1

Vehicles of Desire

The New Brutalists, pace-makers and phrase-makers of the Anti-Academic line-up, having delivered a smart KO to the Land-Rover some months back, have now followed it with a pop-eyed OK for the Cadillac convertible, and automobile aesthetics are back on the table for the first time since the 'Twenties. The next time an open "Caddy" wambles past you, its front chrome-hung like a pearl-roped dowager, its long top level with the ground at a steady thirty inches save where the two tail-fins cock up to carry the rear lights, reflect what a change has been wrought since the last time any architect expressed himself forcibly on the subject of the automobile.

That was in the 'Twenties when Le Corbusier confronted the Parthenon and the Bignan-Sport, and from then to the New Brutalists the Greek Doric motor-car with its upright lines, square styling, mahogany fascia and yellowing nickel trim has remained the *beau ideal* of world aesthetes from Chicago to Chelsea Polytechnic. So great has been the aesthetic self-aggrandisement of architects, so great the public's Ruskin-powered terror of them that when Le Corbusier spoke, no-one dared to argue, and it has been placidly assumed ever since that all artefacts should be designed architect-

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wise, and that later automobiles, which deviated from the Doric norm of the 'Twenties were badly designed. But what nonsense this is. Far from being *uomini universali* architects are by training, aesthetics and psychological predisposition narrowly committed to the design of big permanent single structures, and their efforts are directed merely to focussing big, permanent human values on unrepeatable works of unique art.

The automobile is not big—few are even mantel-piece high—it is not permanent—the average world scrapping period has lately risen, repeat risen, to fifteen years—and they certainly are not unique. The effective time-base against which the impermanence of the automobile should be reckoned is less than even fifteen years, because the average re-sale period—the measure of social obsolescence—is only three to six years, while technical obsolescence is already acute after eight to ten years. And as to uniqueness, even relatively unpopular cars have a bigger annual output than all but the most sought-after pre-fabricated, serially-produced buildings. This is a field where the architect is rarely qualified to work, or to pass judgment, and automobiles designed by architects are notoriously old-fashioned, even where—like Walter Gropius's *Adler* coupés—they introduce marginal novelties such as reclining seats.

The technical history of the automobile in a free market is a rugged rat-race of detail modifications and improvements, many of them irrelevant, but any of the essential ones lethal enough to kill off a manufacturer who misses it by more than a couple of years. The "classic" automobiles whose "timeless" qualities are admired by aesthetes are nowadays the product of abnormal sales conditions—the slump-crazy market on which Citroen's *traction-avant* was launched was as freakish as the commercially and ideologically protected one on which Dr. Porsche launched the *Volkswagen.* On the open market, where competition is real, it is the cunningly-programmed minor changes that give one manufacturer an edge over another, and the aesthetics of body-styling are an integral part of the battle for margins. Under these circumstances we should be neither surprised nor shocked to find that styling runs the same way as engineering development, and in any case there can be no norms of formal composition while
the automobile remains an artefact in evolution, even though particular models are stabilised.

In fact it is a great deal more than an artefact in evolution as a concept while standardised in any passing type; it is also numerous as a possession while expendable as an individual example, a vehicle of popular desire and a dream that money can just about buy. This is a situation with which no pre-industrial aesthetic ever had to cope; even Plato's side-swipe at the ceramic trade in the *Philebus* falls a long way short of our current interpretative needs, for the Greek pot, though numerous and standardized, had long given up evolving and was not conspicuously expendable. But we are still making do with Plato because in aesthetics, as in most other things, we still have no formulated intellectual attitudes for living in a throwaway economy. We eagerly con-

sume noisy ephemeridae, here with a bang today, gone without a whimper tomorrow—movies, beach-wear, pulp magazines, this morning's headlines and tomorrow's TV programmes—yet we insist on aesthetic and moral standards hitched to permanency, durability and perennity.

The repertoire of hooded headlamps, bumper-bombs, sporty nave-plates, ventilators, intakes, incipient tail-fins, speed-streaks and chromium spears, protruding exhaust-pipes, cineramic wind-screens—these give tone and social connotation to the body envelope; the profiling of wheel-arches, the humping of mudguards, the angling of roof-posts—these control the sense of speed; the grouping of the main masses, the quality of the main curves of the panels—these balance the sense of masculine power and feminine luxury. It is a thick ripe stream of loaded symbols—that are apt to go off in the face of those who don't know how to handle them.

The stylist knows how, because he is continually sampling the public response to dream-car prototypes, fantasy vehicles like Ford's fabulous *Futura,* but other people must be more careful. As the New York magazine *Industrial Design* said, when reviewing the 1954 cars, "The most successful company in the history of the world makes automobiles; in 1953 General Motors' sales totalled $10,028,000,000, an unheard of sum. Under the circumstances, passing judgment on a new crop of cars is like passing judgment on a Nation's soul."

But coupled with this admirable caution, *Industrial Design* also possesses a shame-faced, but invaluable, ability to write automobile-critique of almost Berensonian sensibility. In its pages, fenced about with routine kow-tows to the big permanent values, one will find passages like "the Buick . . . is perpetually floating on currents that are permanently built into the design. The designers put the greatest weight over the front wheels, where the engine is, which is natural enough. The heavy bumper helps to pull the weight forward; the dip in the body and the chrome spear express how the thrust is dissipated in turbulence toward the rear. Just behind the strong shoulder of the car a sturdy post lifts up the roof, which trails off like a banner in the air. The driver sits in the dead calm at the centre of all this motion—hers is a lush situation."

This is the stuff of which the aesthetics of expendability will eventually be made. It carries the sense and the dynamism of that extraordinary continuum of emotional-engineering-by-public-consent which enables the automobile industry to create vehicles of palpably fulfilled desire. Can architecture or any other Twentieth Century art claim to have done as much? and, if not, have they any real right to carp?

All right then, *hypocrite lecteur,* where are you now with the automobile? As an expendable, replaceable vehicle of the popular desires it clearly belongs with the other dreams that money can buy, with *Galaxy, The Seven Year Itch, Rock Rattle 'n' Roll* and *Midweek Reveille,* the world of expendable art so brilliantly characterised by Leslie Fiedler in the August issue of *Encounter.* The motor car is not as expendable as they are, but it clearly belongs nearer to them than to the Parthenon, and it exhibits the

same creative thumb-prints—finish, fantasy, punch, professionalism, swagger. A good job of body styling should come across like a good musical—no fussing after big, timeless abstract virtues, but maximum glitter and maximum impact.

