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**Anticipations of Utopia: Discovering an Architecture for
Post-War Britain**

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**PhD in Architecture
The University of Edinburgh
2016**

Signed Declaration

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

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Abstract of Thesis

This thesis responds to a growing appreciation for the richness and ambiguity of mid-century architectural culture in Britain. Initially focussing on the enthusiasm for a science-based approach among architects and town planners, the thesis identifies – in the diverse debates of the Second World War and immediate post-war years – an architecture that achieves significantly more than an abstract, inhuman, or totalising utopianism. Instead, it will expose affinities between the enthusiastic pursuit of objective solutions in architecture and planning and the drastically compromised realities, both of the historic city in ruins, and of certain episodes in the history of architecture that enjoyed popularity after the war. The first chapter introduces the problem of utopianism, a concept that has often accompanied critical studies of modern architecture. An appraisal of the utopian tradition highlights the frequent vagueness and ahistoricism of the term, leaving room for an appreciation of utopian speculation as dynamically historical, with the potential to decisively enact change. The second chapter identifies these characteristics in the mid-century enthusiasm for scientific planning, an approach that used quantifiable methods of research in order to legitimise an emerging town planning profession, which had gained added impetus from the transformative social impact of the Second World War. Underpinned by the civic and regional survey, this approach advanced the potential of technocratic management to ‘solve’ the problems of social organisation and physical planning. However, an analysis of specific attempts to speculatively develop the necessary planning machinery indicates a far richer range of concerns. The third chapter shows that the experience of wartime bombing dramatically changed the aspect of Britain’s towns and cities, with the resulting ruins presenting a visceral challenge to the idealising promise of science. But this seeming conflict obscures the relationship between ruination and reconstruction. For the anxiety and exhilaration of destruction was, in fact, embedded in the practice of rebuilding, both in the memories of the builders and of the public at large. Furthermore, an examination of contemporary architectural writing on the subject of wartime ruins displays an attempt to aestheticise and appropriate the ruin’s effects, while simultaneously maintaining an

outward attitude of detachment. The final chapter develops this discussion, moving from the ruins of the historic city to investigate the mid-century adoption of architectural history as a justification for design. It will show that while scientific research seemed to promise objective solutions, the study of history received a similar authority after the war. Consequently, the historian could assume a status analogous to that of the planning expert: a fact evidenced by the activities of Rudolf Wittkower and Nikolaus Pevsner. Just as the utopian potential of science was conditioned by its contingency, this chapter will demonstrate that the appeal to history would also inevitably be limited to partial solutions.

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List of Abbreviations

Archives Consulted

AA – Architectural Association Archives

CRC – University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections

DRO – Devon Record Office

HALS – Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies

LMA – London Metropolitan Archives

NA – National Archives

RIBA – Royal Institute of British Architects Archives

Groups and Organisations

AA – Architectural Association

APRR – Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction

CIAM – *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*

MARS – Modern Architectural Research Group

RIBA – Royal Institute of British Architects

SPRND – School of Planning and Research for National Development

WAAC – War Artists' Advisory Committee

INTRODUCTION

The Second World War occupies an ambiguous position in histories of the built environment in the post-war era. With every use of the label ‘post-war’, commentators rehearse an understanding of the period that emphasises its proximity to, and emergence from, the conflict that gripped Europe from 1939 to 1945. Due to the horrors of those years – whether judged in terms of human trauma or the loss of architectural heritage and urban memory – we might expect to find them casting a long shadow over the subsequent activity of designers and theorists. However, as Beatriz Colomina has noted, in spite of the burden that military combat exercised on the lives of many influential figures on the British scene, studies of post-war architecture often play down its significance.¹

Certainly, there are those readings whose prevailing optimism guarantees them constant repetition. Planning histories, for instance, find in the war an immediate point of departure, due to the extensive damage wrought by the bombing of Britain’s cities between September 1940 and May 1941. The great urban redevelopments of Coventry, Plymouth, and Southampton, among others, cannot be divorced from the impact of German air raids, whose destruction forced local authorities to respond radically upon the arrival of peace.² The resulting schemes displayed an unprecedented scale and ambition: truly utopian imaginings of the city of the future, accompanied in many cases by a comprehensive rethinking of the society it would

¹ Beatriz Colomina, foreword to *Neo-Avant-Garde and Postmodern: Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, eds. Mark Crinson and Claire Zimmerman (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 2010), 1.

² Junichi Hasegawa, *Replanning the Blitzed City Centre: A Comparative Study of Bristol, Coventry and Southampton, 1941-1950* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992); Hasegawa, ‘The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction in 1940s Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History* 10, no. 2 (1999): 137-161; Matthew Hollow, ‘Utopian urges: Visions for reconstruction in Britain, 1940-1950’, *Planning Perspectives* 27, no. 4 (2012): 569-585; Catherine Flinn, ‘“The City of Our Dreams”? The Political and Economic Realities of Rebuilding Britain’s Blitzed Cities, 1945-1954’, *Twentieth Century British History* 23, no. 2 (2012): 221-245; Stephen Essex and Mark Brayshay, ‘Vision, Vested Interest and Pragmatism: Who Re-Made Britain’s Blitzed Cities’, *Planning Perspectives* 22, no. 4 (2007): 417-441.

accommodate. Contrary to the colloquial understanding of the term, however, these ‘utopias’ were invented completely in earnest. Faced with the utter desolation of many inner-city areas, central government advised planners from an early stage to ‘plan boldly’, insisting that the necessary finances would be made available.³ In turn, thanks to the famous series of reports conducted respectively by Barlow, Scott, and Uthwatt, an extensive planning machinery would eventually emerge that, although compromised, raised the professional planner to a new status in urban politics.

As a result, the early 1940s represent a pivotal moment in defining the events that would follow. The war years alone did not generate an enthusiasm for comprehensive planning, of course. The modern movement had been developing the image of the future city for decades, and even in British planning circles of a modernising inclination schemes for radical reconstruction pre-date the blitz, with Coventry’s 1940 plan perhaps the most famous example.⁴ Nevertheless, one cannot reasonably overlook the importance of these years in prompting the radical shift in political opinion that had occurred by 1945, as progressive lobbyists specialising in all fields put pressure on the government to enact the changes in political and social life that they saw as essential. A notion emerged, which certainly had not existed when Britain stumbled into the declaration of war, that the conflict was being fought for the people, and that out of it would come a renewed social order. The eschatological nature of this presumption, as well as its essential optimism, are again latent in earlier activity within the British planning movement; yet, the point remains that until the experience of the war such a perspective was remote from the minds of politicians or the general public.

By the 1960s, however, the apparent fact of its failure was receiving increased attention from critics. Even Jürgen Habermas, while championing the value of modernity as an emancipatory process, felt obliged in 1981 to admit to the existence of ‘those monstrosities we unanimously condemn [which] arose after World War

³ Junichi Hasegawa, ‘The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction in 1940s Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History* 10, no. 2 (1999), 145.

⁴ Phil Hubbard, Lucy Faire, and Keith Lilley, ‘Contesting the Modern City: Reconstruction and Everyday Life in Post-War Coventry’, *Planning Perspectives* 18, no. 4 (2003), 380.

II'.⁵ Of course, he qualified his subsequent critique with the recommendation that the project of modernity was not over, but instead must rediscover the essential insights of the pre-war generation. Others were less equivocal, and in the decades since the initial reaction a catalogue of objections has emerged, furnishing an ever growing body of critical scholarship. Thus, the modern movement saw its eschatological convictions undermined, finding itself consumed by the very historical process that it had endeavoured to overcome.

The essential irony of this reversal, which transformed the modern architect from the master of history into its slave, provides the motivating basis for this thesis. Bearing in mind this more melancholy reading of the years after 1945, it perhaps becomes easier to adjust our focus and admit their specifically post-war context. While the thrilling plans for the city of the future promised a liberation from the contingencies of the real world, their authors could not realistically escape to the utopian condition of their imagination. Most obviously, the realisation of paper plans in any comprehensive way was impeded by financial and political obstacles. However, even before the plans arrived at the blueprint stage there were fundamental – and often unacknowledged – tensions that undermined the possibility of any grand programme of city building. Although architects, planners, and critics were grasping after an image of the future city, they were driven even more by the need to furnish a convincing context for that image: an argument that would justify the extreme upheaval to follow. In a country shell-shocked by the experience of war, they set out to fashion a body of narratives that aimed to legitimise their own architectural prejudices, awarding them a transcendental authority amongst the ruins of Europe. These exertions cannot credibly be labelled mere instances of professional arrogance, nor should they be condemned as a symptom of modernist introversion. Instead they betray a profound anxiety: a desire to progress beyond the clichés of functionalist dogma, and fabricate a more compelling foundation for modern architecture.

In contrast to the complacent postmodern tendency to depict modernist architecture as totalising, abstract, and inhumane, this study addresses the ambivalences, the

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, 'Modern and Postmodern Architecture', in *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 419.

doubts, and insecurities that characterised the post-war planning discourse. It aims to bring greater nuance to the discussion, analysing the many diverse debates and positions that marked the period in order to achieve a better understanding of mid-century urban culture in Britain.

In adopting this objective, the thesis responds to a growing trend, evidenced not only in recent work by architectural historians, but also by the enthusiasms of the general public. While academics have for some time been reappraising the built product of the post-war years, during the last decade or so there has been a complementary response among those who might previously have recoiled from the sight of a tower block or crumbling public library. Successful campaigns to ‘save’ threatened structures like Preston Bus Station – as well as the demolition of previously unfashionable works by architects such as John Madin and Owen Luder – have expanded the limits of architectural acceptability, publicising the notion that modern buildings do enjoy a definite architectural merit.⁶ The most notable beneficiary of this process has been brutalist architecture, whose aggressive and dynamic forms – once thoroughly detested – have lately begun to enjoy a vogue that has even seen the National Trust organise a ‘10-day celebration’ of the aesthetic.⁷ Although variously inspired, this trend doubtless finds some of its origins in a sense of anxiety not unlike that experienced in the mid-twentieth century. On this occasion, the disquiet derives from the steady rise of a neoliberal orthodoxy that seems to grow ever more entrenched in state structures across the West. It is, ultimately, this state of affairs that has aroused a nostalgic attraction to the physical remains of an era whose commitment to progressive politics and social compassion grows ever more alien.⁸ As a consequence, post-war buildings have found themselves newly infused with social meaning, a symbolic richness that runs contrary to the discouraging impression their timeworn appearance might often provoke. Accordingly, a series of

⁶ Martin Baker, ‘Love, Hate and Concrete: The Battle for Preston Bus Station’, *The Independent*, 4 January 2014, accessed 8 June 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/architecture/love-hate-and-concrete-the-battle-for-preston-bus-station>.

⁷ David Rogers, ‘National Trust to Celebrate Brutalist Buildings’, *Building Design*, 9 September 2015, 7 June 2016, <http://www.bdonline.co.uk/national-trust-to-celebrate-brutalist-buildings/5077388>.

⁸ Ike Ijeh, ‘Is Brutalism the New Victoriana?’, *Building Design*, 30 September 2015, accessed 8 June 2016, <http://www.bdonline.co.uk/is-brutalism-the-new-victoriana/?/5077835>.

accessible histories and guides have begun to appear, taking advantage of this newly discovered regard for the modern built environment.⁹

The general interest in the subject has in many ways followed a renewed impetus among academics to expand the discussion of the development of modernism in Britain, devoting particular attention to the work of the post-war years. Of course, this commitment to qualified reappraisal is quite different from the outlook that dominated architectural discourse from the 1960s, when historians and critics gathered together a catalogue of complaints that systematically discredited the intellectual bases of modern architecture, while also highlighting the problems that had surfaced at the point of construction and inhabitation.¹⁰ The sheer force of this backlash was so severe that it ensured for a long time that substantial accounts of the post-war era remained relatively few. While the postmodern assault was undoubtedly necessary as a corrective to the uncritical acceptance of modernist dogma, it represented, at its most unequivocal, an impulse that tended to deny the many positive contributions that modern architects had introduced. What sometimes emerged instead was the caricature of an architecture that was reductive, abstract, and inhumane, lacking spiritual depth and symbolic nuance.

Some accounts did preserve an openness to the complexities of the theories that dominated the twentieth century: Colin Rowe and Joseph Rykwert, for instance, frequently qualified their judgements by highlighting the intellectual positions that

⁹ John Grindrod, *Concretopia: A Journey Around the Rebuilding of Postwar Britain* (London: Old Street Publishing, 2014); Barnabus Calder, *Raw Concrete: The Beauty of Brutalism* (London: William Heinemann, 2016); Owen Hatherley, *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (London: Verso, 2011); Adrian Jones and Chris Matthews, *Towns in Britain: Jones the Planner* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2014). These have been complemented by other more luxurious publications, which emphasise the visual appeal of post-war buildings: see, for instance, Peter Chadwick, *This Brutal World* (London: Phaidon Press, 2016); Christopher Beanland, *Concrete Concept* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2016); Elain Harwood and James O. Davies, *England's Post-War Listed Buildings* (London: Batsford, 2015). Meanwhile, RIBA Publishing has released an ever growing selection of books in its 'Twentieth Century Architects' series, each one covering the career of a different British architect. These titles address architects as diverse as John Madin and McMorran and Whitby.

¹⁰ See, for example, Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Intentions in Architecture* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963); Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973); Brent C. Brolin, *The Failure of Modern Architecture* (London: Studio Vista, 1976); David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture: The Development of a Theme in Architectural History and Theory from the Gothic Revival to the Modern Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); Alan Colquhoun, *Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).

underpinned modernist architecture and aesthetics.¹¹ Over time, there duly emerged a desire to reconsider the era, and a series of important studies have been published that highlight the diversity of post-war debates, yet still maintain a sense of critical distance.¹² Several accounts have emerged more recently that acknowledge the astonishing diversity of post-war architectural culture.

An early example of this new appetite is evident in the collection *Anxious Modernisms*, assembled from papers presented at a conference at Harvard University in 1998.¹³ Critical of the tendency among contemporary scholars to reduce the discussion of modern architecture to its formal qualities, its editors – Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault – instead advise a thematic emphasis. By attending to the individual concerns that exercised architects and critics, the studies contained in *Anxious Modernisms* exposed the diversity of post-war practices, which succeeded in expanding the range of modernist languages in order to address the questions posed by the post-war situation.¹⁴ Surveying a host of different groups and figures, working in countries all around the world, in a variety of media, the book's essays present numerous suggestive models that the historian might adapt. Meanwhile, taken together, they afford an augmented understanding of post-war architectural culture as a series of autonomous projects, each one an attempt to negotiate an appropriate relationship to the tradition of the modern movement.

Building on these insights, a great deal of research has sought actively to embrace the wealth of architectural perspectives during the twentieth century, acknowledging their interactions with such phenomena as popular culture and the everyday, debates

¹¹ Colin Rowe, *The Architecture of Good Intentions: Towards a Possible Retrospective* (London: Academy Editions, 1994); Joseph Rykwert, *The Necessity of Artifice* (London: Academy Editions, 1982); William H. Jordy, 'The Symbolic Essence of Modern European Architecture of the Twenties and its Continuing Influence', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 22, no. 3 (1963): 177-187.

¹² Most notably, Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002); John R. Gold, *The Experience of Modernism: Modern Architects and the Future City, 1928-1953* (London: E & FN Spon, 1997); Louise Campbell, ed., *Twentieth-Century Architecture and its Histories* (London: Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain, 2000).

¹³ Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault, eds., *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Post-War Architectural Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Nicholas Bullock too gave a valuable overview of this wealth of ideas – concentrating on the British context – in his assessment of the 'war-time debate': Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, 25-36.

around regional identities, avant-garde artistic practice, and the implications of historical tradition. Frequently, historians have isolated their focus to national cultures, situating their subjects in relation not only to the modern movement, but also to the specific issues that preoccupied the inhabitants of a particular place.¹⁵ On closer inspection, every country displays its own array of histories, which serve to contradict the notion of a modern movement that exercised a perniciously restrictive external influence. Quite the opposite, the debates incited in the early twentieth century in fact acted as a spur to activity throughout the subsequent decades, not least in Britain. Accordingly, students of British history have also set out to address the multiple narratives of modernity, and anyone seeking to add to this field must make a selection between them. Certain areas inevitably suggest themselves for their vast significance in the development of post-war production. Of course, one such example is the close relationship between architects, planners, and the ideals and institutions of the welfare state: a consequence of the social and political ideals that informed the evolution of the modern movement. Since the 1930s, modernists in Britain had been agitating for the widespread acceptance of models that had first emerged on the Continent, assuming their place in a long tradition of reform movements.¹⁶

During the subsequent decade, and beyond, this relationship found perhaps its most coherent expression in the campaign to advance new, systematised approaches to building construction on a mass-scale. This monumental project was the most conspicuous form in which the idea of progressive politics could receive an analogical architectural expression: that is, through the adoption of technologically

¹⁵ See, for instance, Alice T. Friedman, *American Glamour and the Evolution of Modern Architecture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Zhongjie Lin, *Kenzo Tange and the Metabolist Movement: Urban Utopias of Modern Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Michelangelo Sabatino, *Pride in Modesty: Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular Tradition in Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Helena Mattsson, *Swedish Modernism: Architecture Consumption and the Welfare State* (London: Black Dog, 2010); John Pendlebury, Erdem Erten, and Peter J. Larkham, eds., *Alternative Visions of Post-War Reconstruction: Creating the Modern Townscape* (London: Routledge, 2015). A sustained project to develop further the understanding of the unique qualities of national modern architectures can be found in the 'Modern Architectures in History' series, published by Reaktion books.

¹⁶ For an account of this activity to promote the benefits of modernism to areas such as housing, healthcare, and town planning, see Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity Before Reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2007), 45-174.

‘progressive’ methods of production and assembly.¹⁷ Their correspondence was further emphasised by the fact that methods of system-building were closely allied to several exemplary instances of social democracy in action. Andrew Saint has written of the celebrated post-war achievements in the field of school construction, in particular the work of the Hertfordshire County Council, which employed flexible systems of prefabrication to make buildings that were efficient, yet elegant and humane.¹⁸ The prodigious volume of housing produced after the war represents another significant phenomenon in this regard: a subject that has been amply catalogued in its successes and failures.¹⁹ Mass-housing provision is also the focus of an important study by Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, its monumental scope matching the ambition of the historical events themselves, and offering a minutely detailed discussion of the transition from theory through to the interference of political complexity and pragmatic compromise.²⁰

The book’s title resolves the technological and social impulses of modernist discourse into the figure of the tower block. One of the definitive symbols of the rise and fall of post-war ambitions, this typology would seem to sum up the disastrous rejection of the traditional grain of British towns and cities, and the patterns of daily life. It highlights the general unpopularity of modern architecture that still endures: the ultimate public disillusionment with the project to radically re-think every aspect of the built environment and its functions. Of course, if we maintain a commitment to the multivalent readings of modernity introduced in *Anxious Modernisms*, it becomes clear that there are many further narratives available. For, beyond these notions of a utopia oriented explicitly towards a politics of progress and a symbolism of futurity, lie impulses of a more ‘conservative’ variety. In chapter one, we will see that utopias need not exhibit an obviously or literally teleological structure. It is possible, also, to discern the existence of a neoliberal utopia, or a neoconservative

¹⁷ This relationship is discussed at length in Brian Finnimore, *Houses from the Factory: System-Building and the Welfare State* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1989).

¹⁸ Andrew Saint, *Towards a Social Architecture: The Role of School-Building in Post-War England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

¹⁹ Brenda Vale, *Prefabs: A History of the UK Temporary Housing Programme* (London: Spon, 1995). Also, Bullock offers a comparison of both house-building and school-building, highlighting the greater success of the latter. See *Building the Post-War World*, 169-198.

²⁰ Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

utopia, which might respectively appeal to the authority of the market, or to popular nostalgia and dreams of national renewal and the permanence of tradition. The reception of such values can, in turn, induce in the world very real and concrete forms of change. Complementing these more political readings, there are architectural developments too that contrast markedly with the connotations of system-building, mass-housing, and radical town planning.

After the war, several significant practices pursued directions that, while cognizant of activity elsewhere, nevertheless contrasted markedly with many of the preoccupations of mainstream modernism. The institutional buildings of McMorran and Whitby, for instance, or the housing designed by Tayler and Green have only relatively recently begun to receive serious attention; however, each serves to challenge any unproblematic priority given to the post-war project of modernisation.²¹ A closer look at even those figures at the heart of debates about the future of design, of course, also advances this perception of a diverse and self-critical modern architecture. Much research has lately focussed on the already well-regarded careers of James Stirling, Alison and Peter Smithson, Colin St John Wilson, or members of the pre-war generation such as Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew.²² In their study of the latter, Iain Jackson and Jessica Holland have emphasised the diversity of the work the pair produced across many decades, realised for a wide array of different clients.²³ Above all, their architecture in West Africa and India displayed a progressively subtle appraisal of climatic conditions and also of the presence of national building traditions: locating the pair as decisive mediators between global and local interests. Meanwhile, the range of transformations in the output of James Stirling necessarily recommends him for this kind of revisionist consideration. In one such example, Mark Crinson has looked to Stirling's partnership with James Gowan

²¹ Edward Denison, *McMorran & Whitby* (London: RIBA, 2009); Elain Harwood and Alan Powers, *Tayler and Green, Architects 1938-1973: The Spirit of Place in Modern Housing* (London: Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture, 1998).

²² See, for instance, the essays on the Alison and Peter Smithson and Colin St John Wilson in Crinson and Zimmerman, eds., *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern*; Sarah Menin and Stephen Kite, *An Architecture of Invitation: Colin St John Wilson* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

²³ Iain Jackson and Jessica Holland, *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew: Twentieth Century Architecture, Pioneer Modernism and the Tropics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

in the 1950s.²⁴ Beginning with their individual paths through architecture school, he goes on to trace their very specific attention to Britain's industrial past and its relationship to the cultural innovations wrought by an emergent consumer society. With this focus, Crinson underlines the appreciation of history within architectural circles – a tendency that had been maturing since the previous decade – but also the concurrent fact that this had to be addressed directly towards some conception of the contemporaneity of society.²⁵ The Smithsons too engaged in this practice, especially through their collaboration with Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi on the exhibition 'Parallel of Life and Art', an event that sought to organise a concrete understanding of British popular culture in the early 1950s, as Alex Kitnick has emphasised.²⁶

Of course, as well as producing buildings, all of these figures also promoted their ideas in print – whether books, journals, or magazines – and occasionally through the staging of exhibitions. This fact returns us to *Anxious Modernisms* and its openness to a more generous approach to architectural history, which does not rely on physical buildings as the sole basis of analysis. Instead, a less tangible conception of 'architecture' can be applied, permitting a relativist outlook that accepts the equality of all discursive methods.²⁷ In particular, such a focus on 'discourse' allows the writing of histories in which practitioners themselves are not the sole actors; rather, the various strategies of critics, historians, and figures marginal from the centres of debate are able to emerge as the protagonists of new narratives. By accepting this methodology, the historian enjoys a considerably expanded field of historical

²⁴ Mark Crinson, *Stirling and Gowan: Architecture from Austerity to Affluence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). For another appraisal of Stirling's project to re-think the assumptions of modern architectural discourse, see Amanda Reeser Lawrence, *James Stirling: Revisionary Modernist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

²⁵ Another aspect of Britain's historical inheritance that won modernists' attention was Georgian architecture, which suggested itself as particularly appropriate for use. See, William Whyte, 'The Englishness of English architecture: modernism and the making of a national international style, 1927-1957', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009): 441-465.

²⁶ Alex Kitnick, 'The Brutalism of Life and Art', *October* 136 (2011): 63-86.

²⁷ There are other studies that are worth highlighting in this regard. For instance, in the book *Mediating Modernism*, Andrew Higgott looks specifically to the written content of books and journals to explain how their authors directed the course of modern architecture in Britain: Andrew Higgott, *Mediating Modernism: Architectural Cultures in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2007). Similarly, Claire Zimmerman embraces the importance of photography in twentieth-century architecture, highlighting the equality photographs often enjoyed with built works: Claire Zimmerman, *Photographic Architecture in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

enquiry, which can also embrace alternative disciplinary perspectives. For example, David Matless has approached British architecture and town planning in the middle of the twentieth century from a background of cultural geography. Looking at diverse, often visual, media he locates reconstruction debate in relation to traditional notions of Englishness, especially the powerful status of the countryside in the national cultural imagination.²⁸

Bearing in mind this respect for tradition, there has also been a very significant expansion of enquiries into a series of specific debates that began in the 1940s in Britain, usually promoted by writers associated with the *Architectural Review*. Interestingly, although the major protagonists of these discussions were all writers and artists of various kinds, their work has enjoyed enormous influence. All committed to modern architecture, but equally convinced that innovation in design must be accommodated to English tradition, they undertook campaigns in the pages of the *Review* that looked to the past for guidance, and developed over many years. These campaigns resolve themselves into three broad categories – ‘the picturesque’, ‘townscape’, and the ‘functional tradition’ – which collectively present the historian with an opportunity to reconsider mid-century discourse and its relationship to ideals of futurity and innovation.²⁹ Most studies have pursued this course, approaching these programmes as a conservative ‘turn’ to a nostalgic ideal of Englishness, or else as an attempt to enrich a cold modern architecture by infusing it with historical associations, bringing it into contact with the informal townscape of Britain. Historians have, therefore, been able to emphasise the prevailing continuity of these developments with the architectures of the past, exploring the inspirations behind these ideas and also their diverse impact on the evolution of architectural design and town planning.

²⁸ David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion, 1998).

²⁹ See the contributions of Erdem Erten, Harriet Atkinson, John Pendlebury, and Barnabas Calder in Pendlebury, Erten, and Larkham, eds., *Alternative Visions of Post-War Reconstruction*; Erdem Erten, ‘“The Hollow Victory” of Modern Architecture and the Quest for the Vernacular: J.M. Richards and the Functional Tradition’, in *Built from Below: British Architecture and the Vernacular*, ed. Peter Guillery (London: Routledge, 2011); Higgott, *Mediating Modernism*, 99-109; Anthony Raynsford, ‘Urban Contrast and Neo-Toryism: On the Social and Political Symbolism of the *Architectural Review*’s Townscape Campaign’, *Planning Perspectives* 30, no. 1 (2015): 95-128.

In its latter stages, this thesis itself looks to the *Architectural Review*, in particular the elaboration of a theory of the picturesque and its main progenitor, Nicholas Pevsner.³⁰ However, it will attempt to consider not so much the content of the discussion, rather the way this discussion was framed – its assumption that a definite foundation for architectural design could be identified, which was then narrated and afforded a certain legitimacy on that basis. In short, the thesis seeks to expose the functioning of the arguments in play, their motivations, and what these reveal about the intense circumstances in which their authors worked. Each of the campaigns betrays a certain nostalgia – even conservatism – and we here return to the issue of anxiety and doubt: a sense of equivocation that all of these studies implicitly accept in their conviction to abstain from singular, monolithic readings. Another such history, by Harriet Atkinson, examines the organisation of the Festival of Britain in 1951, a defining moment in post-war British history due to its position at the end of the era of austerity, while granting a glimpse onto the approaching arrival of affluence. Atkinson gives much attention to the significance of the buildings constructed as part of the Festival, and also highlights its significance in negotiating a new idea of post-war nationhood. She describes the events of that year as ‘a ground for experimentation with what it meant to be modern and British. The models for a newly reconstructed country that were offered – which looked “modern” – were shaped by a deep engagement with the British land and its people’.³¹

This summation reminds that, the range of mid-century discourse was not a frivolous or cynical pursuit of heterogeneity for its own sake, but instead was driven by a serious engagement with the question of how Britain should undertake the project of reconstruction. Indeed, as Anthony Vidler has stressed, the very phrase ‘post-war reconstruction’ carries an inevitable suggestion of the memory of conflict, for it necessarily implies a direct response to some prior state of ruin.³² The cultural

³⁰ This subject has seen a great deal of initial study through the work of Mathew Aitchison and John Macarthur, who have outlined the basic content of Pevsner’s ideas and researched much of its intellectual background. See John Macarthur and Mathew Aitchison, ‘Pevsner’s Townscape’, in *Visual Planning and the Picturesque*, ed. Mathew Aitchison (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010).

³¹ Harriet Atkinson, *The Festival of Britain: A Land and its People* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

³² Anthony Vidler, ‘Air War and Architecture’, in *Ruins of Modernity*, ed. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 30.

trauma of the Second World War should not be forgotten, and, while the notion of ‘anxious modernisms’ can imply this fact, Colomina’s observation of the frequent failure to acknowledge architects’ graphic experiences suggests a desire among scholars to leave their subject untainted by the distasteful realities of history.³³ Some historians have tracked directly the correspondences between modern architecture and modern warfare, and my own research seeks to add to their findings.³⁴

It is within this constellation of new perspectives that I seek to situate this thesis. Adopting, first, a reading that admits the modern movement was not the progenitor of a monolithic ideology, nor was it an outlook that suffocated the possibility of debate. Rather, its foundation initiated a vibrant discussion that over time actively encouraged the proliferation of multiple and independent tendencies, each of which represented a response to a unique cultural context. My research has sought above all to incorporate an appreciation that this variety was largely inspired and defined by a sense of anxiety and doubt, particularly as the memory of the heroic 1920s grew more distant and the Second World War eroded some of the faith that was invested in universal progress. As a result, the selection of topics that will appear in the forthcoming chapters follows directly from this context of military conflict and post-war trauma.

All the same, more optimistic narratives of an explicitly progressive modernity do feature: indeed, they represent this study’s main point of departure. By setting these more widely established readings of modernist endeavour alongside debates that were frankly questioning received doctrine, it is possible to discover a considerably enriched appreciation of the ideas in circulation during the 1940s, while expanding the domain of each beyond their obvious boundaries. It becomes clear that both outlooks were deeply concerned with questions of representation and rhetoric – with how modern architecture was received, and how external opinion might be shaped. Scholars such as Peter J. Larkham and Keith D. Lilley have, accordingly,

³³ See footnote 1.

³⁴ Vidler, ‘Air War and Architecture’; Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Barcelona: Actar, 2007); Jean-Louis Cohen, *Architecture in Uniform: Designing and Building for the Second World War* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2011).

investigated the specific scenographic qualities of reconstruction plans by figures such as Patrick Abercrombie and Thomas Sharp, stressing their emphasis on visual communication and persuasion as a vital constituent part of each scheme.³⁵

Following on from the implications of such studies, the special contribution of this thesis lies in its intention explicitly to reconstruct the idea of a modern movement at a transitional stage, with much at stake: a moment of opportunism in which its supporters were attempting to discover productive narratives through which to legitimate their activity. Operating at a time when so many aspects of Europe's future remained in doubt, these figures incited discussion that was driven by strong convictions, but also by a degree of compromise and negotiation, all the while assuming a tone that floated between confidence and anxiety. Elizabeth Darling's work on the early promulgation of modernism in Britain in the pre-war years sketches a similar picture, emphasising the significance of its rhetorical programme, composed of a content that always existed in dialogue with the pressures of argumentation.³⁶ Like Darling and others, my research does not dwell extensively on built works, but rather explores discussions – primarily written – that evidence a scattering of designers, historians, and critics, striving through their isolated projects to pull together a coherent response to the post-war world. In the process, they discovered their own meaningful architectures and, thus, began to realise a coherent anticipatory vision of the future.

The concerns at the heart of my PhD thesis first took shape as I undertook my MSc by Research from 2010 to 2011 at the University of Edinburgh.³⁷ This work was founded on research in the Percy Johnson-Marshall Collection, an enormous archive held by the University, comprising architectural material that dates mainly from the post-war era. Largely unexplored, the collection offered many potential avenues of investigation. Among the most inviting were the papers relating to the Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction (APRR), an organisation founded in the

³⁵ Peter J. Larkham and Keith D. Lilley, 'Townscape and Scenography: Conceptualising and Communicating the New Urban Landscape in British Post-War Planning', in *Alternative Visions of Post-War*: 108-121.

³⁶ Darling, *Re-forming Britain*.

³⁷ Matthew Latusek, 'Discovering a "Synoptic Vision": South Wales and the Co-Ordination of British Planning in the 1940s' (MSc dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2011).

spring of 1940 that enjoyed a significant, but today largely forgotten, role in shaping the research-based practice of British town planning. Further investigation suggested that, as a body, the APRR had coalesced around the preparation of a research and reconstruction scheme in the South Wales coalfield, and this project consequently became the basis of my MSc dissertation. The Association's efforts to assist productive reconstruction in the area remained for the most part an account of frustrated ambitions. After the abandonment in 1941 of the initial project under the pressure of wartime conditions, a later survey, conducted after the war in the town of Brynmawr and the surrounding district, offered proposals for development that came to nothing. By that time a rubber factory was under construction in Brynmawr, designed by the Architects' Co-operative Partnership.³⁸ Its eventual completion was hailed as a model of the ideals of the post-war state, but came several years after the cessation of activity for the APRR.³⁹ Although in one sense an account of persistent failure, the Association's work in South Wales also furnished a fascinating intellectual history, revealing a series of attempts to negotiate – and even guide – the emerging planning apparatus of the 1940s. It was a pioneering example of the application of research to the problem of planning in post-war Britain, and served as an indication of the wealth of radical ideas in circulation at the time.

John Muller has observed the relationship between such changes in town planning method since its emergence as an independent discipline and “the on-going quest of the profession to maintain social relevance and disciplinary legitimacy”.⁴⁰ Each new approach sought, whether openly or not, to locate the profession in a position favourable to the ever evolving context of public and official taste. Therefore, he

³⁸ The Architects' Co-operative Partnership initially consisted of 11 members, many of whom had earlier been involved with the APRR: Kenneth Capon, Peter Cocke, Michael Cooke-Yarborough, Anthony Cox, Michael Grice, A. W. Nicol, Anthony Pott, Michael Powers, Greville Rhodes, Leo de Syllas and John Wheeler. After the war all except Pott, Nicol, and Wheeler continued, and the practice – under the name, the Architects' Co-Partnership – enjoyed much success. See Cox et al., 'The Brynmawr Rubber Factory', *AA Files: Annals of the Architectural Association School of Architecture* 10 (1985), 3-5.

³⁹ For a scholarly account of the background and construction of the Brynmawr Rubber Factory, see Victoria Perry, *Built for a Better Future: The Brynmawr Rubber Factory* (Oxford: White Cockade, 1994). Additionally, the architects involved with the project recorded their recollections in Anthony Cox et al., 'The Brynmawr Rubber Factory'.

⁴⁰ John Muller, 'From survey to strategy: Twentieth century developments in western planning method,' *Planning Perspectives* 7, no. 2 (1992): 125-155 (125), DOI: 10.1080/02665439208725744.

suggests that such developments should be considered in the light of broader political, economic, and social circumstance. This self-interest underlay the activity of the APRR, and consequently the seemingly remote area of South Wales stood as an important case study. In exploring the faltering pursuit of comprehensive reconstruction around Brynmawr, I began, in turn, to investigate the methods and motivations of town planning in the 1940s, and the broader situation in Britain.

It was this pursuit of legitimacy that I have continued to explore in my PhD research, with my initial focus trained on the mid-century concern with science and research as a basis for design, and the accompanying commitment to technological innovation. While incorporating my work on the APRR and South Wales, I also sought to broaden my investigation beyond this phenomenon to attain a broader perspective over architectural culture in Britain, and to take into account the more humanistic attitudes that began to colour the discussion. This I have done in four extended chapters, which function both as free-standing studies and as complementary elements of the thesis. Individually, each chapter represents an enquiry into a distinct phenomenon that animated architectural and town planning discourse, primarily during, and in the immediate aftermath of, the Second World War. The chapters thus address: utopia as a concept in modern architecture; the appeal of scientific research and expertise as an aid to design; the significance of the ruin in Britain's bomb-damaged cities; and the uses of history and role of the historian as an architectural authority. Meanwhile, read collectively, the studies document a general aspiration in the middle of the twentieth century to 'discover' a valid architecture for the post-war world. We find individuals struggling against the anxiety of annihilation to develop narratives in which they and others might place their faith: fragmentary anticipations of the utopia to come.

In accord with its subject matter, the first chapter is the least specific in its focus. Not entirely concerned with the mid-twentieth century, it stands somewhat apart from the rest of the thesis by addressing historiographic treatments of the utopian tradition, and its problematic relation to modern architecture. This discussion, therefore, establishes a framework within which to read the narratives traced across the

subsequent chapters: disparate instances of utopian speculation, although never explicitly conceived as such. Given the significance of intellectual attacks on the supposedly ‘utopian’ folly of modern architecture, the chapter begins with an appraisal of this critical tradition, which identified the problematic collusion of modernism with oppressive political forces, as well as the ultimate experiential poverty of many large-scale post-war projects. However, several new perspectives have emerged, which seek to reconsider the modern movement: revisions of critical orthodoxy that embrace instead the positive potential of utopian speculation. Drawing, in particular, on the writing of Nathaniel Coleman, Ruth Levitas, and David Pinder, I therefore introduce an understanding of utopia that acknowledges the concrete historical specificity of mid-twentieth century debate, emphasising the intellectual imperative of such ambition.⁴¹

The second chapter moves on to pursue a more direct enquiry into the events of the 1940s. Beginning with the unexpected 1945 general election result, it traces the emergence of public enthusiasm for reconstruction, as the difficult conditions of wartime gave rise to a view that the conflict was being waged in order to initiate a project of social reconstruction. This phenomenon incited the town planning profession to elaborate grand visions of physical reconstruction: an abundance of attempts to construct a compelling picture of the post-war world. Among the more extreme of these was the Modern Architectural Research Group’s (MARS) Master Plan for London, a scheme that posited a comprehensive re-imagining of the distribution of London’s built fabric. One of the dominant – and controversial – impetuses behind its radicalism was the existence of a faith in quantifiable methods of research to ‘solve’ the problem of the city. Part of an attempt to legitimise a newly emerging town planning profession, this approach was underpinned by the civic and regional survey, which advanced the potential of technocratic management to overcome problems of social organisation and physical planning. Looking to the work of Eric Anthony Ambrose Rowse – an eccentric proponent of Patrick Geddes’ theories on regional planning – we find enormous richness and symbolic depth in

⁴¹ See Nathaniel Coleman, *Utopias and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2005); Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (New York: Philip Allan, 1990); David Pinder, *Visions of the City: Utopianism, Power and Politics in Twentieth-Century Urbanism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

what might, at first, seem a coldly technical adherence to science and intellectual detachment.⁴²

While the development of a consciously scientific approach to the city indicates an attitude of confidence and certitude, the context of these endeavours in Britain – the horrific experience of aerial warfare and the constant threat of death – reveals entirely conflicting circumstances. Therefore, the next chapter investigates the specificity of the wartime situation, exposing both the complicity of modern architecture with the processes of destruction and renewal, and the traumas that remained submerged beneath the superficial expression of self-assurance. Above all, we trace this anxiety through the figure of the ruin – a ubiquitous presence in the urban landscape of the 1940s. Despite their eagerness to build wholly anew, architects and planners found themselves constantly surrounded by reminders of the fragile status of their works. While they were to an extent threatened by this new architecture of destruction, they also sought to appropriate the forms of ruination into their new vision of the city: narrating an architecture rooted in the experience of war and the shattered buildings of the past.

