrial development; and together with this, the conviction that to bring about this reformation it is sufficient to analyze the value that the specialists (architects, town-planners, critics) who replace in their entirety the mass of the users of the environment, give to traditional environment.⁵²

Ferrari astutely observes that Abercrombie’s premises remained at stake in the later discourses on planning during the first wave of New Towns, and in *Architectural Review*’s Townscape discourse, and that their persistence tells us something about

the connection, not given as an a priori condition, of the English experience of modern planning to the broader encounter with modern, European postwar architecture. Ferrari suggests that British architects and planners secured Britain's Britishness by actively conserving the image of its inheritance from the turn of the nineteenth century, the protection of which for the greater good, and proliferation of which by contemporary means, lay in the hands of the professional and artistic classes. Pevsner's distaste for the architecture of Churchill College signaled a generational division between himself and the younger generation of architects who gravitated to the Brutalist idiom, whose critical voice was Banham. Where Pevsner regarded the English tradition as sullied by this turn, Banham thought it extended and enlivened. The elder proponent of continuities felt this shift as a historically inevitable rupture, while the younger historian of the modern and the contemporary perceived the work of the Brutalists—a category he himself distrusted—as saving that which was salvageable from the wreck of the official modernism of CIAM.

Tentori explores the history of the New Brutalism discourse under these terms. It is elsewhere well-rehearsed, but in "Phoenix Brutalism" he engagingly presents "a *restrictive* interpretation of the movement," restrictive for keeping a keen eye open for its pertinence to Italian architecture. He sustains, for instance, Banham's "rather acute examination of [Italy's] post-war architecture" across a series of contributions to *Architectural Review*. "As time passes, and despite recent attempts at re-affirming 'misunderstood' values, one must recognize that—in his globally negative judgement of the official Italian architecture in '55—Banham was not unjust in bundling together both young and less young." Whatever errors Banham makes as a critic of Italian architectural culture, he lights upon an impression, as Tentori puts it, of "a hell paved with good intentions (which, however, do nothing to remedy the absolute marginality of the single and collective contribution)."⁵³ The New Brutalism offered Italian architects a model for an affinity between critic and architect that would overcome the contingencies of generations, professional allegiances, and institutional ties. It would be "true culture and not clique jargon."⁵⁴ Tentori suggests that Italian culture might aspire to the English architectural culture of Banham (as well as that of Rudolf Wittkower, so important as an historian to the work of the Smithsons and others of their generation). Banham himself offers a different model of the engaged critic. "Compared to this attitude of the young English—violent, brutal, aggressive—the objections of the young Italians (those, let it be understood, young in '50) are a muttering behind the squire's door, a lackey's resentment."⁵⁵ In 1968 Tentori looked to the forthright and effective criticism of Banham as a model, and to the vibrant discussion built around those architects whom Pevsner had disparaged as figures of a "personality

thought, a “post” condition? Rogers intimates the importance of disarticulating the “essence” of modern architecture from its expression, which Pevsner’s critique in 1966 largely failed to do, and which led Banham to challenge the ethical underpinnings of the New Brutalism aesthetic. Indeed, postwar debates in Great Britain and Italy continually raised the question of whether to be postmodern by reconciling the burden that CIAM, and later Team 10, had come to pose with the present condition, to seek out a fundamental modernism as a pure inheritance of the avant-garde, or to find a new language for architecture in the postwar world. Banham became reticent about the New Brutalism, but the full import of his choice—ethic or aesthetic?—became clear in the 1970s, with the rise of postmodernism as a multivalent ideological and stylistic phenomenon, heralding the death of the modern architecture of the interwar and postwar periods. If for Hudnut the war represented a rupture on humanistic grounds, and in Pevsner’s eyes modernism’s stylistic shift away from rationalism stood for another, then architecture’s linguistic turn presented another still. This latter postmodernism found a secure hold on late twentieth-century architecture—albeit fleetingly—but this is not the “post-modern” of which Hudnut and Pevsner wrote and to which Rogers alluded. In their hands the postmodern stands for a set of problems posed by modern architecture, within modern architecture, that modern architecture might itself overcome.