The top body stylists—they are the anonymous heads of anonymous teams—aim to give their creations qualities of apparent speed, power, brutalism, luxury, snob-appeal, exoticism and plain common-or-garden sex. The means at their disposal are symbolic iconographies, whose ultimate power lies in their firm grounding in popular taste and the innate traditions of the product, while the actual symbols are drawn from Science Fiction, movies, earth-moving equipment, supersonic aircraft, racing cars, heraldry and certain deep-seated mental dispositions about the great outdoors and the kinship between technology and sex. Arbiter and interpreter between the industry and the consumer, the body-stylist deploys, not a farrage of meaningless ornament, as fine art critics insist, but a means of saying something of breathless, but unverbalisable, consequence to the live culture of the Technological Century.

2

The New Brutalism

'L'Architecture, c'est avec des matieres bruts, établir des rapports émouvants. '
—Le Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture*

Introduce an observer into any field of forces, influences or communications and that field becomes distorted. It is common opinion that *Das Kapital* has played old harry with capitalism, so that Marxists can hardly recognize it when they see it, and the widespread diffusion of Freud's ideas has wrought such havoc with clinical psychology that any intelligent patient can make a nervous wreck of his analyst. What has been the influence of contemporary architectural historians on the history of contemporary architecture?

They have created the idea of a Modern Movement—this was known even before Basil Taylor took up arms against false historicism—and beyond that they have offered a rough classification of the 'isms' which are the thumb-print of Modernity into two main types: One, like *Cubism,* is a label, a recognition tag, applied by critics and historians

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to a body of work which appears to have certain consistent principles running through it, whatever the relationship of the artists; the other, like *Futurism,* is a banner, a slogan, a policy consciously adopted by a group of artists, whatever the apparent similarity or dissimilarity of their products. And it is entirely characteristic of the New Brutalism—our first native art-movement since the New Art-History arrived here—that it should confound these categories and belong to both at once.

Is Art-History to blame for this? Not in any obvious way, but in practically every other way. One cannot begin to study the New Brutalism without realizing how deeply the New Art-History has bitten into progressive English architectural thought, into teaching methods, into the common language of communication between architects and between architectural critics. What is interesting about R. Furneaux Jordan's parthian footnote on the New Brutalism—'. . . Lubetkin talks across time to the great masters, the Smithsons talk only to each other'—is not the fact that it is nearly true, and thus ruins his argument, but that its terms of valuation are historical. The New Brutalism has to be seen against the background of the recent history of history, and, in particular, the growing sense of the inner history of the Modern Movement itself.

The history of the phrase itself is revealing. Its form is clearly derived from *The Architectural Review's* post-war *trouvaille* 'The New Empiricism,' a term which was intended to describe visible tendencies in Scandinavian architecture to diverge from another historical concept 'The International Style.' This usage, like any involving the word *new,* opens up an historical perspective. It postulates that an old empiricism can be identified by the historian, and that the new one can be distinguished from it by methods of historical comparison, which will also distinguish it from a mere 'Empirical Revival.' The ability to deal with such fine shades of historical meaning is in itself a measure of our handiness with the historical method today, and the use of phrases of the form 'The New X-ism'—where X equals any adjectival root—became commonplace in the early nineteen-fifties in fourth-year studios and other places where architecture is discussed, rather than practised.

The passion of such discussion has been greatly enhanced by the clarity of its polarization—Communists versus the Rest—and it was somewhere in this vigorous polemic that the term 'The New Brutalism' was first coined.[1] It was, in the beginning, a term of Communist abuse, and it was intended to signify the normal vocabulary of Modern Architecture—flat roofs, glass, exposed structure—considered as morally reprehensible deviations from 'The New Humanism,' a phrase which means something different in Marxist hands to the meaning which might be expected. The New Humanism meant, in architecture at that time, brickwork, segmental arches, pitched roofs, small windows (or small panes at any rate)—picturesque detailing without picturesque planning. It was, in fact, the so-called 'William Morris Revival,' now happily defunct, since Kruschev's reversal of the Party's architectural line, though this reversal has, of course, taken the guts out of subsequent polemics. But it will be observed that The New Humanism was again a quasi-historical concept, oriented, however spuriously,

toward that mid-nineteenth century epoch which was Marxism's Golden Age, when you could recognize a capitalist when you met him.

However, London architectural circles are a small field in which to conduct a polemic of any kind, and abuse must be directed at specific persons, rather than classes of persons, since there was rarely enough unanimity (except among Marxists) to allow a class to coalesce. The New Brutalists at whom Marxist spite was directed could be named and recognized—and so could their friends in other arts. The term had no sooner got into public circulation than its meaning began to narrow. Among the non-Marxist grouping there was no particular unity of programme or intention, but there was a certain community of interests, a tendency to look toward Le Corbusier, and to be aware of something called *le beton brut,* to know the quotation which appears at the head of this article and, in the case of the more sophisticated and aesthetically literate, to know of the *Art Brut* of Jean Dubuffet and his connection in Paris. Words and ideas, personalities and discontents chimed together and in a matter of weeks—long before the Third Programme and the monthlies had got hold of the phrase—it had been appropriated as their own, by their own desire and public consent, by two young architects, Alison and Peter Smithson.

The phrase had thus changed both its meaning and its usage. Adopted as something between a slogan and a brick-bat flung in the public's face, The New Brutalism ceased to be a label descriptive of a tendency common to most modern architecture, and became instead a programme, a banner, while retaining some—rather restricted—sense as a descriptive label. It is because it is both kinds of -ism at once that The New Brutalism eludes precise description, while remaining a living force in contemporary British architecture.

As a descriptive label it has two overlapping, but not identical, senses. Non-architecturally it describes the art of Dubuffet, some aspects of Jackson Pollock and of Appel, and the burlap paintings of Alberto Burri—among foreign artists—and, say, Magda Cordell or Edouardo Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson among English artists. With these last two, the Smithsons collected and hung the I.C.A. exhibition *Parallel of Life and Art,* which, though it probably preceded the coining of the phrase, is nevertheless regarded as a *locus classicus* of the movement. The more instructive aspects of this exhibition will be considered later: for the moment let us observe that many critics (and students at the Architectural Association) complained of the deliberate flouting of the traditional concepts of photographic beauty, of a cult of ugliness, and 'denying the spiritual in Man.' The tone of response to The New Brutalism existed even before hostile critics knew what to call it, and there was an awareness that the Smithsons were headed in a different direction to most other younger architects in London.