The historic city also forms the background for the fourth, and final, chapter. While aerial attack had devastated the cities of Britain, some structures attained a renewed significance as a result of their survival: not least St Paul's Cathedral. As perhaps the pre-eminent icon of blitz-era London, St Paul's became a popular focus of photographic treatments of the bomb-damaged City of London, frequently photographed in dynamic juxtaposition with the gutted structures surrounding it. With this sentiment grew a conviction that the characteristic vistas within which it featured must be preserved – or at least reproduced – when the task of reconstruction commenced. We explore the debates initiated by this view in specific relation to two plans for the area: one published in 1942 by the Royal Academy Planning Committee, and the other produced by Charles Holden and William Holford in 1947,

⁴² Much of this section of the chapter is excerpted from my MSc dissertation, see Latusek, 'Discovering a "Synoptic Vision"'.

although expanded upon publication as a book in 1951.⁴³ The latter, in particular, displays an insistent visual emphasis, a tendency that echoes discourses elsewhere in British architectural culture.

Turning to the work of Nikolaus Pevsner, highlighted earlier in this introduction, we explore his predominantly visual analysis of the picturesque, which prompted a reading of this aesthetic tradition as both uniquely English and directly reflective of certain qualities he found in modern architecture.⁴⁴ Highlighting its highly idiosyncratic assumptions, this chapter seeks to understand Pevsner's project as an attempt, firstly, to create a more emotionally resonant version of modernism, but also to find a trans-historical justification for his personal architectural tastes. This appeal to the legitimating authority of history was not unique to Pevsner, and we finish with a consideration of the peculiar popularity of the scholarship of Rudolf Wittkower – especially his research into renaissance theories of proportion. Again, this trend – notable mainly in a younger generation of architects – was destined to remain a partial and unsuccessful project; but it nevertheless evidences a sustained striving after a convincing foothold in the cultural landscape of the post-war world. While such unapologetic ambition and certitude are much discredited today, it is nevertheless possible to recover a more generous reading of mid-century architectural discussion. But to do so, we must begin with an extended consideration of the problematic concept of 'utopia'.

⁴³ Royal Academy Planning Committee, *London Replanned: The Royal Academy Planning Committee's Interim Report* (London: Country Life, 1942); C.H. Holden and W.G. Holford, *The City of London: A Record of Destruction and Survival* (London: Architectural Press, 1951).

⁴⁴ This work is indebted to the research of John Macarthur and Mathew Aitchison, see Macarthur and Aitchison, 'Pevsner's Townscape'.

CHAPTER 1 – ‘Tomorrow I Don’t Care What Happens’: Situating Utopias

Introduction

It is hard to ignore the profound utopian aspiration that infused British political and social discourse as the Second World War came to an end. A particularly poignant evocation of this moment appears in the record of an anonymous London housewife’s response to news of the Nazi surrender. In an intense outpouring of elation and relief, she exclaims, ‘I can’t grasp the fact that it’s all over ... tomorrow I don’t care what happens. I’m going to be really happy. I’m glad of the opportunity to relieve my pent-up feelings [*sic*]’.¹ While this carefree statement reflects the mood that prevailed upon the declaration of peace, it would not take long before the public could begin to expect some return for the hardships they had suffered. In this regard, there is a revealing comment by Stafford Cripps, a politician who enjoyed phenomenal popularity during the war in his role as Ambassador to the Soviet Union and a prominent advocate of the scientific planning of government. Recognising the high-pitched idealism that had begun to circulate, he advised the delegates at the 1945 Labour Party Conference that they ‘must not lead the people to believe that this is some easy Utopia into which we are inviting them to step’.²

His remark might seem to signal a retreat, an early sign of the intrusion of pragmatism and compromise into the post-war vision of the future – indeed, a warning that anticipates Cripps’s post-war notoriety as the key patron of austerity. However, it also indicates the power that such speculation was perceived to exercise.

¹ A London housewife speaking to Mass Observation in May 1945, quoted in Juliet Gardiner, *Wartime: Britain, 1939-1945* (London: Review, 2005), 663.

² Stafford Cripps in 1945, quoted in Richard Toye, *The Labour Party and the Planned Economy, 1931-51* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2003), 124. Similarly, during the war, Churchill had advised his ministers not to ‘deceive the people by false hopes and airy visions of Utopia and Eldorado’: quoted in Robert Mackay, *The Test of War: Inside Britain 1939-45* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 154.

Here, the function of ‘utopianism’ as a rhetorical device is apparent: its ability to project a compelling image or argument that will act as a spur to collective action. In this manifestation ‘utopia’ need not be alluded to directly, but can exist merely as an evocation of a better world that will – by virtue of its aesthetic and intellectual appeal – draw people along with it. The seductiveness of such a ‘utopia’ is a source of unease to the party politician; but, at the same time, the pursuit of some notion of a better way of life is essential to political change. During and immediately after the war there was no shortage of speculation on the shape of the world that would arrive on the return of peace. Whether in the radical social proposals of the Beveridge Report in 1942 or the proposals set out in the County of London Plan the following year, a sense of creativity and debate was in motion. It was only as politicians, planners, and architects introduced their utopias, and as these imaginaries converged with the altered expectations of wartime life, that these figures found a rare opportunity for action.

In *The Myth of the Blitz*, Angus Calder explores the various narratives constructed during the war. Scrutinising the difficult experiences of Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, and the blitz, he describes the genesis of a potent body of mythology that defined the nation’s identity into the post-war years. In his account, the year 1940 takes centre stage: a moment that ‘for the Left ... would encapsulate a moment of retrenchment as a moment of rebirth; a moment of ideological conservatism as a moment of revolution’. For Calder, this was to have significant consequences for the development of the welfare state – the myth being essentially conservative, obscuring ‘the continuing need for radical change in British society. The Left would think that in 1940 it had captured History. In fact, it had been captured by it’.³ While this may be the case, in an architectural context, the key fact lies in the motive power that such rhetoric exerted over public life, at least in the short term. Meanwhile, Calder is keen to insist that the myth did not consist of ‘scandalous untruths and cover-ups’; rather it provided a sense of purpose and served to promote

³ Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 15.

egalitarianism in society, underpinning the creation of many of the institutions of the welfare state.⁴

The developments of wartime were also very kind on the professions whose expertise focussed on the built environment: in particular, architects and town planners.⁵ The accumulation of support for reconstruction gave an essential backing to physical design, which ensured itself a pivotal role in the grand project for a renewal of the social order that was to come. Undoubtedly, this rise of modern architecture and design in Britain can be attributed in large part to the mundane activity of backroom political discussion and debate. But, at the same time, the impact of more intangible factors was essential. A sense of collective struggle strongly underlined the popularity of the project of reconstruction, acting both as a source of confidence before 1945, and as a model for the perfect society after it.⁶ As we will see, the approaching opportunity to rebuild also provoked a sustained debate around the question of how this was to be done, and how the new architecture ought to be framed. This was part of a broader utopian discourse that became particularly prevalent during the war: a response, simultaneously, to the trauma of conflict and the relief of survival. It is in this context that we see the capacity of utopian dreaming to justify and naturalise activities, such as post-war reconstruction, that were decidedly political.⁷ However, in order to better understand the significance of utopia in the ideological debate of the war – and the period immediately afterwards – it is necessary to consider more deeply its significance in histories of modernist architecture.

⁴ *Ibid*, xiii.

⁵ Chapter 2 will treat this phenomenon more fully.

⁶ Addison, *The Road to 1945* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 162-163.

⁷ Matthew Hollow has presented a similar notion of post-war planning driven by ‘utopian impulses’, which combined idealistic and more prosaic tendencies: Matthew Hollow, ‘Utopian urges: Visions for reconstruction in Britain, 1940-1950’, *Planning Perspectives* 27, no. 4 (2012): 569-585.

The Problem of Utopia and Architecture

Utopia and modern architecture share a troubled relationship. The tension rests on the fact that critics generally assume without question the connection between utopianism and the aims and ideals of the modern movement.⁸ Drawing on the visionary plans for cities of the future from the pre-war years, and then on the progeny of these schemes – the many attempts along similar lines to realise communities of varying sizes and degrees of comprehensiveness in the decades afterwards – these commentators have illustrated the folly of attempting to impose grandiose images of urban order from above. Starting in the 1960s such critiques of utopian planning came to form an irrepressible current against the assumptions and methods of modern architects and planners, resulting in an almost wholesale rejection within twenty years of the achievements of the post-war era. The two defining texts in setting the agenda were Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, and *Collage City* by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, their influence undermining the positivist sense of quasi-religious epistemological legitimacy, and impairing the possibility of a non-critical pursuit of utopian practice.⁹ Indeed, the dramatic change in the cultural landscape by 1980 was summed up by Robert Hughes, who wrote that: 'we have got so used to accepting the failure of utopia that we find it hard to understand our cultural grandparents, many of whom believed, with utmost passion, that its historical destiny was to succeed'.¹⁰ But the issue is not simply that utopia as an ideal has become devalued. Far more problematically, as a consequence of such arguments, the legitimacy of the entire history of architectural modernism has been called into question. Hilde Heynen has drawn attention to this phenomenon, commenting that of 'all the criticisms that modern architecture has had

⁸ A useful exception is the work of Nathaniel Coleman. His in depth appreciation of the writing and theory of the utopian tradition provides useful insights, representing a rarity in architectural histories of utopia. See, in particular: Nathaniel Coleman, 'Utopia on Trial?', in *Imagining and Making the World: Reconsidering Architecture and Utopia*, ed. Nathaniel Coleman (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011): 183-219.

⁹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962); Colin Rowe, *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978). The importance of these books is discussed by Coleman: Coleman, 'Utopia on Trial?', 195n.

¹⁰ Robert Hughes, quoted in: Helga Nowotny, 'Science and Utopia: On the Social Ordering of the Future', in *Nineteen Eighty-Four: Science between Utopia and Dystopia*, eds. Everett Mendelsohn and Helga Nowotny (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1984), 10-11.

to endure since the 1960s, the one of utopianism has apparently had the most impact. It seems that, by now, almost everybody is convinced that modern architecture's utopian ambition was its most harmful attribute'.¹¹

But were utopia and architecture ever as compatible as the project of the modern movement asserted? A brief appraisal of the history of the concept of utopia would suggest an irregularity in their affiliation. When Thomas More coined the term 'utopia' in his book of 1516, he combined with the Greek word for 'place' (*topos*) simultaneously the words 'happy' or 'good' (*eu*) and 'not' (*ou*): that is, his compound signifies somewhere that is both a 'good-place', and yet can be found to exist nowhere.¹² While it is the former that is accountable for the special allure of utopia – the opportunity to materialise in some form an ideal state of society – the latter would appear to dictate that it remain an object of the imagination, and thus an impossible dream for the architect. Doubtless, More's construction carried a degree of satirical intent, a comment on the imperfections of contemporary society, whose condition was such that to posit a good place was at the same time to discover that its realisation was impossible.¹³ But also we see here the intimacy between utopianism and religious thought, with influences drawn mainly from the Judeo-Christian image of the Heavenly Jerusalem, as well as the related notion of the Last Judgement. More's allusion to utopia as not only a 'good-place' but also a 'no-place', by definition opposed to the messiness and compromise of the real world, is therefore significant in transposing something of the contemplative, paradisiacal ideal into the modern utopia.

Accordingly, modernist architects envisaged their work as part of a project rooted in a decidedly teleological understanding of history, in which the spatial re-organisation of society was understood as a prelude to its salvation – Colin Rowe highlighted this aspect of the modern movement's enterprise at some length in his *The Architecture*

¹¹ Hilde Heynen, 'Engaging Modernism', in *Back from Utopia: the Challenge of the Modern Movement*, eds. Hubert-Jan Henket and Hilde Heynen (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2002), 382.

¹² George M. Logan, 'Introduction' to Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Robert M. Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xi.

¹³ Kumar, *Utopianism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), 88.

of Good Intentions.¹⁴ The equivocal tone of his title indicates the sense of unease that the modernist cultural programme has come to evoke. In the first place, the presumption of an almost divinely ordained legitimacy stands in tension to the professed emancipatory aims of modern architecture, while tying it inescapably to the cause of instrumentalised science and technological progress. But also, by implanting into the secular practice of modern architecture the transcendental assumptions of religion, it has been argued that the pursuit of utopia became, from the eighteenth century onwards, a troublesome preoccupation.

As a result of the shift in focus away from the physical world and towards an abstract realm of architectural projection, Dalibor Vesely has highlighted the emergence of a ‘dangerous faith’ of design, in which the designer approaches an identity with God. For Vesely, this understanding carries the germ of the utopian spirit: a God-like will to dominate in pursuit of a spurious paradise, which, moreover, finds its realisation only through ‘the monologue of theoretical or speculative constructions’. He goes on to identify this conception of design directly with the methods of modern science, whose idealised space of experiment – the laboratory – finds its equivalent in the rational and artificial medium of the utopian project or architectural drawing, a realm detached from the world of embodied experience.¹⁵ As a result, both Vesely and Alberto Pérez-Gómez, insist that architects’ attempts to realise the ideal in the finite space of reality are paradoxical and inherently dystopian.¹⁶ In this respect they represented, certainly in the 1980s and 1990s, part of a wider attitude of unease towards the discussion of architecture in conjunction with utopia.

Yet, in the last decade or so, a range of theoretical and historical treatments have occasioned a revival and enrichment of the debate. Some have continued to see utopia generally in terms of modernist millenarianism, attending to the historical

¹⁴ Colin Rowe, *The Architecture of Good Intentions: Towards a Possible Retrospect* (London: Academy Editions, 1994), 30-43.

¹⁵ Dalibor Vesely, ‘Design and the Crisis of Vision’, *Scroope Cambridge Architecture Journal* 7 (1995), 68-69 (68).

¹⁶ Vesely, *Ibid.*, 67-68; Alberto Pérez-Gómez, ‘The City as a Paradigm of Symbolic Order’, in *Carleton Book: Architectural Research by Faculty and Recent Graduates of Carleton University School of Architecture*, ed. Katsuhiko Muramoto and Stephen Parcell (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1986): 5-18.

successes and failures that grandiose urban speculation prompted.¹⁷ Reading utopia as a temporally isolated ideal, located more or less irrecoverably in the past, they nevertheless appreciate its historical significance as an inspiration to architects of mid-century, whose example might yet hold tentative lessons for the future. One such lesson derives from the sheer formal exuberance and ingenuity of radical urban imaginaries, and this aspect has seen the additional publication of visually rich collections documenting the diversity of visionary thought.¹⁸ Of course, such approaches can tend towards the superficial, their luxurious, ‘coffee table’ presentation perhaps implying a degree of artistic dilettantism, elevating the projects to a status of disinterest that belies the political engagement and sense of realism that often motivated their advocates. One is inclined to read, here, evidence of the sort of pessimism in architectural culture noted above, but there are other contributions that have instead sought to effect a constructive reconciliation between architecture and utopia.¹⁹

Albeit tentatively established, this understanding holds the potential to grant utopianism the constructive connotation that it has been denied through much of the post-war era. Deriving, above all, from a willingness to engage deeply with the utopian tradition in order to fashion insightful and effective working understandings of the concept, the intent of these approaches stands opposed to much architectural analysis that has gone before, which was consistently marked by a failure to assemble a definition of utopianism. In fact, utopia has drawn much of its

¹⁷ This sense of a temporally discrete utopianism is summed up in the title of the 2002 collection edited by Henket and Heynen: *Back from Utopia: The Challenge of the Modern Movement*. Other such examples include Peter Blake’s less recent memoir *No Place Like Utopia: Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept* (London: W.W. Norton, 1993); also, Terry Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy: Visions of Utopia, 1900-Present* (London: Hi Marketing, 2004); Stefan Muthesius, *The Postwar University: Utopianist Campus and College* (London: Yale University Press, 2000); Jean-Francois Lejeune, ed., *Cruelty and Utopia: Cities and Landscapes of Latin America* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005); Amy Bingaman, Lise Sanders, and Rebecca Zorach, eds., *Embodied Utopias: Gender, Social Change, and the Modern Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁸ See, for example, Jane Alison and Mary-Ange Brayer, eds., *Future City: Experiment and Utopia in Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007); Robert Klanten, Lukas Feireiss, and Matthias Böttger, eds. *Utopia Forever* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2011); Ruth Eaton, *Ideal Cities: Utopianism and the (Un)Built Environment* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001).

¹⁹ See, for example, Nathaniel Coleman, *Utopias and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2005); David Pinder, *Visions of the City: Utopianism, Power and Politics in Twentieth-Century Urbanism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005); and some of the contributions in the collection *Embodied Utopias*.

effectiveness in architectural discourse from its lack of theoretical precision, finding its way into the critical language of modern architecture as a generalised insinuation of the ‘impractical’ or the ‘totalitarian’, and thus acting as a blunt weapon – its malign character apparently as self-evident as its basis in pure fantasy – with which to beat the project of modernity into submission. Accordingly, it is essential in the following discussion that this aspect of definition – or lack of definition – is borne in mind; for its frequent absence has obscured the potential that utopianism carries for the study of architecture. Before considering the positive contribution utopia might make though, it is first necessary to outline some of those criticisms mobilised in refutation of its principles.

In the British context, the problematic connotations of utopianism received a major attack from Alice Coleman’s 1985 study of social housing production during the post-war years, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing*. A furious assault on the post-war predilection for constructing flats in a modernist idiom, with an accompanying appraisal of the therapeutic value of the traditional house, the book nevertheless evades the task of offering a precise definition of ‘Utopia’, though it broadly takes as its target the paternalistic practices of centralised governments and their attempts to realise a comprehensive ‘ideal environment’, which is presumed to be against the wishes of intended residents.²⁰ The large-scale urban visions realised after the war, whether in the form of mass-housing or the reconstruction of blitzed city centres, have undoubtedly become objects of disapproval among those who have witnessed their frequently compromised realisation and equally common degeneration in subsequent years. Consonant with the lack in planners’ education of any complex engagement with the history of urban design, and a correspondingly misguided faith in the empirical analysis of the physical and social condition of a city, their schemes often evolved a monolithic and monotonous character that disregarded pre-existing conditions and communities. As a consequence, it has been difficult to avoid the sense of imposition rather than consultation, an outcome remote from the genuinely emancipatory intentions of the designers involved. This latter criticism is a dominant one in treatments of utopia: the identification of large-scale

²⁰ Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London: Shipman, 1985), 3.

planning as totalitarian, authoritarian, and thus likely to imperil the maintenance a free society.

Immediately after the Second World War this view received perhaps its most famous and articulate treatment in a paper delivered by Karl Popper in 1947, on the subject of ‘Utopia and Violence’. Establishing, firstly, that utopianism – as applied to political and economic planning – rested upon a false supposition that ends could be determined rationally and scientifically, Popper argued that it necessarily entails a ‘clear and detailed description or blueprint of our ideal state, and also... a plan or blueprint of the historical path that leads towards this goal’. Ultimately, it was the latter requirement that, for Popper, made utopianism ‘dangerous and pernicious’, as well as ‘self-defeating’, with violence the inevitable consequence.²¹ He asserted that, having elaborated and then by some means ‘proven’ the validity of his or her model state, the utopianist is faced with the equally irresolvable problem of practically realising that plan in a democratic society. Once decided, all alternative visions must be suppressed and rational debate – which can only ever deal with *means*, in any case – must end. What is more, and of particular relevance to the field of physical planning, the realisation of the plan *in time* assumes a state of absolute social stasis: the imposition of the moment of the plan’s realisation, or rather the conditions of that moment, onto every succeeding generation until the moment of the plan’s completion. And what happens then is not altogether clear. Popper ends by laying before us the image of a society gazing blindly forward, ‘eager to sacrifice the present for the splendours of the future, and unaware that its principle would lead to sacrificing each particular future period for one that comes after it’.²²

There are similarities here with the concerns of other observers, those who identify the fundamental contradiction of a utopian society, understood to enjoy the simultaneous benefits of scientific research and the securities of social order and

²¹ Karl R. Popper, ‘Utopia and Violence’, in *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 358.

²² *Ibid*, 362.

stability.²³ For science is fundamentally dynamic, undergoing endless revolution as one body of ideas topples another, each generation of scientists achieving new intellectual and practical innovation and changing the historical development of society. Thus the notion of a scientific utopia appears impossible – as indeed Popper’s critique implies – since science is an activity of means leading to unpredictable ends. If utopia is conceived as a perfected and fixed social order, then it cannot enter into an allegiance with science: as J.C. Davis has written, it ‘will either stop science or be overthrown by it’.²⁴ Francis Bacon, author of the first scientific utopia – the *New Atlantis*, published in English in 1627 – identified this problem early on. His celebrated account depicts an island state, Bensalem, discovered by a group of sailors exploring unfamiliar waters off the coast of Peru. Most interestingly, Bacon’s imagined society proposes the existence of an institution for the collection and practical application of pure scientific knowledge, known as Salomon’s House. While Bacon is highly optimistic about the potential of such an organisation for ‘the enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible’, his creation nevertheless carries a note of ambivalence.²⁵ When one of the visitors is conducted by the Father of the House of Salomon around the institution, his description turns to a lengthy and detailed elaboration of the various forms of research undertaken there. However, the experts in this precursor to the modern research institute do not maintain an unmediated relationship with the citizens of Bensalem, holding meetings to determine what should be published and what concealed not just from the public, but in some cases from the state itself.²⁶ In the *New Atlantis* the man of science is the ultimate moral arbiter, invested with the power to decide the extent to which society can be exposed to the fruits of research. Yet Bacon did elsewhere acknowledge that scientific learning was not equivalent to moral understanding. This concern is implicit in the existence of Salomon’s House itself, providing as it does not only a coherent structure to the research of its members but also pressing upon them collective control over one another’s actions.

²³ See Kumar, *Utopianism*, 53-55; J.C. Davis, ‘Science and Utopia: The History of a Dilemma’, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four: Science between Utopia and Dystopia*, eds. Everett Mendelsohn and Helga Nowotny (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1984): 21-48.

²⁴ Davis, ‘Science and Utopia’, 35.

²⁵ Francis Bacon, ‘New Atlantis’, in *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 480.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 487.

Meanwhile, Bacon addressed the issue more directly in his *New Organon*, an earlier work in which he outlined the scientific method he had devised that also guides the experiments at Salomon's House, insisting that among practitioners 'the mind itself be from the very outset not left to take its course, but guided at every step, and the business done as if by machinery'.²⁷ For Bacon, this mechanisation of the intellect – its placement under a constant state of surveillance – represented a necessary check on human nature, whose volatility had been proven by the fall of man from his earlier state of grace. But this aspect has also come to form the core of dystopian fantasies, particularly as the possibility of a scientifically organised state appeared increasingly feasible.

While the nineteenth century saw enormous technological development, from the rise of the professional scientist to the emergence of elaborate utopian social theory, all of which contributed to visions of an ideal society both imagined and enacted, it was during the twentieth century that the dystopia or anti-utopia fully emerged. Among the most eloquent statements of this tendency are Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (published 1924, although completed in 1921), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by Orwell.²⁸ Unlike earlier satirical utopias, for instance *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and *Erewhon* (1872), these texts betray a genuine anxiety at the prospect of subordination to a science unaccountable to any system of ethics – the consequences of which were gradually becoming apparent in the USSR.²⁹ Here Huxley is perhaps most relevant, with his vision of a citizenry organised into a functional hierarchy according to their genetic make-up, thanks to a comprehensive programme of eugenics. Like Bacon, he suggests the necessity of censorship if a stable social order is to be maintained. The World State of *Brave New World* instils simple well-being, or rather docility, in its citizens, and for this purpose requires scientific research. But there is, all the same, an acknowledgement that pure science is 'dangerous and potentially subversive', with

²⁷ Francis Bacon, quoted in J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the ideal society: A study of English utopian writing, 1516-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 128.

²⁸ Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*, trans. Clarence Brown (London: Penguin, 1993); Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955); George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949).

²⁹ Samuel Butler, *Erewhon* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970). On this subject, see Kumar, *Utopianism*, 26-27.

each research paper scrutinised for the threat it might pose to the established order: above all, science must not unsettle the relentless rhythms of production and consumption.³⁰

Ultimately, all of the issues outlined above illustrate the centrality of the problem of administrative power in the conception, realisation, and maintenance of utopia. Whether couched in terms of the men of science of Salomon's House, Huxley's World Controllers, or the post-war architect-planner, the persistent dilemma is that of the contradiction between the practical application of science and the democratic process. Certainly, much of the attraction of scientific planning at mid-century lay in its promise to bypass the uncertainties of political debate and decision-making, with the expectation that experts would thus be empowered to act in an attitude of absolute neutrality, always working in the dubiously justified 'public interest'. In regard to urban planning this objective judgement tended to express itself in the construction of binary oppositions, with one half privileged at the expense of the other; thus figures like order, rationality, and geometry enjoyed prominence in the planner's lexicon, while suppressing others such as messiness, subjective experience, and the place of the body.³¹

Recent accounts of modern urban planning have highlighted how such manoeuvres have served to marginalise certain groups that had found prominence in the modern industrial city. Claims to impartiality in the organisation of urban space functioned to mask this process, obscuring the fact that conceptions of the sanitary, the ordered, or the rational inevitably assume a social significance when applied to public life. Thus, Barbara Hooper has articulated the notion of modern interventions in the city as representing a 'poem of male desires': exposing the coercions veiled by the language of freedom frequently employed by protagonists of the modern movement.³² Their appropriation of a supposedly disinterested scientism consequently carries unsettling

³⁰ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 141.

³¹ See for instance, Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London: Virago, 1991), 7-8; Barbara Hooper, 'The Poem of Male Desires: Female Bodies, Modernity, and "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century"', in *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*, ed. Leonie Sandercock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 231-233.

³² Hooper, 'The Poem of Male Desires'.

connotations, resulting from the fact that instrumentalised reason detaches itself from ethics, facilitating too ‘a science without human ethos’, and thus liable to lead just as readily to evil as to good.³³ Indeed, during the twentieth century attempts to rationalise the state and realise varieties of utopia along more or less scientific lines have often gone hand in hand with totalitarianism and its accompanying crimes against humanity. Such concerns naturally have an impact in an architectural context.

Of course, besides the troublesome conceptual links between a built environment approximating to some notion of utopia and the oppressive tendencies of physical control and surveillance, there is an equally distasteful store of anecdotal evidence of totalitarianism in the careers of several of the ‘great masters’ of modernism. Perhaps most notoriously there is Le Corbusier’s willingness to seek patronage from the Vichy regime, but also august modernists such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson each flirted with Nazism in their own way. Le Corbusier, in particular, sought the power to co-ordinate activity on a large scale as part of a totalising vision for architectural and social development as he turned in the 1930s towards regional syndicalism and the attractions of a technocratic model for the direction of the state.³⁴ As a result, the perceived identity between a disregard for the individual and the aims of modern architecture persists, especially given its persistent affiliation with the large-scale state building projects of the post-war years.

Going back a little further, the utopian accent of modernist urbanism was truly established in its heroic phase, when key architects projected iconic visions of the city, writing themselves into the canon of the modern movement. Among the most striking schemes of the 1920s to attain the standard of utopian infamy are those by Le Corbusier – ‘the straw man of utopian modern architecture’ – and Ludwig Hilberseimer.³⁵ In his *Ville Contemporaine* (‘Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants’) of 1922 Le Corbusier offered a highly repetitive scheme for a city to house and provide for three million inhabitants (Figure 1.1). Hierarchically ordered

³³ Michael Winter, ‘The Explosion of the Circle: Science and Negative Utopia’, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four: Science between Utopia and Dystopia*, eds. Everett Mendelsohn and Helga Nowotny (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1984), 84-85.

³⁴ Pinder, *Visions of the City*, 83-84.

³⁵ Coleman, ‘Utopia on Trial?’, 186.

by function and by class, and its form dictated both by the rationality of orthogonal order and the requirements of vehicular circulation, the project represents the sort of reductivism to which architects are bound to resort when attempting to conjure up an image of the city entire. Similarly, Hilberseimer's *Hochhausstadt* ('Highrise City') of 1924 offers a vision simultaneously of order, of monotony, and of alienation (Figure 1.2). Indeed, the utterly deadpan attitude with which Hilberseimer presents before us his grimly regimented slabs – describing a setting all too appropriate to the miserable isolation of the figures scattered across the landscape – seems to provide a ready-made critique to be applied when opinion shifted. It is intriguing too that these two architects each came to explore how their own particular urban ideal might fit into the real space of the cities in which they worked – Paris and Berlin, respectively – creating images that seem, by their jarring combination of the old and the uncompromisingly new, to speak of the impracticality of the total visions from which they originated. Indeed, the latter is a familiar theme in discussions of architecture and utopia: what Stephan Muthesius calls the 'utopia versus reality dichotomy'.³⁶

This reading of utopia being innately opposed to the real world results in part from the eschatological assumption underpinning utopian imagining, the expectation that such an architectural vision will inaugurate a new order of society. However, just as significant is the fact that envisioning a holistic architectural future has tended to lead designers to make a particular virtue of instrumental rationality, and its dubious formal analogy with visual order. Essentially, we have here a reductive understanding of the role of the city and consequently a solution of equal abstraction. During the renaissance, the pursuit of geometric approaches became a standard practice, for instance in the circular, centralised form of Filarete's *Sforzinda*, although it has been suggested by Jonathan Powers that his ideal nevertheless remained grounded in real processes of construction and compromise (Figure 1.3).³⁷ With the rise of industrialisation the perception that the city existed purely as a functional entity became ever more widespread, as the pursuit of the ideal city

³⁶ Muthesius, *The Postwar University*, 5-6: cited in Hollow, 'Utopian urges', 570.

³⁷ Jonathan Powers, 'Building Utopia: The Status of the Ideal in Filarete's *Trattato*', in *Imagining and Making the World: Reconsidering Architecture and Utopia*, ed. Nathaniel Coleman (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011): 29-56.

coalesced with a concern for the productive process. Consequently, the great utopia of the eighteenth century – Claude-Nicolas Ledoux’s Royal Saltworks at Arc-et-Senans – derives its existence from manufacturing, the dream of building a town directed centrally towards industry (Figure 1.4). This project existed initially in a square form, a geometrically rigid scheme whose significance lay in unifying the diverse functions of the whole into one coherent complex, an articulation of the happy marriage between architecture and social and economic life.³⁸ While the design was to change dramatically in the semi-circular built project, the sense of order and hierarchy remain, with the Director’s Building placed symbolically at the centre of the settlement, its prominence both a means of surveillance and an indication of the increasing secularisation of utopia.

The following century, Charles Fourier further developed the idea of the self-contained city complex in his *phalanstère* concept (Figure 1.5).³⁹ Here, a single building essentially accommodates the functions of a town, in much the same way as Ledoux envisaged in his more disparate project at Chaux, reducing the city to the logic of a factory and distinctly reducing its complexity as an artefact. Instead, we are presented with a single palatial object, again understood in geometric and centralising terms, which further confirms the convergence of architectural form, industrial process, and social life. With no public realm to speak of, at least in the sense it had previously been understood in urban experience, the arid nature of this solution to the problem of modern life is clear. By compressing the traditional city into a single functional entity its richness and incremental formation come to be subordinated to the rationalising mind of a single designer, whose ingenuity will never be able to match the historical variety of the traditional city. This problem is exacerbated by the instrumentality that underlies Fourier’s vision, and those of the figures who followed in his wake. While he attended to the need for public institutions in his *phalanstère* as a support for community life, his fundamentally mechanical reading of the urban process – collecting its functions together as a

³⁸ Anthony Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux: Architecture and Social Reform at the End of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 90.

³⁹ Leonardo Benevolo, *The Origins of Modern Town Planning* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 56-62.

primary organising principle – creates an image of the city that would be very influential and also troublingly reductive.

But there is another issue here: an implied rejection of history, present also in Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer's schemes. In the early nineteenth century, cities were not rationally composed, they did not correspond to the notion of order that figures such as Fourier advocated – it is doubtless for this reason that his utopia was so appealing. The suggestion that cities ought to be comprehensively planned around their practical functions carries the implication that they need to be wholly remade, reorganised to replace the irrational and impractical fabric inherited from the past, whose irregular structure clashed so jarringly with that of the abstract, geometric future city.

As a result, the development of urban theory, certainly as it developed in the early twentieth century, began to take the *tabula rasa* as an inevitable starting point to any urban intervention, in order that the rational logic of the planner and the plan could proceed unimpeded. Responsibility for improving urban conditions was gradually assumed by government through the latter half of the century, accompanied by an expectation of practical regulation and amelioration. While the emerging town planning lobby would criticise this approach for its lack of a comprehensive, radical outlook, there was still a degree of correspondence in their conception of the urban problem. Therefore, the abstract principles of the Enlightenment utopia – its structurally bounded, functional order and accompanying simplicity – would endure in some form into the utopia of the modern movement and the post-war era.

The Flaws of the Formalist Utopia

What emerges, then, is an image of utopia as domineering, oppressive, marginalising, and in the end alienating in its bypassing of historical precedent and human complexity. What is more, so extensive are the philosophical pitfalls of utopia

as an ideal, so sustained the standard body of criticism debunking it, that any attempt to appreciate architecture when situated in its shadow seems near impossible – as is clear in the discussion above. In the light of this, what is the value of yet again setting modern architecture alongside utopia? Surely the attempt to connect them is doomed to fail? The recent resurgence of literature on utopia and architecture noted earlier would suggest otherwise, perhaps there is yet something to be gained from re-thinking utopianism. But, in order to address this issue, it is necessary first to raise a key point in the pair's association: namely that, as Tim Benton has suggested, 'utopia is a post modernist term [...] it wasn't used by modernists in the high period of modernism in architecture [...] so, in using this term [...] we're applying a current concept rather than one that was active at the time [*sic*]'.⁴⁰ This is not to dismiss the existence of a distinctly utopian outlook in modern architecture, for it is impossible to deny the eschatological convictions of the modern movement. However, the absence of the word itself from the foundational pronouncements of the 1920s is puzzling, given the evident eagerness to employ it in later years to embellish diagnoses of failure. An important point is that it is not necessary for the term to have been consistently part of the architect's or planner's vocabulary – although it did occasionally appear in British wartime and post-war debates – for it to maintain its critical value as a means of interpreting the built environment. This fact is demonstrated by the huge impact exercised by postmodern critiques on perceptions of the modern movement, through their invocations of 'utopia' and 'utopianism'. Their mobilisation of these terms, and their effect in informing a general consensus about the failings of the entire modernist project demonstrates the significance of laying claim to the critical apparatus with which the production of the post-war era has been judged. Over the years, utopia assumed a pejorative character, the taint of cultural obsolescence and political violation, buried in its meaning just as it had received from Thomas More its schizophrenic constitution.

Among the critics of a utopian modernism, Colin Rowe has probably exercised the greatest influence, due to the centrality utopia – or, rather, its rejection – assumed in the formulation of his ideas. Surprisingly early on in the post-war era, Rowe arrived

⁴⁰ The comment comes from a talk by Tim Benton broadcast online, quoted in Coleman, 'Utopia on Trial?', 186n.

at a position of ambivalence respecting utopia, as he voiced his still relatively mild concern in the 1959 article ‘The Architecture of Utopia’, before hardening his stance progressively in subsequent years: his increasing disillusionment documented in his two most celebrated studies, *Collage City*, written in collaboration with Fred Koetter and published in 1978, and *The Architecture of Good Intentions* of 1994.⁴¹ His critique hinges on the judgement that modernism conceived as a grand historical project was untenable from the start, a conclusion shared by other contemporaries of diverse intellectual dispositions, such as Alan Colquhoun and Manfredo Tafuri. Here, Rowe observed what he perceived to be the fallacious belief that architecture could act as the agent of a socio-political project of transformation: that by means of formal ‘progress’ – that is, the dismissal of the forms of historical architecture – architects might advance the emancipation of the human spirit. In the terms of his analysis, modernism emerges as a style as arbitrary as any other, whose hegemony was falsely justified with tautological reference to a doomed programme for political and social change. Responding to this problem, and in line with an increasing disregard for the notion of cultural progress, Rowe expressed the need to detach architectural form from the historical process, liberating designers from any sense of fidelity to the forms once tied to the – newly disowned – millennial future, which still remained safely quarantined ‘as possible social metaphor rather than probable social prescription’.⁴²

Given his concern with the formal content of modern architecture, and the corresponding antidote of a discriminating use of historicist collage administered by the insouciant *bricoleur*, it is natural that Rowe’s understanding of utopia should share a preoccupation with its formal determination. His 1959 essay charts the history of ideal cities, identifying the near ubiquity of the circle as an organising motif, an inheritance from renaissance humanism, simultaneously intended to

⁴¹ Colin Rowe, ‘The Architecture of Utopia’, in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976): 205-223.

⁴² The quotation is in fact drawn from the addendum that Rowe added to the essay in 1973: *Ibid*, 216. For a consideration of Rowe’s activity in this regard, see Joan Ockman, ‘Form without Utopia: Contextualizing Colin Rowe’, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 57, no. 4 (1998): 448-456.

symbolise and deliver perfection to society.⁴³ It is this dialectical relation that constantly directs Rowe's conception of the issue at hand: between the physical utopian vessel of the ideal city and the political and social deeds by which it is animated. The view is summed up in his comment that the relationship between the state and utopia analogises that of the individual and a work of art. According to Rowe, the similarity between one pair and the other lies in utopia's purported capacity to 'instruct, civilize, and even edify the political society which is exposed to it'. He continues, 'but for all that it cannot, any more than the work of art, become alive. It cannot, that is, *become* the society which it changes; and it cannot therefore change itself'.⁴⁴ Ultimately, society is too dynamic, too historically rich, and too inclined towards change to survive in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the utopian's imagination; and, drawing on Popper's insights, it was clear to Rowe that the same imagination could not tolerate the impact of social contingency on its creation, a state of affairs that must inaugurate violence not freedom. This formulation, his central objection to utopia, received ever fuller, more damning, and more influential expression in later years, but it nevertheless remains problematic, particularly in the light of contemporary insights regarding the relation of utopia and society.

For, in Rowe's understanding, utopia is a more or less fixed formal typology that recurs through history: it receives social 'content' but remains substantially unchanged, either in agreement or disagreement with the socio-political situation whose company it must keep. There is unquestionably some truth to this understanding. It is in the nature of a tradition – in this case the utopian form of the ideal city – to maintain some consistency of ideals through time, generating forms that persist regardless of who might be employing them, or when. Regardless of their historical context designers will look to their predecessors when composing urban imaginaries and certain motifs retain a particular appeal, occasionally for practical reasons although undoubtedly the symbolic connotations of certain forms are accountable for their recurrence, a point on which Rowe is strong. However, the

⁴³ Although Jonathan Powers has called into question Rowe's claim, highlighting the square form of such paradigmatic ideal cities as More's Amaurot and Johann Valentin Andreae's Christianopolis: Powers, 'Building Utopia', 40.

⁴⁴ Rowe, 'The Architecture of Utopia', 212.

schema that Rowe presents tends to reduce the architectural utopia to a discrete range of trans-historical formal characteristics – an understanding consonant with his art historical education, and with his prescription of a *Collage City*. The modern movement had not delivered on its promise of paradise because its architects had attempted to channel this redundant utopia, an imposition of perfect, transcendent form onto an unwilling society. Following on from this, Rowe’s solution proposed the cultivated appropriation and playful application of architectural motifs from times past to invigorate the visual content of the city, and, more importantly, liberate it from any allegiance with progressive historical projects of social reform: in theory, an ideologically neutralised urban realm.