1. Joseph Hudnut, "The Post-modern House," *Architectural Record* 97 (May 1945): 70–75, rev. in *Architecture and the Spirit of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1949), 108–19; citation is to the 1949 edition. The term "postmodern" is Hudnut's, although he hyphenates the word. For a fuller consideration of Hudnut's position see Jill Pearlman, *Inventing American Modernism: Joseph Hudnut, Walter Gropius, and the Bauhaus Legacy at Harvard* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2007).
2. Hudnut, "The Post-modern House," 119.
3. Hudnut, "The Post-modern House," 109.
4. Hudnut, "The Post-modern House," 110.
5. Hudnut, "The Post-modern House," 115.
6. Hudnut, "The Post-modern House," 111.
7. www.team10online.org/team10/e/ck.
8. Compare Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 184. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites a series of new applications of the term "post-modern" in the English language from 1917 on, each couched as a neologism; see "Postmodern, *n.* and *adj.*," *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (June 2009), dictionary.oed.com, accessed August 21, 2009. See also the introduction to this volume.
9. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy, 1977).
10. His approach was to manipulate the terms within modern architecture itself. See Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1973). Also see Elie Haddad, "Charles Jencks and the Historiography of Post-Modernism," *Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 4 (2009): 493–510.
11. Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), titled *Pioneers of Modern Design* in subsequent editions, one of which (revised and enlarged) appeared with Yale Univ. Press (2005).
12. Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, 207.
13. See Paul Walker's account of colonial modernists in 1930s Britain: "Migration and Modern Architecture: The Case of New Zealand," *Fabrications: The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand* 18, no. 1 (June 2008): 40–55, esp. 42–46.
14. Nikolaus Pevsner, "Architecture in Our Time," *Listener* (UK), December 29, 1966, 953–55, discussed in Mark Goldie, *Corbusier Comes to Cambridge: Post-War Architecture and the Competition to Build Churchill College*, exh. cat. (Cambridge, UK: Churchill College, Cambridge, and the Cloister Press, 2007), 39–40. The year 1966 marked thirty years since *Pioneers* had first appeared; it also saw published a new book by Pevsner's former student, Reyner Banham, which returned to the title of his now-seminal 1955 essay, "The New Brutalism," to offer the movement, tongue in cheek, a set of rules, and in so doing signaled that movement's conclusion. See Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural Press, 1966); for the earlier essay see Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism," *Architectural Review* 118, no. 708 (December 1955): 355–61. Compare John Macarthur, "The Nomenclature of Style: Brutalism, Minimalism, Art History, and Visual Style in Architecture Journals," *Architectural Theory Review* 10, no. 2 (2005): 100–109.
15. Goldie's account is authoritative. See *Corbusier Comes to Cambridge*, 8–23, 44–45.
16. Quoted in Goldie, *Corbusier Comes to Cambridge*, 6.
17. Goldie, *Corbusier Comes to Cambridge*, 40.
18. Pevsner, "Architecture in Our Time," cited in Goldie, *Corbusier Comes to Cambridge*, 40; Goldie's parentheses. Pevsner's admission of Brutalism's historical legitimacy does little to assuage his annoyance at its rise.
19. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style: Architecture since 1922* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1932). Compare Nikolaus Pevsner, "Introduction," in Nikolaus Pevsner, ed., *The Anti-Rationalists and the Rationalists* (London: Reed, 2000), 1–2; originally in Nikolaus Pevsner and James Richards, eds., *Anti-Rationalists* (London: Architectural Press, 1973).
20. Compare Maarten Delbeke's distinction between a strategic and formal Mannerism in "Formalism and Formalised Theories of Architecture: Robert Venturi, Roman Mannerism, and Baroque," in David Beynon and Ursula de Jong, eds., *History in Practice: Proceedings of the 25th Annual Conference of the Society of*

Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand (Geelong, Victoria: Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand, 2008), 63; and CD-rom.

21. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002; original German ed., 1944); compare Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (Italian ed., 1973; English ed., Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973), esp. "The Dialectic of the Avant-Garde," 78–103.
22. This principle underpinned Pevsner's early articulation, alongside Hubert de Cronin Hastings and others of the *Architectural Review* editorial group, of the principles of "townscape" in the 1930s and 1940s, an approach to the reconciliation of invention and context that Pevsner also called "visual planning," and that in the 1940s was formalized as an editorial campaign. See Nikolaus Pevsner, *Visual Planning and the Picturesque*, ed. Mathew Aitchison (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010). See also John Macarthur, *The Picturesque: Architecture, Disgust, and Other Irregularities* (London: Routledge, 2007), 206–11. The later tendency in townscape discourse toward a contextualist, reconciliatory line, signaled by Gordon Cullen's *Townscape* (London: Architectural Press, 1961), translated the progressive premises of *Architectural Review*'s campaign of the 1930s into a conservative and nostalgically historicist position. In this section I draw heavily on the work of Mathew Aitchison, who attends to this history at length in "Visual Planning and Exterior Furnishing: A Critical History of the Early Townscape Movement, 1930–1949" (PhD diss., Univ. of Queensland, 2009).
23. Erdem Erten considers *Architectural Review* editorial policy at length in "Shaping 'The Second Half Century': The *Architectural Review* 1947–1971" (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2004).
24. "Flats at Bologna, Italy, A. Persichetti, G. Sterbini: Architects," *Architectural Review* 105, no. 627 (March 1949): 129.
25. Alan Ballantyne, "Italian Scrapbook," *Architectural Review* 111, no. 662 (February 1952): 84.
26. Hilde Selem, "Urbs in Rure: Urban Nuclei in the Italian Countryside," *Architectural Review* 122, no. 727 (August 1957): 91–92.
27. Georgina Masson, "Italia Nostra: Campaign to Defend the Italian Scene," *Architectural Review* 124, no. 742 (November 1958): 284–87.
28. Ivor de Wolfe, "The Brideshead Principle, with Special Reference to Italian Landscape and the Lake of Bolsena," *Architectural Review* 129, no. 770 (April 1961): 228–35.
29. Ivor de Wolfe, ed., *The Italian Townscape* (London: Architectural Press, 1963). The attribution of authorship is Mathew Aitchison's; see "Visual Planning and Exterior Furnishing."
30. Ivor de Wolfe, "Introduction," *Architectural Review* 131, no. 784 (June 1961): 384.
31. Ivor de Wolfe, "Open Space as Enclosure," *Architectural Review* 131, no. 784 (June 1962): 401–16.
32. Ivor de Wolfe, "Street as Enclosure," *Architectural Review* 131, no. 784 (June 1962): 427–40.
33. Reyner Banham, "Italian Eclecticism," *Architectural Review* 112, no. 670 (October 1952): 213–17; and "Neoliberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture," *Architectural Review* 125, no. 747 (April 1959): 231–35. Compare these with his more appreciative review of Luigi Moretti's Roman project, "Casa del Girasole," *Architectural Review* 113, no. 674 (February 1953): 73–77. Banham attributes his knowledge of the term "Neoliberty" to an article by Paolo Portoghesi: "Neoliberty," 232; see also letter on *Architectural Review* letterhead to Nikolaus Pevsner, August 28, 1959, Nikolaus Pevsner Collection, Getty Research Institute, box 14A, folder "Correspondence 1957–1959." Thanks to Mathew Aitchison for this reference. Harry Francis Mallgrave defines the style as an exploration (from the mid-1950s) of "the very first period of Italian modernism, the period between Art Nouveau [in Italian, "Liberty," after London's Liberty and Co., and for which Neoliberty is named] and the rationalism of the late 1920s, specifically to augment the modernist vocabulary and to resituate Italian modernism within Italy's historical tradition." Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Modern Architectural Theory: A Historical Survey, 1673–1968* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 362.
34. Banham, "Italian Eclecticism," 213.
35. Banham, "Italian Eclecticism," 213.
36. Banham, "Italian Eclecticism," 215.