Alison Smithson first claimed the words in public as her own in a description of a project for a small house in Soho (*Architectural Design,* November, 1953) designed before the phrase existed, and previously tagged 'The warehouse aesthetic'—a very fair description of what The New Brutalism stood for in its first phase. Of this house,

she wrote: '. . . had this been built, it would have been the first exponent of the New Brutalism in England, as the preamble to the specification shows: "It is our intention in this building to have the structure exposed entirely, without interior finishes wherever practicable. The contractor should aim at a high standard of basic construction, as in a small warehouse".' The publication of this project led to an extensive and often hilarious correspondence in various periodicals through the summer of 1954, a correspondence which wandered further and further from its original point because most writers were in fact discussing either the exhibition *Parallel of Life and Art,* or the (as yet) unpublished school at Hunstanton. When this was finally published (AR, September, 1954) the discussion took a sharper and less humorous tone, for here in three-dimensional and photographic reality, and in the classic Modern Movement materials of concrete, steel and glass, was the Smithsons' only completed building. The phrase The New Brutalism was immediately applied to it, though it had been designed in the spring of 1950, long before even the house in Soho, but the Brutalists themselves have accepted this appellation, and it has become the tag for Hunstanton wherever the building has been discussed.

Hunstanton, and the house in Soho, can serve as the points of architectural reference by which The New Brutalism in architecture may be defined. What are the visible and identifiable characteristics of these two structures? Both have formal, axial plans—Hunstanton, in fact, has something like true bi-axial symmetry, and the small Gymnasium block alongside the school is a kind of exemplar in little of just how formal the complete scheme was to have been—and this formality is immediately legible from without. Both exhibit their basic structure, and both make a point of exhibiting their materials—in fact, this emphasis on basic structure is so obsessive that many superficial critics have taken this to be the whole of New Brutalist Architecture. Admittedly, this emphasis on basic structure is important, even if it is not the whole story, and what has caused Hunstanton to lodge in the public's gullet is the fact that it is almost unique among modern buildings in being made of what it appears to be made of. Whatever has been said about honest use of materials, most modern buildings *appear* to be made of whitewash or patent glazing, even when they are made of concrete or steel. Hunstanton *appears* to be made of glass, brick, steel and concrete, and is in fact made of glass, brick, steel and concrete. Water and electricity do not come out of unexplained holes in the wall, but are delivered to the point of use by visible pipes and manifest conduits. One can see what Hunstanton is made of, and how it works, and there is not another thing to see except the play of spaces.

This ruthless adherence to one of the basic moral imperatives of the Modern Movement—honesty in structure and material—has precipitated a situation to which only the pen of Ibsen could do justice. The mass of moderate architects, *hommes moyens sensuels,* have found their accepted practices for waiving the requirements of the conscience-code suddenly called in question; they have been put rudely on the spot, and they have not liked the experience. Of course, it is not just the building itself which

has precipitated this situation, it is the things the Brutalists have said and done as well, but, as with the infected Spa in *An Enemy of the People,* the play of personalities focuses around a physical object.

The qualities of that object may be summarized as follows: 1, Formal legibility of plan; 2, clear exhibition of structure; and 3, valuation of materials for their inherent qualities 'as found.' This summary can be used to answer the question: Are there other New Brutalist buildings besides Hunstanton? It is interesting to note that such a summary of qualities could be made to describe Marseilles, Promontory and Lakeshore apartments, General Motors Technical Centre, much recent Dutch work and several projects by younger English architects affiliated to CIAM. But, with the possible exception of Marseilles, the Brutalists would probably reject most of these buildings from the canon, and so must we, for all of these structures exhibit an excess of *suaviter in modo,* even if there is plenty of *fortiter in re* about them. In the last resort what characterizes the New Brutalism in architecture as in painting is precisely its brutality, its *je-m'en-foutisme,* its bloody-mindedness. Only one other building conspicuously carries these qualities in the way that Hunstanton does, and that is Louis Kahn's Yale Art Centre. Here is a building which is uncompromisingly frank about its materials, which is inconceivable apart from its boldly exhibited structural method which—being a concrete space-frame—is as revolutionary and unconventional as the use of the Plastic Theory in stressing Hunstanton's steel H-frames. Furthermore, the plan is very formal in the disposition of its main elements, and makes a kind of symmetry about two clearly defined axes at right angles to one another. And this is a building which some Brutalists can apparently accept as a constituent New Brutalist structure.

But, with all due diffidence, the present author submits that it still does not quite answer to the standard set by Hunstanton. For one thing, the Smithsons' work is characterized by an abstemious under-designing of the details, and much of the impact of the building comes from the ineloquence, but absolute consistency, of such components as the stairs and handrails. By comparison, Kahn's detailing is arty, and the stair-rail and balustrading (if that is the word for stainless netting) is jarringly out of key with the rough-shuttered concrete of the main structure. This may be 'only a matter of detailing' but there is another short-fall about Yale Art Centre which could not be brushed off so easily. Every Smithson design has been, obviously or subtly, a coherent and apprehensible visual entity, but this Louis Kahn's design narrowly fails to be. The internal spaces will be cluttered with display screens which, in the nature of his programme and his solution of it, must be susceptible of being moved, so that formal clarity is always threatened. But beyond this the relation of interior to exterior fails to validate the axes which govern the plan. Available viewpoints, the placing of the entrances, the handling of the exterior walls—all tend to lose or play down the presence of planning axes. No doubt there are excellent functional reasons for the doors being where they are, and excellent structural reasons for the walls being treated in the way they are—but if these reasons were so compelling, why bother with an axial plan anyhow?