The way that Rowe’s proposal – when incorporated into a complacent postmodern architecture – became the foundation for a renunciation of the modernist programme, assuming the appearance of a project itself, provides an illustration of the futility of cultivating an architecture excised from social content. At the same time Rowe was elaborating his concept, Manfredo Tafuri was working on a similarly bleak appraisal of the urban achievements of the twentieth century. His analysis precisely identified the imprisonment of architecture in the relations of production in capitalist society, resulting in a ‘crisis of ideological function of architecture’, which could serve only to maintain existing conditions. As a result mere formal games are utterly futile, ‘an intellectual illusion to be dispelled’, for it is impossible ‘to anticipate, through mere imagery, the conditions of an architecture “for a liberated society”’.⁴⁵ Ultimately, the architect is utterly powerless to effect change; in fact, the experience of modernism with its privileging of rationality, bureaucratisation, and mass-production, represents an inescapable perpetuation of the ideology of the plan, central to the maintenance of a capitalist society. In some ways this is a similar conclusion to Rowe’s, at least with regard to modernism. Both seek to expose as foolhardy any attempt to bring about social revolution by means of a change in architectural design. But, while Rowe focussed his critique on the idea of adopting social revolution as a mission, he did continue to believe that it was the architect’s essential duty to elaborate some variety of formal language. Tafuri, on the other hand, views as a deceit any attempt to pursue

⁴⁵ Manfredo Tafuri, ‘Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology’, in *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 32.

change through architectural manipulation. In his reading, design will inevitably succumb to commodification, and salvation will come ‘neither by wandering relentlessly through “labyrinths” of images so polyvalent that they remain mute, nor by shutting oneself up in the sullen silence of geometries content with their own perfection’.⁴⁶

In Tafuri’s recognition of the historical contingency of architectural production, there is a useful riposte to Rowe’s tendency to view architecture in opposition to its context – yet there remains in his attitude a nihilism that is somewhat less accommodating. The architect is, in Tafuri’s view, tragically embedded in history, and any suggestion that society’s material condition may be bettered by architecture remains a distorting myth: utopia, in fact, serves only the ideological present. Others too have shown concern for the problematic transformative potential of utopia, whether conceived in spatial or socio-economic terms. David Harvey’s main engagement with utopianism in his collection *Spaces of Hope* articulates just this problem. As what he calls ‘Utopias of spatial form’ are almost universally – certainly in Britain – realised by a combination of state planning or by means of capital accumulation, so their ideals come to be compromised by their engagement with existing interests. As a result, the contradictions of the whole process of planned utopianism are clear: ‘Utopias of spatial form are typically meant to stabilize and control the processes that must be mobilized to build them. In the very act of realization, therefore, the historical process takes control of the spatial form that is supposed to control it’.⁴⁷

While Harvey illustrates the issue with a reference to the failure of urban regeneration projects in Baltimore, as well as the limitations of those enacted under the aegis of the new urbanism movement, the observation is just as relevant to the failures of grand architectural projects pursued after the Second World War. Similarly, beyond the structural forces working to inhibit the pursuit of a future free from the constraints of the present, there is a poverty of imagination that undeniably affects the experiential qualities of the post-war city. With regard to language –

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 32-33.

⁴⁷ David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 173.

though visual expression is just as relevant – Terry Eagleton sums up the situation: ‘since we can speak of what transcends the present only in the language of the present, we risk cancelling out our imaginings in the very act of articulating them’, adding that the ‘only real otherness would be that which we could not articulate at all’.⁴⁸ It is no doubt this dilemma that accounts for much of the modern movement’s suspicion of history and the attendant fascination with the *tabula rasa*: the belief that the renunciation of tradition, of ‘the language of the present’, would create a rupture sufficiently pronounced to materialise a society magically renewed.

A Historically-Situated Utopianism

But, at the same time, to draw Eagleton’s observation to its logical conclusion would end in utter inertia; for all action relies, unavoidably, on some imaginative articulation. It is in this respect that utopia assumes its full import: playing a concrete role in public life by providing a rhetorical impetus towards change. In this context, the concept of utopia does not even need to be referenced directly, but can exist merely as an evocation of, or argument for, a better world. This acceptance of the necessity of utopianism underlies some of the more recent studies of utopia noted earlier. Their authors have tended, in keeping with their revisionist tone, to focus on how analyses have functioned as more or less consciously calculated efforts to dismiss and move beyond modernism rather than to properly consider utopia’s value per se.

Nathaniel Coleman has been particularly critical of this tendency, his assessments informed by an expertise in the history of utopia as a literary and theoretical tradition that is surprisingly rare among architectural historians. Tackling Alice Coleman’s *Utopia on Trial* in particular, he has taken issue with the lack of theoretical rigour in such critiques, specifically their failure to provide a precise definition of the term beyond the implicit connotation of impracticality and vainglorious idealism verging

⁴⁸ Terry Eagleton, quoted in Pinder, *Visions of the City*, 258.

on fantasy.⁴⁹ With this vulgar pejorative reference established, the ideals of modern planning and the projects they originated appear fated to fail from the outset, implicated by an association made long after the event, their designers, meanwhile, cast as impractical dreamers. There is not much appreciation for their hopes and desires, and little recognition of social or cultural circumstance: to assign the label of utopia in this way is effectively to close one's eyes to the specificities of a historical situation. Rowe is, of course, more subtle in his consideration of utopia, but his excessive formalism tends to engender an equally narrow historical perspective.⁵⁰ Similar accusations have been levelled at Manfredo Tafuri's notion of capitalism as a total system that consumes everything it touches without contradiction or subjective subversion, Henri Lefebvre noting how this view 'evacuates history'.⁵¹ Yet, as discussed above, his argument does indicate the operative function of utopia, in Tafuri's interpretation a negative function, distracting from the role of modern architecture as accomplice to capitalist development.

Interestingly, considering his significance as an opponent of utopian thought in architecture, Colin Rowe himself wrote an article in 1959 – just months before his better known 'The Architecture of Utopia' – whose conclusion carried a rather optimistic meditation on the potency of utopia, fascinating when set alongside his subsequent offerings. His brief comment suggests that:

If Le Corbusier's Utopianism does seem to have been such a powerful agent of change in the 1920s and 1930s, is it not unreasonable to suppose that if change is required, then another Utopian attitude might well again provide the stimulus.⁵²

To be sure, if the passage is optimistic, then it is cautiously so; Joan Ockman has read in it signs of Rowe fumbling towards an adequate response before the crisis he perceived in the ideals of the modern movement, and Rowe himself appended a

⁴⁹ See Coleman, 'Utopia on Trial?'

⁵⁰ Coleman has criticised Rowe's approach to utopia in *Utopias and Architecture*, 65-68; 239-240. Similarly, some of the shortcomings of Rowe's analysis have been discussed by Jonathan Powers: 'Building Utopia', 39-45.

⁵¹ This argument is outlined by David Pinder in *Visions of the City*, 255-256.

⁵² Colin Rowe, 'Le Corbusier: Utopian Architect', in *As I Was Saying: Recollections and Miscellaneous Essays, Volume I*, ed. Alexander Caragonne (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 142.

prefatory note when presenting the essay in 1996, dismissing the ‘engaging naïveté’ of the passage.⁵³ Of course, his equivocation would subsequently resolve itself into an extensive critique of the millenarian impulse in utopian speculation and architectural projection, its inclination towards the ultimate, arresting history, social development, and freedom in the process. His scepticism towards the virtues of an eschatological utopianism was summed up in the pithy comment that ‘the relation of society to utopia is not the relation of a donkey to a carrot’.⁵⁴ While this is true, the error of any claim to the contrary would lie more in its binary logic, an element of Rowe’s thought that we have seen to be problematic. The pair should not be conceived as separated in this way, for utopian speculation represents an intimate engagement with society, which Rowe’s dismissal neglects. Just because the content of utopian imaginings might banish history and its compromising influence, it is unthinkable that this characteristic could extend beyond the page or drawing board to incise itself directly into concrete social life. To do so would surely be to bypass the complex question of the relation of the real and the ideal, of practical realisation growing out of speculative projection.

Others have taken on this idea of utopia as an instrument of change, and in this field the work of Ruth Levitas is particularly interesting. Outlining the consistent failure properly to define what utopia, or even utopianism, might constitute, she suggests three ways in which utopias are conceived: by *form*, *content*, and *function*.⁵⁵ Most approaches understand utopia in terms of the first two, while the latter receives less attention. Defining utopia by *form* means simply deciding on what the description in question represents: a literary description of the good society, for instance, although such a definition would exclude architectural manifestations among others. Such a definition, might take More’s *Utopia* as the formative example, to which all examples under consideration must correspond. Meanwhile, those approaches that look to *content* are of a more evaluative kind, concerned with what characteristics are depicted and whether they do, in fact, represent a desirable social model. Finally, and least commonly, there is a definition in terms of *function*: that is, the appreciation of

⁵³ Ockman, ‘Form without Utopia’, 452; Rowe, ‘Le Corbusier: Utopian Architect’, 135.

⁵⁴ Rowe, ‘The Architecture of Utopia’, 213.

⁵⁵ See Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (New York: Philip Allan, 1990), 4-6.

the social role that utopia might play. This aspect of utopianism is seldom given as much attention, certainly in architectural treatments, which usually see utopia either as a coherent range of formal characteristics drawn from the ideal city tradition, or simply as an inherently unachievable dream.

However, in studies of political action the functional element has, and still does, attract interest. In her argument, Levitas cites various formulations of the applications of utopia to politics, among them Barbara Goodwin and Zygmunt Bauman. In her contribution to *The Politics of Utopia*, authored with Keith Taylor, Goodwin presents the utopia as a theoretical underpinning for political activity, acting to criticise the present by transporting us to an idealised, totally realised surrogate state. In order to function in this way, the world envisaged must at the very least be theoretically possible, however strained the concept possibility might be, in order to give practical impetus to some reform.⁵⁶ Similarly, Bauman argues for the capacity of utopias to ‘relativise the present’ and initiate concrete change, in his appraisal of the impact of socialism in critiquing capitalist orthodoxy, representing a sort of ideal counter narrative in the West since its emergence in the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ Yet, in spite of the achievement of the socialist utopia in actualising such manifestations as the Soviet Union, Bauman concludes that the ultimate inadequacy and inhumanity of these examples when set against the originating ideal has led to its decline as an effective critique. Essentially the result of a loss of political attractiveness – due to the fact that the socialist states represent in reality more a bourgeois utopia than the egalitarian idyll that forms the content of the originating vision – this conception of the decline of utopia stresses the functional potential to induce change as the essential characteristic in the success or failure of a utopian political theory.

Another figure who has looked to the impact of grand experiments in socialism as a guide is Erik Olin Wright, whose long-term ‘Real Utopias’ project seeks to reconstruct faith in the viability of radical, emancipatory political change, which he

⁵⁶ Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia: A Study in Theory and Practice* (London: Hutchinson, 1982).

⁵⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Socialism: The Active Utopia* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976), 13.

perceives to have waned since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the inauguration of a new ‘end of history’. Underlying this view is the conviction that ‘what is pragmatically possible is not fixed independently of our imaginations, but is shaped by our visions’.⁵⁸ Such visions may not actually be realised, but their existence acts to inspire transformations that, though less extreme, might not otherwise have occurred. One is reminded of Oscar Wilde’s often quoted description of utopia:

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.⁵⁹

Wright, therefore, looks to what he views as utopian institutions that have been realised on a small scale, but might serve as a model for practical change elsewhere, taking as examples such experiments as participatory city budgeting and the worker co-operatives formed in northern Spain by the Mondragon Corporation. All of these figures, then, demonstrate the importance of utopia as a subversive form, challenging the *status quo* in a manner that has frequently seen writers fall foul of authority. Tommaso Campanella wrote *City of the Sun* in jail in 1602, later forced to delay and alter his published text; James Harrington was first censored then imprisoned for his *Oceana*; meanwhile, Zamyatin’s *We* was first published in English, rather than Russian, with the author exiled abroad.⁶⁰

By transcending the limitations imposed by the present, architectural manifestations enjoy the same potential. Of course, measuring architectural success solely in terms of an ability to instigate change is not entirely appropriate, although this militant connotation does seem particularly suited to the consideration of the attitudes of many key planners and architects of the 1930s and 1940s, and of the climate within which they operated. Architecture and politics are qualitatively different; indeed, the inclination towards conflating the two is partly accountable for some of the faults in approaches to the built environment at mid-century – their positivism and

⁵⁸ Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010), 6.

⁵⁹ Oscar Wilde, quoted in Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 5.

⁶⁰ Kumar, *Utopianism*, 86-88.

instrumentality. All the same, it does not seem unreasonable to attend to the importance of function, in Levitas's sense of the word, when considering utopianism alongside architecture. For to dismiss it would be to ignore the operative role of utopia for architectural production: the projection of more or less total visions of the built environment of the future, and in some of the more ambitious cases the society that would nurture it, as a critique of the present and spur to activity into the future. There is a tendency in the standard usage of utopia to ignore the rhetorical, negotiated, and compromising aspects of projection and realisation, instead raising architecture to the status of an autonomous art thoroughly extracted from the real world. By incorporating an appreciation for the function of utopianism, provision can be made for the fact that architecture is itself just as dependent on the political process as other fields of practical reform. As a result, a more nuanced picture can emerge, one that does not dogmatically deny failings of modern architecture, but also problematises the notion of failure, for 'there is no contradiction between utopian impulses in construction and dystopian experiences in habitation'.⁶¹

As with Levitas's conceptions of content and form, however, the definition of function is problematic, as utopian speculation might perform alternating roles in different times and societies. As we have just seen, utopia might act not simply as a motor of change, providing an ideal goal towards which action might be directed, it might also represent a critique, serve to relativise existing conditions, or it may even act as a form of compensation at a time of social or political hardship. As an example of the latter, Levitas highlights the medieval fashion for depictions of Cockaigne, a fantasy of ease and abundance that certainly carried elements of social critique, but was not posited as a practically realisable – or even desirable – model, but rather acted as a spiritual compensation. It is on these grounds that Levitas attempts to render a broader definition, which does not limit utopia to any one category, concluding instead that it represents simply the 'desire for a better way of being and living'.⁶² While this might appear an excessively generous formulation, it succeeds in inviting an engagement with a range of examples, rather than limiting utopia purely to, for instance, literary manifestations, a tendency of specialist utopian studies,

⁶¹ Ruth Levitas, contribution to 'Triologue', in *Imagining and Making the World*, 318.

⁶² Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 7.

which often exclude the possibility of architecture carrying any relevance to the field. Meanwhile, with respect to architectural studies, the definition allows for a similarly broad appropriation of evidence, so that a comprehensive review of architectural utopianism must assess not just built production, but also the various media of its representation and, as importantly, the circumstances within which certain social visions came to be generated.

A key aspect of this viewpoint is Levitas's appreciation for historical specificity. She is keen to emphasise that utopia is not a universal category, nor is utopianism a timeless and permanent attribute of the human spirit, as some writers have suggested. Rather, she looks to J.C Davis's notion of the 'scarcity gap': the disparity between limited satisfactions in relation to the potentially boundless projection of needs.⁶³ Each of these features – needs and the capacity to satisfy them – are historically based in Levitas's view, not the product of some abstract 'human nature':

Utopia is a social construct which arises not from a 'natural' impulse subject to social mediation, but as a socially constructed response to an *equally* socially constructed gap between the needs and wants generated by a particular society and the satisfactions available to and distributed by it. *All* aspects of the scarcity gap are social constructs, including the propensity to imagine it away by some means or other.⁶⁴

The satisfactions need not even be realisable for them to exert an influence, for even the most radical and impractical visions can nevertheless serve a function of critique or compensation. Nor indeed need they be radical in the sense traditionally ascribed to utopia, that is, leftist and subversive in their attitude towards established interests. A tendency of much scholarship in the field of utopianism, certainly that concerned with architecture is to align the concept purely with the revolutionary pursuit of the good society, often concluding that such a project is fundamentally misguided. In consequence, the utopian role of conservative ideologies – those that work to quell oppositional change – is frequently missed.

⁶³ Levitas outlines the argument presented in Davis's book *Utopia and the Ideal Society* at some length: *Ibid*, 161-164.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 181-182.

The emergence of the New Right in the 1980s is a subject that Levitas explores here, identifying two forms of utopianism that work in concert to consolidate its standing: the neoliberal utopia, directing itself to the future, and the neoconservative utopia, which is oriented to the past in its valorisation of tradition and heritage. The first posits the benefits of a free market, providing an efficient and individually liberating economic model that assists in the improvement in the real standard of living – and attendant growth in inequality. The neoconservative utopia, meanwhile, celebrates the state, authority, and tradition in order to maintain hierarchies of power; and though in theory these stand opposed to the ideals of neoliberalism, ‘in practice these are connected at the level of policy through the mutual interdependence of the free market and the strong state’.⁶⁵ Writing at the end of the 1980s, Levitas suggested that far from a decline in the power of utopia, as commonly represented by the decline of the Soviet Union, these developments in fact exposed a utopianism that was thriving, though largely unidentified as such.⁶⁶

This oversight largely continues today, hidden by a suspicion of utopia that has instigated and then nourished the prevailing belief that we live in an age of experience, an era lying somewhere ‘after utopia’.⁶⁷ An overriding sense of pessimism is rife, the feeling of living in the midst of an inexorable decline caused either by environmental disaster, urban degeneration, or by the social tensions caused by the widening gap of rich and poor – a state of affairs that discourages utopian imagining. As several important treatments have suggested, above all that of David Harvey, it is difficult to look beyond the prevailing neoliberal consensus in economic affairs, its utopian underpinning notwithstanding, as the source of this forfeit of optimism. While the centralised attempts to engineer greater equality that underpinned post-war urban planning are more or less forgotten, the dominance of the free market and the surrendering of the prime cuts of urban real estate to a small social elite seem to constitute the only possible future for our cities. Harvey looks at

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 186.

⁶⁶ This conflict of utopias has been variously explored. For Levitas’s assessment of the utopian status of the New Right: *Ibid*, 186-189. See, also, Andreas Huyssen, ‘Memories of Utopia’, in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London: Routledge, 1995), 86-88; Pinder, *Visions of the City*, 13-15.

⁶⁷ Pinder, *Visions of the City*, 12-13.

these developments in relation to recent events in Baltimore, lamenting the uneven relation between public and private investment, as large areas of the inner-city have come to accommodate bland developments whose promises of urban regeneration have come to little amid the withering away of public services.⁶⁸ This is the utopian city of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, its degeneration into an urban dystopia not dissimilar to that of the modern movement.

In recent years some architectural historians have responded to this neglect of utopia, applying the concept primarily with an accent on its functional role. Nathaniel Coleman, whose criticism of vague approaches to utopianism we have already noted, has adopted the term as a means of comprehending the success of works of ‘exemplary architecture’ from the post-war era.⁶⁹ Coleman, however, does not write as a dogmatic apologist for modern architecture – he frequently acknowledges the banality of much of the built environment inherited from the recent past, actually denying that most post-war architecture can be categorised as utopian at all.⁷⁰ Rather, he approaches the debate from the side of utopia: by sensitively engaging with the concept, rather than appropriating it as a blanket term of abuse, he seeks to reveal its potential as a tool of analysis. In *Utopias and Architecture* he looks to the Convent of Sainte-Marie-de-la-Tourette, the Salk Institute of Biological Studies, and the Amsterdam Municipal Orphanage, by Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn, and Aldo van Eyck respectively, reading them as ‘partial utopias’: fragmentary realisations of a more fully conceived and idealised whole. He suggests that ‘exemplary architecture is *always* part of some potential whole imagined by its architect, a whole that serves as an organising model – even if for the realisation of only a single building – conceived of as a partial utopia’.⁷¹

Taking optimism as a core value in such an approach to design, Coleman reconstructs the philosophies of his protagonists, which by their uniqueness serve to illustrate that utopia need not represent the imposition of a single monotonous

⁶⁸ For Harvey’s assessment of Baltimore, see Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 133-156.

⁶⁹ Coleman, *Utopias and Architecture*, 11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 190-196.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 2.

outlook, but can instead inform the achievement of heterogeneous ideals. His approach is particularly attractive in that it does not overlook the task of actually analysing existing architecture in depth, in this case as a means towards articulating an approach that architects might apply today. Yet Coleman makes the point that it is not possible to formulate a set of rules for successful practice to be copied, instead the examples he offers constitute successful processes to be emulated. Such a lack of programmatic detail is unavoidable, perhaps even an attraction, particularly given Coleman's criticism of excessive matter-of-factness and overreliance on technical reason in contemporary architecture, which sees practice relegated to the level of banal construction. The methods he praises, meanwhile, form a contrast to the prevailing modernist faith in rationality, technocracy, and the plan as a comprehensive means of securing a better future, yet Coleman is keen to emphasise that the success of these partial visions lay in their conceptual allegiance with, and sympathy for, an optimistic modernist project.

A less ambiguous study of the impact of the modern movement on cities comes from Leonie Sandercock, who gives a damning assessment of the extreme instrumentality of what she describes as the 'five pillars of planning wisdom'. Thus, the modern city emerged through the core principles of an attachment to rationality in design; a comprehensive outlook both in terms of design and functional organisation; positive science as a source of authority and model for practice; the state as the agent of production; and the notion of an obvious, neutrally apprehended, and legitimising 'public interest'.⁷² Propagated by the post-war pedagogical programme of the University of Chicago, these assumptions enacted an influential institutionalisation of the functionalism of the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM), with its bias towards social science as a key to the apprehension and organisation of urban life. It is from these negative values that Sandercock develops an alternative vision for the twenty-first-century city: the democratic and multi-cultural 'Cosmopolis'.⁷³ While her account is at times overly simplistic, it does reflect well the content of standard histories of modern planning and architecture, which expound

⁷² Leonie Sandercock, *Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities* (Chichester: John Wiley, 1998), 27.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 30.

a mainstream, officially sanctioned account of the rise of an established profession, complete with a coherent and bounded theoretical creed. Of course, for all its interest, and admitted success in looking anew at utopianism and architecture, Coleman's account does little to look beyond the old masters of the modern movement, with its emphasis on a broadly defined 'exemplary architecture'. Against this view, Sandercock proposes a 'noir' underside to the historical orthodoxy, unpicking the various duplicities, exclusions, and erasures that underlie the making of the modern city.⁷⁴

Taking his lead from this attempt to work 'against the grain' of modernism, David Pinder has looked at the relevance of the relatively marginalised urban thought of the Situationist International, in particular the notion of 'unitary urbanism' and the development by Constant Nieuwenhuys of his *New Babylon* concept.⁷⁵ Sidestepping Tafuri's distrust of avant-garde practice, Pinder asserts the importance of such utopian anticipations in providing routes towards revolutionary change, drawing on Levitas's observation of the functional role of utopia. In this context, Situationist ideas are particularly attractive due to their opposition to the spatially determined, totalising model of modern planning outlined in Sandercock's critique, which is explicitly concerned with fixed built form. Instead, figures such as Constant and Guy Debord stressed the need for a participatory and evolutionary urbanism that would attend to the desires of city dwellers themselves, engendering a re-conception of social relations and the culture of everyday life. Tied closely to the radical political perspectives of its advocates, the Situationists' utopianism found special prominence during the Parisian uprisings of 1968, an indication of the possibilities inherent in architectural and urban speculation.

While looking to articulate the benefits of an open, provocative, and optimistic outlook towards the future, Pinder's *Visions of the City* also takes on more mainstream approaches to urbanism, notably those of Ebenezer Howard and Le Corbusier. We are offered a measured analysis of their failings, the 'noir' aspects very much in evidence, as Pinder points out the dubious practices of ordering that

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 33-54.

⁷⁵ Pinder, *Visions of the City*, viii.

distinguish the modernist analysis of, and intervention in, the city. A key focus in his study is the relation of planning to authority, and the susceptibility of utopian expectations to devolve into banal and alienating urban surroundings when they are forced to interact with pre-existing social and economic processes – a fact noted earlier. Thus, in the context of the degeneration of the Garden City’s egalitarian, collectivist ideal into a socially exclusive and repetitive suburbia, Pinder asserts the need to ask of Howard’s creation: ‘what made it so conducive to existing power interests, and what enabled its appropriation for ends that might seem antithetical to its more progressive elements’?⁷⁶

It is this question that emerges as central to historical enquiries into the function of any utopia seeking to move beyond the mere projection of an ideal, until it is forced to interact with political process, shedding its status as a utopian no-place. But, such a critical study can also legitimately stand alongside an appreciation for the progressive, emancipatory, and richly creative aspirations of architecture and town planning in post-war Britain. The interest to the historian of the evocation of a better world surely lies in this convergence of a genuine desire to criticise the conditions of the present, while also being forced unavoidably into dialogue with those conditions.

Turning back to post-war Britain we recognise the failing of the post-war architectural and urban vision, its excessive belief in a large-scale remaking of the urban pattern, or the faith that universally valid architecture could be conceived. But it is also possible to attend to the value of the utopianism fostered during the war. Of course, a grandiose, comprehensively conceived urban scheme is rarely unrealisable per se; instead, the contingencies of politics compromise the visions presented in such urban imaginaries. It is this fact – the tension between an ideal utopia and the messiness of realisation – that attends with an appreciation of the radical potential of utopia to shift the political paradigm: understanding the cleavage between them not necessarily as failure, but as an inevitable result of the fact of realisation, a process that could never have been launched without the initial utopian impulse. Even so, the war period in particular emerges as a time when many of the collectivist values of

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 47.

planning experts came tantalisingly close, given the military state of emergency that Britons were forced to embrace, feeding into an image of the projected post-war society. Here again, we see the two sides of utopianism, of desire and coercion. One reason why the war features so little in treatments of post-war architecture is doubtless this conflicted inheritance, which it is necessary to explore in greater detail with regard to a few of the utopian projects produced during and before the war, and the expectations of the powers and methods planners would be able to use.

Ultimately, the utopian paradigm of the 1940s should not be explored in the light of a specifically architectural tradition of utopia, beyond appreciating the influence that any tradition will have on the ideas of a particular historical moment. To adopt such a model – defining utopia through a set of codified, timeless formal characteristics, which are isolated and then tautologically criticised – fails fully to discern the historical immediacy of utopian speculation, certainly that which emerged within Britain through the 1940s. In short, to look at the ideal for the post-war city through the lens of Campanella or Chaux is to distort and limit one’s perspective, impoverished by the assumption that utopia is inevitably perfected, totalising, and restrictive.

Utopia in this discussion instead intends the creation of some ideal of social, political – and architectural – transformation that seeks to address the concerns of a particular situation: a model whose discreteness will critically affect its success if it comes to be realised. A utopian project may even take on a dystopian aspect, it may be progressive or regressive in its results, and it may be extensively realised, only come together in part, or appear only for a limited period of time. It is in the context of a particular range of imaginative responses to a particular range of concerns – local historically and to an extent geographically – that the debates of this thesis should be understood. By these means, a sensitive appreciation may be attained, instead of thinking solely in terms of some placeless architectural ideal and casually slotting that era into the canon of misguided attempts to make a better world.

Chapter 1 – Illustrations



Figure 1.1) Le Corbusier, *Ville Contemporaine* ('Contemporary City for 3 million inhabitants'), 1922, plan.



Figure 1.2) Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Hochhausstadt* ('Highrise City'), 1924, perspective drawing.

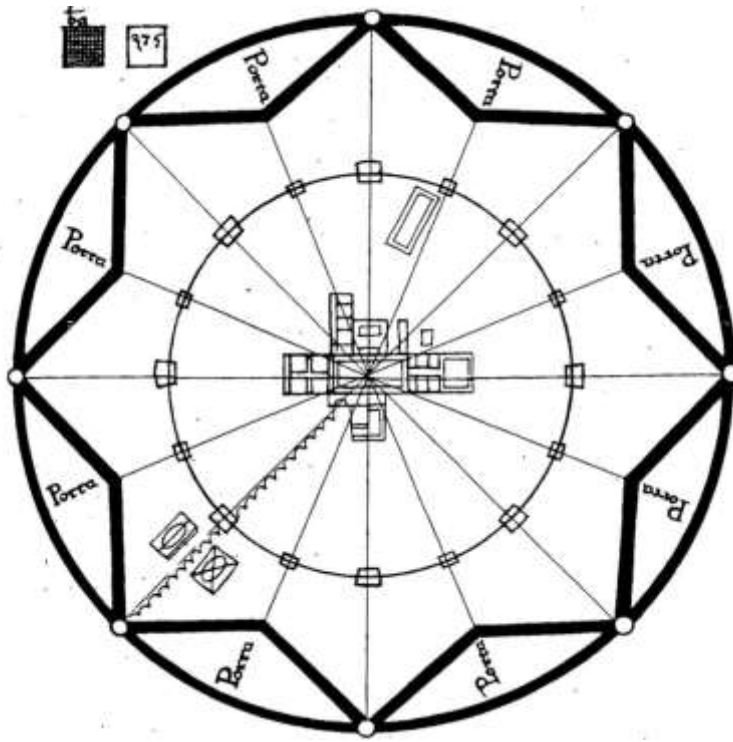


Figure 1.3) Filarete, *Sforzinda*, 1457-1464, plan.

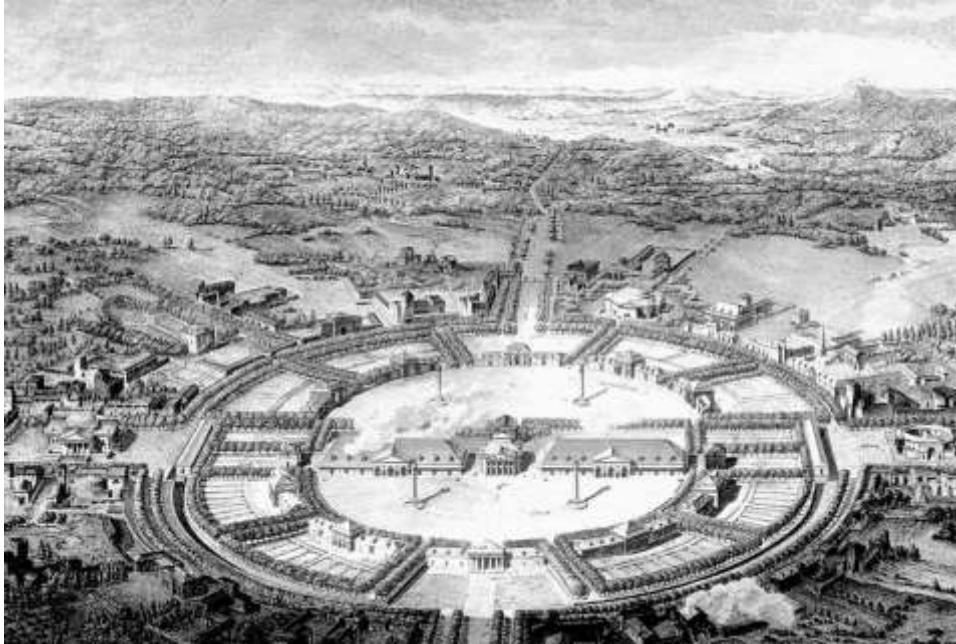


Figure 1.4) Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *Royal Saltworks at Arc-et-Senans*, late-eighteenth century (published 1804), engraving.

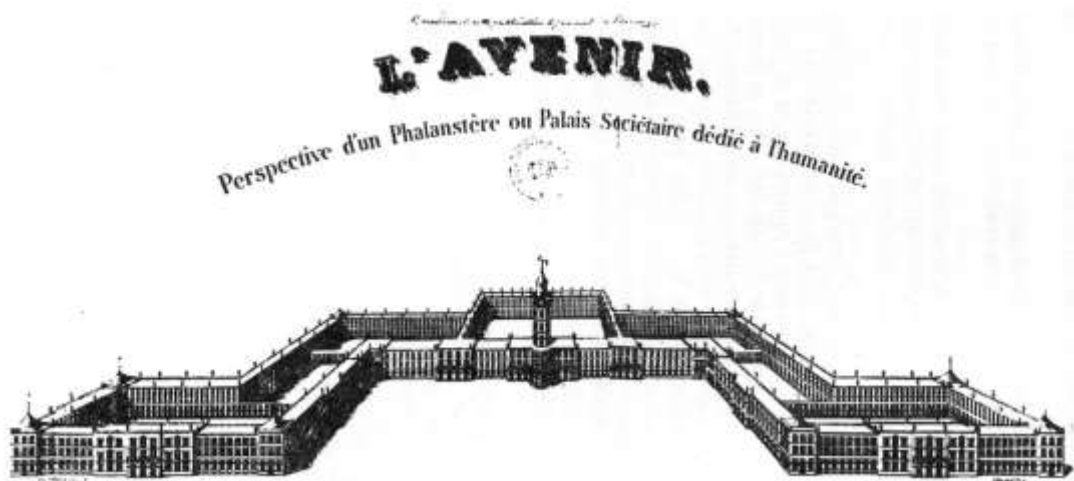


Figure 1.5) Charles Fourier, *Phalanstère*, early-nineteenth century, perspective.

CHAPTER 2 – Arbiters of Utopia: Technocrats, Experts, and Scientific Planning

Introduction

Having pleaded in the preceding chapter for an appreciation of the concrete, distinctly historical nature of utopian speculation, it is appropriate that we should plunge into one of the great political shocks of the twentieth century: the 1945 general election.¹ The affair was neatly summarised by Winston Churchill when he commented that ‘all our enemies having surrendered unconditionally or being about to do so, I was instantly dismissed by the British electorate’ – a statement whose tart matter-of-factness seems only to augment its impact.² It is revealing that Churchill judges his achievement in relation to recent military exploits, assuming that victory in war would lead inevitably to success on the domestic stage. Perhaps in this respect he was misled by memories of Lloyd George’s triumph in the election that arrived in the immediate aftermath of the First World War.³ On 5 July 1945, this supposition was proven to be decisively obsolete – at least for the present.

Thus, the event serves conveniently to dramatise the tension between the new and the old – not least, the scientific and the amateur – inaugurating the new world that had been expected with the arrival of peace. Faced with the overwhelming nature of the result, the political establishment were stunned. Having used ‘the old techniques of

¹ While the social radicalism of Labour’s victory might be questioned, there is little doubt of the surprise it brought to political commentators. Kenneth Morgan emphasises the nostalgia that suffused the Labour victory and the moderate nature of those in charge, see Kenneth O. Morgan, *The People’s Peace: British History, 1945-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 27-28.

² Winston Churchill, quoted in Henry Pelling, *The Labour Governments, 1945-51* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 261. For an analysis of Churchill in relation to the Second World War and the election result in 1945, see Paul Addison, ‘Churchill and the Price of Victory: 1939-1945’, in *From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1939*, ed. Nick Tiratsoo (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997): 53-76.

³ Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 143.

impressionism and wishful-thinking' to gauge the public mood, they found themselves utterly out of touch.⁴ While the Conservatives had supposed that they would be carried effortlessly back into office on the back of the nation's gratitude to Churchill, the great hero of the war effort, the electorate instead handed Labour a landslide victory. The outcome was even more surprising given Labour's state of disarray in the 1930s. Initially powerless to deal with economic depression, and later divided by the in-fighting that led to the formation of the cross-party National Government, the probability of any success in the near future must have appeared slight.

But what is so striking today is the fact that the result, in which Attlee's party won 393 seats to the Conservatives' 213, had been so well signposted beforehand. In the present era of exhaustive political commentary and analysis, when the divining powers of the opinion poll are trusted absolutely, even the most cursory glance at events and available statistics in advance of July 1945 indicates the Tories ought to have expected a defeat. In the first place, the various by-elections conducted between 1939 and 1945 demonstrated a general animosity towards Conservative candidates, who frequently found themselves ousted by independents prompting drastic swings in the share of the vote.⁵ But, while such phenomena might be read as fleeting expressions of protest at local issues or the various impositions of wartime, the polls undertaken by Gallup and Mass Observation bore confirmation of a substantial shift in the public mood.⁶ People were, for the most part, exhausted by the war effort and seeking security and the satisfaction of simple, everyday needs – among the most decisive factors was Labour's stress on housing construction and other social aspirations stirred by the 'people's war'.⁷ Addison comments that opinion polling and market research had attained a systematic level of implementation before 1939, such that by 1940 the government attempted to take advantage of the new techniques

⁴ Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 154-159.

⁶ Polls conducted from 1943 onwards had indicated Labour enjoyed a lead of at least ten points over the Tories. The day before the election Gallup reported a slight narrowing, predicting a Labour vote of 47 per cent and a figure of 38.5 per cent to for the Conservative Party. See Robert Mackay, *The Test of War: Inside Britain 1939-45* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 194-195.

⁷ Morgan, *The People's Peace*, 27.

of analysis by establishing the Home Intelligence department of the Ministry of Information, as well as the Wartime Social Survey.⁸ Consequently, one can trace the changing political attitudes of the British public with a degree of accuracy throughout the war years, continuing right up to the election. Thus, a report published in the *News Chronicle* shortly before the election noted that the poll forecast ‘continued to suggest, as it had done for years, that an election would produce a Labour majority and that the Liberals and minor parties would fare badly’.⁹ Indeed, as far back as the spring of 1942, there was a considerable feeling of goodwill towards Labour, and in spite of the gap continually narrowing in the final months before the 1945 election the result ought to have been in little doubt.¹⁰

The War for Reconstruction

There is something appropriate in this triumph of social science on the public stage at the moment when in many fields of political activity experts were welcoming the benefits their methods of analysis might yield. In retrospect, this exactly anticipated ‘shock’ result throws into relief the prevailing optimism of 1945, the hope among planning professionals at least that they might play a key role in guiding the future development of the state. Traditionally conceived as rather intractable and at the mercy of the irrational forces of ideological conflict, the political arena had been rendered predictable: a confirmation of the promise of applied expertise. Of course, the promise had for several years been evident, for the successful conduct of the war had already indicated the benefits to be gained from enlisting the service of ‘boffins’ to assist government. Whether in the form of John Maynard Keynes in the Treasury,

⁸ Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 15.

⁹ Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945-1951* (London: Vintage, 1993), 65. All the same the staff at the *News Chronicle* continued to disregard the indications of the Gallup polls: Mackay, *The Test of War*, 195.

¹⁰ Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 162; 266. The 1942 survey saw Mass Observation ask members of the public in different areas of the country who they *expected to win* the next election. The results were as follows:

	Cons (per cent)	Lab (per cent)
London	12	27
Midland	14	33
North	17	26

or John Desmond Bernal installed – remarkably in spite of his Communist sympathies – in the Ministry of Home Security, Britain’s reserves of academics and intellectuals were hastily called into service in the autumn of 1939.¹¹

However, these individuals soon became frustrated that the state had not been radicalised sufficiently, feeling that they were being largely wasted in inefficient and ineffective activity. Reconvening a club formed several years earlier – the ‘Tots and Quots’ (*Quot hominies, tot sententiae*) – they gathered to discuss the issues at hand, very quickly accumulating material to be published in 1940 as *Science in War*, one in the series of Penguin Specials.¹² Here, beyond the application of pure science, they advised a full programme of scientific management in production, ultimately anticipating the lengths to which the government would later be forced to go in the practice of total war. Angus Calder has noted the novelty of these developments, commenting that while scientific research played an important part in waging the First World War, ‘the Second established the importance of the scientist and his questioning, irreverent outlook’.¹³ The importance of much scientific work during the war is obvious, for example the development of radar technology or the atom bomb had an enormous influence over its outcome.¹⁴ But the period also saw the rise of political and social planning, with pre-war pressure groups such as Political and Economic Planning (PEP) and the Nuffield College Social Reconstruction Survey producing much-circulated research. The former organisation’s ideal being, as Julian Huxley put it, to keep politics ‘in touch with scientifically ascertained fact’, a comment that articulates well the prevailing optimism of intellectuals.¹⁵

And there is undoubtedly a link to be made between these phenomena – the fact that World War II was unprecedented, both in the practices of organisation noted above and in its impact on most of the British public – and the defeat of the Tories in 1945.

¹¹ For an account of the application of scientific expertise across a range of fields during the Second World War, see Guy Hartcup, *The Effect of Science on the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000); Angus Calder, *The People’s War: Britain, 1939-45* (London: Cape, 1969), 457-477.