37. Banham, "Italian Eclecticism," 216. He refers to Luigi Moretti's article, "Ecletticismo e Unità di Linguaggio," *Spazio* 1 (1950): 5–7.
38. Nigel Whiteley, *Reynier Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 16–22.
39. Banham, "Neoliberty," 231.
40. Banham, "Neoliberty," 231–32.
41. Banham, "Neoliberty," 232.
42. Banham, "Neoliberty," 232.
43. Maria Bottero, "Questo Numero," *Zodiac* 18 (1968): 5 (English trans. 256).
44. Bottero, "Questo Numero," 256.
45. In *Zodiac* 18 (1968), the texts in English are: Henry-Russell Hitchcock, "English Architecture in the Early 20th Century: 1900–1939," 6–10; Michael Gold, "Sir Owen Williams, KBE," 11–30; "English Brutalism: Selection of Writings," 42–50; James Stirling, "Anti-Structure," 51–60; Joseph Rykwert, "Universities as Institutional Archetypes of Our Age," 61–63; "Selection of Architectural Works," 64–187; and John Taylor, "Design and Building by English Local Authorities," 208–11. The articles in Italian comprise: Maria Bottero, "Questo Numero," 5; Francesco Tentori, "Phoenix Brutalism," 31–41; Lina Marsoni, "20 Anni di New Towns: Rilettura di un Intervento Parametrico," 188–200; Maria Biasia, "Metropoli e Regione Urbana nella Ricerca Geografica Inglese," 201–7; Bianca B. Raboni, "Le Università in Inghilterra: Un Problema Aperto," 212–19; Giorgio Gaetani, "Traffico e Spazio Urbano," 220–28; and Alberto Ferrari, "La Lettura dell'Ambiente Fisico nella Cultura Inglese," 229–36; respective English and Italian translations were provided at the back of the volume.
46. "English Brutalism: Selection of Writings," 42–50.
47. For further consideration of the British New Towns see Anthony Alexander, *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Suburbs* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009). Compare the contemporaneous analyses in Alan Colquhoun Duff, *Britain's New Towns: An Experiment in Living* (London: Pall Mall, 1961); and Frederic J. Osborn and Arnold Whittick, *The New Towns: The Answer to Megalopolis* (London: Hill, 1963; rev. ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970).
48. Bottero, "Questo Numero," 256.
49. In *Zodiac* 18 (1968): Francesco Tentori, "Phoenix Brutalism": 31–42 (English trans. 257–66); Alberto Ferrari, "La Lettura dell'Ambiente Fisico nella Cultura Inglese," 229–36 (English trans., "The Aesthetics of Physical Environment in Contemporary English Architectural Culture," 289–95).
50. Ferrari, "Aesthetics of Physical Environment," 289.
51. Patrick Abercrombie, *Town and Country Planning* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933).
52. Ferrari, "Aesthetics of Physical Environment," 289.
53. Tentori, "Phoenix Brutalism," 260.
54. Tentori, "Phoenix Brutalism," 259.
55. Tentori, "Phoenix Brutalism," 260.
56. Manfredo Tafuri, *Teorie e Storia dell'Architettura* (Bari: Laterza, 1968), 21–23.
57. Ernesto N. Rogers, "Appunti sull'Inghilterra e l'Italia" (1961), in *Editoriali di Architettura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968), 206.
58. Rogers, "Appunti sull'Inghilterra e l'Italia," 209.