This is a hard thing to have to say about a seriously considered building by a reputable architect of some standing, but contact with Brutalist architecture tends to drive one to hard judgements, and the one thing of which the Smithsons have never been accused is a lack of logic or consistency in thinking through a design. In fact it is the ruthless logic more than anything else which most hostile critics find distressing about Hunstanton—or perhaps it is the fact that this logic is worn on the sleeve. One of the reasons for this obtrusive logic is that it contributes to the apprehensibility and coherence of the building as a visual entity, because it contributes to the building as 'an image.'

An Image—with the utterance of these two words we bridge the gap between the possible use of The New Brutalism as a descriptive label covering, in varying degrees of accuracy, two or more buildings, and The New Brutalism as a slogan, and we also go some way to bridge the gap between the meaning of the term as applied to architecture and its meaning as applied to painting and sculpture. The word *image* in this sense is one of the most intractable and the most useful terms in contemporary aesthetics, and some attempt to explain it must be made.

A great many things have been called 'an image'—S. M. della Consolazione at Todi, a painting by Jackson Pollock, the Lever Building, the 1954 Cadillac convertible, the roofscape of the *Unité* at Marseilles, any of the hundred photographs in *Parallel of Life and Art.* 'Image' seems to be a word that describes anything or nothing. Ultimately, however, it means something which is visually valuable, but not necessarily by the standards of classical aesthetics. Where Thomas Aquinas supposed beauty to be *quod visum placet* (that which seen, pleases),[2] image may be defined as *quod visum perturbat*—that which seen, affects the emotions, a situation which could subsume the pleasure caused by beauty, but is not normally taken to do so, for the New Brutalists' interests in image are commonly regarded, by many of themselves as well as their critics, as being anti-art, or at any rate anti-beauty in the classical aesthetic sense of the word. But what is equally as important as the specific kind of response, is the nature of its cause. What pleased St. Thomas was an abstract quality, beauty—what moves a New Brutalist is the thing itself, in its totality, and with all its overtones of human association. These ideas of course lie close to the general body of anti-Academic aesthetics currently in circulation, though they are not to be identified exactly with Michel Tapié's concept of *un Art Autre,*[3] even though that concept covers many Continental Brutalists as well as Edouardo Paolozzi.

Nevertheless this concept of *Image* is common to all aspects of The New Brutalism in England, but the manner in which it works out in architectural practice has some surprising twists to it. Basically, it requires that the building should be an immediately apprehensible visual entity, and that the form grasped by the eye should be confirmed by experience of the building in use. Further, that this form should be entirely proper to the functions and materials of the building, in their entirety. Such a relationship be-

tween structure, function and form is the basic commonplace of all good building of course, the demand that this form should be apprehensible and memorable is the apical uncommonplace which makes good building into great architecture. The fact that this form-giving obligation has been so far forgotten that a great deal of good building can be spoken of as if it were architecture, is a mark of a seriously decayed condition in English architectural standards. It has become too easy to get away with the assumption that if structure and function are served then the result must be architecture—so easy that the meaningless phrase 'the conceptual building' has been coined to defend the substandard architectural practices of the routine-functionalists, as if 'conceptual buildings' were something new, and something faintly reprehensible in modern architecture.

All great architecture has been 'conceptual,' has been image-making—and the idea that any great buildings, such as the Gothic Cathedrals, grew unconsciously through anonymous collaborative attention to structure and function is one of the most insidious myths with which the Modern Movement is saddled. Every great building of the Modern Movement has been a conceptual design, especially those like the Bauhaus, which go out of their way to look as if they were the products of 'pure' functionalism, whose aformal compositions are commonly advanced by routine-functionalists in defence of their own abdication of architectural responsibility. But a conceptual building is as likely to be aformal as it is to be formal, as a study of the Smithsons' post-Hunstanton projects will show.

Hunstanton's formality is unmistakably Miesian, as Philip Johnson pointed out, possibly because IIT was one of the few recent examples of conceptual, form-giving design to which a young architect could turn at the time of its conception, and the formality of their Coventry Cathedral competition entry is equally marked, but here one can safely posit the interference of historical studies again, for, though the exact priority of date as between the Smithsons' design and the publication of Professor Wittkower's *Architectural Principles of the Age of Humanism* is disputed (by the Smithsons) it cannot be denied that they were in touch with Wittkowerian studies at the time, and were as excited by them as anybody else.

The general impact of Professor Wittkower's book on a whole generation of post-war architectural students is one of the phenomena of our time. Its exposition of a body of architectural theory in which function and form were significantly linked by the objective laws governing the Cosmos (as Alberti and Palladio understood them) suddenly offered a way out of the doldrum of routine-functionalist abdications, and neo-Palladianism became the order of the day. The effect of *Architectural Principles* has made it by far the most important contribution—for evil as well as good—by any historian to English Architecture since *Pioneers of the Modern Movement,* and it precipitated a nice disputation on the proper uses of history. The question became: Humanist principles to be followed? or Humanist principles as an example of the kind of principles to look for?

Many students opted for the former alternative, and Routine-Palladians soon became as thick on the ground as Routine-Functionalists. The Brutalists, observing the inherent risk of a return to pure academicism—more pronounced at Liverpool than at the AA—sheered off abruptly in the other direction and were soon involved in the organization of *Parallel of Life and Art.*

Introducing this exhibition to an AA student debate Peter Smithson declared: 'We are not going to talk about proportion and symmetry' and this was his declaration of war on the inherent academicism of the neo-Palladians, and the anti-Brutalist section of the house made it clear how justified was this suspicion of crypto-academicism by taking their stand not only on Palladio and Alberti but also on Plato and the Absolute. The new direction in Brutalist architectural invention showed at once in the Smithsons' Golden Lane and Sheffield University competition entries. The former, only remembered for having put the idea of the street-deck back in circulation in England, is notable for its determination to create a coherent visual image by non-formal means, emphasizing visible circulation, identifiable units of habitation, and fully validating the presence of human beings as part of the total image—the perspectives had photographs of people pasted on to the drawings, so that the human presence almost overwhelmed the architecture.

But the Sheffield design went further even than this—and aformalism becomes as positive a force in its composition as it does in a painting by Burri or Pollock. *Composition* might seem pretty strong language for so apparently casual a layout, but this is clearly not an 'unconceptual' design, and on examination it can be shown to have a composition, but based not on the elementary rule-and-compass geometry which underlies most architectural composition, so much as an intuitive sense of topology. As a discipline of architecture topology has always been present in a subordinate and unrecognized way—qualities of penetration, circulation, inside and out, have always been important, but elementary Platonic geometry has been the master discipline. Now, in the Smithsons' Sheffield project the roles are reversed, topology becomes the dominant and geometry becomes the subordinate discipline. The 'connectivity' of the circulation routes is flourished on the exterior and no attempt is made to give a geometrical form to the total scheme; large blocks of topologically similar spaces stand about the site with the same graceless memorability as martello towers or pit-head gear.