¹² *Science in War*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1940). See Hartcup, *The Effect of Science*, 7-8.

¹³ Calder, *The People’s War*, 462-463 (462).

¹⁴ Juliet Gardiner, *Wartime: Britain, 1939-1945* (London: Review, 2005), 313-315

¹⁵ See *Ibid*, 469-470 (470); Stephen Brooke, *Labour’s War: The Labour Party during the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 275-279.

After all, war ought to be the natural province of Conservatism, a moment in which people turn to the emotional reassurance to be gained from tradition and order. In wartime the citizens of Britain, and to an extent its empire, were granted the opportunity to indulge a collective sense of patriotic identity, being mobilised to perform their duty to the nation. This effect has seen armed conflict impact the outcome of several British general elections during the twentieth century, beginning with the so-called ‘Khaki election’ of 1900 and ending with Margaret Thatcher’s success in 1983 in the wake of the Falklands War.

During the Second World War, there was certainly no shortage of opportunity for boosting Conservative support, not least through the charismatic and reassuring presence of Churchill, whose popularity was such that BBC audience research indicated two adults in every three listened to his speeches.¹⁶ With such a consistent body of examples from history on their side there must have seemed little reason, certainly at the outbreak of hostilities, for Tory figures to fear any collapse in national support. Yet other personalities were also emerging into the public eye. The same BBC research indicated that J.B. Priestley’s celebrated ‘Postscripts’ talks garnered one in three listeners, a not inconsiderable achievement, with Graham Greene moved to comment that ‘in the months after Dunkirk [he was] a leader second only in importance to Churchill’. All of this in spite of – or perhaps due to – the fact that his discussions often contained strongly leftward-leaning content, such as his addressing the ‘outdated’ concept of property or attacking the ruling-classes.¹⁷ And it is not surprising that many in the establishment came to see Priestley as a threat to stability, particularly since he was not the only member of the progressive intelligentsia given the chance to air his views. George Orwell summed up the situation in his 1943 essay ‘Poetry and the Microphone’, writing that the ‘tendency of the modern state is to wipe out the freedom of the intellect, and yet at the same time every state, especially under the pressure of war, finds itself more and more in need of an intelligentsia to do its publicity for it’. Therefore, he continued, there had been little choice but the conscription practically wholesale of such figures by the BBC and government ministries, no matter how ‘undesirable his political history or

¹⁶ Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 118.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 118-119; Mackay, *The Test of War*, 143-144; Calder, *The People’s War*, 138-139.

opinions'.¹⁸ Accordingly, Julian Huxley and the philosopher C.E.M. Joad each appeared on the popular programme 'The Brains Trust', in which they discussed a range of questions sent in by listeners, and G.D.H. Cole of the Nuffield Survey also enjoyed a platform to present his views.¹⁹

Meanwhile, an example of a more general platform for dissenting voices came in the Army's attempts to provide a series of educational opportunities for its troops. Efforts to maintain morale and interest, the programmes included lecture courses and group discussions, organised by the Army Education Corps (AEC) and the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA). However, they received a decidedly lukewarm reception in certain areas of government, the controversy resting on two main concerns. Firstly, a suspicion – largely misplaced – that individuals drawn to the military's education services were of a left-leaning tendency, and second, that it was unwise to encourage soldiers to engage with and debate contemporary political and social issues. And it is true that some of the content did offer an apparent challenge to the *status quo*, with topics for discussion such as: 'What's wrong with democracy?', 'Do we deserve our Empire', and 'How should our schools be run?' [*sic*]. As these titles indicate, reconstruction was one of the dominant and most popular themes in the courses, as soldiers looked forward to what they might expect when they returned home.²⁰ And, as has been suggested, this tendency was paralleled in the civilian population too, with a shift to the left in public opinion during the war presaging the rise of Labour to office after it.²¹

In social and political histories of the Second World War, discussion has been dominated by the question of the whether there existed a true popular 'consensus' during the conflict, and, above all, whether this sense of collective purpose continued

¹⁸ George Orwell, 'Poetry and the Microphone', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, Volume 2: My Country Right or Left, 1940-1943*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 381.

¹⁹ Calder, *The People's War*, 364-366; Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 145.

²⁰ Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 145-151; Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, 8-9.

²¹ On the other hand, Sonya Rose offers an alternative to this account, in her stressing of the diversity of the British public during the war: Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

into the post-war years.²² Certainly, there were many prominent figures willing to proclaim the fortitude of the collective spirit. G.D.H. Cole wrote in 1943 of the ‘deep sense of national unity which holds us together as a people’, which, in his view, became particularly important when France fell and Britain had suffered the ignominy of the retreat from Dunkirk.²³ It was in the years between 1940 and 1942 that the public mood swung to the left, or at least towards an expectation that things must change in the direction of greater equality.²⁴ Indeed, it is surely not a coincidence that this was a time in which opinion polls were noting the largest disparity between the two leading parties, as noted earlier – although surveys did tend to suggest the leftward trend was not specifically party-based. A Mass Observation survey of November 1940 stated that ‘it has been hard to find, even among women, many who do not unconsciously regard this war as in some way revolutionary, or radical’.²⁵ Meanwhile, two years later Home Intelligence observed in its regional studies the prevalence of what it termed ‘home-made socialism’ across the country, a characteristic of which being a ‘general agreement that “things are going to be different after the war”’.²⁶

Various charismatic public figures had found themselves in a position to sketch their vision for Britain to a public rendered newly receptive to such ideas by the collectivising impact of total warfare. In keeping with his radical rhetoric Priestley

²² Addison and Marwick have argued that a genuine sense of wartime consensus was generated, although the latter cautions: ‘The Dunkirk spirit was real, but it was temporary’: Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change 1900-1967* (London: Bodley Head, 1968), 295-296; Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 103-126.

However, on returning to the question in the epilogue to the 1994 edition of *The Road to 1945*, Addison admitted that the structures built before and after the war had not been as robust as he had expected in the 1970s, a fact that, taken with the evolution of post-war politics in Britain, led him to moderate his diagnosis of a sustained consensus. This view – framed either in negative or simply critical terms – has defined several more recent studies of the era and its aftermath. See Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 280-283; Harriet Jones and Micheal Kandiah, ed., *The Myth of Consensus: New Views on British History, 1945-1964* (London: Macmillan, 1996); Corelli Barnett, *The Audit of War: Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London: Macmillan, 1986); Morgan, *The People’s Peace*, 10-28. Meanwhile, there has been a similar recent re-evaluation of the notion of a popular consensus in support of the proposals of town planners during and after the war: see Phil Hubbard, Lucy Faire, and Keith Lilley, ‘Contesting the Modern City: Reconstruction and Everyday Life in Post-War Coventry’, *Planning Perspectives* 18, no. 4 (2003): 377-397.

²³ Brooke, *Labour’s War*, 271-272.

²⁴ This shift is outlined by Addison’s chapter ‘Two Cheers for Socialism’: *The Road to 1945*, 127-163. See, also, Mackay, *The Test of War*, 153-155.

²⁵ Calder, *The People’s War*, 139.

²⁶ Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 162-163.

had, since Dunkirk, been elaborating a sense of the possible futures opening themselves up to the country: images that might shape the social and political settlement when Europe was again at peace. For instance, one broadcast was drawn to a finish with a proposition notable for its optimism:

Now, the war, because it demands a huge collective effort, is compelling us to change not only our ordinary, social and economic habits, but also our habits of thought. We're actually changing over from the property view to the sense of community, which simply means that we realise we're all in the same boat. But, and this is the point, that boat can serve not only as our defence against Nazi aggression, but as an ark in which we can all finally land in a better world.²⁷

Priestley here identifies 'community' as the defining ethos of the era, imbuing it with egalitarian ideals such that it becomes a project for social progress.²⁸ As an expression of the purely quotidian – the prosaic present of the war – it encapsulates the sense of the British people drawn together through the contingency of circumstance into a new attitude of egalitarianism, and this impression of social cohesion dovetailed with political developments as well. Steven Brooke has illustrated how the Labour Movement appropriated the term during the war, as a means of overcoming an excessive concern in socialism with class. He suggests that the affectionate portrait of the nation sketched by Orwell in his *The Lion and the Unicorn* and Evan Durbin in *What Have We to Defend?*, published in 1941 and 1942 respectively, fulfilled the task of 'reclaiming patriotism for the left', and brought community to the centre of the socialist agenda. As a result, the door was open for others to attempt to channel these collective resonances towards planning initiatives elsewhere.²⁹ Naturally, the concept could be transferred from social to physical reconstruction, as town planners and architects considered how this spirit of togetherness might be advanced through their own activities, providing a dwelling for the 'better world' that Priestley promised.

²⁷ J.B. Priestley, talk from 21 July 1940, *Postscripts* (London: William Heinemann, 1941), 38.

²⁸ The term community is one of the major figures of mid-century discourse in town planning, for further detail on the term and its applications in planning, see Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Jessica Allen, 'Contested Understandings: The Lansbury Estate in the Post-War Period' (PhD Thesis, University of London, 1994).

²⁹ Brooke, *Labour's War*, 272-275 (275).

This notion of collective unity was pushed into the foreground: presented, simultaneously, as a product of collective hardship, the eventual guarantor of military success, and cherished ideal for social organisation after the war. The term found its way into the mouths of politicians both in public speeches and behind closed doors, as they appropriated its positive attributes, and effortless evocations of wartime effort and utopian dreaming.³⁰ Thus, when a Committee on Reconstruction Problems was formed in February 1941 under the chairmanship of Arthur Greenwood, the Prime Minister provided a neat summation of ‘community’ as it was understood at the time in his twofold terms of reference. Alongside the first – unenviably intimidating – task of preparing ‘a scheme for a post-war European and world system’, Churchill asked that the committee prepare short-term reconstruction schemes that ‘should have as their general aim the perpetuation of the national unity achieved in this country during the war, through a social and economic structure designed to secure equality of opportunity and service among all classes of the community’.³¹ The term is not applied with any sense of being a coherent and self-conscious social theory, appearing almost casually, but its context is revealing. In this case ‘community’ carries a double significance: it is used to describe a condition of society that already exists and is tied to the notion of a wartime social consensus; yet it also reaches into the future, extending the promise of an eventual dissolution of social inequalities and the arrival of the harmoniously planned society.³²

This utopian aspiration, remarkable considering the politics of the preceding decade, becomes more comprehensible when considered in light of the impact of the war. For the collective disturbance from the normal patterns of life that it prompted, as well as the collective experience of sacrifice, brought a corresponding shift in the attitudes of many. In the first place some gained from the conflict, most dramatically those for

³⁰ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 95; Allen, ‘Contested Understandings’, 207.

³¹ National Archives (NA), HLG/117/1, Committee on Reconstruction Problems, confidential memorandum, undated, 1.

³² Meanwhile, Sonya Rose has questioned the notion of a monolithic wartime ‘community’, highlighting its tendency to constrain. She emphasises instead the varied identities that comprised the nation of Britain and the Commonwealth, and explores the identities of gender, race. See Rose, *Which People’s War?*.

whom the 1930s had been a miserable decade.³³ The munitions drive boosted the economy, unemployment was thus brought practically to an end, and wage incomes increased, continuing to rise into the post-war years.³⁴ Accompanying these developments was the mass mobilisation of labour bringing Britain to a state of ‘total war’, providing a new experience of work for many women, and feeding into a sense of the ‘common lot’. These events collectively contributed to an apparent levelling off of society, of which there was no better expression than rationing, which led the way in encouraging the credo of ‘equality of sacrifice’ across society while also setting into relief the behaviour of those wealthier individuals who succeeded in dodging the restrictions.³⁵

An interesting index of popular sentiment is provided by the regard in which the Soviet Union was held at the time. This was to reach something of a climax in the national celebration of Red Army Day in February 1943 – that is, the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the formation of the Red Army – lent extra enthusiasm by the recent capitulation of German troops in Stalingrad. The latter victory has come to symbolise the appalling nature of the conflict in Russia, and certainly the suffering undergone by its population was appreciated by those in Britain, whose own experience of the Blitz encouraged a sense of solidarity. Indeed, in 1944 Coventry took the step of agreeing a ‘Bond of Friendship’ with Stalingrad.³⁶ British workers eagerly took part in production drives to produce arms for Russia, recognising the significance of the struggle to the east, and these exercises fostered a softening of attitudes. Some of this activity was non-political, one ally supporting another and acknowledging its sacrifice, yet it cannot be ignored that membership of the Communist Party in Britain increased at this time, rising from 12,000 in June 1941 to 65,000 by September of the following year.³⁷

³³ Mackay, *The Test of War*, 30-35; Rose, *Which People’s War?*, 29-31.

³⁴ Mackay, *The Test of War*, 80-81.

³⁵ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 59, 96-97; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, ‘Consensus and Consumption: Rationing, Austerity and Controls after the War’, in *The Myth of Consensus*, 79-81. For a discussion of the significance of the ‘equality of sacrifice’ slogan in terms of class, see Rose, *Which People’s War?*, 31-38.

³⁶ Steven V. Ward, ‘Soviet communism and the British planning movement: rational learning or utopian imagining?’, *Planning Perspectives* 27, no. 4 (2012), 506.

³⁷ Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 140.

Again, this aspect of politicisation draws us back to the question of planning, for many agitators in Britain used this opportunity to highlight the benefits of the Soviet system of governance and social organisation – at least as it was perceived at the time. A much-read book among admirers of the Communist state – and young planners generally, certainly in the town planning movement – was the study *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation*, by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, which gave a glowing analysis of achievements in Russia.³⁸ In the late-1930s their account had proffered a compelling vision, but with a war raging and the Red Army continuing to resist, left-wing intellectuals in Britain pointed to the productive efficiency of the Soviet Union's planned economy and the spiritual vigour and collective fight that appeared to stimulate this egalitarian nation. Therefore, it became reasonable to ask: if Russia had revolutionised its society, such that it could wage an effective war against the Nazis, why not Britain too?

The idea of social reconstruction assumed increasing credibility among the public in the early war years, prompted by interested agitators in various areas of the media, until it accompanied a Labour victory in 1945. But there is a striking irony in this gradual collective acceptance of a radical post-war settlement. It is a phenomenon proposed by Addison in his discussion of the work of intellectuals, technocrats, and social reformers: individuals who found a role for themselves in spite of their lack of combat action by manoeuvring the campaign for 'reconstruction' to a central position in the war effort.³⁹ Politically and morally, the Second World War needed no external legitimisation, no insistence that its end must inevitably launch a new social order; rather, it was fought by the democratic nations of Europe to nullify the unreasonable, oppressive, and threatening force of Fascism. In short, the war surely represented a defence of some conception of the *status quo*, however progressively inclined or evolutionary. Considered in this light, the fact that by 1945 there had accumulated a concrete set of expectations across the country, a sense that these years had been directed towards a progressive, reformist purpose, would be highly

³⁸ Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* (London: Longmans, 1935).

³⁹ Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 183-184. Also, Mackay, *The Test of War*, 233.

unusual – were it not, of course, for the seminal position the war has assumed in narratives of modernisation in Britain in subsequent decades.

In the Russian context, there was sufficient openness to the Soviet cause to accommodate an exhibition in London during November 1942 that promoted ‘Twenty-five years of Soviet Progress’. Its opening was even attended by the august figure of Edwin Lutyens, present in his capacity as President of the Royal Academy.⁴⁰ Only recently – in October of the same year – Lutyens had made his own qualified contribution to this atmosphere of optimism and openness to radical ideas, when he oversaw the exhibition of the Royal Academy Planning Committee’s scheme for London.⁴¹ The Committee, of which he was chairman, had been working on the project for two years, and produced a scheme that, while stylistically conservative in its commitment to axial planning and monumental classicism, posited a city almost unrecognisable from the London of 1942. Its almost complacent assumption of a radical mandate is revelatory of the atmosphere that had developed among architects and planners during the early 1940s.

The great virtue of modernism was seen to lie in its ability to initiate a wholly beneficial and all-encompassing transformation of British society, and the Second World War was built into the process as a confirmation of moral purpose, its architectural relevance attested by the unprecedented damage inflicted on the built fabric of Europe’s cities. In books and exhibitions, Ministry of Information films and widely publicised plans, the benefits of modern architecture and town planning were trumpeted; meanwhile, interested parties sympathetic to the cause lobbied for influence among political decision-makers. But this confidence, articulated for purposes of propaganda, was naturally tempered by an insistent anxiety regarding what precisely the future would look like. A profusion of plans emerged, each betraying the prejudices and preoccupations of their authors, a range individual utopias that vied to announce the most compelling image of a post-war society.

⁴⁰ Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 138.

⁴¹ Royal Academy Planning Committee, *London Replanned: The Royal Academy Planning Committee’s Interim Report* (London: Country Life, 1942). For a more detailed discussion of this plan and the debates that it incited, see chapter 4.

While Lutyens and the Royal Academy Planning Committee produced one such plan, there was another scheme composed that same year – no less dramatic in its disdain for the built fabric of London – that provides an illustration of how science and research might be mobilised in support of architecture and town planning.

‘Planning *is* Politics’: The MARS Plan and the Evasion of Utopia⁴²

The most significant impetus towards attempting to visualise the post-war world coincided with the most destructive phase of the war for British cities. It was during 1941 and 1942 that the production of plans and books of grandiose prophecy became most frenzied, as the conviction emerged that social reconstruction must now be complimented by substantial attention to the physical condition of the country. The Uthwatt and Scott Reports arrived in these years, building on the recent work of the Barlow Commission, and collectively they indicated a political willingness to back up the radical schemes planners were beginning to commit to paper.⁴³ The extremity of these projections – pitched almost at the boundary between the realisable and the fantastic – demonstrates not only the ambition and optimism of planners at the time, but also the perceived importance of presenting the imagination with a seductive vision of the future. It is natural, then, that we should find the town planner William Holford, late in 1942, speaking of the need to see ‘the physical building and replanning of Britain as the outward symbol of the deeper social reconstruction for which we are fighting’, a demonstration that planners’ attentions extended beyond the mere provision of improved functions to encompass the representational aspect of their work: its self-conscious role as an icon of improvement.⁴⁴ Two years earlier, in a review of yet another prospect onto the country’s brilliant future, the *Architectural*

⁴² This quote is taken from Catherine Bauer, ‘Planning is Politics – But Are Planners Politicians?’, review of *County of London Plan*, by J.H Forshaw and Patrick Abercrombie, *Architectural Review* 96, no. 573 (1944), 82.

⁴³ For a contemporary discussion of these reports, see Nuffield College, *Britain's Town and Country Pattern: A Summary of the Barlow, Scott, and Uthwatt Reports* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943).

⁴⁴ William Holford, ‘Editorial Foreword’, *Town Planning Review* 18, no. 4 (1942), 233.

Review spoke of being in the middle of a “Reconstruction” boom’ in terms of theoretical speculation.⁴⁵

In each of these cases the author articulated the awkwardness of addressing the future from a position of architectural stasis. On the one hand, designers feared losing public support by appearing impractically remote and – to use the pejorative of the time – ‘Utopian’; while, on the other, the memory of perceived failures in the aftermath of the last war recalled the consequences of a lack of ambition. The review went on to suggest that, in spite of the attractiveness of utopian speculation: ultimately, ‘the future is being made now’.⁴⁶ In part, this comment expresses a concern that there were more important matters at hand than visionary plan-making: that architects should address themselves primarily to the war effort at a time when its conclusion remained far from clear. But there is another element at play, consistent with the editorial line of the *Review* at the time – particularly as presented in those pieces on reconstruction by J.M. Richards, who likely authored the text in question. In articles such as ‘Wanted: an Hypothesis’ and ‘A Theoretical Basis for Physical Planning’ Richards articulated the necessity of constructing a firm methodological framework, both in terms of theory and practice, so that when the war ended practitioners would be able to proceed with the opportunities available to them.⁴⁷ Most explicitly, he wrote that the planner must not be afraid:

... of committing himself as to his *aims*, which means accepting the risk of falling into that error which is commonly – and rightly – condemned under the label “wishful thinking” or “Utopianism”; an error which consists in cherishing theoretical ideals in a way that distracts attention from the problems on which their ultimate achievement depends.⁴⁸

Here, Richards highlights the dilemma posed by a planning method elaborated on the basis of impartial research. Such an approach could endlessly gather technical and social information in order to provide solutions to problems, but the perceived

⁴⁵ ‘Shorter Notices’, review of *A New England*, by S.D. Adshead, *Architectural Review* 92, no. 457 (1942), 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 24.

⁴⁷ J.M. Richards, ‘Wanted: an Hypothesis’, *Architectural Review* 90, no. 539 (1941): 148-149; ‘A Theoretical Basis for Physical Planning’, *Architectural Review* 91, no. 542 (1942): 39-42.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 40.

impartiality of the research process did not hide the prejudices exercised in identifying the problems in the first place – a fact we will explore later in this chapter. What is more, the desirability of these choices betrayed the prior existence of certain political and social aims.

This prejudicing of particular principles becomes apparent when one turns to the plans that emerged in this period. Although claiming to derive from careful study of a multitude of urban conditions, many of these ‘scientific’ plans are – in retrospect – spectacularly reductive. One especially extreme case of utopia made manifest is the Master Plan for London presented by the Modern Architectural Research (MARS) Group in 1942 (Figure 2.1). Published in the June issue of the *Architectural Review* in an attempt to capitalise on the recent explosion of interest in post-war reconstruction, the plan was extraordinarily ambitious in its proposal to renew practically the entire built fabric of London, altering beyond recognition not only its buildings but the layout of the city as a whole.⁴⁹ Its authors were the members of the MARS Group’s Town Planning Committee, figures of prominent across the British architectural scene such as Maxwell Fry, Godfrey Samuel (a member of Tecton), William Tatton-Brown, and Arthur Ling (soon to begin work on the *County of London Plan*, and later appointed City Architect of Coventry), although the plan was finalised by the Committee’s two *émigré* members, Arthur Korn and Felix J. Samuely.⁵⁰ The scheme posited ‘a master plan’, a new organising grid that would be superimposed onto the present city and promised to clarify its form and improve its functioning and productivity. Forming its ‘backbone’, the centre of London was to be preserved, with the City maintaining its role as the hub of finance and administration, the West End continuing to provide cultural and commercial diversion for the public, and essential economic functions served by the Port and existing industrial areas. However, outside this historic ribbon all else was to change, the outlying neighbourhoods and parks swept away and replaced by a distinctive herringbone

⁴⁹ Arthur Korn and Felix J. Samuely, ‘A Master Plan for London: Based on Research Carried Out By the Town Planning Committee of the MARS Group’, *Architectural Review* 91, no. 546 (1942): 143-150.

⁵⁰ A full account of the preparation of the MARS Plan for London can be found in John R. Gold, ‘The MARS Plans for London, 1933-1942: Plurality and Experimentation in the City Plans of the Early British Modern Movement’, *The Town Planning Review* 66, no. 3 (1995), 254-258.

structure whose form was defined primarily by a systematically organised mass-transit system. Each rib of this structure would stretch away to north and south, departing from the historic core at regular intervals along its length, in turn allowing strips of green space to penetrate the previously crowded and chaotic metropolis. The fourteen ribs would themselves form ‘districts’, huge residential areas that would each house around 600,000 people distributed across a system of units of decreasing size: so, the ‘districts’ would divide into twelve ‘borough units’, and these into four to eight ‘neighbourhood units’, before their final division into six ‘residential units’ comprising approximately 1,050 people (Figure 2.2).⁵¹

We are told that the highly schematic nature of the proposals, modelled after an ascending cellular scale, was partly intended to furnish a structure towards which all future development could be directed, with work proceeding at any one of a number of different scales. Correspondingly, the article assured that even the ‘best plan is of no value unless it is possible to visualise the stages of its execution’, before charting a decidedly ambitious programme of works.⁵² If 80 percent of London’s pre-war building industry were put to the task, the project could be implemented according to a twenty-year timetable, split into five stages – although the plan’s authors do tentatively suggest that the intervention of war has induced destructions and population upheavals that might afford an even earlier end date. In the long term, it was anticipated that the expense of money and time would be offset by the enormous improvements in efficiency promised by the comprehensively organised London of the future. Absurdly, these projections were represented in a table that, attempting to translate them into more legible and precise form, rendered the operation in terms of individual working hours. The conclusion was that the monumental task at hand could be achieved with just two hours six minutes of labour per person per week (Figure 2.3) – a fraction of the savings that the plan would realise in the long term. It is revealing that while the sum for the rebuilding of London along the lines dictated by the MARS Plan was set at £60 million per year, its authors glibly suggest that the amount required ‘to build London from scratch’ was calculated barely higher at £70 million.

⁵¹ Korn and Samuely, ‘A Master Plan for London’, 145-146.

⁵² *Ibid*, 149.

The megalomania of the whole concept resolves itself into the famous image of the herringbone plan: a map of London, mutilated by the erasure of massive tracts of space earmarked for landscaping and braced into a new orientation with the creation of several major transportation routes (Figure 2.1). Thus, while the Thames continues to follow its erratic course – fringed by the shrunken remains of the old city – there is also a new mark on the landscape, cutting through from west to east and giving on to a network of secondary arteries. In contrast to the line gently described by the nearby river, this angular insertion seems a crude and aggressive gesture, bearing no resemblance to what went before, while the lines that feed the accompanying ‘districts’ describe a slightly snaking profile in a token concession to regional geography. Although the image is described as only a ‘rough impression’ of the anticipated scheme, its simplicity seems perfectly to restate the plan’s brutal renunciation of complexity, its singular refusal to acknowledge the history of London, accepting only the most basic determining factors.⁵³

In this respect, the MARS Master Plan for London would seem to be the epitome of the sort of utopianism we encountered in the previous chapter; indeed, nearly 30 years later a historical account of its creation explicitly described the Plan as ‘frankly Utopian ... in concept’.⁵⁴ However, in 1942 its authors only used that word in order to evade it, stating that the idea of such a simplified form ‘may appear Utopian’ but in fact forms the foundation for a carefully considered programme of works along which to proceed.⁵⁵ Of course, we have seen that this programme was far from realistic; nevertheless, it is worth dwelling further on the fact that a group of designers whose proposals were so visionary simultaneously distanced themselves from the pursuit of utopia. They were certainly not alone in doing so. Having spent the previous chapter discussing in detail the history of utopia and the dilemma it poses to the historian of modern architecture, it is now necessary briefly to clarify its exact significance in the British architectural scene of the 1940s. For, rather than a

⁵³ *Ibid*, 143. It is revealing that the plan’s authors justify their intervention by means of an analogy that compares London with ‘a factory that is technically deteriorating and must be rebuilt’: *Ibid*, 144.

⁵⁴ Dennis Sharp, ‘Concept and Interpretation: The Aims and Principles of the MARS Plan for London’, *Perspecta* 13 (1971), 167.

⁵⁵ Korn and Samuely, ‘A Master Plan for London’, 144.

cause around which to unite, the invocation of ‘utopia’ usually prompted a careful retreat, with the adjective ‘utopian’ pinned onto those ideas deemed insufficiently rooted in practical considerations.

Such cases occur constantly across treatments of reconstruction during the war. For instance, in a lengthy assessment of the contemporary planning approach and its limitations in the *Architectural Review*, J.M. Richards writes that practitioners needed to accept ‘the risk of falling into that error which is commonly – and rightly – condemned under the label “wishful thinking” or “Utopianism”; an error which consists in cherishing theoretical ideals in a way that distracts attention from the problems on which their ultimate achievement depends’.⁵⁶ Although just a few years later in 1946 Richards’ caution with respect to visionary planning would crystallise in the penning of a eulogy to the simple appeal of English suburbia – the book *Castles on the Ground* – and a general shift in his interests towards the study of the historic environment, his position earlier that decade was decidedly more uncompromising as he dominated the expression of architectural opinion in his role as editor of the *Review*.⁵⁷ Yet his attitude towards extravagant planning thought evidently remains one of equivocation, even as he cautions planners against an excess of pragmatism. Elsewhere – in a comment that also cites the suburban home – we find a special supplement in the *Architects’ Journal* similarly offering a passing evasion of utopia. Entitled ‘Planning for Reconstruction’, the text presented a ‘Beveridge Plan for our environment’ and sought to explain the benefits of social democracy that could be provided not only by architects but also by experts in other fields. In line with its aim to present ideas in ‘simple terms’ before a general public, the article was published as a pamphlet by the Architectural Press the following year. At its beginning, the anonymous author states that the promise of reconstruction has instigated a variety of expectations, and suggests that ‘some simply look forward to a new suburban house with constant hot water and a refrigerator, whilst others retreat from any bold ideas on the grounds that they are wildly utopian, and modestly expect that we should carry on from where we left off in 1939’.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ J.M. Richards, ‘A Theoretical Basis for Physical Planning’, 40.

⁵⁷ J.M. Richards, *Castles on the Ground* (London: Architectural Press, 1946).

⁵⁸ ‘Planning for Reconstruction’, *Architects’ Journal* 98, no. 2544 (1943), 305.

In each of these cases, as well as in the MARS Plan, the use of the word is strikingly similar. Not offering direct renunciation, the statements each seek quietly to evade the charge of utopianism. They prevision a sceptical public, into whose mouths the term is pre-emptively inserted in order to sustain their own supposedly more grounded suggestions. Evidently, the writers in question are concerned with the nature of appearances, in spite of their expressed dedication purely to the practical imperatives of post-war reconstruction; and, more than anything else, their concern derives from the undeniably bold political demands implicit in their proposals. While the authors of the MARS Plan could present a 20-year programme of works and a prospective balance sheet as proof of their competence, these same details also represented evidence of political ambitions that assumed a dubiously totalitarian mandate. Admittedly, the experience of wartime had eased somewhat the reception of such demands. Speaking on the BBC in 1943, Herbert Manzoni, the City Surveyor and Engineer of Birmingham, was content to advise that when peace resumed ‘every single building [must be] co-ordinated with national and local plans’.⁵⁹ Korn and Samuely, in fact, state in defence of their proposals that the nation had recently ‘become accustomed to astronomical budgets’, adding that the projected cost of their entire plan was the equivalent of a mere three months expenditure by Great Britain during the war.⁶⁰

The Town Planning Committee’s instinct to think on a national scale reflects attitudes prevalent not only at the unofficial level: the studies of government commissions had for several years been publishing papers whose proposals carried an ambition akin to those of the MARS Plan. There was serious interest in the issue of addressing planning at a national scale, co-ordinating projects across the country under the auspices of a centralised ministry.⁶¹ Among the more ambitious agitators, it was hoped that such a ministry would enjoy a mandate sufficiently comprehensive

⁵⁹ Herbert Manzoni, quoted in Matthew Hollow, ‘Utopian urges: Visions for reconstruction in Britain, 1940-1950’, *Planning Perspectives* 27, no. 4 (2012), 572.

⁶⁰ Korn and Samuely, ‘A Master Plan for London’, 149.

⁶¹ This enthusiasm for national planning, of course, followed from the experience of large-scale planning during the war: see Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 167-181; Morgan, *The People’s Peace*, 14-17.

that it would not only manage the shaping of the physical environment, but also marry this with the complexities of economic planning. However, governmental links with such ideas began with the comparatively modest recommendations forwarded by the Barlow Report.⁶² Produced by a Royal Commission appointed in 1937, the Barlow Report set out to address a range of industrial concerns. Its recommendations, which entailed the assumption by the state of extensive executive powers, established the notion of government responsibility for both physical and economic planning.⁶³ Consequently, the Barlow Report set in motion a series of other enquiries that aimed to evaluate these and similar obligations; together they would play a key role in mobilising parliament into implementing unprecedented planning measures.⁶⁴

Although Barlow's Majority Report remained fairly cautious about the planning machinery that the state might construct, a Minority group produced another document suggesting the establishment of a Ministry with executive powers and the further authority to define a 'General Scheme of [national] development'.⁶⁵ Additionally, Patrick Abercrombie, a member of the Commission, separately pushed for a fuller appreciation of local determinants beyond the merely industrial factors that the Commission had set out to investigate. Taken together, these recommendations represented, quite simply, the introduction of a comprehensive planning approach into the culture of British policy-making, extending dramatically the authority enjoyed by the town planner. Yet even this Minority Report still did not go so far as to demand a complete overhaul, instead advising that existing Departments of government retain their powers; subordinated to the General Scheme they would come to the new Ministry for co-ordination.⁶⁶ While the later Uthwatt Report – which reported in 1942 on the intractable planning issues of compensation and betterment – tempered these conclusions, it did nevertheless propose a Minister for National Development, who, though lacking a departmental home, would

⁶² It was presented to parliament in January 1940: Nuffield College, *Britain's Town and Country Pattern*, 13.

⁶³ Gordon E. Cherry, *Town Planning in Britain since 1900: The Rise and Fall of the Planning Ideal* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 101-102.

⁶⁴ Nuffield College, *Britain's Town and Country Pattern*, 13-18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 47-51 (51).

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 51-55.

perform a similar co-ordinating role. This Minister would be assisted by a staff of consultants whose presence was a symptom of the rising regard held by the mercurial figure of the expert.⁶⁷

Another mainstay of wartime planning literature, the enthusiasm for a design culture based on the application of expertise imagined a future in which the primary impulse for the designer would be the solution of problems through research. Thus, just as idealists anticipated the cessation of political debate, so many architects and planners posited the realisation of a built environment whose form would emerge as a logical consequence of empirical study. Their vision assumed an ambitious system of central planning and scientific management in which experts from various fields would collaborate to mastermind the beneficial organisation of the state's activities.

Naturally, the political implications of such paternalism did not pass unnoticed, although the excitement at the possibilities that lay before what was still a relatively young profession did tend to encourage a casual attitude to democracy – at least in theoretical discussion. Some indication of the issues at hand are apparent in another contemporary reference to utopianism, which appears in a discussion of the *County of London Plan* – again in the pages of the *Architectural Review* – by the American town planning expert Catherine Bauer. In the course of the article, Bauer expresses her sympathy for the opinion of conservative figures who had publicly disparaged the ambitions of 'utopian planners'; she adds that 'it is not only useless but irresponsible to make radical proposals without recognising their revolutionary political implications'.⁶⁸

Above all, Bauer was directing her critique at the notion prevalent among her peers that the planning process enjoyed the potential to render political action obsolete, to be replaced by an impartial calculation of needs and ends. For instance, the following year in his foreword to E.A. Gutkind's *Creative Demobilisation* – one of the more strident statements in favour of systematic national planning – Herbert Read would

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 53-58.

⁶⁸ Bauer, 'Planning is Politics', 82. In her description of the 'utopian planners', Bauer is quoting the remarks of civil servant Gwilym Gibbon.

write: 'Planning has become the catchword of our age: not merely, one suspects, because it is a necessity inherent in our historical situation, but also because it offers for many people a welcome escape from the ambiguities of political action'. He continues, rather chillingly, to assert that planning represents 'the "scientific" attitude in social relations, and to be scientific in our days is as good as being moral'.⁶⁹ It would perhaps be disingenuous to suggest that Read is here advocating a definite subordination of normative ethics to any process of decision-making that can be construed as 'scientific'; rather, he is reflecting on the primacy given to empirical fact in modernity. However, the fact remains that in conflating the two terms, he leaves unanswered the question of what exactly 'scientific' means in the realm of moral responsibility.

In opposition to this view, Bauer insists that 'planning *is* politics': the dynamics of political debate must be respected rather than treated as the misguided functioning of a civilisation whose errors had been overcome. Any major political decisions 'cannot *and should not* be decided by the experts and intellectuals alone, no matter how rational, eloquent, scientifically objective, high-minded, progressive or correct they may be'. For Bauer, the experts were focussing on the wrong issues. Instead of obsessing over the exercise of power itself, they ought to instead be addressing the necessary role the citizen must play in the planning process. Indeed, she suggests that the question of citizen participation constituted 'the great political challenge of our time'.⁷⁰ Such participation represented the key to ensuring the true comprehensiveness of comprehensive reconstruction, marrying the rebuilding of the post-war world to the aspirations and expectations of a general public that was too often overlooked by the scientifically-oriented surveys that formed the basis of the planning process.

Yet the appeal to science was complicated, motivated as much by a desire for legitimacy as it was for political authority. Returning to the MARS Plan, we find its authors claiming in their conclusion that the final shape of the scheme rested on two

⁶⁹ Herbert Read, foreword to *Creative Demobilisation: Vol. 1, Principles of National Planning*, E.A. Gutkind (London: Kegan Paul, 1943), xiii.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

central convictions: ‘that London can and must be rebuilt on organised lines, and that the methods employed to find the most suitable solutions must be scientific investigation into every mode of life, involving preliminary analysis, followed by imaginative and unprejudiced composition of the results’.⁷¹ This statement provides a concise summary of the science-based approach, a broad tendency in planning methodology that emerged during the interwar years and whose impact we have begun to trace above. Here, we see the Korn and Samuely emphasising the necessity, first, on centralised management of the planning process in order to co-ordinate schemes at a national scale; secondly, they promote empirical, scientific study as a prelude to – or, more precisely, the decisive genesis of – the final planning composition. The exact language employed highlights the seductive resonances that science could confer onto the planning process. The pair write of ‘solutions’, which in the context of scientific investigation implies the existence of answers to the making of the built environment that are objectively valid – a suggestion underscored by the subsequent detailing of a ‘composition of the results’. Furthermore, the success of this process depends on the research being undertaken in an ‘unprejudiced’ manner, to ensure that the correct solutions are reached. There remains, however, one errant phrase: although the translation of data into plan must be objective, this intellectual detachment must also be coloured by the agency of the imagination. It is a curious, almost paradoxical, claim, establishing a tension at the heart of the scientific approach to town planning. To explore this condition further, it is necessary to explore the background to research-based practice, in particular the tool that defined planning culture in Britain at mid-century, providing – in the view of the profession itself – the decisive guarantee of scientific validity: the civic and regional survey.

⁷¹ Korn and Samuely, ‘A Master Plan for London’, 150.

The Geddesian Survey: Discovering a ‘Synoptic Vision’⁷²

While the application of research in town planning drew heavily on the traditions of the town planning movement, it also relied on developments elsewhere, most notably in the social sciences.⁷³ Through the rational analysis of the interactions between society and the surrounding environment, researchers believed they could direct the course of each towards a better future. It is this principle that formed the primary basis of the regional and civic survey, a tool whose total acceptance – to the point of legal obligation in 1947 Town and Country Planning Act – underpinned the apotheosis of physical planning after the war.⁷⁴

Having first emerged in the writings of Patrick Geddes, the survey later grew popular thanks to several features elaborated by this biologist and pioneer sociologist.⁷⁵

Contrary to the approach of the earliest trained town planners, who were concerned foremost with physical design, research-based practice focussed the profession on a web of factors – social, economic, and geographical – insisting that they be interpreted comprehensively. Here, as well as gaining a theoretical foundation previously absent from their work, planners could also claim an extensive and interdisciplinary mandate. Allied with this latter point were the scientific connotations of diagnostic analysis, replacing the notion of an art whose dictates seemed arbitrarily formal, as indicated by the disciplinary title ‘Civic Design’.⁷⁶ With its new objective apparatus, a movement that had been somewhat amateurish now boasted the authority of modern science: this aspect, above all, laid the foundations for the expanded role of town planning in the post-war political settlement. We have

⁷² This section draws heavily on material from the opening chapter (‘Prologue: The Brynmawr Experiment’) of my MSc dissertation: see Matthew Latusek, ‘Discovering a “Synoptic Vision”: South Wales and the Co-Ordination of British Planning in the 1940s’ (MSc dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2011), 5-16.