Such a dominance accorded to topology—in whose classifications a brick is the same 'shape' as a billiard ball (unpenetrated solid) and a teacup is the same 'shape' as a gramophone record (continuous surface with one hole) is clearly analogous to the displacement of Tomistic 'beauty' by Brutalist 'Image,'[4] and Sheffield remains the most consistent and extreme point reached by any Brutalists in their search for *Une Architecture Autre.* It is not likely to displace Hunstanton in architectural discussions as the prime exemplar of The New Brutalism, but it is the only building-design which fully matches up to the threat and promise of *Parallel of Life and Art.*

And it shows that the formal axiality of Hunstanton is not integral to New Brutalist architecture. Miesian or Wittkowerian geometry was only an *ad hoc* device for the real-

ization of 'Images,' and when *Parallel of Life and Art* had enabled Brutalists to define their relationship to the visual world in terms of something other than geometry, then formality was discarded. The definition of a New Brutalist building derived from Hunstanton and Yale Art Centre, above, must be modified so as to exclude formality as a basic quality if it is to cover future developments and should more properly read: 1, Memorability as an Image; 2, Clear exhibition of Structure; and 3, Valuation of Materials 'as found.' Remembering that an Image is what affects the emotions, that structure, in its fullest sense, is the relationship of parts, and that materials 'as found' are raw materials, we have worked our way back to the quotation which headed this article 'L'Architecture, c'est, avec des Matières Bruts, établir des rapports émouvants,' but we have worked our way to this point through such an awareness of history and its uses that we see that The New Brutalism, if it is architecture in the grand sense of Le Corbusier's definition, is also architecture of our time and not of his, nor of Lubetkin's, nor of the times of the Masters of the past. Even if it were true that the Brutalists speak only to one another, the fact that they have stopped speaking to Mansart, to Palladio and to Alberti would make The New Brutalism, even in its more private sense, a major contribution to the architecture of today.

NOTES

1. There is a persistent belief that the word *Brutalism* (or something like it) had appeared in the English Summaries in an issue of *Bygg-Mastaren* published late in 1950. The reference cannot now be traced, and the story must be relegated to that limbo of Modern Movement demonology where Swedes, Communists and the Town and Country Planning Association are bracketed together as different isotopes of the common 'Adversary.'

2. Paraphrasing *Summa Theologica* II (i) xxvii, I. The passage is normally rendered into English as 'but that whose very apprehension pleases is called beautiful.'

3. *See* his book of the same name, published in 1952. A closely analogous development is that of *musique concrete,* which uses 'real sounds,' manipulated in a manner which resembles the manipulation of some of the photographs in *Parallel,* and does not concern itself with harmony or melody in any recognizable way.

4. This analogy could probably be rendered epistemologically strict—both beauty and geometry, hitherto regarded as ultimate properties of the *cosmos,* now appear as linguistically refined special cases of more generalized concepts—image and topology—which, though essentially primitive, have been reached only through immense sophistication. Once this state of sophistication has been achieved, and the new concept digested, it suddenly appears so simple that it can be vulgarized without serious distortion, and for a handy back-entrance to topology without using the highly complex mathematics involved, the reader could not do better than acquire a copy of *Astounding Science Fiction* for July, 1954.

3

Ornament and Crime

The Decisive Contribution of Adolf Loos

Everyone knows that Modern Architecture is undecorated. This concept is the layman's recognition check: flat roof, big windows, no decoration. It is also one of the great seminal half-truths that have now become rules of design morality. But how did this state of affairs come about? Did the spirit of the times command? Did the *Zeitgeist,* like a baroque angel, swoop down to stay a thousand pencils as they held poised above the beginning of an Ionic volute or an Art Nouveau lily?

In this particular case we can put these art-historical miasmas back where they belong, and recognize that they are the cloaks of ignorance. Ideas do not bumble about in the abstract, looking for somewhere to settle. They are formulated in the minds of men, and communicated from man to man. The *Zeitgeist* is primarily a record of our ignorance of the communications that took place in any particular epoch—grandiose statements of the order of 'Perspective was not the discovery of any one person, it was the expression of the whole era,' are simply a roundabout way of admitting that we don't know to whom Brunelleschi talked before he talked to Manetti, and that we would

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rather not go to the labour of drawing up the family tree of personal contacts that runs from Brunelleschi to all the great perspectivists of the Quattrocento.

We are a bit too glib in presupposing diffuse cultural forces that act upon creative minds like the weather or the common cold, and a little too chary of conceding that some one specific person at some determined (if no longer determinable) moment must have been the first to conceive of central perspective, the undulating facade, architecture without ornament.

To us, now, the idea of an undecorated architecture has so nearly the status of a Mosaic commandment, to be flouted in practice but never queried in theory, that it is difficult to conceive of it as the thought of one man, and much easier to refer it back to the collective unconscious of the pioneers of Modern design. But the surviving literary evidence from the first twenty years of this century does not reveal any widely diffused hostility to decoration. There were ideas like Significant Form that were later to reinforce such a hostility when it had taken hold; there was a certain suspicion of past styles of decoration; there was even a certain indifference to ornament, articulated by Geoffrey Scott and earlier by Auguste Choisy, as the feeling that ornament was something that one might do without if one's command of formal composition was sufficiently sure. But only in the writings of one man, the Viennese architect Adolf Loos, will one find a positive anathema on ornament.

Did Adolf Loos, then, beat ornament single-handed? He certainly thought so himself, for he wrote in the introduction to his book *Trotzdem,* published in 1930, 'I have emerged victorious from my thirty years of struggle. I have freed mankind from superfluous ornament.' This is an uncommonly big claim even for a big-talking movement like Modern Architecture, and it needs scrutiny. But scrutiny will be facilitated if we look first at the weapons with which he fought. The example of his buildings was not decisive—their exteriors are sometimes, but not always, plain; the interiors, though devoid of decorative objects for the most part, exhibit almost a milliner's sense of the decorative qualities of wood and marble, fairface brick, turkey carpets, glass and metal. His doughtiest blows at ornament were struck in print, and the doughtiest of all in one single essay, published in 1908.

Its title is an eye-blacker for a start, *Ornament und Verbrechen:* Ornament and Crime. It brings the reader up with a jerk and sets his stock responses jangling. It is probably the first appearance of that pugnacious moral tone that was to characterize the writings of the Twenties and Thirties, and the opening paragraphs fully sustain this bourgeois-blasting, damn-your-delicate-feelings attitude:

> The human embryo goes through the whole history of animal evolution in its mother's womb, and when a child is born his sensory impressions are those of a puppy. His childhood takes him through the stages of human progress; at the age of two he is a Papuan savage, at four he has caught up with the Teutonic tribesmen. At six he is level with Socrates, and at eight with Voltaire. At this age he learns to distinguish violet, the colour that the eighteenth century

discovered—before then violets were blue and tyrian was red. Physicists can already point out colours that they have named, but that only later generations will be able to distinguish.

Children are amoral, and so, for us, are Papuans. If a Papuan slaughters his enemies and eats them, that doesn't make him a criminal. But if a modern man kills someone and eats him, he must be either a criminal or a degenerate. Papuans tattoo their skins, decorate their boats, their oars—everything they can get their hands on. But a modern man who tattoos himself is either a criminal or a degenerate. Why, there are prisons where eighty per cent of the convicts are tattooed, and tattooed men who are not in prison are either latent criminals or degenerate aristocrats. When a tattoed man dies at liberty, it simply means that he hasn't had time to commit his crime.

The urge to ornament oneself, and everything else within reach, is the father of pictorial art. It is the baby-talk of painting. All art is erotic.

The first ornament born, the cross, is of erotic origin. The earliest art-work, the first creative active of the earliest artist, was smudged on the cave wall to let off emotional steam. A horizontal stroke, the reclining woman; a vertical stroke, the man who transfixes her. The man who did this felt the same impulse as Beethoven, was in the same heaven of delight as Beethoven composing the Ninth.

But the man of our own times who smudges erotic symbols on walls is either a criminal or a degenerate. It is clear that this violent impulse might seize degenerate individuals in even the most advanced cultures, but in general one can grade the cultures of different peoples by the extent to which lavatory walls are drawn upon. With children this is a natural condition, their first artistic expressions are erotic scribblings on the nursery wall. But what is natural to children and Papuan savages is a symptom of degeneracy in modern man. I have evolved the following maxim, and present it to the world: The evolution of culture marches with the elimination of ornament from useful objects.

This is still a tremendous performance nearly a half-century after its composition. . . . But it won't stand re-reading. This is *Schlagobers-Philosophie,* that whisks up into an exciting dish on the café table, and then collapses as you look at it, like a cooling soufflé. It is not a reasoned argument but a succession of fast-spieling double-takes and non-sequiturs holding together a precarious rally of clouds of witness—café-Freudianism, café-anthropology, café-criminology. The testimonies of these various witnesses don't really support one another, but they must have appeared convincing at the time, partly because they were all new and hot, but more especially for an overriding reason that will be discussed later. But Loos has no intention of giving the reader time to pick the argument to pieces, he wants to detail the poor response that the world made when presented with his 'maxim.'

I had thought with this rule to bring a new joy into the world, but no-one has thanked me for it. Rather, people have pulled a long face and hung their heads. What oppressed them in my discovery was the proposition that no new ornament could be invented. Were we, men of the nineteenth century, to be incapable of doing what the simplest negro, the men of every previous age or nation, had been able to do?

'Men of the nineteenth century'—this must mean that the maxim had been enunciated in the Nineties originally, and at that time, with Viennese Art Nouveau flourishing

like a rain-forest, it must have sounded more mad than sad. Loos, however, followed it up with Old Testament rhetoric.

> Then I said: Weep not. Behold the true greatness of our age, that it can no longer bring forth ornament. We have vanquished decoration and broken through into an ornamentless world.
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> Behold. The time is at hand and fulfilment awaits us. Soon the pavements of our cities shall glisten like marble; Like Zion, the holy city, the Capital of Heaven.[1]

But no-one thanked him. What had gone wrong? Almost inevitably, he alleges an Imperialist plot: Certain reactionaries rejected his prophecies, the Austrian state continued to support and subsidize a reign of ornamental terror, retarding progress, making people wear felt boots instead of rational footwear, because it had found that a backward people was easier to govern. Some citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were so backward that they had not yet been converted to Christianity, would have been looked down on by the Goths and Visigoths. Happy the country that has no such stragglers! Happy America!

America for Loos, as for so many of the pioneers, was the promised land of technology. Not a word about the Indian reservations or the hookworm belt, nor the coloured slums of the Northern cities, which he must have seen on his visit to the U.S. Americans were his ideal Twentieth Century men and

> When two men live side by side, all things else being equal, the twentieth-century man gets richer, the eighteenth-century man gets poorer, assuming that each lives according to his inclinations, for the man of the twentieth century can cover his needs with smaller outlay, and thus make savings.
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> The vegetable that tastes good to him when simply boiled in water and glazed with butter, is only palatable to the other when served with honey and nuts, after the cook has slaved over it for hours. Decorated plates are expensive, whereas the plain white crocks that modern man prefers are cheap. One saves, the other overspends, and it is the same with nations. Woe to a people that hangs back from cultural progress. The English get richer, and we get poorer.

What would he have made of a Cadillac economy, where undecorated goods are apt to be in an inaccessible luxury price-bracket, while ornamental products are within the reach of all but the most depressed strata of society? One can guess, for a few paragraphs later he sketches in a satirical draft of a high-obsolescence economy, where everything is highly decorated and thrown away almost as soon as it is made, and everyone swims in wealth and well-being. But it is only a satirical view of a vulgar 'Land of Cockayne.' He is not envisaging it as a way of life that need be taken seriously, nor one that he wants any part in. He exhibits here that peasant streak so common in reformist aesthetes, and can see objects of use only as possessions whose market value must be maintained, not as equipment to be discarded when technically obsolete. Not for him the scrapping economy implicit in Futurism's 'Every generation its own house,' or

Le Corbusier's 'On jette, on remplace.' In fairness one should note that he could accept expendability in trashy materials: 'I can accept papier maché in an artists' club, run up in a couple of days, torn down when the exhibition is over. But to play ducks and drakes with golden sovereigns, to use banknotes to light cigars, to crush pearls and drink them—*das wirkt unästhetisch.*'

But in skipping on thus far we have overpassed the vital paragraph that holds the historical key to 'Ornament and Crime,' and explains the instance of its writing and the immediate power of conviction that it undoubtedly possessed.