⁷³ On the close relationship between town planning and social science, see M. Hebbert, ‘The daring experiment: social scientists and land use planning in 1940s Britain’, *Environment and Planning B* 10, no. 1 (1983): 3-17.

⁷⁴ On the significance of the Act see Jules Lubbock, ‘1947 and all that: Why has the Act lasted so long?’, in *Man-Made Future: Planning, Education and Design in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Iain Boyd Whyte (London: Routledge, 2007), 1-15.

⁷⁵ For an account of the life and work of Patrick Geddes, see Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London: Routledge, 1993); Volker Welter, *Biopolis: Patrick Geddes and the City of Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

⁷⁶ Cherry, *Town Planning in Britain since 1900*, 84.

seen that government had grown increasingly bold in its acceptance of responsibility for future planning, and consequently its aspirations chimed well with the technocratic accent of the profession, which came to receive the backing of a generous administrative machinery.

Although, by this point, much of the superficial content of Geddes' survey method had changed, his ideas remain essential to a full understanding of the tradition as it emerged in the interwar years. Just as modern architecture and town planning identified the nineteenth-century city as a problem to be solved, so too did Geddes seek an antidote to the urban effects of the industrial revolution, which he believed had fostered cities antipathetic to a healthy human life.⁷⁷ In response, he suggested that a society must learn to understand, then to anticipate, its own evolutionary course, directing it towards a more materially and spiritually enriching future. But to do this a continuous accumulation of knowledge about the geographical and historical elements of the city must take place: the production of a survey that would lead inexorably to a plan for development. However, a purely impersonal, objective study, though later emphasised amongst planning professionals, was of limited value to Geddes. For him, the process of practical self-education was as important as the data that emerged, and consequently the citizens themselves had to take part in the material and spiritual transformation of their surroundings.⁷⁸

One of the dominant themes in Geddes' theory of the city was its emphasis on the inter-relatedness – and continuity – of environmental dynamics. First theoretically, Geddes argued all aspects of the environment must receive attention, and solutions must take account of diverse phenomena. Secondly regarding method, he believed the ensuing survey must be incorporated into civic life as completely as the factors it attempted to understand. A study of appropriate depth would cover not only the city – shaped by the works of man – but also the larger geographical region whose characteristics had prescribed the extent and direction of an area's human

⁷⁷ Helen Meller, 'Understanding the European City Around 1900: The Contribution of Patrick Geddes', in *The City After Patrick Geddes*, eds. Volker Welter and James Lawson (Oxford: P. Lang, 2000), 35.

⁷⁸ See Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1949), 118-144.

development. It was in this context that Geddes elaborated his famous triad: place, work, folk. He derived this formulation from the similar *lieu, travail, famille*, used by the French sociologist Frédéric Le Play to help conceptualise the necessary impact an environment had on society, acknowledging, in turn, the capacity of humans actively to alter their natural surroundings.⁷⁹ Le Play elaborated this basic insight in order to reach an identification of social settlements, organised into a network whose structure was naturally dependent on the ability of humans to work. Thus he arranged human life according to certain ‘primary occupations’, engendering in Geddes’ intellectual scheme another concept: the ‘valley section’ (Figure 2.4).⁸⁰

The valley section served to codify Geddes’ holistic perspective.⁸¹ He represented the concept with a longitudinal section through an imagined region extending from the hills, and down their wooded slopes, over the plains and onwards to the sea. This schematic map provided a template onto which he could trace the ideal forms of human labour and settlement. Thus, beneath each new geographical feature Geddes accordingly marked a different tool, each signifying a different type of work arising inevitably from the contingencies of the immediate environment, and defining a different mode of existence. Although the city at the valley region’s core was a slightly different quantity, its intensification of social relations tending to obscure easy categorisation, Geddes nevertheless demonstrated how many of its institutions evolved as a result of the surrounding environment.⁸² As a result, he argued, through the valley section ‘[w]e can discover that the kind of place and the kind of work done in it deeply determine the ways and the institutions of its people’.⁸³

This observation was central to the survey, which really constituted an attempt to convert the unreal, schematic model of the valley section into a living image of an

⁷⁹ Welter, *Biopolis*, 11-12.

⁸⁰ Sofia G. Leonard, ‘The context and legacy of Patrick Geddes in Europe’, in *The City After Patrick Geddes*, eds. Volker Welter and James Lawson (Oxford: P. Lang, 2000), 71-72.

⁸¹ An account of the valley section by Geddes can be found in the introduction to the 1949 edition of *Cities in Evolution*, complete with a description of each of the ‘primary occupations’, see Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, introduction to *Cities in Evolution*, by Patrick Geddes (London: Williams and Norgate, 1949), xv-xxviii. Scholarly treatments of the concept, which is rich in symbolic elaboration, can be found in Meller, *Patrick Geddes*, 40-41; Welter, *Biopolis*, 60-66.

⁸² Welter, *Biopolis*, 65.

⁸³ Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, introduction to *Cities in Evolution*, by Patrick Geddes (London: Williams and Norgate, 1949), xviii.

actual region. Such a study would, firstly, see the citizenry ‘become at home in [their] region’, but more importantly, this identification with the present would bring a corresponding sense of the emerging future: that is, it would lead to a plan of action.⁸⁴ Such a project involved a commitment to inter-disciplinarity: following from Geddes’ holistic approach, a comprehensive reading of the factors affecting society would require a team worthy of the task. Its members had to be capable of tackling the range of problems that would meet the surveyor as he or she set about planning at the regional scale assumed by the valley section. One of the great innovations of that concept was the extension of the concerns of the survey beyond the limits of a city, which had traditionally been the focus of urban designers’ attention. By embracing the wider countryside, the valley section also dissolved the division between town and country, so that the ‘city-region’ emerged, formed from a collection of settlements that were continuous rather than opposed, differing in degree of social intensity but not in kind.⁸⁵ Such a co-ordinated conception would, in Geddes’ terminology, grant a ‘synoptic vision’: a universal perspective onto the environment.⁸⁶ By this means, he said, ‘our dispersive and unrelated specialisms can be co-ordinated towards a synthetic vision and a unified evolutionary understanding, region by region. Similarly our multifarious division of labour can thus be harmonised and orchestrated towards the common weal’.⁸⁷

The notion of a ‘synoptic vision’ betrays Geddes’ taste for biological analogies, and demonstrates a faith in the supposed objectivity of vision. Indeed, Geddes’ philosophy is infused with references to visibility.⁸⁸ His son, Arthur Geddes, once described him as an ‘essentially eye-minded [person] ... a visual not an audative [*sic*]’.⁸⁹ The valley section, for instance, represents one of many diagrammatic aids to conceiving the civic and regional environment (Figure 2.4). Such diagrams and ‘thinking machines’ schematised complex processes: their elements, once disposed

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, xxvi.

⁸⁵ The concept of the city-region appears in Geddes, *Cities in Evolution*, 12-15.

⁸⁶ Geddes, *Cities in Evolution*, 114-116.

⁸⁷ Geddes, quoted in Tyrwhitt, introduction to *Cities in Evolution*, xxvii.

⁸⁸ Fraser MacDonald provides a useful account of the predominantly ‘bodily’ orientation of Geddes’ conception of vision, see Fraser MacDonald, ‘Technician of Light: Patrick Geddes and the Optic of Geography’, in *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds: Geography and the Humanities*, eds. Stephen Daniels et al. (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁸⁹ Arthur Geddes, quoted in *Ibid*, 275.

in spatial or temporal succession, immediately became legible and afforded ready solutions.⁹⁰ A similar example occurs in the idea of a ‘synoptic vision’, in its evocation of the total and multi-disciplinary outlook required of the surveyor in his or her investigations. But the suggestions embodied in the word ‘vision’ served to collapse the myriad complications involved in the process of empirical perception into a monolithic and all-encompassing sight. Geddes’ attention to the value of looking received further elaboration through the existence of the Outlook Tower, a centre devoted to the practice of the survey, which served as ‘an Index-Museum to the World’. From its lofty site beside the approach to Edinburgh Castle, the tower granted both a mediated vision – through its camera obscura – and a natural prospect from the external viewing gallery.⁹¹ Thus Geddes envisaged the visitor to the Outlook Tower undertaking a perceptual synthesis; his or her study took in each aspect of the geographical landscape, and brought it under the scrutiny of all the sciences. It enshrined the identity between looking and analysing, an analogy masking a fundamental incongruity. Whereas the former indicates an absolute perception, at least when configured in the form of a ‘synoptic vision’, the process of analysis can never be detached, nor free from selectivity.⁹² Ultimately, the omniscient associations embodied in the term provided nothing more than a conceptual model to elevate an inconveniently human process.

Here, we are reminded of the tension apparent in the MARS Plan, which advised the ‘imaginative and unprejudiced’ projection of a result out of the research process.⁹³ The pairing repeats the paradox implicit in Geddes’ ‘synoptic vision’: the exercise of a rationality that is universal and objective, but simultaneously prefaced on the projection of a gaze that is selective and necessarily imaginative. To this end,

⁹⁰ On the origins of the ‘thinking machines’, see Fraser MacDonald, ‘Technician of Light: Patrick Geddes and the Optic of Geography’, in *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds: Geography and the Humanities*, eds. Stephen Daniels et al. (London: Routledge, 2011), 275-277.

⁹¹ David Matless has illustrated the role of the camera obscura in the Geddesian philosophy for its ‘aesthetic definition’ and ‘directness of vision’, see David Matless, ‘Regional surveys and local knowledges: The geographical imagination in Britain, 1918-39’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 17, no. 4 (1992), 465.

⁹² Michiel Dehaene, ‘Surveying and Comprehensive Planning: The “Co-Ordination of Knowledge” in the Wartime Plans of Patrick Abercrombie and Max Lock’, in *Man-Made Future: Planning, Education and Design in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Iain Boyd Whyte (London: Routledge, 2007), 39.

⁹³ Korn and Samuely, ‘A Master Plan for London’, 150.

Michiel Dehaene has explored in some depth the problematic mechanism inherent in the survey technique, noting its contradictory ‘shuttling movement between facts and values, observation and qualification’.⁹⁴ This comment lays bare the problem that underlay the application of the survey method as a means of justifying architectural or town planning solutions. While pretending to participate in an act of ‘discovery’, the surveyor was in fact exercising an entirely personal range of prejudices.

Despite the conflicts embedded in his terminology, however, Geddes did at least accept the need for a concrete visual apprehension of the city in his use of the Outlook Tower – in line with his belief in the role of the survey process within the community. In the production of the MARS Plan this process had become abstracted beyond recognition, its divorce from the life of the city summed up in an approach to vision that saw London rendered on a miniscule, diagrammatic scale that served only to emphasise the monotony of its organising schema. Indeed, the highly concrete and localised practices that Geddes proposed were converted by Korn and Samuely into the less considered imposition of a schematic cellular structure. While initial survey projects led by Geddes had been undertaken mainly by voluntary enthusiasts – amateur disciples with no relation to the planning profession – the subject of ‘Regionalism’ had soon become popular in the town planning movement, as well as among geographers and sociologists.⁹⁵ It promised to give planners a comprehensive mandate, because, in the terms defined by Geddes, to limit the bases of planning was to completely undermine its capacity effectively to deal with the environment. The town planning profession, repeatedly allotted the role of organising limited suburban developments, or defining minimum standards for housing, found in the Geddesian method a route to extended employment. What is more, the methodical, almost performative nature of the survey served also to legitimise the profession, by locating the planner’s scheme within a fabricated – but no less compelling – discursive context. Importantly also, the incorporation of ‘regional planning’ made the discipline attractive to government, the region delineating a unit that was easy both

⁹⁴ Dehaene, ‘Surveying and Comprehensive Planning’, 39.

⁹⁵ On the popularity of Regionalism in British planning see Gordon E. Cherry, *Cities and Plans: The Shaping of Urban Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Edward Arnold, 1988), 97-98; Meller, *Towns, Plans and Society*, 53-55.

to grasp and corresponded to existing administrative boundaries.⁹⁶ In 1920, the Board of Health was already performing investigations that represented the first instance of regional planning in Britain, albeit on an informal basis. In its task, the Board of Health was assisted by the influential planning consultant Patrick Abercrombie, among others. Abercrombie typified the next generation of Geddes followers, amplifying the comprehensive scope of the profession and binding it to the fabric of government.⁹⁷

Such professional advocates of Geddesian planning differed substantially in their methods from the earlier pioneers. While both invoked Geddes as an inspiration, the citizen survey and piecemeal activity that took place under the Scot's own watch was far removed from the reading of Geddesian theory offered by London's opinion-forming planners. Above all, the spiritual element receded. In spite of its existence in a good deal of Geddes' own thought, this spiritual instinct – the aspiration to transform not merely the environment, but also the self – had no place in the profession developing under the influence of educators across Britain. They advised a method whose striking scientism exposes a profession in search of authority, legitimacy, and a theory through which to lend order to its activity. This attraction to the structures and controls of a technocratically governed society was widespread within the profession – though naturally varying in extent according to the differing outlooks of individuals and institutions.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ultimately it was hoped that a reform of regional boundaries would take place, their new shape disregarding historic forces and instead developing out of a need for balance. Industrial regions and rural regions would cease to exist, and the population in all areas would be able to enjoy both the town and the country. On this view see Patrick Abercrombie, *Town and Country Planning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), 126-127; Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, 'Town Planning', in *Architects' Year Book*, ed. Jane Drew (London: Paul Elek, 1945), 11-13. The influential Barlow Report had recommended regional bodies to investigate relevant planning issues, see Nuffield College, *Britain's Town and Country Pattern*, 63-64.

⁹⁷ For Abercrombie's view on planning and the need for a national framework along regional lines, see Abercrombie, *Town and Country Planning*, 103-127. Michiel Dehaene discusses Abercrombie's role as that of 'a self-styled Geddesian': see Michiel Dehaene, 'A Conservative Framework for Regional Development: Patrick Abercrombie's Interwar Experiments in Regional Planning', *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 25, no. 2 (2005), 131-132.

⁹⁸ An example of the scientism of intellectual discourse at this time is given by Jules Lubbock's account of the conference of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, held in September 1941 and entitled *Science and World Order*. See Lubbock, '1947 and all that', 1-15. See, also, M. Hebbert, 'The daring experiment'; Calder provides an extended discussion on this rise, and wartime infiltration, of 'boffins', see Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-45* (London: Cape, 1969), 461-477.

One of the more extreme – though inevitably experimental – examples emerged in 1938 at the AA School, still among Britain’s most important educational institutions at the time.⁹⁹ Since this was a student project, unrestrained by the problems of practical realisation, the plan exhibits a purity and radicalism that illustrates the extreme end of the technocratic ideal. In this respect, it recalls the similarly speculative proposals of the MARS Plan. However, while Korn and Samuely’s scheme – still four years in the future – was assembled with relative haste and a lack of real co-ordination, the AA School’s project was a more organised affair, and gave a tantalising hint of how the new social order might function. It was at a national scale that the AA School’s conception was pitched, and the extreme instrumentalism of its methods can largely be attributed to the pressing problem of mass co-ordination. It is worth elaborating more fully on these events as an indication of how science-based planning might function.

A New Approach to Town Planning at the AA School¹⁰⁰

The radical procedures for planning that were to emerge in the AA School just before the Second World War were unprecedented. Above all, the School’s teachings were characterised by a persistent emphasis on the necessary collaboration of expert advisors, and an approach that rendered architectural design almost wholly subservient to the process of scientific investigation. Such methods received their most articulate expression in a thesis project known as ‘Town Plan’. Produced by a group of students at the School, ‘Town Plan’ here serves as an illustration of the

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity Before Reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2007), 182.

¹⁰⁰ This section excerpts material from the second chapter (‘A New Approach to Town Planning at the AA School’) of my MSc dissertation: see Matthew Latusek, ‘Discovering a “Synoptic Vision”’, 17-29.

intellectual motivations behind the comprehensive planning that would take place in the 1940s.¹⁰¹

The radical principles established at the School in the late-1930s could not have been more different from those that stood before. For until the 1930s both architectural and town planning education in Britain remained fairly traditional in its outlook, thus helping maintain the independent identities of the professions themselves. For instance, the Architectural Association School persevered with methods of instruction drawn from the pedagogical canon of the nineteenth century, an emphasis on a Beaux-Arts approach and the teaching of the orders among its longest-standing principles.¹⁰² Meanwhile, town planning remained a separate discipline whose credibility among architects was affected by legislation that limited its scope for positive intervention. Certainly, though, great progress was made in the first quarter of the century.¹⁰³ In 1909 William Lever formed the first Department of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool, and Patrick Abercrombie, who later held the departmental professorship, started the influential *Town Planning Review* soon after.¹⁰⁴ Yet strikingly, there remained a cleavage between the work of professional architects and town planners – put simply, the art of Architecture began where the still-developing town planning professionals had little provision to go. Further, architectural educators saw any planning work simply as an extension of their own concerns, so that an architect’s training already treated larger-scale physical design.

¹⁰¹ On this period at the AA School and the Town Plan project, see Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain*, 179-198; Elizabeth Darling, “‘Into the world of conscious expression’: Modernist revolutionaries at the Architectural Association, 1933-1939”, in *Man-Made Future: Planning, Education and Design in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Iain Boyd Whyte, (London: Routledge, 2007): 157-173; Mary O. Ashton, “‘Tomorrow Town:’ Patrick Geddes, Walter Gropius, and Le Corbusier”, in *The City After Patrick Geddes*, eds. Volker Welter and James Lawson (Oxford: P. Lang, 2000), 191-209. Andrew Saint, *Towards a Social Architecture: The Role of School-Building in Post-War England* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987), 2-5. The Students themselves published an account of the project: see R. Cotterell Butler, ‘AA School: Co-operative Thesis – Unit 15: Design for a Town’, *Architectural Association Journal* 54, no. 619 (1938): 89-90.

¹⁰² Elizabeth Darling, “‘Into the world of conscious expression’”, 160.

¹⁰³ See Cherry, *Town Planning in Britain since 1900*, 66-86.

¹⁰⁴ Gordon E. Cherry, *The Evolution of British Town Planning: A History of Town Planning in the United Kingdom during the 20th Century and of the Royal Town Planning Institute, 1914-74* (Leighton Buzzard: Leonard Hill, 1974), 54; Helen Meller, *Towns, Plans and Society in Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 48-50.

However, a new spirit began to emerge in Britain in the interwar years, preceded by events elsewhere in Europe. The modern movement, which had persistently made an impression on design and practice in both disciplines, found a following. Elizabeth Darling has demonstrated how organisations such as the MARS Group – whose own research-based Master Plan for London has already been discussed – encouraged a discursive environment more welcoming than that of the past to the institutionally alien principles of modernism.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the emergence of modern practices like Tecton in 1932, or the activist MARS Group a year after, came to signal the existence of a more open architectural establishment, willing at least to test new approaches to physical design.¹⁰⁶ Appropriately, the MARS Group was formed the same year that the seeds of a revolution in teaching methods were planted at the AA School, with the arrival as Assistant Director of Eric Anthony Ambrose Rowse.¹⁰⁷ Although a rather obscure figure in the history of British town planning, Rowse had a sense of ambition that belied his minority status, projecting a far-reaching vision of the discipline’s potential. Striving to overcome the organisational problems posed by large-scale planning, he elaborated a series of extraordinarily rich solutions to direct the systematic co-ordination of activity. Therefore, despite achieving little in terms of practical results, Rowse’s work provides a revealing case study of the attempts by a young discipline to furnish a compelling justification for their authority.

He arrived at the AA, since the School had recently come to accept the need to treat town planning and architecture as individual, professional fields. Consequently, they appointed an expert in the former in order to ease the transition to a new approach.¹⁰⁸ In this deferral to the authority of expertise, we encounter a recurrent theme of this chapter: an issue that would have important ramifications for the practice of planning. On the surface, hiring Rowse seems a curious choice, certainly considering

¹⁰⁵ Darling, *Re-forming Britain*. For other accounts of the rise of modernism in Britain, see John R. Gold, *The Experience of Modernism: Modern Architects and the Future City, 1928-1953* (London: E & FN Spon, 1997); Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: outledge, 2002), 25-36.

¹⁰⁶ Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, 110-113.

¹⁰⁷ For an account of Rowse’s time at the AA, see ‘The AA Story’, *Focus* 3 (1939): 79-111; Darling, “‘Into the world of conscious expression’”; Andrew Saint, *Towards a Social Architecture: The Role of School-Building in Post-War England* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987), 2-3.

¹⁰⁸ Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, ‘SPRND: A Short Account its History; Aims and Objectives and Proposals for its Future Development’, May 1952, Royal Institute of British Architects Archive (RIBA), Jaqueline Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\6\2.

the upheavals he would soon bring to the School. But he was presumably chosen for his acquaintance with town planning education, having started the first Department of Civic Design in Scotland in 1932, while teaching at the Edinburgh College of Art.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, he gave little immediate indication of a radical, reforming agenda, and – under the supervision of the long-serving School head Howard Robertson – he maintained a deferential approach. But the complexion of Rowse’s authority changed in 1935 as he and the AA secretary, Francis Rowland Yerbury, set up the School of Planning and Research for National Development (SPRND) – a new and separate school that received funding from the AA and offered instruction only in physical planning. It was not under his control alone, however, for although Rowse assumed the role of Principal, a large Advisory Board composed of experts in many fields guided the SPRND’s direction.¹¹⁰ Their input supplemented the new approach that Rowse encouraged in the School, by providing inter-disciplinary expertise to complement his eclectic curriculum. In his plea for the collaboration of specialised research, Rowse’s background in Geddesian civics becomes clear; coming from Edinburgh, he effectively transplanted the ideals of his compatriot into the heart of British town planning education.

But, despite sharing Geddes’ view with regard to the content of his method, Rowse came to different conclusions; or rather, he was willing to amplify Geddes’ insights to far more radical ends than his peers. While Abercrombie remained pragmatic, always seeking to negotiate the existing departments of British politics, Rowse felt that the implications of regional planning required a root-and-branch redefinition of planning procedures.¹¹¹ The great town planning reformers of the interwar years adapted their activity to circumstance. However, Rowse worked with an eye on the future, anticipating what he felt must happen, not what government was likely to accommodate. While the belief that planning rested on interdisciplinary concerns was widely recognised by the 1930s among planners inspired by Geddes, Rowse was

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain*, 183-184; Ellen Shoshkes, ‘Jaqueline Tyrwhitt: A founding mother of modern urban design’, *Planning Perspectives* 21, no. 2 (2006), 181.

¹¹⁰ Tyrwhitt, ‘SPRND’.

¹¹¹ Dehaene, ‘A Conservative Framework’, 137.

intent on developing collaborative enterprise so far that he broke the bounds of traditional practice.

As noted, the primary tool of Geddes' Regionalism was the survey, whose content encompassed all factors – whether physical or social – with a bearing on human life. Rowse's Advisory Board embodied the synoptic approach at the SPRND, underscoring his conviction that the School would 'succeed in welding the work of the Engineer, the Surveyor, the Architect and the local Government Official with that of the Economist, the Sociologist and the politician into that of the planner'.¹¹² While the enlistment of a multiplicity of experts to the Board and staff of the School of Planning was tolerated by the AA, the resignation of Robertson from the Architecture School in December 1935 tested its willingness to leave Rowse alone.¹¹³ Of course, the planning team required the co-operation of architects just as much as town planners; and the architect's education needed to prepare him or her for the shared task ahead.

Consequently, taking temporary charge of the AA School, Rowse immediately began a process of restructuring. In the spring term of 1936 he installed the 'unit system', which broke up the students into small groups, each supervised by a different tutor. Rather than five classes (with one for each year) there were now fifteen 'units', with students advancing every term to a new project, providing, in the students' own words, a 'new and more analytical approach to architecture'.¹¹⁴ After briefly dissenting, the students soon saw the system's advantages: their work received more attention and criticism, and problems could be attacked in greater detail. But, most importantly, new solutions began to emerge through the conduciveness of 'units' to teamwork and careful research, rather than prioritising the individual's original conception.¹¹⁵ The students' work consequently began to find a fresh orientation,

¹¹² E.A.A. Rowse, 'The Planning of a City', *Journal of the Town Planning Institute* 25, no. 5 (1939), 168.

¹¹³ 'The AA Story', 81-82.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹¹⁵ The political struggles within the AA School during this period are fascinating, though largely outside the scope of this paper. Summaries, covering the unit system and other reforms that Rowse brought to the AA School, can be found in, 'The AA Story'; Darling, "Into the world of conscious expression", 160-173.

with the pre-thesis and thesis projects of one group – designated as Unit 12 and Unit 15 in each case – exemplifying the revolution that Rowse had prompted.

The content of these assignments was in itself a departure from standard practice. Instead of tackling a single building, or an urban ensemble, the students assumed the design of a complete town for 50,000. The scheme was perfectly suited to demonstrating the comprehensive, scientific principles that Rowse stressed, and he clearly played a large part in its development, publishing several articles after the completion of the thesis plan.¹¹⁶ Also crucial was the input of the unit tutor, Cyril Sjöström (later Cyril Mardall), supervising the first project in 1937, and pursuing the second – more challenging and noteworthy – during the spring and summer terms of 1938. As a plan with utopian – though, in Rowse’s view, not unrealistic – ambitions, the outcome was naturally imagined on a grand scale. Rowse explained that the modern town must be understood as a ‘social organism’: a self-sufficient unit whose needs could be exactly, scientifically studied.¹¹⁷ The scope for such research was somewhat limited in Unit 12’s programme, since the students were allotted an ideal flat site, a blank canvas on which they could explore the form that the human settlement of the future would take (Figure 2.5). The result provided the template for the thesis design of the following year, which adapted its predecessor’s rectilinear features to a genuine location near the village of Faringdon (Figure 2.6).¹¹⁸

Although publicised as ‘Tomorrow Town’, Rowse stated his dislike for the name, perhaps uneasy at its intimation of fantasy (Figures 2.6 and 2.7). He instead preferred the conspicuously prosaic title of ‘Town Plan:’ an indication of the deadpan attitude assumed by its authors. Yet the vision of ‘Town Plan’ took it far beyond the standards of the time. Although produced by a group of 17 undergraduates, it constituted one of the most ambitious and considered of modernist urban schemes.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Rowse, ‘The Planning of a City’; E.A.A. Rowse, ‘Town Plan: The Unknown Towns’, *Focus* 1 (1938). While the students emphasised that the choice of the project was their own, the influence of Rowse’s ideas cannot be underestimated: Darling, “‘Into the world of conscious expression’”, 167.

¹¹⁷ Rowse, ‘Town Plan’, 17.

¹¹⁸ On the Unit 12 pre-thesis project, see Mary O. Ashton, “‘Tomorrow Town’”, 197; Darling, *Re-forming Britain*, 191-193.

¹¹⁹ An article in the AA Journal notes 17 students, see Butler, ‘AA School: Co-operative Thesis – Unit 15’, 89. But elsewhere only 13 are named: Ashton, “‘Tomorrow Town’”, 197. These students were

Of course, Le Corbusier's *Ville Contemporaine* and the *Ville Radieuse*, which so dominate the history of urban theory and utopianism, were well known to students at the time, as Mary Ashton has shown.¹²⁰ But whereas Le Corbusier adopted the role of master planner – the architect of the city – and negotiated a relatively narrow range of problems, the members of Unit 15 identified themselves instead as co-ordinators, directing an analysis of the site and the needs of its prospective inhabitants, and distilling the data to reach a plan. To cover the issues they split into two groups: one tackling town planning, the other investigating housing.¹²¹

From a town planning point of view, several problems assumed importance. Unlike the Corbusian emphasis on the adaptation of the city to the motor car, the provision of open space, and zonal organisation, 'Town Plan' began with nutrition. Doubtless here the students received their stimulus from Rowse's own anxieties at the time. Indeed, the problem of adequate provision of food became a lifelong preoccupation. Encounters with concerned demographers during the mid-1930s had led him to the belief that human life faced a crisis of access to sufficient food; he therefore incorporated into his planning philosophy the provision of a source of balanced nutrition, which would not only sustain life, but make it comfortable.¹²² Such a focus on 'optimum diets' illustrates Rowse's faith in the potential for the scientific management of humanity. He proposed that all of the material needs of society could be discovered through technical research, a view that was not entirely unconventional. In fact, thanks largely to a misinformed admiration of the Soviet State's achievements – which would grow even stronger during the war – it presented a popular administrative model among Western intellectuals, who only belatedly discovered that famine and not utopian order was bestowed on the masses by Stalin's scientist-technicians. A former student of Rowse's, Kenneth Watts, has

Elizabeth Chesterton, Peter L. Cocke, R.V. Crowe, D. Duncan, Anthony Pott, P.M. Thornton, John Wheeler, A.J. Brandt, R.L. Davies, D.S. Gladstone, J.C. de C. Henderson, Peter Saxl, and F.L. Sturrock.

¹²⁰ Ashton, "Tomorrow Town".

¹²¹ For accounts of 'Town Plan', see Ashton, "Tomorrow Town"; Darling, *Re-forming Britain*, 181-198; Darling, "Into the world of conscious expression"; Butler, 'AA School: Co-operative Thesis – Unit 15'; Rowse, 'The Planning of a City', 169-170.

¹²² In the 1960s and 1970s Rowse sought to find a solution to an impending population catastrophe, which he feared would consume the third world. See Kenneth Watts, *Outwards from Home: A Planner's Odyssey* (Lewes: Book Guild, 1997), 55-56.

written of this influence, highlighting the popularity of such studies as the Webbs' *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* – its pages ordaining 'the expert as the new priestly class'.¹²³

Accordingly, the 'Town Plan' team began with a soil survey carried out by scientists at the University of Reading, using the results to identify fertile zones that must be free of buildings.¹²⁴ A desire for self-sufficiency lay behind this policy: the town would provide the majority of its own food, only importing those foodstuffs disqualified after investigation of the locality. Therefore, quite apart from laying down the grand lines of the plan, the primary concern lay in the *prohibition* of development: building remained in the background to make room for 'preventative medicine, agriculture and economics. The right diet, the right soil, the right balanced market'.¹²⁵ Next, 'Tomorrow Town' would grant employment to its residents as practicably as it did their food. The workplace would be sufficiently nearby that nobody would have to walk for more than half an hour – generally located either in the civic centre, or the multi-industry zone lying on the far side of a green belt and major arterial road. The choice of industries would not be made lightly: consultation indicating those most suitable to the area, and helping determine their organisation along scientific lines. It consequently followed that the provision of transportation must be reconciled with the necessities of economics, while housing must also be incorporated within the street pattern, and an accessible civic centre placed at the head of the town. The latter hinted at the 'spiritual service' required of a settlement by its citizens.¹²⁶ Although the methods of scientific management were systematic, Rowse acknowledged that more profound human needs existed than could be rendered through optimum provision of services. Therefore houses were arranged in a system of ever enlarging neighbourhoods to generate a sense of community absent in the industrial city. Starting with the large community of 2,000, the town next divided into the 'acquaintance group' of a couple of hundred, ending in a 'friendship group' of four to five families – a number deemed appropriate by sociologists and

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁴ Rowse, 'The Planning of a City', 169.

¹²⁵ Rowse, 'Town Plan', 18

¹²⁶ Rowse, 'The Planning of a City', 170.

psychologists.¹²⁷ The resulting pattern established what Rowse described as a ‘system of villages’, each one bounded by green space, creating peaceful isolated communities, and containing schools – their compact size validated by the research of educational psychologists – and other civic buildings.¹²⁸

As a whole the scheme was crafted carefully onto its sloping site, effecting a necessary distortion of the Unit 12 plan (Figure 2.5). Such contextualism also saw local historical monuments preserved, as well as the incorporation of the nearby village of Faringdon into the outer fabric of the town. Flat slabs, terraces, and detached dwellings followed contours, dropping away from the civic centre in loose rings, and affording views onto the surrounding countryside. Meanwhile, their densities were carefully calculated, with the choice of mixed dwelling types a radical departure from suburban tradition: again presaging the tastes of the post-war era.¹²⁹ Sjöström’s interest in prefabrication was also apparent, as Unit 15 devised standardised, easily assembled housing units, further embellishing the precision of a settlement whose form and production had been meticulously managed.

Process was all important in ‘Town Plan’. In order to accommodate so many different fields of knowledge, the students switched repeatedly between individual research and group consultation. Rowse highlighted the delay before treating the physical fabric as one of the great virtues of the project: first the assortment of experts would provide input; and only when furnished with the relevant data could the physical designers collaborate with the lawyer-administrator in settling a pattern.¹³⁰ At the outset the students defined the shape the plan would take, before dividing to research a particular problem, each one the concern of an individual or small group. Next, they pooled all of their data and discussed together the bearing it would have on the plan. Finally, having collectively confirmed every decision, the students divided again to produce drawings, delivering a prodigious degree of detail in a minutely-considered scheme.¹³¹

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 169-170.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹²⁹ Darling, *Re-forming Britain*, 194-195; Ashton, “‘Tomorrow Town’”, 206-208.

¹³⁰ Rowse, ‘The Planning of a City’, 169.

¹³¹ Butler, ‘AA School: Co-operative Thesis – Unit 15’, 89.

Of course, much of the interest of 'Town Plan' lay in its signalling of the future. Elizabeth Darling, noting its similarity to the New Towns, has remarked that the project – and others like it at the AA School and SPRND – served to prepare architects for their eventual roles as public servants undertaking extensive schemes.¹³² In its programme and many of its principles 'Town Plan' anticipated the requirements, as well as the emotional and intellectual climate, of the post-war world. However, it is interesting to consider the relative insignificance of architectural design in the plan. Although the students applied innovative methods of prefabrication and gave the ensemble a clean, Corbusian identity, it is clear that the modern process of scientific research preceded a rather unsystematic exercise in old-fashioned draughtsmanship (Figure 2.7). The facades of the dwellings are monotonous, inevitably so, given the emphasis on the application of comprehensive principle. Indeed, it is questionable that Rowse and his students would have welcomed anything but a repetitive order of design. While it was possible to consult sociologists on the subjects of soil composition and nutrition, there was – besides the calculation of optimum population densities – little consideration of the sociological resonances that architectural form might exercise. Instead, the Unit 15 students pursued an entirely arbitrary aesthetic of abstraction. The standardised nature of the buildings' construction was raised to an aesthetic principle, a narrative basis to justify the preference for the architectural mode evolved in Europe since the 1920s. It therefore becomes apparent that the elevation of empirical process brought a corresponding poverty in the artistic articulation of the built environment in 'Town Plan'.

As a technological utopia, the highly rationalised process of research and co-ordinated realisation is the most symbolically potent aspect of the project. Rowse and his students located their core justification in having undertaken a lengthy process of scientific analysis, as a result, the architectural expression of 'Town Plan' was made almost wholly subordinate to that process. In this sense, architecture is almost an afterthought, and even then it is conceived in terms of a fetishisation of absolute

¹³² Darling, *Re-forming Britain*, 182; 194.

efficiency, optimisation, and co-ordination, which gives rise to the use of prefabricated units, mechanised construction, and a rather clinical – and certainly very oppressive – visual order. In short, these are all signifiers of the abstract process of research that preceded the creation of the physical plan itself, as well as highly co-ordinated enterprise anticipated for its realisation. Meanwhile, the imagined processes of concrete habitation are ignored – rendered undesirable, due to their conceptual messiness and their dissociation from the undertaking of research. As we saw, this concreteness was something that Geddes had emphasised strongly; however, it simply did not complement the rehearsal of a rhetoric of scientism.

We see, in these limitations, the relative inarticulacy of architectural gestures when generated from this type of understanding. It is certainly not the case that such buildings are void of any symbolic, representational, or didactic content, but, nevertheless, their primary reference remains fixed on the nature of the process that saw them conceived, a process whose emphasis on the value of efficiency actively discourages the generation of a rich and generous architectural language. In ‘Town Plan’, the medium of conception and realisation represents practically their entire message. Additionally, besides this limitation of physical design there is another issue. The schemes are, ultimately, not architectural but technocratic: they project the existence of a state wholly reorganised economically, politically, socially. In essence, the central – and necessarily limiting – theme of these utopias is the image of the political and social consensus that would see them implemented: they present the narrative of such a consensus, but not necessarily the tools by which it might be realised.

Nevertheless, ‘Town Plan’ enjoyed considerable publicity, notably receiving a generous write-up from John Summerson upon its exhibition at the AA School’s end of year show in 1938. During World War II its reputation increased still further, especially after the MARS Groups used the model of ‘Town Plan’ in the ‘Coventry of Tomorrow’ exhibition of 1940, in an attempt to promote the value of scientific planning.¹³³ Often in narratives of the Unit 15 thesis scheme the story ends in

¹³³ Ashton, “‘Tomorrow Town’”, 208.

Coventry, with the students' model imparting upon the city's inhabitants a prospect onto the future, whose arrival would be guaranteed by the Blitz the following year. Even before the arrival of war, events had reached a climax at the AA School, and then came to an apparent conclusion. Rowse had been subordinated to the Beaux-Arts traditionalist H.S. Goodhart-Rendell almost immediately after the arrival of the unit system. The clash of their personalities and methods in the subsequent two years, exemplified the striving of the new scientific approach against the institutional methods of the past: of course it was the former that finally emerged triumphant from the wreckage of the war.¹³⁴ In the short term, however, the AA forced Rowse to step aside; replaced in May 1938, he left the students to complete the revolution he had started.¹³⁵

'The Delays and Frustrations of Over-Elaboration': The 'Composite Mind' as an Administrative Model¹³⁶

In its emphasis on the satisfaction of 'optimum' needs as the key to human happiness, 'Town Plan' resulted from a virtual cult of science, which infused planning theory in the 1930s and 1940s. While, admittedly, making provision for the dubious concept of 'community', it is hard to deny that its solution to the human condition tended to elevate city-making – and the city makers – too far from the experience of city-dwelling. As we have seen, much of the motivation for this scientism came from lobbyists outside the town planning movement, figures who were not necessarily concerned with the physical environment but with the planning of society more generally. They believed that a new order could be realised through the sort of rationalised social administration that formed the foundation of 'Town Plan'. The eugenic agenda exhibited here relied on a range of disciplines, among which physical design was in attendance. But insecurities remained on how to co-

¹³⁴ 'The AA Story', 85-99.

¹³⁵ Darling, *Re-forming Britain*, 188-189.

¹³⁶ This section excerpts material from the third chapter ('The delays and frustrations of over-elaboration': The 'composite mind' as an administrative model) of my MSc thesis, see Matthew Latusek, 'Discovering a "Synoptic Vision"', 30-49.

ordinate the required expertise – and justify the expert’s authority. Due to their remote position, the designers of ‘Town Plan’ did not need fully to address this problem. They had little choice but to do the majority of the work, and, in spite of their consultation with universities or research into expert recommendations, their methods could never match the labour required of a full-scale national planning scheme. However, Rowse was soon to presume a mandate that presented an entirely different prospect, and he set about the elaboration of a convincing model for collective planning.

After having left the AA School, he continued to maintain the SPRND, which in 1938 also broke away from the AA and came under the full control of its Advisory Board, appealing for funding independently.¹³⁷ Soon the war would arrive, impeding the activity of students and all but closing the School; still, it would seem at this point that Rowse turned his attention to the practical problem of planning.¹³⁸ The focus of his interest was South Wales, an area that had for over a decade suffered from economic stagnation and severe unemployment, and had long been highlighted as a possible test case for centralised reconstruction. In early 1940, stuck in the Reserve and awaiting the call-up, he and several others unfit for enlistment were granted a space in Francis Yerbury’s Building Centre on Bond Street.¹³⁹ Among these castaways were Peter Cocke, Anthony Pott, and Peter Saxl: all of whom had been members of Unit 15. With the additional presence of Michael Powers, another recent AA graduate, it transpired that Rowse commanded all of the co-ordinating expertise that his methods required.¹⁴⁰ Though still without an institutional vehicle,

¹³⁷ On the newly independent SPRND, see Tyrwhitt, ‘SPRND: A Short Account its History’.

¹³⁸ Comments on the School’s virtual closure in 1939 can be found at Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction, ‘All About Us’, *Information Bulletin: Sheet 182* (London: APRR, 1948); also Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, ‘Notes on School of Planning, featuring an account of the founding of the APRR’, May 1953, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\38\2\4. However, the School continued to operate into 1940 in a heavily reduced form, run only by Rowse and his secretary F.J. Pinder Davis out of Mountfield Park Farm, Sussex: Rowse notes the new headquarters in a letter to Tyrwhitt, 8 September 1939, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\7. Rowse’s correspondence makes note of the interruption of the School’s work on South Wales: Rowse to Cyril Sjöström, 11 July 1940, University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections (CRC), Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 5.

¹³⁹ On Yerbury’s invitation, see Tyrwhitt, ‘Notes on School of Planning’; Cox et al., ‘The Brynmawr Rubber Factory’, 4.

¹⁴⁰ The personnel at the Building Centre are noted in part by Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, subsequent Director of the APRR, and also by correspondence to be elaborated later, see Tyrwhitt, ‘Notes on School of Planning’.

he was soon able to acquire the funding necessary to resume his personal planning mission. A revival of the SPRND was impossible given the national situation, but a different organisation did emerge, with Rowse as its Director: the Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction (APRR).¹⁴¹ This new group aimed to pursue the same concerns as its predecessor, but now with a fuller emphasis on consultation, research, and practical planning.¹⁴²

The APRR later developed a pronounced position as an independent body for research and the dissemination of information to regional planning bodies, and it largely followed this agenda during its first year. There is little doubt, however, that Rowse located his research team in a more pivotal position than it would later adopt among the agitators for post-war planning. Or rather: the planning mechanism that he envisaged managing the brave new world after the war, proposed a much closer adoption of the APRR into its functioning than would ultimately occur. Before his departure for the army in January 1941, Rowse took the opportunity fully to define this role. Using South Wales as a testing ground, he also began to assemble – at least on paper – the other component parts of his planning machine. These bodies each performed a task in a sequential process, but also combined to define an ideal of teamwork, ‘a possible means of overcoming the limitations of a single brain’.¹⁴³ To the whole Rowse gave the name the ‘composite mind’.

The history of the composite mind is obscure: it is a challenge even to define who originated the term. The difficulty arises from its frequent appearance in architectural discussions after the war, without reference to an originator. For instance, Walter Gropius used the term to illustrate the importance of overcoming the specialised knowledge of the sciences. For him, the composite mind remained the goal of architects, as a means of attaining a ‘total architecture’. Although alluding to the

¹⁴¹ Although the name Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction does not seem to have been adopted for some months (even in July 1940 Rowse was still discussing possible names), this paper will use the name for the whole period to maintain clarity. See Rowse to Sjöström, 11 July 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 5.

¹⁴² The APRR did still aim to teach, but rather than school based instruction any learning would now be done through practical involvement in reconstructive planning, see ‘Planning the New Britain’, *Architectural Design and Construction* 10, no. 9 (1940), 201.

¹⁴³ E.A.A. Rowse, quoted in Ashton, “‘Tomorrow Town’”, 195.

value of collaboration, Gropius's focus was the individual: the composite mind was an ideal of mental dexterity in the face of the scattering of specialisms in the machine age.¹⁴⁴ He had practised a form of architectural collaboration in a more modest sense, when he worked in partnership with Maxwell Fry in England before the Second World War. Although never truly sharing the work on an individual project, Fry and Gropius did nevertheless consult on certain issues in order to take advantage of their collective expertise, an approach that Fry described as a 'perfect collaboration'.¹⁴⁵

Closer to Rowse's conception was that of the structural engineer Ove Arup, for whom the composite mind represented a network of brains working as a team. Like Gropius, he lamented the pursuit of expertise through ever-narrowing disciplinary channels, resulting in a fractured body of knowledge; but Arup addressed differently the practical issue of negotiating the detailed aspects of a building programme. Recognising that the architect 'could not possibly, by himself, know about all the intricacies of modern technical developments which go into building ... [which] cannot be adequately surveyed by a single mind', he noted the consequent emergence of:

... the specialist or expert, and the usual problem arises how to create the organization, the "composite mind" so to speak, which can achieve a well-balanced synthesis from the wealth of available detail. This is, I suppose, one of the essential problems of our time.¹⁴⁶

Rowse, a man whose interest in demographics led him to prepare ominous forecasts for humanity, doubtless saw the composite mind in similarly grave terms. It is quite possible that Rowse himself authored the term: he later wrote that its development

¹⁴⁴ Gropius's comments here date from 1956, although he was addressing a problem he had raised in 1937: Walter Gropius, untitled article, *Architectural Record* 119, no. 4 (1956), 196.

¹⁴⁵ See Iain Jackson and Jessica Holland, *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew: Twentieth Century Architecture, Pioneer Modernism and the Tropics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 63. For a discussion of Gropius in the context of 'Town Plan', see Ashton, "Tomorrow Town", 195-197.

¹⁴⁶ See Peter Jones, *Ove Arup: Masterbuilder of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 94-95.

had begun in 1934 during his time at the AA School, and certainly by 1940 – as we will see – he had furnished a rich and idiosyncratic model.¹⁴⁷

His initial aim had been to embed collaborative practice into the educational establishment, with all of his work at the AA School promoting this ideal. The ‘unit system’ is one obvious example of building an instinct for group practice among architects, but the most important instance was the establishment of the SPRND, occurring just a year after the genesis of the composite mind. In 1939, Rowse had spoken of the relative ease of training architects capable of working as a team, for ‘all good building depends upon good teamwork’. Planning posed a far greater challenge, requiring ‘more than one brain to evolve a programme of sufficient comprehensiveness to prevent injustice and prejudice injuring innocent people’. Whereas architecture presented primarily a problem of physical building, planning also concerned society itself. The potential impact of such work meant it must therefore be freed from the mutual incomprehension of disciplinary specialisation, through the cultivation of what Rowse at this stage called the ‘collective brain’. Formed of ‘permanent officials, and ... laymen’, this body ‘should have passed through one phase of mutual experience, learnt a common vocabulary and come to an almost intuitive understanding of and respect for the other’s point of view’. The ‘mutual experience’ he planned to develop would have come from the SPRND, which would accommodate not only students but also more experienced experts traditionally considered too old for further education. After their time at the School these figures, from the variety of disciplines at work in ‘Town Plan’, would resemble ‘the lobes of the “collective brain,”’ ready to engage with the real project of reconstruction.¹⁴⁸ Thus what Rowse ultimately aimed for was a systematic co-ordination of expertise, unified at the level of language and expression, as well as that of thought and action.

¹⁴⁷ This claim is drawn from a section treating the composite mind, found in a report whose references seem to date it to the mid-1960s: E.A.A. Rowse, ‘An analysis of the organisation of environmental development’, undated, CRC, Outlook Tower, Rowse Papers, folder labelled ‘World’. There are certainly references in earlier articles by Rowse to a ‘collective brain’, thus the final concept seems to have taken some time to fully come together: Rowse, ‘The Planning of a City’, 168-169.

¹⁴⁸ This passage is drawn from Rowse, ‘The Planning of a City’, 168. The article is formed of extracts of an address to the Birmingham and Five Counties Architectural Association.

The formation of the APRR and the scheme for South Wales afforded an opportunity for Rowse to test his concept with a legitimate expectation of success. Identifying the period after the war as key to the reconstruction of South Wales, Rowse set to work organising the machinery that would prepare the ground before the arrival of peace.¹⁴⁹ Essentially the composite mind consisted of four parts, two of which were ‘advisory or panelising’, the other two ‘executive or canalising’.¹⁵⁰ The whole he described through a minutely detailed analogy to the human brain, whose natural command of the body would be replicated in the organically co-operating teams of administrators.¹⁵¹ Perhaps its most important function came through the Welsh Regional Planning Board, a body of local experts divided into the fields of food, homes, and work. Their judgements would adapt any proposals to the Welsh context, performing the central intellectual role of the cerebral cortex in the composite mind.¹⁵² The thalamus, passing information on to the cerebral cortex, was represented by former Advisory Board of the SPRND, now the APRR’s Advisory Council. Together the two groups would offer critical comment on the proposals forwarded by their two partners, which were composed of planning technicians. First, an Executive Committee would be formed, under a chairman chosen by the Ministry of Health Planning Department – the national planning force in Britain at

¹⁴⁹ Rowse to Tyrwhitt, 20 April 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 5; Rowse wrote to M.E. Taylor (Planning Officer for East Monmouthshire Joint Planning Committee) noting that the work in South Wales was ‘a task of great importance after the war’: Rowse to M.E. Taylor, 22 August 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4.

¹⁵⁰ Rowse to Peter Scott, 28 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

¹⁵¹ The description that follows is drawn from two letters that Rowse wrote in September 1940, when the momentum behind the scheme appears to have been most fierce. Much of the text is duplicated in the second letter, but each frames the description differently: Rowse to Maitland Radford, 12 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4; Rowse to Scott, 28 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6. Additional detail is provided by a third letter: Rowse to Elizabeth Chesterton, 28 October 1940, CRC, Outlook Tower uncatalogued archive, box labelled ‘APRR – Reports for Lord Justice Scott Committee 1940-46’, folder ‘Tyrwhitt Correspondence 1942’.

¹⁵² The precise form of the composite mind is confused by the conflicting descriptions that Rowse gave during 1940. Although in September he gave the account upon which this paper concentrates, the following month he described a system with a slightly altered definition. It took the general form of a tripartite ‘Welsh Planning Board’. The three parts were: the ‘Advisory Body, or to use my term composite mind, made up of experts drawn from all walks of Welsh life’; the ‘Executive Section’; and the ‘Research and planning personnel’ of the APRR. He added: ‘Behind this organisation stands our own Advisory Council’. Here then, the general form is the same but certain parts are emphasised and, most notably, the composite mind is reduced to cover only the group of local experts. The reason for this change is unclear, possibly Rowse moderated his ideas in the light of obstacles; but also, the context of the letter suggests that he may have been attempting to improve the coherence of the regional planning board, for establishment in other areas of Britain: Rowse to Chesterton, 28 October 1940, CRC, Outlook Tower uncatalogued archive, ‘APRR – Reports for Lord Justice Scott Committee 1940-46’, ‘Tyrwhitt Correspondence 1942’.

the time. The Committee, containing Local Authority Planning Officers, Engineers, and others, would use its expertise to direct the workers in the task of reconstruction. Sitting below the decision-making ‘lobes’ of the composite mind and controlling the ‘muscles’ of the social body, the Executive Committee thus fulfilled the role of the cerebellum, providing the momentum required to force proposals through.¹⁵³ It was joined finally by the APRR itself – the medulla oblongata in Rowse’s terminology – which would perform similar ‘motor’ functions, though with a minimal statutory jurisdiction.

Viewed as a whole, the composite mind model presents a dizzying prospect. In outlining such a complex network of panels, Rowse hoped to ensure that any planning proposals would be watertight in a national context, yet sensitive to local conditions. Of course, the Welsh Regional Planning Board would provide the nuance, through its membership of various local experts. Meanwhile, the composite mind also supplied the reinforcement of expertise drawn from across the nation. In spite of its ambition, Rowse insisted that such a planning machinery was workable, and must oppose the ‘beaurocratic technique of control, abortive in its inhuman narrowness’.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, his letters repeatedly emphasise the need for the composite mind to be flexible, its personnel gathering slowly in response to each new obstacle, their intuitive understanding evolving through engagement in the process of planning.¹⁵⁵

As an example of how this might occur, Rowse suggested the natural starting point of dietary provision, which would inexorably draw in other fields.¹⁵⁶ He had of course initiated the ‘Town Plan’ project in the same way. On that occasion the students of Unit 15 had mainly sourced their data from elsewhere with little outside

¹⁵³ A brief article on the APRR’s work in Wales, dating from September 1940, actually lists the ‘strong Executive Council’ as part of the APRR, with the ‘distinguished group of experts [of the] . . . Advisory Council’. It is therefore likely that if the Executive section was part of the Association it nevertheless exercised similar autonomy to the Advisory Council. See ‘Planning the New Britain’, 201.

¹⁵⁴ Rowse to Scott, 28 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, Rowse to Anthony Pott, 13 August 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4; Rowse to Scott, 5 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

¹⁵⁶ Rowse suggested that the first aspects to be drawn in would be education, sociology, and industry: Rowse to Scott, 2 October 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

input, but in the composite mind Rowse anticipated a full framework of consultants. First, the APRR technicians with the relevant expertise would determine ‘optimum basic diets’, with the aid of recommendations from the British Medical Association and the Committee Against Malnutrition. Their general conclusions would receive criticism from the Association’s Advisory Council of 150 experts, figures who, Rowse claimed, would represent a ‘cross-section of the nation’.¹⁵⁷ A fascinating exercise in democratic consultation, the Advisory Council contained an array of professionals. Among its members were architects and planners – for example, Edwin Lutyens, Giles Gilbert Scott, and Ove Arup – as well as industrialists, health experts, farmers, and geographers. However, it also aimed to include unexpected and often unrepresented voices, both male and female, and even accommodated an actress, a postman, an ‘East End Householder’, and a ‘Coalminer’s wife’.¹⁵⁸

At the next stage, the moderated proposals would reach the Welsh Regional Planning Board, coming under the scrutiny of experts who could adapt them to the local situation. Having by this point achieved a policy on paper the Executive Committee would then take charge of readying the measures for practical implementation using their technical knowledge. But still the dietary proposals remained undercooked. The APRR workers would take on the laborious task of finalising their details, before the Committee officials could take a coherent plan to parliament for statutory implementation. Consequently, Rowse hoped to realise in the field of politics a system that had been only crudely worked out in ‘Town Plan’ two years before, effecting a ‘continual progression of thought from judgement to execution’.¹⁵⁹

An obvious aspect of this process is of course its complexity, but one is also struck by its fluidity. Rowse sought to lay out a planning mechanism that respected the complexity of factors with a bearing on planning, particularly those specifically local concerns that might not be recognised from London. Harbours apocalyptic fears of

¹⁵⁷ Rowse to Chesterton, 28 October 1940, CRC, Outlook Tower uncatalogued archive, ‘APRR – Reports for Lord Justice Scott Committee 1940-46’, ‘Tyrwhitt Correspondence 1942’.

¹⁵⁸ See Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction, *Broadsheet No. 1: General Information* (London: APRR, no date [revised 1941]), unnumbered pages, Devon Record Office (DRO), Dartington Archives, DWE.G.9.F.

¹⁵⁹ The account of the composite mind in action comes from a letter to Scott: Rowse to Scott, 28 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

social catastrophe in the wake of the transition from war, he suspected that anything less than a comprehensive and sensitive approach would be disastrous.¹⁶⁰ As a result, he preferred to suffer ‘the delays and frustrations of over-elaboration than to attempt to force an issue on a short term policy’.¹⁶¹ Additionally, and somewhat more practically, a flexible system would be much more adaptable to the ever-changing situation of wartime, and capable of moulding to the unknown shape of the post-war settlement.¹⁶² Here, the identity that Rowse outlined in the structure of the composite mind becomes most relevant. For, in conceiving a group of professionals who would overcome their intellectual heterogeneity, he raised the possibility of realising an autonomous, biological entity to govern social policy. It would be ‘superhuman yet broad and humane in character’: both inhuman by its multiplicity of brains, and yet also humanoid, as a result of these brains’ cerebrally inspired interaction.¹⁶³ Regardless of how such a body might be organised, it remained an analogue, a formal aggregate of the brain’s structure that masked what was essentially a series of experts and technicians. Naturally, Rowse’s discussions of the concept always emphasised the composite mind’s anthropomorphism, the similarity it would achieve to the functioning of the human brain – capable of performing a multiplicity of tasks, adaptable to change, capable of development. He even extended the analogy, pairing the satisfaction of society’s needs with the maintenance of bodily organs.¹⁶⁴ Ultimately then, the group of experts – whose engagement with the process of planning would, Rowse imagined, draw them to communicate intuitively – would be ready to tackle ‘the fundamental processes of the social body’.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Rowse to J.C. Ratcliffe, 19 March 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\7.

¹⁶¹ Rowse to Scott, 28 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

¹⁶² Rowse to Pott, 13 August 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4. Rowse wrote to Peter Scott, an associate in South Wales, that such flexibility represented ‘the soul of a plan, which must never for a moment be allowed to solidify; it must always lead us on. That is why I lay so much stress on the “composite mind” which should arise within a well-chosen planning personnel’: Rowse to Scott, 5 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

¹⁶³ Rowse to Scott, 28 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

¹⁶⁴ ‘It is not difficult to establish a relationship between the condition we would like people to enjoy – good food, happy hones [*sic*], adequate work and release – and the stomach, procreational organs, liver, kidneys, heart and lungs’: Rowse to Radford, 12 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4.

¹⁶⁵ Rowse to Scott, 28 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

Such a model was doubtless attractive, for it promised to arm the planning movement with a political and administrative leviathan possessing the subtlety required to meet every approaching challenge. But the terms in which the concept was framed posed significant ethical dilemmas: it accentuated the planners' importance, naturalised the role of planning, and promoted a tendency towards social positivism. In the first place, just as the stress on the comprehensiveness of planning solutions enhanced the planner's status, so he or she also received a boost from the composite mind. For the framework it conferred on social policy-making placed planners literally at the head of the process, in a position of power unthinkable during the inter-war years of government compromise. Second was a more significant implication: the composite mind gave the illusion that such social control was structurally determined. Not only did the piecemeal and ad hoc arrangement of experts gain an advantageous analogy to an organism, with its reassuring implications of functional integrity, but this suggestion additionally gave the stamp of legitimacy to the planner's authority. The biological accent Rowse gave to the concept manoeuvred his new planning machinery into a position of natural and unchallenged dominance where the experts' position above a corporate society would be as inevitable as the domain of the brain over the body. Thus an artificial network of boards, councils, and committees could seem organic and biological, acting instinctively and impartially to service society.

These two consequences – the claim to an authority that was both inflated and naturalised – were of course related, with each drawing its legitimacy from the other. And the constitutional dilemma they encompassed, unavoidably bound up in the problem of the co-ordination of expertise, preoccupied the planning movement as a whole. Indeed, while the composite mind as such was a fairly limited phenomenon – Rowse was certainly not at the core of policy-makers in wartime Britain, and significantly, his concept stayed on paper – it is remarkable how many significant figures he assembled. The assistance of George Pepler, Francis Yerbury, and Thomas Alwyn Lloyd provided a formidable expertise in town and country planning.¹⁶⁶ At the same time, Rowse's position on the 1940 Council, another multi-disciplinary body concerned with issues of reconstruction in a manner similar to the APRR,

¹⁶⁶ Rowse's correspondents also included figures like Frederick Osborn and Herbert J. Fleure, see CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1.

generated influential contacts elsewhere.¹⁶⁷ In fact, we have already seen that the notion of centralised, national planning did receive a good deal of official support through the reports of Barlow and Uthwatt. Of course, the model was far removed from Rowse's aspirations, and it is no surprise that the author of the composite mind was disappointed with the scope of the Barlow Report, lamenting that it was 'out of key with the immensity of the risks and opportunities which the war has forced us to face'.¹⁶⁸

The emergence of government backing for large-scale planning presents a fascinating context to Rowse's thought. However, he shared with several other figures an even more complementary perspective, and their collective desire to participate in the negotiation of post-war reconstruction indicates the extent of the consensus among the British intellectual 'elite'.¹⁶⁹ One of the period's most notable advocates of planning, and another correspondent of Rowse's, was Karl Mannheim. A Hungarian sociologist who had worked in Germany since the early-1920s, Mannheim was one of the wave of émigré intellectuals who crossed the Channel in 1933. Upon arrival he established a position at the London School of Economics and began to take an increasingly active interest in reconstruction, soon gaining praise from a similarly preoccupied constellation of British thinkers. His so-called 'third way', a course between the totalitarianism he had fled in Germany and the excessively individual values of the democratic West, advanced the benefits of social engineering and comprehensive planning. In Mannheim's view this policy would help to guide toward a peaceful post-war settlement a culture that was morally vacuous and fragmented by specialisation.¹⁷⁰ Most notably presented in *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, his proposals received illustration with frequent

¹⁶⁷ On the 1940 Council ('A Council to Promote the Planning of the Social Environment') see Hebbert, 'The daring experiment', 6-7. The Council could count among its members many significant figures, including Julian Huxley, Patrick Abercrombie, Sir Montague Barlow, Dudley Stamp, Lord Forrester, and Frederick Osborn. The full board is noted in a letter: E.A. Gutkind to J.R. Currie, 3 June 1941, DRO, Dartington Archives, T.AG.ECON.S5.

¹⁶⁸ Rowse to Scott, 28 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6, 53-58. He also, predictably, criticised its failure to identify food provision as one of its concerns. See Rowse to Scott, 5 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

¹⁶⁹ Lubbock, '1947 and all that', 2-6.

¹⁷⁰ See Geoff Whitty, 'Mannheim, Karl (1893-1947)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., last modified May 2007, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53147>, accessed 12 August 2011.

and controversial reference to Europe's totalitarian states.¹⁷¹ Implicit in such examples was the conviction that the new social order would enjoy benevolent supervision from an intelligentsia of elites, their role presenting a contemporary echo in the composite mind.¹⁷²

Mannheim's prescription of a cure for society, and Rowse's own solution, share a comparably dubious moral justification. Yet for each, the practice of elite governance represented a response to, not an aberration from, the development of democratic industrial society; and for Rowse in particular the public had to provide the main impetus for the passage into the future. Above all, the evolution of a directionless 'mass-society' concerned Mannheim, and he envisaged the function of his intelligentsia as disseminating cultural and moral leadership upon the masses. It was this interest in social psychology that Rowse drew attention to in his accounts of their meetings, but the Scot shied away from allusions to extremist politics.¹⁷³ In a letter to the doctor Maitland Radford he proposed 'a study of the subject, Collaboration as a basis of Social Psychology', adding that the composite mind might afford an occasion to 'start this ball rolling'.¹⁷⁴ Of course, the latter represented a distillation of the ideal of collaboration, indeed it would perfect collaborative practice to the point where the notion of traditional 'team work' dissolved, with Rowse dreaming of eventual extra-sensory communication of ideas at the top level. But in turn the public must be fully integrated into the planning process. After all, the composite mind

¹⁷¹ Karl Mannheim, *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction: Studies in Modern Social Structure* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1940).

¹⁷² An interesting example of the concern of British intellectuals for the problem of social order can be seen in the activity of the 'Moot'. This discussion group boasted the attendance of a range of significant figures living in Britain at the time, such as T.S. Eliot and Michael Polanyi. Mannheim was one of its dominating personalities and his views on the need for a ruling intelligentsia. Although useful in the circulation and elaboration of ideas, disagreements within the Moot, as well as the inhospitable post-war planning climate, meant that it had little long term influence. See Matthew Grimley, 'Moot (*act.* 1938–1947)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/67745>, accessed 12 August 2011.

It has even been suggested that the composite mind arose in response to Mannheim, the pair having first met in 1936: Watts, *Outwards from Home*, 56. Although Rowse's own comments undermine the possibility of such a singular inspiration for the concept, it is probable that Mannheim heavily informed the intellectual climate at the APRR, particularly in its first year.

¹⁷³ He put the question of how men and women could learn unselfishness to Mannheim on one occasion: Rowse to Frederick J. Osborn, 26 August 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4. He also indicated to Scott that he would soon have the opportunity to put a series of questions to Mannheim on socio-psychology: Rowse to Scott, 28 October 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

¹⁷⁴ Rowse to Radford, 12 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4.

necessarily implied the existence of a ‘social body’, the relationship unequal but nevertheless two-way; and this corporate entity would, as Mannheim hypothesised, follow the lead of its intelligentsia.¹⁷⁵ As a result, Rowse hoped to effect a ‘closer integration of society, closing the gulf between governing activities and the passive governed’.¹⁷⁶

The war too would play a part in the moulding of mass-psychology, Rowse writing that ‘the steady increase in the awful terror . . . will inexorably drive us on to altruism in a manner wholly unexperienced in the slack selfish times of peace’. As already discussed, the pressure of the war experience did inspire a change in the general mood of the British public, although quite how far it endured into the post-war years is up for debate. As Gordon Cherry has noted, it was a general error of the planning movement to believe that such change would be permanent, and thus that planning could be undertaken to accommodate a static future.¹⁷⁷ An event as epochal as the Second World War could reasonably be predicted to alter social attitudes, but the faith in the capacity of scientific management to continue their manipulation betrayed a series of positivist assumptions at the root of planning theory, particularly that of Rowse.

In this respect, Rowse again followed Geddes, whose adherence to the notion of social evolution underlay his understanding of regional and civic development. This, of course, informed the practice of survey and plan, the first diagnosing the ills of society, the second effecting its continued evolution. Such language is filled with biological references, which owe something to contemporary fashion, but are mostly a consequence of Geddes’ training in Edinburgh and London, the latter under T.H. Huxley.¹⁷⁸ During these early years Geddes also discovered the evolutionary sociology of Herbert Spencer, who, by bringing a biological reading of the structure and development of society, allowed a similar transposition of the natural sciences’

¹⁷⁵ In a letter to Scott, Rowse wrote of his fear ‘of uncontrollable, murderous revolution’, noting that ‘the violent faction always oversteps the mark in times of trouble; but it is the intellectuals who incite them to action’: Rowse to Scott, 13 November 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

¹⁷⁶ Rowse to Scott, 5 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

¹⁷⁷ Cherry, *Cities and Plans*, 142-143.

¹⁷⁸ See Meller, *Patrick Geddes*, 25-31.

methods of analysis. Spencer's conception of society as analogous to an organism must also have informed the composition of the composite mind, whereby a system of planning was inferred from the function of motor control in the human body.¹⁷⁹ The spurious validity of such a model should not escape attention. Essentially, by drawing comparisons with a more or less arbitrary model, selected from the biological sciences, a discipline dealing with an entirely different phenomenon could claim a comprehensive methodology, endowed with the lustre of objectivity.

The 'Exacting Trials of Reality': The Composite Mind in Motion

Given these complications, we are obliged to consider how Rowse's attempt to form a composite mind worked out when it moved from the realm of theory to face what he called 'the exacting trials of reality'.¹⁸⁰ One of his first actions upon undertaking work on South Wales in March 1940 was to contact Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, a town planner who had been a student at the SPRND just before the war.¹⁸¹ She too was a disciple of Geddes, and had earned a reputation as an expert in the production of regional surveys.¹⁸² At the School her thesis project had consisted of a team-based analysis of East Anglia, which also offered proposals for the area's reconstruction; an equivalent, at a regional scale, to the work of Unit 15 in 1938.¹⁸³ Upon graduation she began work on another survey, of Welwyn Garden City, which was intended to

¹⁷⁹ On the impact of Spencer see *Ibid*, 28-29.

¹⁸⁰ Rowse to Radford, 12 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4.

¹⁸¹ Tyrwhitt to 'Mr Young', 8 July 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\6. Here Tyrwhitt notes that she was asked by Yerbury and Rowse to take up work on March 21. Tyrwhitt would become a significant figure on the international planning scene. On her career, see: Ellen Shoshkes, 'Jaqueline Tyrwhitt and transnational discourse on modern urban planning and design, 1941-1951', *Urban History* 36, no. 2 (2009), 262-283.

¹⁸² Tyrwhitt noted that she was at this time 'an ardent disciple of Patrick Geddes': Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, personal note on Sigfried Giedion, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\60\2, quoted in Shoshkes, 'Jaqueline Tyrwhitt and transnational discourse', 264.

¹⁸³ She enrolled at the SPRND in autumn 1937, following a 2-year course of evening classes. See Tyrwhitt, 'Notes on School of Planning'. Tyrwhitt wrote that her thesis was interrupted but that she nevertheless received a distinction from the School. See Tyrwhitt to R.H. Hudson, 3 June 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\6.

last for three years.¹⁸⁴ The war however intervened; and so when Rowse contacted her, Tyrwhitt had already spent several months working with the Women's Land Army (WLA), while awaiting a project that might better suit her abilities.¹⁸⁵

Interestingly however, even after receiving assurances regarding the nature of the project, Tyrwhitt declined the role of senior researcher.¹⁸⁶ Concerned that the scheme's 'highly theoretical character' placed it on the periphery of the war effort, she did not change her mind until July, and continued to prioritise the WLA for the remainder of 1940.¹⁸⁷ Meanwhile at the Building Centre work got under way, kick-started by an exhibition exploring 'permanent evacuation' that Rowse hoped would be the first of several 'Open Forums'.¹⁸⁸ Relying for its content on 'Town Plan' and the work of Tyrwhitt's East Anglia Group, the show was intended to galvanise architectural and planning bodies into taking note of Rowse's approach.¹⁸⁹ Its

¹⁸⁴ Some background on the survey is offered in a letter, in which Tyrwhitt explains the intended timeframe and thus limitations to the study as completed, see Tyrwhitt to L.K. Elmhirst, 7 September 1940, DRO, Dartington Archives, C.DHLTD.6.7. In the end she was able to work on the project only until October 1939. Yet still had time to produce a substantial 104-page report, having done all of the fieldwork alone, albeit with supervision from a small Research Committee: 'Life and Work in Welwyn Garden City', 1939, DRO, Dartington Archives, C.DHLTD.6.7.

¹⁸⁵ Her time with the WLA can be followed with reference to RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\5, which collects her correspondence relating to the WLA. After some complications at the end of 1939, much of Tyrwhitt's WLA activity took place with the Forestry Commission, for whom she worked as a forestry measurer in the New Forest.

¹⁸⁶ This job is mentioned in a letter, Rowse to Tyrwhitt, 21 March 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 5.

¹⁸⁷ The quote is drawn from a letter in which Tyrwhitt announces that 'in the end I have been over-persuaded' and will therefore join the APRR personnel: Tyrwhitt to Leonard Knight Elmhirst, 15 July 1940, DRO, Dartington Archives, C.DHLTD.6.F. She wrote a similarly themed letter to the WLA in July with a request for her release, pleading the difficulty the APRR faced in finding a surveyor with sufficient experience to work on the South Wales job: Tyrwhitt to Young, 8 July 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\6.

¹⁸⁸ The exhibition took place on 25 April 1940 at the Building Centre, 'In conjunction with the London Builders Conference'. See Rowse to Peter L. Cocke, 18 March 1940, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4; F.J.P. Davis to Tyrwhitt, 2 April 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\7. The theme of the exhibition was 'The dispersal of surplus industries from London and other towns . . . with the suggestion that such works should be commenced now as evacuation and to help the building industry': W.G. Maddison to Tyrwhitt, 1 May 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\7. Indeed, Rowse saw the South Wales scheme as a useful case study for considering the reconstruction of London. See Rowse to Sjöström, 10 March 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 5.

¹⁸⁹ Its aim was to 'bring to the notice of men who, if they wished to, could put theory into practice, such ideas as 'To-morrow Town': Rowse to Peter L. Cocke, 18 March 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4. Of course, at this time 'Town plan' was much in demand. Cocke, who led the organisation of the display at the Building Centre, was keen to ensure that it would be available for the 'Coventry of Tomorrow' exhibition, held 6 to 13 May 1940: Cocke to Rowse, 2 April 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4. And Rowse certainly did not protest, writing of the necessity 'to press your

unveiling was calculated to coincide with the incipient work of the APRR, with Rowse stating that by exhibiting a scheme like 'Town Plan', 'we may be able to tack it on to the [South Wales] job'.¹⁹⁰ The disavowal of SPRND influence introduced a further tactic to increase the display's persuasiveness, encouraging the impression that the projects were the work of serious, practising architects rather than a group of angry young graduates. As a result, 'Town Plan' was shown as a design of the Architects' Co-operative Partnership, a name that several members of 'Unit 15' had collected under in the spring of 1939.¹⁹¹ The work, though, garnered little attention, few visited the exhibition and consequently it closed after a single day, leading Rowse to admit that it had failed to impress.¹⁹²

Although he remained optimistic, proposing that a similar display be repeated in the near future, the affair exposed some of the project's frailties at that early stage.¹⁹³ One might cite a lack of enthusiasm for the sort of radical reconstruction that Rowse had in mind; momentum only really began to build as the war took its toll on the physical and psychological fabric of the country, starting later in the year.¹⁹⁴ Above all, Rowse's reliance on a relatively inexperienced group of architects, planners, and technicians posed a problem as he tried to promote his approach among authoritative figures. Even accepting the backing of his Advisory Council, events at the AA School and his rogue SPRND had seen him marginalised somewhat from the institutional mainstream. For all the ambition and scale of his composite mind concept, the isolation of the new Association must have been all too apparent. Having said this, he did enjoy the luxury of directing some of the brightest young minds in British planning. Coming straight from the centre of a revolution in design

conviction on as many people as it is possible to bring under your influence': Rowse to Cocke, 6 April 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4.

¹⁹⁰ Rowse to Cocke, 21 March 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4.

¹⁹¹ Rowse to Ratcliffe, 19 March 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\7. At this point, the Architects' Co-operative Partnership consisted of 11 members: Kenneth Capon, Peter Cocke, Michael Cooke-Yarborough, Anthony Cox, Michael Grice, A. W. Nicol, Anthony Pott, Michael Powers, Greville Rhodes, Leo de Syllas and John Wheeler. Pott, Nicol, and Wheeler left after the war, but the rest remained, with the practice taking a prominent role in the post-war scene. See Cox et al., 'The Brynmawr Rubber Factory', 3-5. Incidentally, the East Anglia Group called themselves the 'Associated Planners': Maddison to Tyrwhitt, 1 May 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\7.

¹⁹² Rowse to Cocke, 3 May 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4; Maddison to Tyrwhitt, 1 May 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\7.

¹⁹³ Rowse to Cocke, 3 May 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4.

¹⁹⁴ Cherry, *Town Planning in Britain since 1900*, 92.

methodology, these idealists had collectively undergone just the sort of education that Rowse required of his composite mind. It may have been the early setback of the ‘Open Forum’ that pressed him into theorising a more comprehensive planning body to work around the APRR, which had started preliminary study on South Wales in May.¹⁹⁵

The subsequent months seem to have been fairly unproductive insofar as actual planning activity and archival evidence indicates a period of sourcing material from elsewhere.¹⁹⁶ But, in July, Rowse prepared a memorandum on the subject of planning in the South Wales coalfield. His attempt, via Frederick Osborn, to press it onto the chairman of the 1940 Council demonstrates a recognition that to achieve results he required the backing of authoritative national bodies.¹⁹⁷ In the memorandum itself, Rowse gave ‘what is intended to be the skeleton of a “Composite Mind”’, and in contemporary correspondence he first described the complex biological schema discussed above.¹⁹⁸ Accordingly, its various parts were coming together; George Pepler was advancing the formation of an Executive Committee, while Peter Scott, an associate in South Wales, did corresponding work for the Welsh Regional

¹⁹⁵ Although Rowse had long maintained the need for a composite mind (or ‘collective brain’), its precise composition was fairly indistinct at first. In his first letter to Tyrwhitt on the work in South Wales he suggested a panel of experts including himself, as well as the SPRND Board (the APRR had not yet taken form), to advise on the proposals. See Rowse to Tyrwhitt, 21 March 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 5. His confirmation that work had started comes in: Rowse to E.C. Willatts, 3 May 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4.

¹⁹⁶ It is likely that South Wales only engaged Peter Cocke on a full-time basis. Rowse contacted bodies like Political and Economic Planning and the Land Utilisation Survey of Britain in order to source the information they had gathered on South Wales. See Rowse to Max Nicholson (Secretary, PEP), 10 April 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4; and subsequent letters; Rowse to Willatts (Organising Secretary, Land Utilisation Survey of Britain), 23 April 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4; and subsequent letters.

¹⁹⁷ Rowse to Osborn, 4 July 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4. A couple of months later he was circulating the document – along with a ‘Programme’ – around influential figures, especially those in Wales. Radford gave his opinion on the Memorandum and Abridgement of a Programme of Work in Radford to Rowse, 30 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4. See also Rowse to Scott, 28 October 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4; Pott to Tyrwhitt, 19 November 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\6. It is evident that the document was being circulated among Welsh experts in September: Scott to Rowse, 21 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

Regrettably, I have been unable to locate either of these documents, which would certainly help to give more concrete information on the content of the plans for South Wales. I have therefore been forced to reconstruct both the composite mind concept and the progress of the project almost entirely from the letters of key figures, held at CRC, RIBA, DRO, and HALS.

¹⁹⁸ Rowse to Radford, 12 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4.

Planning Board. As this work commenced, the APRR had assembled a team to perform the necessary practical planning.¹⁹⁹

The core of the South Wales personnel had worked on ‘Town Plan’, though the rest were also recent graduates. With sufficient financial backing, the security of the Association, and Rowse’s assurances that a suitable planning framework would materialise, the group set to work, each adopting a separate issue of concern in the region. Thus Powers explored the ‘Location of possible new industries’, Saxl looked at ‘education’, Pott ‘units of housing’, and Ann Radford (later Ann Wheeler) ‘dietary and agricultural standards’. Meanwhile, Cocke, who had been called onto the scheme much earlier in the year, was probably present and may have played a general co-ordinating role. In turn, their findings were being ‘submitted to the big names in their lines for criticism and suggestion’.²⁰⁰ Once the London-based researchers and experts had done what Rowse referred to as the ‘donkey work’, the results went ‘to Scott, who then consults those . . . who have the intense local knowledge which is vital to success in planning’.²⁰¹ It was the composite mind in action.

Furthermore, satisfied with the direction of the South Wales work, Rowse soon took the opportunity to propose an extension to his planning apparatus beyond South Wales. The situation arose when another member of the ‘Town Plan’ team, Elizabeth Chesterton, wrote to him indicating the probability of planning around Ipswich.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Rowse to Scott, 28 September 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6; Rowse to Alwyn Lloyd, 26 October 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4; Rowse to Chesterton, 28 October 1940, CRC, Outlook Tower uncatalogued archive, ‘APRR – Reports for Lord Justice Scott Committee 1940-46’, ‘Tyrwhitt Correspondence 1942’.

²⁰⁰ These details are all given in a letter Pott to Tyrwhitt, 19 November 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\6. Of course Pott, Saxl, and Cocke had all worked on ‘Town Plan’. Sjöström later wrote that he had also taught Radford and Powers: Cox et al., ‘The Brynmawr Rubber Factory’, 10. Pott and Radford were contacted about the job in August, and it is probable that the others were too, with the obvious exception of Cocke. See Rowse to Ann Radford, 10 August 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4; letter Rowse to Pott, 13 August 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4. The latter letter also comments that this main phase of work is due to commence on 2 September 1940.

A notice in *Architectural Design and Construction* on the APRR’s work ‘preparing a plan for the regeneration of South Wales’ notes only three paid researchers on the job. Clearly, by the time Pott wrote to Tyrwhitt in November this staff had increased. See ‘Planning the New Britain’, 201.

²⁰¹ Rowse to Alwyn Lloyd, 26 October 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4.

²⁰² Chesterton to Rowse, 12 October 1940, CRC, Outlook Tower uncatalogued archive, ‘APRR – Reports for Lord Justice Scott Committee 1940-46’, ‘Tyrwhitt Correspondence 1942’. See also, Tyrwhitt to Chesterton, 25 February 1941, CRC, Outlook Tower uncatalogued archive, ‘APRR – Reports for Lord Justice Scott Committee 1940-46’, ‘Tyrwhitt Correspondence 1942’.