> Now that ornament is no longer organically integrated into our culture, it has ceased to be a valid expression of that culture. The ornament that is designed to-day has no relevance to ourselves, to mankind at large, nor to the ordering of the cosmos. It is unprogressive and uncreative.
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> What has happened to the ornamental work of Otto Eckmann? What has happened to van de Velde? The artist used to stand for health and strength, at the pinnacle of humanity, but the modern ornamentalist is either a cultural laggard or a pathological case. He himself is forced to disown his own work after three years. His products are already unbearable to cultured persons now, and will become so to others in a little time. Where are now the works of Eckmann, and where will those of Olbrich be ten years from now? Modern ornament has neither forbears nor descendants, no past and no future. It may be received with joy by uncultured folk, to whom the true greatness of our time is a book with seven seals, but even by them in a short time forgot.

That fixes him in time. Where other men of his day may have had an uneasy feeling that Art Nouveau was losing its impetus, he had a personal quarrel with Hoffmann and the *Wiener Sezession,* and any stick would serve to beat the *Wiener Werkstätte.* For all that, it took courage—truculence even—to launch these personal attacks at a time when the world reputation of both *Sezession* and *Werkstätte* were at their height, and had made Vienna a centre of artistic pilgrimage. On the other hand, the crack-up was already signalled. Long-witted operators like Peter Behrens were quietly sloughing off Art Nouveau, and that symptomatic young person Charles Edouard Jeanneret was, in the very year of 'Ornament and Crime,' telling Josef Hoffmann he could keep his *Werkstätte,* recognizing that it was no longer creative. In articulating his quarrel with the *Sezession,* Loos was polarizing the attitude of a generation to decoration, as surely as Marinetti in the next few months was to polarize its attitude to machinery. In a time of decision his was a decisive gesture.

The decision taken, his position was clear: all forms of cultural regression are crime and waste; ornament is cultural regression and must therefore be a waste and a crime; worse than that, sex-crime. With his position so clearly given, and in such forthright terms, it comes as a further shock to find him hedging the issue with soft options.

> I address myself particularly to those natural aristocrats who stand at the summit of human progress, and yet have the deepest understanding of the needs and impulses of lesser men—the Kaffir who weaves an ornament into his cloth after a receipt so subtle that it is

only seen when the whole is unpicked; the Persian knotting his rugs; the Slovak peasant working her lace; the grannie who works wonders with crochet-hook, beads and silk—he understands them and lets them alone, for these are consecrated hours in which they work. A vulgar revolutionary might burst in on them and say 'that's a lot of rubbish,' just as he might shout to old ladies performing their Stations of the Cross 'There is no God.' But under an aristocracy even an atheist takes off his hat when passing a church.

Then he goes on to relate a touching parable of the dismay of his shoemaker on being asked to make a pair of utterly plain shoes, even at a third over the price of the normally-ornamented model. Ornament, he says, is the culture of the poor, and we—aristocrats who have Beethoven and Wagner—have no right to deprive them of it. But a cultured man who goes to hear the Ninth Symphony and sits down to design a sampler is either a show-off or a degenerate.

The death of ornament has brought the other arts to unbelievable heights. The symphonies of Beethoven could never have been written by a man who had to wear velvet, silk and lace. Anyone who goes around to-day in a velvet coat is no artist, but a clown or a housepainter. Wandering tribesmen wore bright colours to distinguish themselves from one another, but we have grown subtler and more refined—we moderns wear our clothes as a mask.

So unbelievably powerful is a modern personality that it can no longer be expressed through clothing. Freedom from ornament is a sign of mental strength, and modern man may use the ornament of historic and exotic cultures at his discretion, but his own inventive talents are reserved and concentrated on other things.

In spite of the slight crescendo for the coda this is still a stingless tail, all passion spent. Nevertheless, 'Ornament and Crime' is still good fighting talk. In its author's own eyes it ranks with *Architektur,* written a year later, as one of his two prime writings, but not necessarily as his unique blow against ornament. To revert to the introduction to *Trotzdem,* we find that it continues 'Ornament was once synonymous with beautiful, but thanks to my life's work it now means inferior.' Life's work, he says, and on the narrow stage of Austria this might be true, but on the wider screen of the Modern Movement at large much of his writing after 1900 went by default for lack of republication on foreign presses. It is on the reprinting history of 'Ornament and Crime' that his claim to have liberated mankind must rest.

But it rests securely. Already in the Nineteen-teens it had attracted enough notice outside Vienna to earn republication, first in Herwarth Walden's expressionist magazine, *der Sturm,* in 1912, and then in Georges Besson's sprightly translation in *Les Cahiers d'Aujourdhui* in 1913.

These reprints brought Loos—and the essay—to the notice of an interested if restricted international readership. They also presumably brought Loos's ideas to the notice of the Futurist Sant'Elia, the first writer outside Vienna to be visibly influenced by them—Marinetti, the leader of the Futurists, had contacts with *der Sturm* as well as Parisian circles.

The French version was once more reprinted, unaltered, in No. 2 of *l'Esprit Nouveau.* One should remember that at this early date (March, 1920) *l'Esprit Nouveau* still had a third director beside Ozenfant and Le Corbusier, and while its appeal to those two for its relevance to architecture and design is obvious enough, its appeal to the third director, Paul Dermée, would be equally strong. For though he was a poet, he was also close in with the Dadaists, and one can imagine how gratefully any attempt to equate Beethoven with a cave artist, and a comfort-station muralist, would fall upon the ears of those who were trying to get the Morgue accepted as an object of sentimental interest and had already moustached the Mona Lisa. The reappearance of 'Ornament and Crime' while Dada was still going full blast was uncommonly timely, and guaranteed it a favourable hearing at another moment of decision.