She had recently joined the East Suffolk County Planning Department, and welcomed the prospect of introducing Rowse's philosophy of Geddesian holism and scientific management to the region.²⁰³ Naturally, Rowse replied immediately, outlining the form of the composite mind for the South Wales scheme and proposing an East Anglian counterpart. It would be identical to that already taking shape with the aid of Scott and Pepler, though with the obvious difference that its Board and Executive Committee would accommodate experts, planning officers, and engineers from East Anglia. The divisions based in London – the APRR and its Advisory Council – would again accept the responsibility of providing the raw research and the critical comment necessary to the functioning of the composite mind. Of course Chesterton could claim to represent only a small part of the region, but Rowse assured her that if she could convince those at her end then 'Essex would come in, I spoke to them some time ago and found them very sympathetic. Norfolk and Cambridgeshire would probably follow suit'. He continued that 'I have reason to believe, from reliable sources, that there is every hope that such Province plans will have strong hopes of realisation after the war'.²⁰⁴

In sum, these discussions seemed to promise a significant future for the composite mind. By Rowse's account at least, the constituent divisions were hastily taking shape in South Wales, their measures endowed with a sensitivity to local conditions, and carrying some legislative muscle thanks to the Executive Committee. Additionally, the model seemed capable of adoption in a range of different regions: it could gradually accumulate local expertise, drawn perhaps from bodies already existing in each area, while the APRR granted some national consistency, collective experience, and a means of communication. The Association therefore stood to gain much by the arrangement, and would accordingly find itself thrust to the core of

²⁰³ Indeed, Chesterton sought to send members of Suffolk Association of Architects to the APRR headquarters in order to receive a briefing on the subject: Chesterton to Rowse, 9 December 1940, CRC, Outlook Tower uncatalogued archive, 'APRR – Reports for Lord Justice Scott Committee 1940-46', 'Tyrwhitt Correspondence 1942'.

²⁰⁴ See Rowse to Chesterton, 28 October 1940, CRC, Outlook Tower uncatalogued archive, 'APRR – Reports for Lord Justice Scott Committee 1940-46', 'Tyrwhitt Correspondence 1942'; Chesterton to Rowse, 25 November 1940, CRC, Outlook Tower uncatalogued archive, 'APRR – Reports for Lord Justice Scott Committee 1940-46', 'Tyrwhitt Correspondence 1942'.

British reconstruction, its young workers ensuring that methods of appropriate comprehensiveness would shape the post-war world.

However, a shift in focus towards these planners and technicians rather undermines the grandiose picture summoned up in the pages of Rowse's correspondence. The first intimation of doubt comes from Tyrwhitt's reluctance to join the project at its inception. Her concerns that South Wales 'might be just another useless paper scheme' were perhaps understandable, given the immature state of work at that stage; but Tyrwhitt, in fact, remained unconvinced throughout the year.²⁰⁵ In September she wrote that the project probably represented little more than 'playing about on the fringe of the economic and social difficulties that we are bound to face "afterwards"'; and further, she 'could not believe that it was likely to prove really valuable – or, in fact, that it would be made use of'.²⁰⁶ As a result, she contacted Anthony Pott in the hope of obtaining reassurance from a figure already at the heart of the APRR. His reply cannot have provided much comfort. Instead he offered a series of observations that mirrored Tyrwhitt's own doubts, presenting a fascinating alternative portrait of the project's achievements.

Above all he confessed to 'muddle-headedness', a result of the fact that 'the Welsh end . . . hasn't got going yet'. Although Rowse identified as advantageous a personnel that formed slowly, the patchiness of the composite mind severely hampered the progress of those attempting to produce proposals. So the lack of organisation external to the APRR saw the team 'engaged on very vague "sketches" of various aspects of "planning"'. Given the fragmentary nature of the South Wales planning administration, the prospect of a multiplication nationally along the same lines seemed to Pott highly questionable. He wrote that Rowse 'takes a romantic view, and thinks that sooner or later we should all be taken over by a Ministry of

²⁰⁵ In full Tyrwhitt wrote: 'Rowse blethers about a S. Wales job. It might be interesting or it might be just another useless paper scheme'. Tyrwhitt to Maddison, 9 April 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\7.

²⁰⁶ She wrote that she was never fully convinced South Wales 'would really resolve itself into anything more than playing about on the fringe of the economic and social difficulties that we are bound to face "afterwards" – and, while it would doubtless be "interesting", I could not believe that it was likely to prove really valuable – or, in fact, that it would be made use of'. Tyrwhitt to L.K. Elmhirst, 7 September 1940, DRO, Dartington Archives, C.DHLTD.6.F.

Planning and Reconstruction, and that work will be of immediate practical use'. The work, he affirmed, would undoubtedly be of some value, though this would be primarily because 'an intelligent and fairly accurate survey may always prove a handy thing to have about (for someone); as may constructive proposals which aren't too obviously fantastic'.²⁰⁷ These last comments in particular, hinted more realistically at the role that a body with the APRR's financial and administrative limitations might take up.

Setting aside the ethical justification for the composite mind, then, the concept's scope and ad hoc flexibility made it a difficult ideal to realise. Such comprehensiveness also assumed, in spite of its apparent sensitivity to regional context, a broad interpretation of the type of planning necessary and the exercise of research by a body administered from the capital. The proposition that a 'forward liaison centre' be set up for APRR workers in South Wales was not enough to ease the foundational incongruity between the outlook of those in the provinces and that of the outside operatives.²⁰⁸ There was evidently no lack of enthusiasm on the part of those lobbyists that Scott contacted in Wales, for they too had long sought central support for redevelopment of the depressed coalfields. Most notably, when Scott hosted a meeting in Aberystwyth, those in attendance responded positively to the plan, but advised caution. Suggesting that developments be put on hold for six months, they proposed instead the formation of informal discussion groups across Wales, addressing a few suitably emotive issues.²⁰⁹ In any case, Rowse had already been forced to confess that 'pace has slackened' at the Building Centre.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Pott to Tyrwhitt, 19 November 1940, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\6.

²⁰⁸ This idea was first aired by Scott, before Rowse wrote in agreement. See Scott to Rowse 6 November, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6; Rowse to Scott, 13 November 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

The fear of an overt London presence recurs throughout the progress of the work. Rowse and Scott were always eager to ensure that the role of the APRR should receive as little publicity as possible, and that the development of the composite mind must rely mainly on local initiative and enthusiasm. See, for example, Rowse to Alwyn Lloyd, 26 October 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 4: 'I have insisted that it is not wise for this Association to make too emphatic an appearance in Wales'. Also, Scott to Rowse, 20 December 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6; Rowse to Scott, 27 December 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

²⁰⁹ The letter in which Scott relates the details and conclusion of the Aberystwyth meeting contains a handwritten annotating by Rowse stating: 'This is the right way'. Scott to Rowse 6 November, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

Whether he would ever have had the opportunity to mobilise figures in Wales (or East Anglia) into taking their place in the composite mind is impossible to know, for in January 1941 Rowse was called up from the Reserve.²¹¹ Before departing he asked Tyrwhitt to replace him as Director of Research at the APRR and, on this occasion, she agreed.²¹² The Association she inherited did not concern itself solely with the scheme for South Wales, and had already begun the publication of information deemed useful to planning.²¹³ Nevertheless, it was clearly a body disorientated by the ambitious exertions undertaken during the previous year. A frustrated Anthony Pott noted, upon leaving for the army, that the ‘lack of organisation and any direction, or even comprehensible idea’ had been ‘devastating in effect’.²¹⁴

In response the Tyrwhitt-era APRR took on a very different identity.²¹⁵ Its responsibilities became more precise, its ambitions more modest; in short, instead of anticipating what post-war conditions might be and fitting itself into an imagined machinery, Tyrwhitt’s Association pragmatically addressed the problems illuminated by the failure of the composite mind. While still accepting the Geddesian standard of local and regional involvement, the APRR now tried to resolve the sort of

He received a similar response from the gathering in Cardiff. It is important to make clear that the tone of these meetings does not seem to have been at all negative. Those in attendance were ‘keen’ and ‘enthusiastic’, and a definite plan of action was agreed. This consisted of concentrating on a single issue (unemployment after the munitions boom), as well as an investigation of the various failed plans undertaken after the First World War. But undoubtedly, the conclusions checked the course that Rowse envisaged the project following; and after this, by coincidence or not, the scheme declined. On the Cardiff meeting, see Scott to Rowse, 20 December 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6. Rowse replied to this letter with approval, but there is perhaps a note of doubt (and desperation) in his accompanying invocation that, ‘The important thing is to make sure that plans for a better state of affairs after this war do not “come to nothing”: against that we must fight to the last’. See Rowse to Scott, 27 December 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

²¹⁰ The main reason for this slowing down seems to have been the APRR’s reduced priority in the Building Centre. But nevertheless, Rowse continued writing to Scott with updates and requests for local data. Rowse to Scott, 1 November 1940, CRC, Ex-PGC, box PG.1, folder 6.

²¹¹ Rowse to W.G. Maddison, 17 January 1941, CRC, Outlook Tower uncatalogued archive, ‘APRR – Reports for Lord Justice Scott Committee 1940-46’, ‘Tyrwhitt Correspondence 1942’.

²¹² Tyrwhitt, ‘Notes on School of Planning’.

²¹³ For instance, its series of informative *Broadsheets*, produced from June 1940. See APRR, *Broadsheet No. 1: General Information* (London: APRR, no date [revised 1941]), unnumbered pages, Devon Record Office, Dartington Archives, DWE.G.9.F.

²¹⁴ Pott to Tyrwhitt, 12 February 1941, RIBA, Tyrwhitt Papers, TyJ\1\6.

²¹⁵ For more on this subject, see Latusek, ‘Discovering a “Synoptic Vision”’, 50-73.

discordances that Rowse had encountered.²¹⁶ It soon abandoned his grand project for South Wales, and the composite mind was left forgotten; however, it remains a fascinating endeavour in several respects.

In the first place, it represents a sustained – albeit flawed – attempt to negotiate the vast network of difficulties involved in building and co-ordinating a systematic planning machinery. It also demonstrates that there were many strands to the town planning movement, with Rowse and his young band of followers resolutely situated outside of the mainstream. Lacking the necessary official political backing, they were condemned to labour away at what would, in Tyrwhitt’s words become ‘just another useless paper scheme’.²¹⁷ Above all, we see in the composite mind a rich, though highly idiosyncratic, attempt not only to construct an approach to planning, but also to find a language in which that approach might most compellingly be expressed. The almost bizarre literalness of Rowse’s conception – its ‘cerebellum’ and ‘cerebral cortex’, and so on – was really a striving after an idea that would enjoy the symbolic complexity to match the huge volume of the social and economic factors that planners took as their object. As we have seen, Rowse was motivated by a desire to address ‘the immensity of the risks and opportunities which the war has forced us to face’, and there is no doubt that the war context was key to the urgency with which he pursued the South Wales project.²¹⁸ It is these ‘risks and opportunities’ that arose from the war that the next chapter will set out to address.

²¹⁶ A neat statement of aims that were followed closely under Tyrwhitt can be found in, APRR, *Broadsheet No. 1: General Information* (London: APRR, no date [revised 1941]), unnumbered pages, Devon Record Office, Dartington Archives, DWE.G.9.F.

The change in orientation in the APRR is indicated by a comment in a report dated to October 1942 saying the Association ‘took its present form in March 1941’: APRR, ‘The Work of the APRR’, October 1942, APRR Report No. 18, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS), Verulam family archive, D/SEV 034.2, 1.

Additionally, in the summer of that year the APRR finally became a company, limited by guarantee. The memorandum and articles of association lays down the main aims of the APRR, codifying its practical approach: ‘Memorandum and Articles of Association of Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction’, incorporated 16 August 1941, HALS, Verulam family archive, D/SEV 034.1.

²¹⁷ See footnote 205.

²¹⁸ See footnote 168.

Chapter 2 – Illustrations

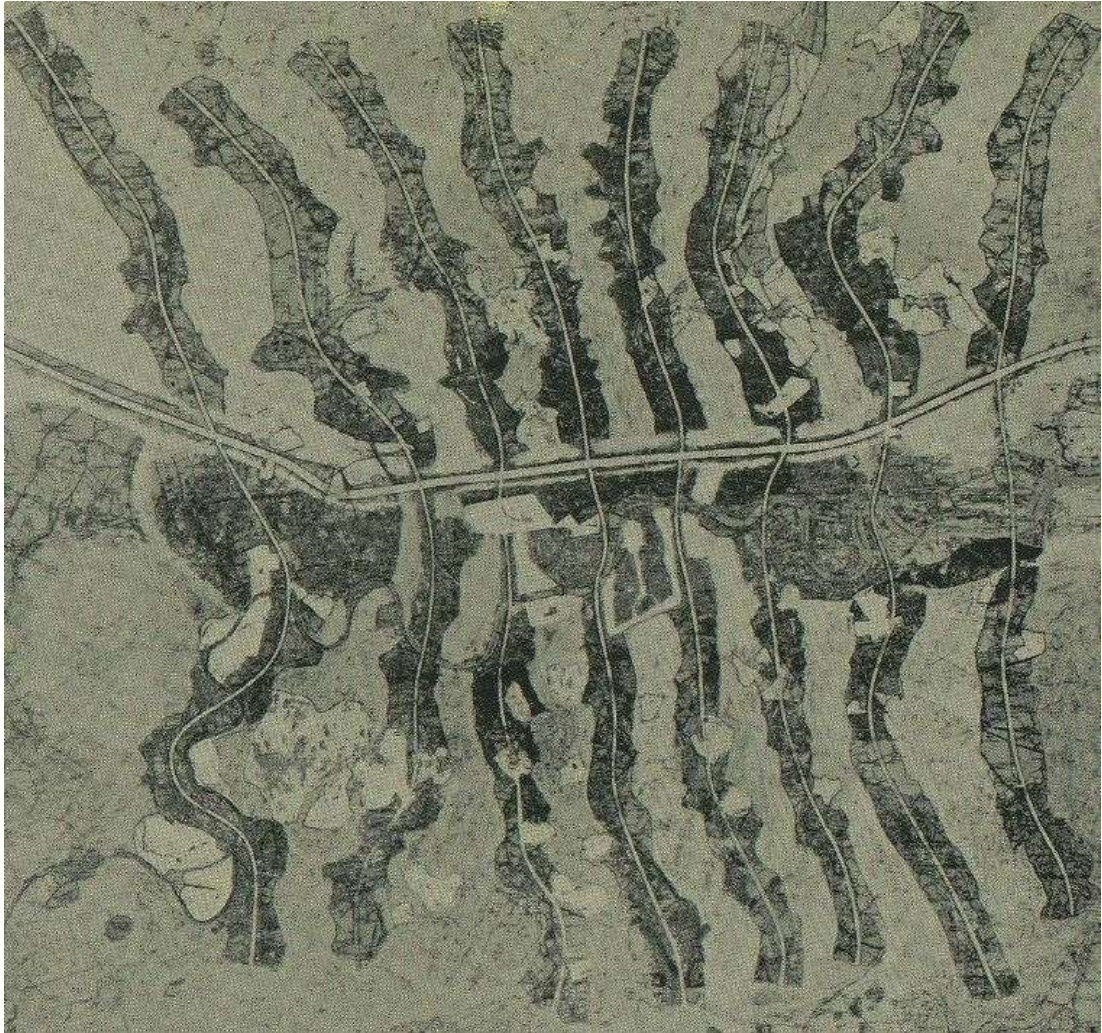


Figure 2.1) Modern Architectural Research Group (Arthur Korn and Felix J. Samuely), *A Master Plan for London*, 1942, plan.

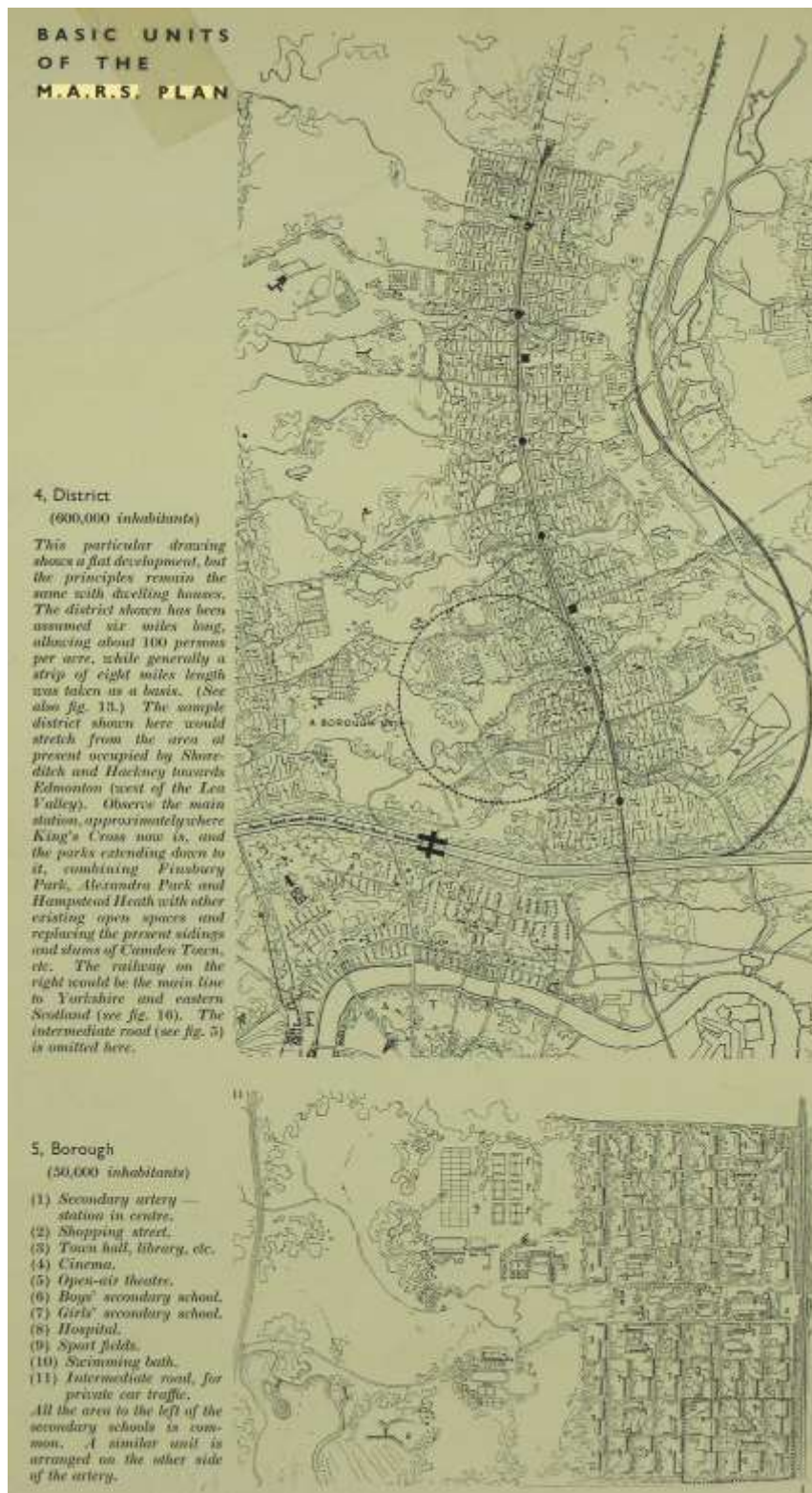


Figure 2.2) Modern Architectural Research Group (Arthur Korn and Felix J. Samuely), *A Master Plan for London*, 1942, details of District and Borough plans.

TABLE II. Balance Sheet (expressed in weekly working hours).

In London the value of one person's work each year = £275 = 2/6 per hour, 43 hrs. per week.

The number of working people in 1938 was 4,349,000.

From this, the total value of one London working hour per week = $\frac{4,349,000}{2.5} \times \frac{52}{20} = £28,267,000$.

To understand the relative importance of various items, they are all expressed in terms of weekly working hours.

	Capital	Annual Value	§ Weekly Working Hours	
			Hrs.	Min.
Rateable Value of Greater London	—	104,627,000	3	48
Amount required to build London from scratch, as it is (including services, roads, railways) ...	1,750,000,000	†70,000,000	2	8
London's Productive Capacity ...	—	1,196,000,000	43	0
Amount required to carry out M.A.R.S. Plan ...	1,200,000,000	‡60,000,000	2	6
Amount required to carry out patchwork improvements (Bressy Plan)* ...	230,000,000	‡11,500,000	—	13
Administration Income of Greater London (Rates) ...	—	62,152,000	2	7
Capacity of London Building Trade (1937) ...	—	75,000,000	2	38
London Transport Board (Capital)	110,000,000	†4,400,000	—	9.3
All British Railways (Capital) ...	1,100,000,000	40,000,000	1	25
London Public Traffic Receipts (1938) ...	—	42,120,000	1	30
British Export Deficit ...	—	346,379,000	12	17
Saving of ¼ hr. per person per working day due to improved plan ...	—	84,802,000	3	0
Total saving expected (distribution costs, freight, etc.) ...	—	239,200,000	8	28

* The alterations suggested in the Bressy Report would be helpful, but by the time they are carried out many of them would already be obsolete. They are on the same lines as the Paris Rebuilding of 1870 (Haussman).

† 4 per cent. interest.

‡ Twenty yearly instalments.

§ Number of weekly working hours per working person in London.

|| If every working person in London works one hour each week.

Compare :—

Cost of carrying out M.A.R.S. Plan = £60,000,000 per year for 20 years.

Saving expected in time alone = £84,802,000 per year indefinitely.

Capacity of London Building Trade (1938) = £75,000,000 per year.

Compare also :—

Total saving expected = £239,200,000 per year.

(To be used for increased production).

British Export Deficit, 1938 = £346,379,000.

Circumstances will undoubtedly make it necessary to decrease this deficit after the war. The rebuilding of London alone would effect a reduction of 70 per cent. without reducing the standard of consumption, and with a colossal increase in the standard of living. A similar organisation of the conurbations of Manchester—Liverpool—Birmingham—Wolverhampton and Glasgow would most likely wipe out the deficit and provide a much needed surplus.

Figure 2.3) Modern Architectural Research Group (Arthur Korn and Felix J. Samuely), *A Master Plan for London*, 1942, Balance Sheet (expressed in weekly working hours).

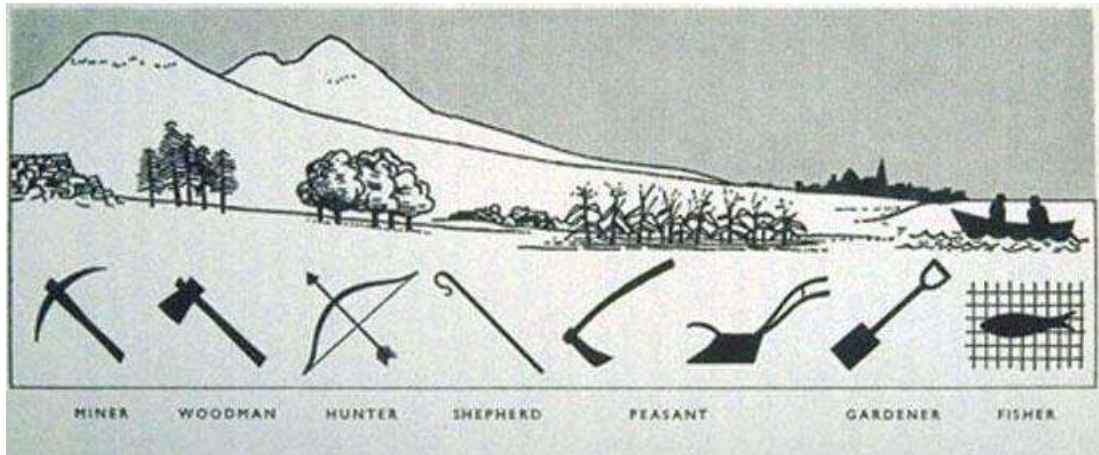


Figure 2.4) Patrick Geddes, *Valley Section*, undated, schematic drawing

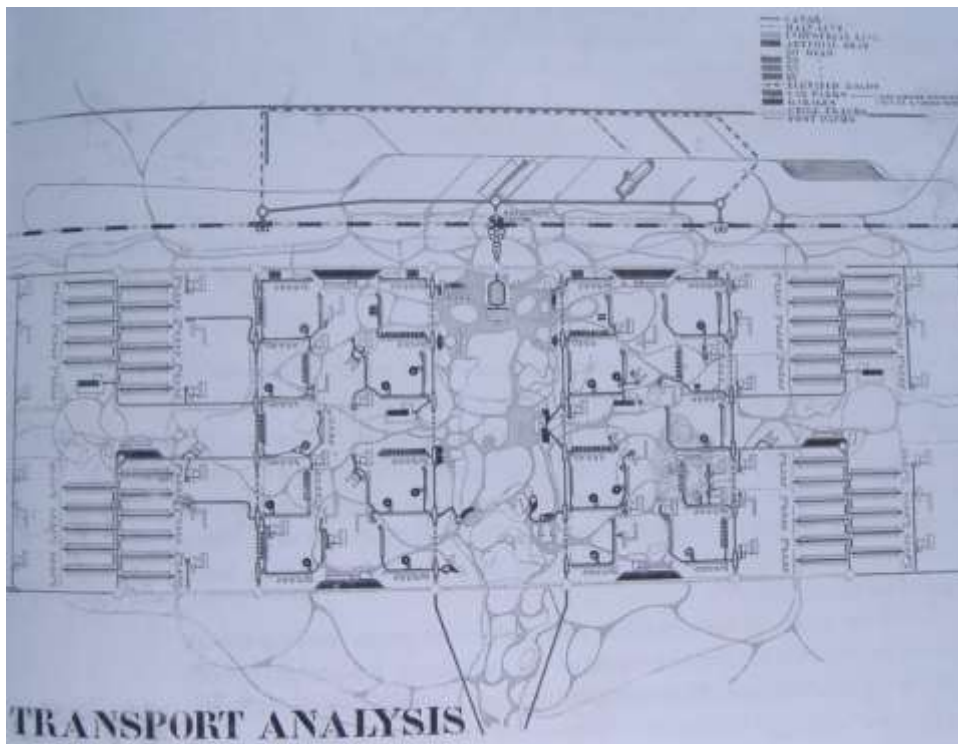


Figure 2.5) Unit 12, *A Plan for a Town for 50,000 Inhabitants for 1950 for a Hypothetical Flat Site*, 1936-1937, pre-thesis project, plan of central area.



Figure 2.6) Unit 15, 'Town Plan, Faringdon, Berkshire', 1937-1938, thesis project, plan.

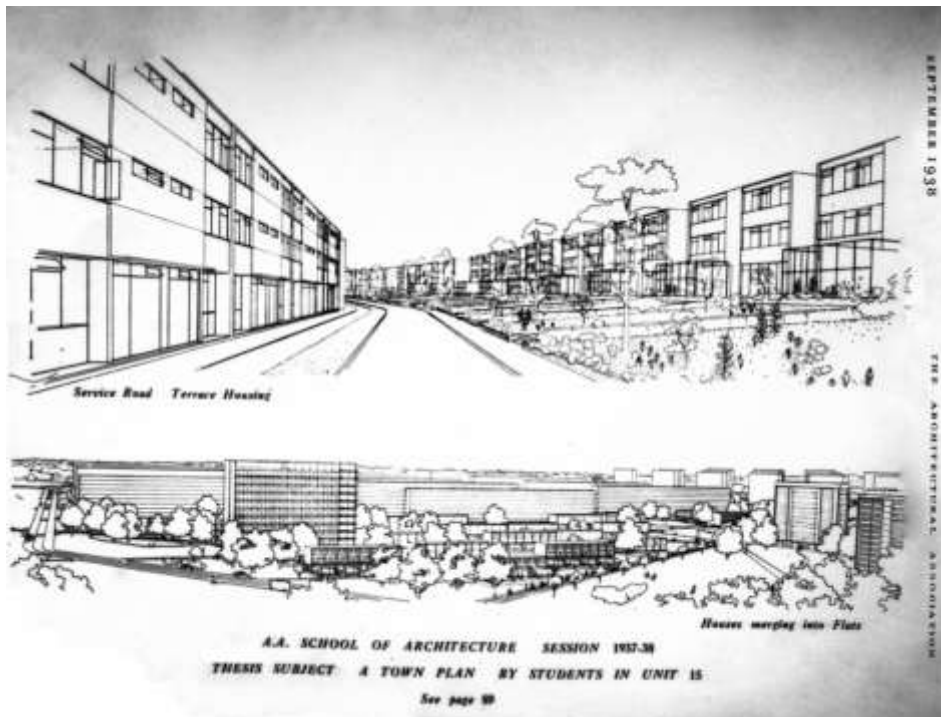


Figure 2.7) Unit 15, 'Town Plan, Faringdon, Berkshire: Housing', 1937-1938, thesis project, perspectives of terraced housing and general scheme.

CHAPTER 3 – The ‘Preliminary History of Reconstruction Programmes’: Ruins in the Wartime City

Introduction¹

At both the start and end of the British film of 1950, *Night and the City*, we are treated to dramatically-framed scenes of pursuit, as the protagonist Harry Fabian runs for his life through a landscape of post-war devastation. While the bombed-out ruins around St Paul’s Cathedral provide a familiar setting for the film’s opening, its conclusion sees Fabian flee to a South Bank unrecognisable from that of today (Figure 3.1). A blitzed and derelict former industrial area, the site was at the time undergoing a transformation in preparation for the Festival of Britain, which was due to take place the following year. Each of these locations has subsequently attained iconic status, although the latter may appear a curious choice of setting for a story that recounts the squalid life of an American hustler as he attempts to make a name for himself in London’s criminal underworld.²

Spaces of dereliction carry a common, though vaguely articulated, connotation of malevolence in the public mind. Associated with ‘deviant’ acts carried out by people identified as ‘undesirable’, such areas represent – according to Christoph Grunenberg – a ‘*locus horribilus*’ within the urban landscape.³ Furthermore, the presentation of industrial ruins generally in cinema tends to act as a signifier of social and moral disintegration, a phenomenon seen perhaps most starkly in the staging of films that

¹ The title of this chapter quotes from J.M. Richards, ‘First Instalment of a Survey of Bomb Damage to Buildings of Architectural Importance’, *Architectural Review* 90, no. 535, ‘Destruction and Reconstruction Special’ (1941), 6.

² For a specifically architectural account of the Festival, emphasising its provincialism and architectural timidity, see Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002), 61-75.

³ C. Grunenberg, ‘Unsolved mysteries: Gothic tales from *Frankenstein* to the hair-eating doll’, in *Gothic: Transmutations of Horror in Late Twentieth Century Art*, ed. C. Grunenberg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 195: quoted in Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 8.

explore imagined dystopian futures.⁴ In this sense, the climactic passages of *Night and the City* unfold in a setting that is wholly appropriate to the film's seedy content. However, in received narratives of post-war architecture, the Festival of Britain has come to represent a quite opposite range of resonances to those displayed in Jules Dassin's film. Rather, it epitomises the social and political optimism of the immediate post-war years, as a bright and breezy modernism pointed the way towards a better future, assuming its place as the new and officially authorised design idiom for the nation's public architecture. The memory of the homes and factories that had occupied the area before they were razed by air raids was almost completely effaced; this morbid history deemed detrimental to the celebration of Britain's streamlined modernity.

In fact, the only architectural reminder of the festival site's past that remained in 1951 was the famous Shot Tower, which had been a prominent feature on the banks of the Thames since its construction over a hundred years earlier. It was preserved as a more or less anonymous relic: sanitised, shorn of its former military motive – a shot tower is used for manufacturing lead projectiles for use in warfare – and instead co-opted to function as a radio beacon.⁵ Yet the glimpse of the Festival's pre-history afforded by our witnessing the frantic attempts of Harry Fabian to escape his pursuers (one of whom he evades by seeking refuge inside the Shot Tower itself!), hints at the ultimate transience of the built environment over time. To a nation that had seen its cities altered forever as a result of aerial attack this morphological fragility must have been all too apparent – and it would shortly be restated once more. For the South Bank was cleared and remodelled almost immediately after the conclusion of the Festival, and, although the quarter continued to accommodate cultural activity, it was no longer intended to proclaim quite such radical socio-political aspirations – largely a result of the changed political climate after the 1951 general election. Corresponding to this shift in authority, the Royal Festival Hall alone was permitted to survive, joining the Shot Tower as a new architectural

⁴ See Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 35.

⁵ 'Shot Tower and Lead Works, No. 63 Belvedere Road', in *Survey of London: Volume 23: Lambeth: South Bank and Vauxhall*, ed. Howard Roberts and Walter H. Godfrey (1951), 47, accessed 5 December 2014, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=47038>.

memento mori, each of them a ruin fragment and monument to historical displacement.⁶

The willingness in each case to preserve these lonely counterparts illustrates an ongoing awareness that ruins and urban fragments enjoy a communicative role: the capacity to realise a significance far greater than the sum of their incomplete parts. With their original context erased, such objects offer the only material means of sustaining the memory of a previous urban configuration beyond its own time. More importantly, these fragments find themselves empowered – or perhaps obliged – to speak for the values that they and their now absent companions are seen to have represented. This process raises certain implications. For, such values do not emerge in an innocent or disinterested manner, but are in large part determined by the preservers themselves, who, in their selective respect for the past, can re-write the meaning of the ruin and shape a historical narrative into the present. One consequence of this re-writing is the effective legitimisation of the wider act of urban erasure, with the destruction of an older fabric supposedly compensated by the survival of a few fragments. These representative objects promise to condense the essential qualities of what has been lost, offering both a potted history of the city and a memorial to its passing. Here, the ruin finds itself elevated to a new status, and cherished as a precious ‘other’ animating the urban scene; it is privileged to survive by virtue of its strangeness, but it only really becomes so through the act of preservation. Paradoxically, then, the acceptance of the ruin’s right to remain ensures its estrangement, and, as a necessary complement, the strange, new buildings that rise around it are accepted as normal, legitimate, and without need of justification.

⁶ This chapter will deal primarily with buildings in a literal state of ruin, rather than those – such as the Royal Festival Hall – whose definition as ruins is to be understood more figuratively. Nevertheless, it will become clear that during the 1940s some commentators did themselves extend the concept of ruination beyond merely those structures that had been razed by bombing, to embrace also those standing in areas labelled ‘depressed’ or ‘blighted’. Recently, this more ambiguous reading of the ruin has become a topic of theoretical and artistic enquiry, employed as a useful category for considering recent trends in urbanism – particularly in relation to urban regeneration – as well as the history of architectural modernism, and the accompanying notion of utopian ‘failure’. Such concerns have found further relevance due to the impact on British cities of processes of gentrification, which have exploited the fashion for ‘ruin porn’ by appropriating – indeed, often simulating – the spaces of modern architectural decay. For a rich and wide-ranging selection of essays that engage with these ideas, see Brian Dillon, ed., *Ruins* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2011).

At the heart of this complex of issues lie two distinct attitudes towards the ruin, and it is their interplay that is essential in lending to the act of urban renewal a decisive legitimacy. On the one hand, the ruin possesses a unique value as a document of history and site of collective memory: in this respect it is something to be treasured. However, ruins are also tarnished by obsolescence. Consigned to a state of isolation within the city, they stand almost as an implicit judgement on the past – a signal of historical rupture that contradicts their equal appeal to communal identification. Together these interpretations sustain a compelling dialectic, with the rich and seductive qualities of the fragment counterbalanced by a threatening ambiguity and ‘otherness’. As we will see, during the 1940s both of these readings were exploited by figures directing their attention to the buildings left ruined by aerial assault. Their immense communicative potency could have been in little doubt, but the practical need to rebuild was similarly stark, and most architectural writers were eager that reconstruction be pursued in line with modernist doctrine. In this campaign the ruin would, with a certain inevitability, emerge as an object both of fascination and suspicion, appropriated as a rather dubious foundation on which to build a rhetoric for progress into the post-war era.

Destruction into Reconstruction

A shift of focus onto the ubiquity of the wartime ruin in British towns and cities introduces us unavoidably, and a little unexpectedly, to the often overlooked connection between the project of reconstruction and the prior experience of mass-destruction. Several commentators have noted the decidedly muted presence of the Second World War in the canonical histories of post-war architecture, this in spite of the importance of the years from 1939 and 1945 in the acceptance of modernism by the British establishment and, to an extent, the public.⁷ Of course, as Anthony Vidler

⁷ Anthony Vidler, ‘Air War and Architecture’, in *Ruins of Modernity*, ed. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 30; Beatriz Colomina, foreword to *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern: Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, ed. Mark Crinson and Claire Zimmerman

highlights, the memory of conflict receives constant recitation in the phrase ‘post-war reconstruction’.⁸ Always invested with a double meaning, this catchword represents, in one sense, the overt and often emphasised aspiration towards a re-imagining of the entire body of social and political relations in Britain: a regeneration that would receive symbolic expression in a similarly renewed and radical architecture. But there is also a more easily overlooked connotation. For, to speak of ‘post-war reconstruction’ necessarily implies the more distressing imperatives of repair and rebuilding: a direct response – both physical and psychological – to some prior state of ruination. While subsequent accounts of the period have ignored this connection, the writings of key figures during and immediately after the war display less ambiguity in their content. Often produced specifically as part of public propaganda campaigns, these texts actively identify the war experience as a central driving force behind the campaign for reconstruction.

For instance, one of the most high-profile architectural exhibitions of the war years was that organised by the RIBA and held at the National Galleries in February 1943. Carrying the revealing title ‘Rebuilding Britain’, its main designers were modernist regulars Jane Drew, Anthony Cox, and Eugene Rosenberg, the latter of the post-war practice YRM, while it was opened by William Beveridge, whose famous 1942 report established the foundation for post-war social reconstruction.⁹ Coincidentally, another important figure cited by Drew as a designer of the exhibition was Rodney Thomas, who in the same year helped found the Arcon group to research the possibility of closer collaboration between architecture and industry.¹⁰ Their work saw the design of the Mark V prefabricated house, of which 41,000 were built in answer to the housing shortage in the wake of wartime air raids – an explicit instance

(New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2010), 1-2. Vidler specifically cites the accounts of Reyner Banham, Kenneth Frampton, Alan Colquhoun, and Manfredo Tafuri, further listing Benevolo’s history as a rare exception.

⁸ Vidler, ‘Air War and Architecture’, 30. Similarly, David Gissen has encouraged an awareness of the literalism of the term ‘post-war architecture’, with regard to buildings constructed by Alison and Peter Smithson on bombsites: David Gissen, ‘Debris’, *AA Files* 58 (2009), 9.

⁹ Jane Drew, ‘Autobiography Information and Notes’, undated, RIBA Archive, Fry and Drew Papers, F&D28/3, 11; ‘Autobiography’, F&D/29/1, 34-35. On the exhibition, see: John R. Gold, *The experience of modernism: Modern architects and the future city, 1928-53* (London: E&FN Spon, 1997), 172.