For this reprint appeared after Le Corbusier had finished with his flower-box-smothered house-projects of the war years, but before the Villa at Vaucresson that ushered in his new style. It was read, and of this we can be certain, by Erich Mendelsohn, between his first and second Dutch visits; after the decorated Luckenwald factory, and before the undecorated Sternefeld house. It appeared after Gropius's decorated Sommerfeld House had been designed, but before the 'reformed' projects and the undecorated Jena theatre, and again we can safely posit communication between Paris and Germany. Riding hard behind this timely reappearance came the publication of Loos's first book of collected essays, *Ins Leere Gesprochen,* which covers the years 1897–1900 only, but shows him in his Plumbing-before-Art-work mood, and remains to this day better known and more widely read than *Trotzdem.*

For, by the time *Trotzdem* appeared, Loos had ceased to be timely. He caught no mood of disgust with *Art Nouveau,* nor any Dadaist mood of disgust with art in general. Not only had the mood changed, but the ideas he had pushed had now been so thoroughly absorbed and understood that they looked more like Laws of Nature than the Works of Man.

All his best ideas had been pirated by younger men. His advocacy of Thonet chairs and *Fauteuils Grandconfort 'Maple'* had been so thoroughly taken over by Le Corbusier that Loos began to deride Thonet as *eine falsches Modell* in order to maintain some show of independence. But even the anti-ornament campaign had been plagiarized without acknowledgment, and in the introduction to *Trotzdem* he says, following what has been quoted already,

> But even the echo as it answers believes the note to be its own, and that perfidious book *Die Form ohne Ornament,* published in Stuttgart in 1924, conceals my efforts even while it falsifies them.

He might well complain. *Form without Ornament* was the catalogue *de luxe* of a Werkbund exhibition that toured Germany in 1924–25. Its illustrations make a brisk start with Jena glass and Stuttgart soap, but then trail off through such objects as Breuer's early Bauhaus furniture until they wind up with products so arty that they can

only be described as *Sezession ohne Ornament.* The impossible, as Loos had seen it, had taken place, and the fine art designers had climbed on the anti-ornamental bandwaggon. Wolfgang Pfliederer says, in his introduction to this 'perfidious' book, 'If we survey the field of artistic handicraft today we find that it is not unified, but draws . . . from two sources . . . Technical form and Primitive form.'

Technical Form and Primitive Form. Engineers and peasants had been identified by Loos in that other prime essay, *Architektur,* as the two good, clean form-givers who did not commit the crimes of architects and artists, and to suggest that they might be tributary to the artistic handicrafts was to turn his arguments upside down and inside out. Within three years he was dead anyhow, and rapidly passing into that special limbo of oblivion that is reserved for those who have ideas that are too good to belong to one man alone. He had settled the problem of ornament as Alexander settled the Gordian knot, shockingly but effectively, and his ideas had gained an empire wider than the Macedonian's wildest dream. It is impossible now to imagine how the Modern Movement might have looked as a decorated style, but it might have been just that, had not its creators had ringing in their ears Adolf Loos's challenging equation: Ornament equals Crime.

NOTE

1. Depressingly enough, Loos's views on clothing were entirely consistent with his views on architecture. His ideal was *der Mann im Overall,* so his Holy City would have looked rather like a set for *1984.*

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Ungrab That Gondola

Once upon a *dreadful* day, a tall, dark neo-Palladian yawned at the mention of "Divina Proporzione," and the panic was on. It had been a terrible season: a ranking Brutalist had been rude about Alberti, a man at the ICA had described *Bicycle Thieves* as "creep," *Vogue* had spoken up for ordinary coffee, and old Astragal had treated an exhibition of Italian Industrial Design with what sounded like tolerant amusement, instead of the loutish self-abasement required by protocol. In other words, the bright boys had eased the skids under the Italian influence just when it was building up nicely, and it has now slipped so far that an Espresso bar is a place where you have Devonshire teas in Cuban décor to the strains of a skiffle group, and a copy of *Domus* lasts forever, instead of getting shredded in a fortnight.

At this point, the weekend egg-heads—always prompt to flog the dead horse of a stationary band-waggon—have begun to take it up (as a lost cause, presumably) and at the Café Royal one dull evening recently a team of middle-essayists, lady film-critics and Establishment art-pundits wagged their heads gravely over the influence of *espresso,* scooters and Italian films on the English way of life. It was the kind of discussion that

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makes the average symposium on elemental bills sound like dialogue by Oscar Wilde, but it left a question uppermost in one's mind—what made the Italian influence tick?

Leaving aside the purely trade reasons operative on architecture students, *viz.,* the refusal of their elders and betters to teach them anything about architecture, and the permanent manic-depressive influences like Venetian honeymoons, lady water-colourists, Ruskin, Norman Douglas and Our Gracie, what was it hit the English about 1950 and left them spin-dizzy for over half a decade? The answer was briefly sighted by Paul Reilly in the course of the Café Royal forum, when he observed that *espresso* machines as such seemed to be designed to fit into chromium, American-style bars, not the Espresso bar as it is understood in the Brompton Road.

That was the first clue to the answer, and the rest followed by checking what had occupied the vacuum left by the fading of Italian influence—Jayne where Lollo had been, Plymouth where Ferrari had been, Mies where Ernesto had been, Aspen Congress where the Triennale had been, Norbert Wiener where Croce had been, and so on all down the cultural line. Italy, in fact, had been a "clean" substitute for America in the panic years when the onset of the Cold War had forced puzzled pinks, tweedsmen and do-gooders generally to face the fact that F.D.R. was dead, and that you couldn't incline to the gusto and busto of the American Way of Life while leaning to the Left.

Italy, undergoing a maximum wave of American influence (the first post-war Italian car I saw on Italian soil was an imitation Studebaker crammed on a *Topolin* chassis in 1950) and in many ways outdoing the U.S. at its own game (remember those side elevations of Silvana Mangano?), but rendered respectable to the veterans of the Pink Decades by virtue of the biggest Communist Party and the worst social problems in Europe, was the perfect let-out. Add the traditional connections mentioned earlier, and a modicum of guilt for having won the War, and we didn't stand a chance, did we?

Those days look as if they have gone forever. Give it a decade, and someone will make a fortune by reviving *Grab me a Gondola* as a period musical.