¹⁰ Brenda Vale, *Prefabs: A History of the UK Temporary Housing Programme* (London: Spon, 1995), 22 n.12.

of the architectural response to destruction.¹¹ The compact edition of the exhibition catalogue, produced as a cheap and practical pamphlet for general distribution, begins by quoting Churchill's statement that the public has 'one large immediate task in the replanning and rebuilding of our cities and towns'. Its author continues that this is partly due to a historic failure properly to plan the built environment, and partly 'because so much has been knocked down by Hitler'.¹²

Even more significant was the 'Living in Cities' exhibition of 1942. Mounted by the 1940 Council and the British Institute of Adult Education to travel around the country, its hard-line modernist vision for the future city found a significant audience, not least through the distribution of the accompanying Penguin catalogue, which sold a not inconsiderable 134,000 copies.¹³ Authored by the exhibition designer, Ralph Tubbs, the book is notable in articulating a 'present' decisively shaped by the experience of bombing, and defined by the ruinous city. The cover memorably illustrates the imperative of reconstruction in a juxtaposition of four separate images, each summarising a distinct historical period: 'Long Ago', 'Yesterday', 'To-day', and 'To-morrow?' (Figure 3.2).¹⁴ The first two are represented, respectively, by an aerial photograph of a medieval cathedral, isolated from any built reference to modernity and bathed in sunshine, and a view across a smoky and blackened industrial town, with neither scene being identified specifically.¹⁵ Just as anonymous – but drawing on a similarly dense mythology, albeit still nascent – is the image selected to encapsulate the present: a bombsite, freshly attacked, with a passing stream of displaced individuals to indicate the immediacy of the experience. Many would have recognised the location as the Broadgate in Coventry: perhaps the most iconic victim of the blitz, and, in turn, a conspicuous pioneer of physical reconstruction after it. Finally, a pair of hands –

¹¹ Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, 180-182.

¹² Royal Institute of British Architects, *Towards a New Britain* (London, The Architectural Press, 1943), frontispiece. On the two editions of the catalogue, see: Elizabeth Darling, *Re-Forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity Before Reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2007), 251 n.129.

¹³ Gold, *Experience of modernism*, 170.

¹⁴ Ralph Tubbs, *Living in Cities* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1942).

¹⁵ The location of the first is, in fact, Norwich Cathedral. While the second image is drawn from a 1932 photograph taken by Spencer Arnold from the tower of Hanley Parish Church, Staffordshire. See, 'Hanley', Getty Images, accessed 6 December 2014, <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/view-from-the-tower-of-hanley-parish-church-looking-towards-news-photo/112766500>.

symbolising the universal and disinterested modern architect – work at a drawing board with the assistance of a set square, ruler, and compasses: a suggestion of the exacting geometrical spatial order of the city to come, and a sharp contrast with the chaos of the preceding pair of images. Upon opening the book, one is again faced with a montage combining four separate – though on this occasion thematically uniform – photographs: the first shows air raid victims sheltering in a tube station, there are two of buildings in various stages of destruction, and, last, a group of soldiers clearing debris from a bombsite. Thus, *Living in Cities* immediately makes a case for comprehensive reconstruction, but it also asserts that this projected future rests upon – indeed, follows by necessity from – the effects of aerial attack.

History and the City in Ruins

Yet beyond these fairly broad acknowledgements of the impact of bombing on the need for post-war reconstruction, a more profound theoretical underpinning also develops. Of course, in the instances noted above, the relevance of the war is only vaguely sketched: it provides a striking contrast between present reality and visionary future. We may even doubt the sincerity of the authors' claims, and instead attribute quotations of war damage to the necessity of presenting a visceral justification for comprehensive planning before a public whose opinion remained cool to the embrace of the modern movement. However, several significant figures elaborated the role of the war, incorporating it centrally into the progressive historical scheme that underpinned the modern movement's faith in architecture. There is a suggestion of this in Tubbs's influential text; but in the work of Lewis Mumford, inspired by the rigorously taxonomic mind of his mentor Patrick Geddes, the war experience found a definite location in history. Writing in 1938, and adopting Geddes' cyclical models, Mumford had outlined his perception of the six stages of growth and decay traced by human settlements, and, by extension, in society in general. Somewhat prophetically, he asserted that the final stage of development, 'Nekropolis', would see 'war and famine and disease rack both city and countryside.

The physical towns become mere shells ... the streets fall into disrepair and grass grows in the crack of the pavement'.¹⁶ Mumford's sense that this historical schema applied very much to his own present is left in no doubt by an explicit reference in the description of the fifth stage to the 'gangster-dictators', Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. This 'Tyrannopolis' saw increasing social and political disintegration, followed inevitably by imperialistic wars and the progressive subordination of state power to the military.¹⁷ Correspondingly, in a pamphlet produced in the final year of the Second World War, Mumford wrote 'we have come face to face with the lethal end-products of megalopolitan civilisation', adding 'every bombed area is *ipso facto* a Necropolis'.¹⁸

Naturally, this decline was not merely an urban phenomenon, but paralleled a broader 'schism of the soul' (he drew this phrase from another student of cyclical history, Arnold J. Toynbee) betraying a catastrophic failure of society.¹⁹ It was in response to this 'fall of man' that Mumford found justification for the application of regional planning along Geddesian lines.²⁰ Thus, in summarising the message of a book written towards the end of the war in anticipation of victory, he stated that the 'drama our civilisation had presented ... was played to its end': as a result, the 'time has come for a new drama to be conceived and enacted'.²¹ Another individual, the critic and editor of the *Architectural Review*, J.M. Richards, was similarly convinced of the threat to progress and the significance of the war as a motor of change. Throughout the blitz he endured a permanent awareness of the dangers of aerial attack through his service as a member of the St Paul's Night Watch, protecting the cathedral from the threat of falling incendiaries.²² Yet, during the earliest phases of the war, he had remained cautious of addressing the fact of the conflict and its bearing on architecture in the pages of the *Architectural Review*, preferring for the periodical to maintain a stance of detachment consonant with its rather patrician

¹⁶ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1938), 291-292.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 290-291.

¹⁸ Lewis Mumford, *Rebuilding Britain Series, No. 12: The Plan of London County*, ed. F.J. Osborn (London, Faber & Faber, 1945), 14.

¹⁹ Lewis Mumford, *The Condition of Man* (London: Martin Secker, 1944), 14

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 392.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²² For an account of Richards' time as a member of the Night Watch, see J.M. Richards, *Memoirs of an Unjust Fella* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), 148-157.

background and personnel.²³ This changed midway through 1941 when – partly in response to practically the entire January print run falling victim to an air raid of the publisher’s offices – Richards produced almost single-handed a special instalment of the *Architectural Review* on ‘Destruction and Reconstruction’, for which he wrote a particularly strident foreword.²⁴

In this manifesto for reconstruction, Richards looked to the precedent of the industrial revolution, a period in which ‘the changes that civilisation continually undergoes were suddenly accelerated’, and architecture, as a result of its failure to find any response other than nostalgia and historicism, ‘lost touch with reality and sank into the chaos of the nineteenth century’. A similar fate threatened a century later, and in consequence he urged the danger of slipping ‘into a new eclectic age in which architecture is a respected professional mystery, but not an essential part of the machinery of civilisation’.²⁵ Here, we find a clear sense of the interlinking of the convulsive impact of warfare and the development of architectural practice, along similar lines to those Mumford was outlining at the same time. A revealing theme, to be borne in mind for later, is Richards’ opposition between the mysterious activity of an old-fashioned profession and the technically exacting mechanised civilisation that would guarantee the smooth passage of reconstruction. Elsewhere in the text Richards’ teleological implication became even more stark, as he stated that the war was not really a war at all ‘so much as inevitable *change* passing through one of its most intense (and most unpleasant) phases’. Indeed, the war constituted a ‘phase of revolution’ with a clear significance to the re-ordering of society.²⁶ And for many in

²³ Richards justified the position on the grounds that he did not wish the *Architectural Review* either to become too pragmatic, and subservient to the war effort, or to indulge in ‘Utopianism’. See, J.M. Richards, foreword to *Architectural Review* 90, no. 535, ‘Destruction and Reconstruction Special’ (1941), 1.

²⁴ The details of this incident are noted in the edition of the *Architectural Review* released the following month. Some of the January material was salvaged from the wreckage of Eyre and Spottiswoode’s and incorporated into this ‘January-February’ issue. See, *Architectural Review* 89, no.530 (1941), unnumbered.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 1.

²⁶ A sense of Richards’ schema of historical progression is evident when he writes that the ‘days when wae was an interval between periods of peace ... have gone. In due course we shall presumably again be, in a sense, at peace, but we shall not be *back again* at peace. We shall be living in a world as different in its own way from the world before the war as our present wartime world is’. See, *Ibid*, 1.

the modern movement the evidence of this revolution, an age-defining overthrow of the tradition, was to be found in the ruins scattered throughout the cities of Europe.

Indeed, the bulk of the 'Destruction and Reconstruction' issue carried a photographic record of buildings lost to bombing, each illustration accompanied by a scholarly comment by John Summerson on the building's history and merit.²⁷ This selection was presented by Richards as 'symbolising the disintegration of the whole pre-war era which it is the task of the new plans to supersede'. In being assaulted and destroyed, he claimed, the congested inner-city areas of Britain has reached their 'apotheosis', while those few buildings of artistic value 'lost in the process must be regarded as burnt-offerings on the altar of reconstruction'.²⁸ The art critic Stephen Spender assumed a similarly transcendent tone, when he spoke of his expectation of a closer relationship in future between artists and the public; this development, he hoped, would help see Britain 'build new cities and a new civilisation worthy of the values which we are now spiritually aware of because they have, materially, been destroyed'.²⁹ Several years after the war, this eschatological reading of the ruin remained, attending the comments of another prominent critic, Herbert Read, as he paid tribute to Le Corbusier on the occasion of the award of the 1953 Royal Gold Medal for Architecture. Summoning the image of the neglected, now verdant, bombsites common in the post-war city, Read's speech hails the Swiss architect as 'the poet who has given us a new vision of the future, and not only a vision but the beginnings, white, limpid, clean, clear and without hesitations, a new world opening up like a flower among the ruins': an assertion of epochal change that is rooted in the destruction of the past, and yet materially divorced from it.³⁰

Of course, this reading of the ruin as a symbol of transience is a standard motif through history, but it has been suggested that it is an instinct peculiar to modernity to read such fragments as not only temporally but also politically divorced from the

²⁷ The images collected in this issue and in subsequent supplements in the 'Destruction and Reconstruction' series were soon after collected in a book, J.M. Richards, ed., *The Bombed Buildings of Britain: A Record of Architectural Casualties* (London: The Architectural Press, 1942).

²⁸ Richards, foreword to *Architectural Review* 90, 2.

²⁹ Stephen Spender, introduction to *Air Raids* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 8.

³⁰ Herbert Read, quoted in foreword to *Architects' Year Book 5*, ed. Trevor Dannatt (London: Elek Books, 1953), 8.

present. That is, as Russel A. Berman has written, modern ruins ‘enact a particular political representation, the ruin as the ruin of an *ancien régime*’.³¹ The tradition of ruin gazing has always accepted this conceit of the impermanence of imperial power; historically, however, the encounter with the ruin is understood to be resolutely passive: more meditative and melancholy than the blithe triumphalism professed by Richards. An engraving, *The New Zealander* by Gustave Doré, sums up well this romantic conception, with its undertones of historical fatalism and the unavoidable decline of empires (Figure 3.3). Doré imagines a London of the future, diminished from the vital world city it had been in 1872 and fallen instead into picturesque decay, its intimations of the sublime appreciated by a figure sitting on the opposite bank of the Thames – the colonial visitor of the title. This fantasy ‘Grand Tourist’ gazes into the distance, letting his sketching pad rest at his side as he reflects on the eclipse of an empire, and presumably wonders at the fate of the current world order and of the geographical supremacy that his own presence implies.³²

The readiness with which such a reading arises demonstrates that any appraisal of ruination will involve the projection of some conception of intentionality, meaning, and historical narrative onto the silent architectural debris of conflict or neglect. But it has been argued by Peter Fritzsche that the framework within which ruins are understood changed dramatically during the early nineteenth century, particularly as a consequence of the French Revolution. Whereas previously, the dereliction of the past was read in aesthetic or moral terms – as an indication of the power of nature over culture and the fragility of human works – this changed with the shock of political and industrial revolution, combined with a growing maturity in the study of history.³³ Subsequently, Fritzsche suggests, the public perceived the past as something ‘bygone and lost, and also strange and mysterious’, stranded in the wake

³¹ Russel A. Berman, ‘Democratic Destruction: Ruins and Emancipation in the American Tradition’, in *Ruins of Modernity*, 104.

³² Chris Woodward, *In Ruins* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001), 1-2. On the reflexivity of the imperial ruin gaze, see Julia Hell, ‘Imperial Ruin Gazers, or Why Did Scipio Weep?’, in *Ruins of Modernity*, 169-192.

³³ For Fritzsche’s reading of the meaning of ruins in the eighteenth century, see Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Times and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 97-98.

of ‘the restless iteration of the new’.³⁴ Ruins too, as the material inheritance from past generations, emerged in an entirely different light. They now tended to encourage less a generalised and poetic response in observers, and were received rather as memorials to specific historical events: no longer met with gloomy passivity, ruins emerged as object-lessons in activism and political empowerment to subjects who became suddenly sensitive to their own ‘situatedness’ in history.³⁵

Surreal Encounters and the Trauma of War

While one might doubt Fritzsche’s broad-brush approach and bold generalisations, he does nevertheless present an appropriate background to the assumptions we have seen among modernists in Britain in the mid-twentieth century. Above all, the eschatological threat underlying the ruin-gazing tradition remained subordinate to the faith in historical rupture, endlessly restated. Thus, the reflexive significance of the ruin as it was traditionally understood received little commentary, with the crumbling shells of bomb-ravaged buildings littered around British towns and cities taken as memorials to a morally impoverished past, valuable only as a platform from which the nation would leap confidently into the post-war world. As Frederic Osborn put it in 1946: the bombing of British cities meant people ‘began to speculate on better things that might be built on the acres of rubble; and from this they went on to speculate how the out-of-date areas left unbombed might be replanned’.³⁶

This articulation of an unproblematic and complete transition from destruction to reconstruction is well illustrated in a poster produced several years after the war for the Festival of Britain (Figure 3.4). Advertising the ‘Live Architecture’ exhibit at the Lansbury Estate, it records a remarkable event that saw a new housing estate and shopping precinct built and displayed to the public in Poplar, East London, an area that had long experienced severe poverty and had suffered extensive bomb damage

³⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 92-96

³⁶ Frederic J. Osborn, *Green-Belt Cities* (London: Evelyn, Adams and MacKay, 1969), 47.

through the course of the war. In the poster, two hands (recalling the front cover of *Living in Cities*) ascend elegantly out of a landscape of grey and broken buildings: one raises aloft a model-like image of a construction site, while the other, closer to view, holds a schematically rendered house, within whose outline is superimposed a photograph of a pristine, modern interior, its window open to the sky beyond. In one sense, it is a stylish and compelling composition: an expression of optimism and the opening-up of new architectural horizons into the future. Yet there is also something clinical and chilling about the image. Sara Wasson has commented that the dismembered arms hint at the trauma of the preceding years, an expression of the bodily and physical mutilation whose memory continued to linger beyond the war, leaving its mark in other media away from the rhetorical gusto of architectural modernism – for instance, the paintings of Graham Sutherland.³⁷ This judgement is certainly accurate, but the poster admits also – in its cartoonish forms and bizarre juxtapositions, all set against a serene, near cloudless sky – a hint of surrealism.

It is a fact that, as the bombs rained down, the British artistic community had been sensitive to the invasion of everyday life by the surreal.³⁸ When addressing the era in his memoirs over a decade later, the artist Julian Trevelyan wrote that during the war it:

...became absurd to compose Surrealist confections when high explosives could do it so much better ... Life had caught up with Surrealism or Surrealism with life, and for a giddy moment we in England lived the irrational movement to its death.³⁹

His response to the shattered urban realm is evidently inflected with a creeping sense of the macabre: the death-blow dealt to surrealism repeated in the mortal threat of aerial attack. This impression finds a poignant counterpart in a comment from Nigel

³⁷ Sara Wasson, *Urban Gothic of the Second World War: Dark London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 155-156. To illustrate the popularity of the broken body metaphor Wasson cites a poem by Mervyn Peake describing London as ‘half-masonry; half pain’, see *Ibid*, 145.

³⁸ On the subject of British Surrealism and the Second World War, see Ian Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 138-159; Ben Highmore, ‘Itinerant Surrealism: British Surrealism Either Side of the War’, in *A Companion to British Art: 1600 to the Present*, ed. Dana Arnold and David Peters Corbett (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2013), 253-257.

³⁹ Julian Trevelyan in 1957, quoted in Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade*, 139.

Henderson, whose wartime service as a combat pilot eventually drove him to a nervous breakdown. Like Trevelyan, Henderson's experiences led him to suggest that the trauma of war rendered artistic practice trivial and meaningless, writing of:

Houses chopped by bombs while ladies were still sitting in the lavatory, the rest of the house gone but the wallpaper and the fires still burning in the grate. Who can hold a candle to that kind of real life Surrealism?⁴⁰

Not surprisingly, given the all-consuming scale of the war effort, Henderson was not the only artist or architect to have been touched by the conflict. His close collaborator Peter Smithson was drafted into the army at the age of nineteen, and also served in India; it was in India too that Alan Colquhoun and Robert Maxwell met; likewise, James Stirling and Colin Rowe encountered one another as members of the same military unit. In fact, the latter injured his back sufficiently severely to end his aspirations of becoming an architect, and Stirling was first hospitalised with shell-shock and later shot in the left hand and shoulder, leaving him with a permanently damaged finger and the consequent recipient of a disability pension for the rest of his life.⁴¹ Despite all this, as noted at the start of this chapter, the war experience is almost completely forgotten by mainstream histories of modernism.

This absence is all the more curious given that the apprehension of the surreal and the uncanny, which seems so pregnant with suggestions of the blitz's traumatic emotional inheritance, did receive comment in accounts of the time. A glance through the photographs of bombsites collected in the *Architectural Review*'s July 1941 'Destruction and Reconstruction Special' provides much evidence for the uncanny effects people discovered as they emerged from their shelters to an unfamiliar city. One scene, for example, displays a pub, half of its interior untouched, half blasted-open and exposed to the street – with only a pile of debris left to maintain the ambiguous boundary between inside and out (Figure 3.5).

Bowing forwards from above, the surface of the upper floor reveals to our view a

⁴⁰ Nigel Henderson quoted in Colomina, foreword to *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern*, 1; Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade*, 139-140.

⁴¹ These events are summarised by Beatriz Colomina, see *Ibid.*, 1-2. For a more in depth account see Colomina, 'Friends of the Future: A Conversation with Peter Smithson', *October* 94, 'The Independent Group' special issue (2000), 13-15; Girouard, *Big Jim*, 21-24.

billiards table, which seems to watch malevolently as two men set about the task of clearing-up. Meanwhile, a second group of labourers pose further back; in response to their bizarre surroundings, one pretends casually to pull a pint for another, who reaches forward to collect the glass (presumably empty of libation). This ritual of everyday life clings precariously to its setting, with the little farce staged across a fractured, drooping bar, the actors' good cheer overshadowed by the building's evidently dangerous condition. The accompanying caption gives some hint of these ambiguities, noting the scene's exhibition of the 'surprising poetry of destruction'. It attaches the same label to another photograph, this time an outdoor view presenting a confusion of fence, grass, and rubble, all set against a screen of ruined houses. In the face of this disorder, however, the passage instead identifies 'the almost gaiety, like a scene in a French film, of a garden in next morning's sunshine'.⁴² The cinematic reference presumably alludes to the poetic realism of the 1930s, a genre whose rich atmospherics supply a revealing context to the author's desire to highlight the evocative qualities of wartime ruins. What is more, his framing of destruction in terms of film reinforces the impression of a strange unreality – further augmented by performance – which was discerned in the previous photograph.⁴³

Even more instructive is a curious contribution to the 'Marginalia' section of the *Architectural Review* from December of the same year. The anonymous entry labels its subject an instance of 'Surrealism in 1856', and reproduces an engraving found in the recently published book *Space, Time and Architecture* (Figure 3.6). In turn, the image had been obtained from James Bogardus's nineteenth-century study *Cast Iron Buildings*, and, as the brief text notes, carries a definite 'surrealist flavour' in the partially erased depiction of a nondescript iron-framed building in an American city. The author additionally comments that Bogardus:

⁴² John Piper, 'The Architecture of Destruction', *Architectural Review* 90, no. 535 (1941), 29.

⁴³ For a discussion of the affinities between film and ruination, see Johannes Von Moltke, 'Ruin Cinema', in *Ruins of Modernity*: 395-417. In the British context, the relationship between ruins and cinema was certainly not one-sided: ruins are, in fact, a frequent presence in films of the era, which often exploit their expressive qualities during moments of dramatic climax. As well as *Night and the City* (1950), discussed at the beginning of this chapter, other contemporary films that make use of wartime ruins are: *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), *Hue and Cry* (1947), *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947), *Pool of London* (1951), *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951), *The Yellow Balloon* (1953).

... drew this modern ruin to prove that the iron framework would stand up even with, as he writes, 'the greater part removed or destroyed by violence.' Strengthened in our views by recent experience, we may be inclined to argue that to inhabitants the advantage remains doubtful, if only a front, be it ever so subtly balanced out, remains upright.⁴⁴

With this expression of disquiet, we return to the ruin as deviant, as '*locus horribilus*', in this instance, as a threat to the certitudes of modernism and its promise to overcome the perceived crises of pre-war civilisation through a rational approach building. Questioning an – albeit rather absurd – assertion of faith in the boundless potential of technology and its ability to engender progress in every sphere of life, the passage unconsciously betrays a small fracture in the optimistic proclamations made in favour of post-war reconstruction. It is perhaps in the theory of modern architecture itself – as well as in the almost aggressive disavowal of melancholy characteristic of the modernist ruin gazer – that we should explore for evidence of the age of anxiety into which architects and planners moved as the war ended.

Indeed, insecurity was written into the ideal of the modernist city. Alongside its claim to guarantee light, air, good health, and greenery, the diffuse spatial order promoted by figures as contrarily disposed as Le Corbusier, and Frederic Osborn carried also a more sinister justification. The former, while embracing the virtues of the aeroplane in revolutionising the human apprehension of the world, nevertheless admitted the ambiguity of its promise in the potential incarnation as either 'dove or falcon'.⁴⁵ His publication in 1933 of the iconic *Ville Radieuse*, therefore, made explicit reference to the plan's range of anti-bombing features: from the capacity of the buildings' pilotis to disperse poisonous gases, to the provision of protective metal plating on their rooftops.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the popularity in America of the low-density

⁴⁴ 'Blast-Proof Architecture', *Architectural Review* 90, no. 540 (1941), 184. Indeed, the *Architectural Review*'s 'Destruction and Reconstruction Special' suggested that a picture of a burnt-out Victorian corner building displayed 'the drama of the transparent shell'. See Piper, 'The Architecture of Destruction', 27.

⁴⁵ Le Corbusier, quoted in Vidler, 'Air War', *Ruins of Modernity*, 34.

⁴⁶ Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to Be Used As the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilisation*, trans. Pamela Knight, Eleanor Levieux, and Derek Coltman (London: Faber, 1967), 60-61; 171. For further comment on this subject, see Jean-Louis Cohen, *Architecture in Uniform: Designing and Building for the Second World War* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2011), 144-147.

residential model of the Garden City – relentlessly promoted by Osborn – found a source in the menace the hydrogen bomb presented to heavily built-up urban areas.⁴⁷ Between 1944 and 1947 the United States Strategic Bombing Survey investigated the effects of the bombing programme over Germany, and concluded that decentralisation had mitigated the effectiveness of strikes aimed at industrial targets; correspondingly, it proposed that a similar policy be applied to the nation's own housing in response to the nuclear threat.⁴⁸ In Britain, the *County of London Plan* remarked on 'the melancholy fact that future planning and reconstruction might have to recognise the possibility of air attack', adding, chillingly, that the:

... nature and intensity of such attacks, if and when they occur in future, must be a matter of conjecture; precautions which might be considered reasonable in the light of present knowledge might be found of little value at a later date when more effective methods of destruction have been perfected.⁴⁹

The retrospective prescience of this observation encapsulates the dread that would pervade post-war British society in the face of the nuclear threat. As we have seen, there had been a number of proposals during the past decades for a substantial decentralisation of London's population, and the *County of London Plan* would add to this body of thought. Its motives here were not consciously directed to the aerial threat; but, had they been, any presumption that 'precautions' might be taken against future attacks was proved futile, for military experts would soon calculate that just a handful of Soviet bombs would be enough to ravage the entire country.⁵⁰ The sort of decentralising precautions advised by the United States government would in this instance offer little protection to British citizens – such was the unavoidable concentration of its population, Garden City or not. Nevertheless, the New Towns

Another dominant modernist figure, Frank Lloyd Wright, also cited the threat of bombing while agitating for the mass-decentralisation demanded by his Broadacre City model. These ideas were widely circulated in Britain through an often reproduced article on the future of London published in the *News Chronicle* in 1941. Here, Wright made repeated reference to the blitz as a background to his proposal that the capital be rebuilt to cover an area twenty-five times larger than before. See Meryle Secrest, *Frank Lloyd Wright* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), 487.

⁴⁷ Murray Fraser and Joe Kerr, *Architecture and the 'Special Relationship': The American Influence on Post-war British Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2007), 145.

⁴⁸ Vidler, 'Air War', *Ruins of Modernity*, 35

⁴⁹ J.H. Forshaw and Patrick Abercrombie, *County of London Plan* (London: MacMillan, 1943), 124.

⁵⁰ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Little, Brown, 2005), 334.

that would develop around the country, and whose realisation had won such impetus during the war, would in their sparse planning inherit at least a reminder of the violence of the war years.

The Ruins of Technological Progress

However, there is a far more troubling association between modernism and aerial attack in the collaboration with military elements of various architects, planners, and art historians during the Second World War. In an exhaustive study Karen J. Weitze, has highlighted the role of several figures in this work, the most renowned among them being Erich Mendelsohn, Antonin Raymond, and Ludwig Hilberseimer.

However, more relevant to a British context was the involvement of Arthur Korn and Felix Samuely – both prominent members of the MARS Group, whose 1942 London Plan (discussed in the previous chapter) is infamous for its extreme rationalisation of the city's functions, as well as its disregard for the already existing urban fabric.⁵¹

Offering their technical expertise, these figures aided in the execution of bombing campaigns over Germany and Japan through a range of different projects, carried out at the request of authorities in Britain and the United States.

In all of the above cases, the collaboration constituted merely consultations on construction methods used in industrial and residential buildings in target areas, so that full-size replicas could be created in order to assess their structural integrity through test-bombings. Although these individuals' general ignorance of each other's involvement – as well as the fragmentary nature of their contributions to the project as a whole – dilutes any direct personal culpability, the coupling of the technological expertise underpinning modernist practice and its elaboration in the name of destruction remains unsettling. Weitze reads the assortment of schemes together as

⁵¹ Karen J. Weitze, 'In the Shadows of Dresden: Modernism and the War Landscape', in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 72, no. 3 (2013), 322-323.

The MARS Plan itself almost suffered destruction as a result of enemy action when almost all of the extant copies were destroyed in bombing raids. See Gold, *Experience of modernism*, 257 n.39.

an almost coherent architectural space: a ‘war landscape’ whose limits were extended by the parallel production by the artist-architect Gerald K. Geerlings of innovative target maps, which combined abstracted aerial and perspectival views of key sites. While for Weitze these developments are of interest primarily for their demonstration of cross-European cultural interactions and their blurring of the divide between art and science, we might also view in the virtual ‘war landscape’ a peculiar inversion of the H-bomb-induced adherence to population dispersal.⁵² That is, just as the latter secured an urban morphology whose justifications in the name of rational order were underwritten by paranoia and the prospect of violence, so ‘the war landscape’ saw architects’ and planners’ technological expertise employed to ease that same process of destruction.⁵³

These phenomena – ruination and rebuilding – have frequently converged during the course of our discussion, particularly in response to Vidler’s emphasis on the curious, though generally unheard, discord in the slogan ‘post-war reconstruction’.⁵⁴ Returning for a moment to the Lansbury Estate poster (Figure 3.4), we see in its surreal juxtapositions a decisive consequence of this conflict: for it is clear that the ruins depicted at the base of the image, are as much a signifier of technological possibility as the pristine dwellings rising from the destruction. In short, the ruin not only undermines the optimism of modernist rhetoric through a regression into surrealism and irrationality, it also threatened to rewrite the meaning of science and in the process problematize any profession of faith in technological progress. As Leonardo Benevolo writes in his appraisal of the immediate post-war moment, the ‘boundaries between technology, politics and morals, which seemed clear at first, were now no longer recognisable’, adding that ‘the possibility of destruction inherent

⁵² Murray Fraser and Joe Kerr, *Architecture and the ‘Special Relationship’*, 145.

⁵³ Another, appropriately strange, example of the collaboration of the arts with military technology come with the decision of a group of British Surrealists – Julian Trevelyan, Roland Penrose, Bill Hayter, and Buckland Wright – to form an ‘Industrial Camouflage Research Unit’ to investigate the design of camouflaging systems for large buildings and machinery. See, Highmore, ‘Itinerant Surrealism’, 254.

⁵⁴ See footnote 8.

in the most modern means of warfare laid responsibilities on technicians which went beyond the technological field'.⁵⁵

Again, the issue is often clear in the writings of modernists themselves, where statements broadcasting the all-encompassing potential of science and technology begin to assume an emphasis quite different from that intended. For example, when addressing the connection between industry and town planning in a pamphlet in Frederic Osborn's *Rebuilding Britain Series*, the planner Roland Pumphrey pointed to the axiom that 'action and reaction are equal and opposite', continuing:

That which destroys necessitates that which rebuilds. The loss of life and the destruction of property ... under the Nazi Blitzkreig – these features of modern warfare have galvanised public opinion in this and other lands into an agitation for a vastly improved distribution of industry, housing and community life after the war'.⁵⁶

Although never stated directly, there is a clearly implied continuity between the public's experience of destruction systematically conveyed by means of modern technology, and their presumed apprehension of the benefits that such technical expertise might bestow in the pursuit of reconstruction. In turn, of course, the equivalence of benign and malign technology is also apparent; and in this sense we must perceive the co-existence of destruction and reconstruction as twin procedures in a unified process, in which each guarantees the other's role. Indeed, J.M. Richards highlighted this very fact in 1941, commenting that the 'destruction we see around us has a very real place in the preliminary history of reconstruction programmes'.⁵⁷ Thus arose what was in retrospect an uneasy alliance, wherein a nation was invited to embrace the benefits of radical technological progress, having just seen a less benign – though no less systematic – application of technology level large areas of its cities. And there was no signifier more entangled in this web of scientific positivism,

⁵⁵ Leonardo Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture: Volume 2, The Modern Movement* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1971), 684. In a related vein, Colomina has explored the appropriation by architects of wartime technologies and processes, as a result identifying the investment of post-war life in the anxieties of the Cold War: Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Barcelona: Actar, 2007).

⁵⁶ Roland Pumphrey, *Rebuilding Britain Series, No. 6: Industry and Town Planning* (London: Faber & Faber, 1941), 11-12.

⁵⁷ J.M. Richards, 'First Instalment of a Survey', 6.

destruction, and reconstruction than the ruin. It was the conspicuous urban product of systematic aerial bombardment: both proving the death of the old order and providing a canvas onto which would be cast the new urban pattern, whose justification found its source in the assured benignity of technology and science.

Of course many architects and planners did little to obscure this complicity with their persistent rejoicing at the possibilities opened-up by the damage wrought on Britain's towns and cities. Some were restrained in their assessment. For instance, in the 1947 plan for the City of London, its authors Charles Holden and William Holford spoke of how the areas of greatest damage 'offer an opportunity'.⁵⁸ Using the standard binary language of the modern movement – a narrative of self-justification, even self-deception – they oppose the qualities of age and decay with the purity of the new:

... instead of replacing all the buildings as they used to stand, on the same narrow streets, and in the same disjointed pattern created by time and a multitude of ownerships, these devastated areas may be replanned on more convenient lines, with better light and air and access, and under the control of a few landlords instead of many.⁵⁹

However, they also speak of how the enormous levels of destruction had 'upset [the] constant piecemeal renewal of the City fabric, by tearing great gashes across its surface': an expression of loss and almost physical trauma. They added, as a preface to their detailed report recording the damage done throughout the area, that it would seek to 'give a description of what has been lost, and of what may be gained'.⁶⁰

Others however were unpleasantly unequivocal. Presenting a particularly strident view was the planner William A. Robson, who stated of the *Luftwaffe*: as 'site-clearing agencies they have shown themselves to be incomparably effective', later suggesting that areas 'which should long ago have been dealt with ... have been

⁵⁸ C.H. Holden and W.G. Holford, *The City of London: A Record of Destruction and Survival* (London: Architectural Press, 1951), 186.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 184.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 186.

demolished by the most speedy procedure ever devised'.⁶¹ This appropriation of the effects of aerial attacks, to the extent that hostile weaponry appears practically a tool of the urban designer, is a common motif of the time, and can tend to obscure one's historical perception of the trauma of the war experience. Even such a moderate figure as Clough Williams-Ellis spoke of the German bombs enacting a process of 'slum-clearance', given that many had 'from a town planner's point of view – fallen so providentially as to have solved problems that might else have continued to hold up urgently needed improvements for generations'.⁶² In fact, *Living in Cities* seems to achieve a sort of apotheosis in moral disorientation and the confusion of intentionality in urban transformation when Tubbs states that in the post-blitz city, haphazardly scarred by conflict and still requiring demolition work, "re-destruction" may have to precede reconstruction'.⁶³

In this ambiguity we perceive a battle for control over what ruination should signify, and how far the promise of science and technology might be trusted. Was the destruction of the historical city an occasion for benign *progress from* an outworn past, or did it instead augur a malign *passage towards* an uncertain future? The front cover of an edition of *Picture Post*, published on 25 August 1945, articulates well this condition of doubt. Carrying the title 'Man Enters the Atom Age', it displays a child alone on a beach looking towards a twilit horizon. In the corner, seeming to have been squeezed out by the sublime vista, lies the caption 'Dawn – Or Dusk?'. This question would be the touchstone for the nuclear age and all of its moral complexities: a nightmare parody of the brave new world anticipated during war. Yet, as we have seen, the project of reconstruction was never unproblematic, and its origins in the ruins of British towns and cities would be restated as the fragile certainties of the modern movement gradually slipped from favour. It is therefore necessary to consider further some of the writings that sought directly to confront the ruin's ambiguous presence on the streets of the wartime city.

⁶¹ William A. Robson, *Rebuilding Britain Series, No. 4: The War and the Planning Outlook* (Faber & Faber, 1941), 9; 13.

⁶² Clough Williams-Ellis, *Rebuilding Britain Series, No. 5: Plan for Living* (Faber & Faber, 1941), 19.

⁶³ Tubbs, *Living in Cities*, 32.

A Traumatic Inheritance

In academic encounters with the post-Second World War ruin, W.G. Sebald's striking essay 'Air War and Literature' seems an almost constant presence, thanks to the force of its content and the credibility of its central thesis.⁶⁴ Derived from a series of lectures given in Zurich in 1997 – and subsequently published in *On the Natural History of Destruction* – the study explores the failure of German society to frankly acknowledge the experience of bombing in the years since the Second World War. While the ordeal of the British public cannot be doubted, as the centres of such cities as Coventry, Plymouth, and Exeter were practically wiped off the map, the destruction seen in Germany existed on another level entirely – in several respects.⁶⁵ The activity of the British and American military, which became particularly intense from 1942 onwards, led to many city centres being affected and incurred appalling casualties – Sebald cites attacks on 131 towns in total. It was not only the number of towns targeted that made Germans' hardship exceptional, but also the comprehensiveness of the campaigns mobilised against these towns and cities, such that centres of the significance of Berlin, Hamburg, and Dresden saw their buildings razed to the ground on an unprecedented scale. When expressed in the form of abstract statistics these events are shocking enough – Sebald notes such details as numbers of casualties, numbers of homes destroyed, numbers of people rendered homeless, and even the cubic metres of rubble per capita into which certain cities were reduced – but when understood as concrete experiences they are beyond everyday comprehension.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ W.G. Sebald, 'Air War and Literature', in *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: The Modern Library, 2004): 1-104.

⁶⁵ The singularity of Germany's experience is notably highlighted by Leonardo Benevolo – whose account of modern architecture is rare for commenting, albeit briefly, on the moral complexities posed by the Second World War: Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture: Volume 2*, 733.

⁶⁶ 600,000 civilian deaths; 3.5 million homes destroyed; 7.5 million people homeless; and regarding the last statistic, 31.1m³ per capita in Cologne, 42.8m³ per capita in Dresden. See Sebald, 'Air War and Literature', 3-4.

In a series of descriptions, unrelenting in their frankness, Sebald describes the circumstances of some of these air raids: the ferocity and chaos of the attacks themselves, and the psychological residue left behind with the rubble.⁶⁷ It is this latter phenomenon – or, rather, its apparent absence – that provides the foundation for the essay’s argument. For Sebald highlights how this singularly violent and traumatic period ‘left scarcely a trace of pain behind in the collective consciousness, it has been largely obliterated from the retrospective understanding of those affected, and it never played any appreciable part in the discussion of the internal constitution of our country’.⁶⁸ This omission he attributes to the sheer shock of those affected, mingled with a sense of collective guilt, and traces its absence from the literary production of post-war Germany in all but the most vapid offerings.

We have seen this kind of passive historical censorship already in the reluctance of historians of modern architecture to comment on the wartime mobilisation of important designers and critics, even in those cases where military participation resulted in severe – and, one presumes, lasting – physical or psychological injury.⁶⁹ Drawing Sebald’s insights into the field of post-war architecture, Anthony Vidler has sketched some of these evasions, highlighting too the pessimistic and deeply anxious outlook that persisted after hostilities had ceased, and as the world slipped into the state of constant diplomatic tension that characterised the Cold War years. Far from historically discrete, this anxiety is, for Vidler, part of a broader cultural tendency in which the fear of bombing and the prospect of future conflict represents the ‘repressed master discourse of the twentieth century’, its impact apparent through decades of architectural and artistic production, although rarely receiving direct critical acknowledgement.⁷⁰ There was, in fact, some intimation of this at the time, as

⁶⁷ As an example, see Sebald’s account of the bombing of Hamburg: *Ibid*, 26-30.

⁶⁸ Sebald, *Ibid*, 4

⁶⁹ Notably, as mentioned already, there were injuries to Colin Rowe (for whom the damage was certainly long-term), James Stirling, and Nigel Henderson. See Colomina, foreword to *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern*, 1-2; Vidler, ‘Air War and Architecture’, 30; Mark Girouard, *Big Jim: The Life and Work of James Stirling* (London: Pimlico, 2000), 21-24.

⁷⁰ Vidler, ‘Air War and Architecture’, 32.

Herbert Read wrote of a ‘geometry of fear’ apparent in the formalist practices of British sculpture after the war.⁷¹

Given the contradiction between this underlying attitude and the optimistic principles of modernism it is little surprise to find its presence remain subdued in historiography, as well as in the writings of the new generation of architects themselves, particularly during those decades when the memory of bombing was so fresh. And while Vidler’s discussion focusses primarily on the anticipatory fear of destruction – which he reads in various practices, from the opportunistic dovetailing of the nuclear threat and the sparse spatial order of the modernist city, to the equivocal stance that marks the ‘anti-architecture’ experimentation of groups such as Superstudio and Archigram – the significance of memory, and its suppression, remains ever present as a pendant to post-war apprehension.⁷² It is easy to forget that architectural destruction has a history no less substantial than that of architectural construction, a fact indicated by Nicola Lambourne in her study of the bombing of cultural monuments in Western Europe in the Second World War. Lambourne also emphasises the absence of these events from the historic record, citing the publication in 1942 of Pevsner’s *An Outline of European Architecture*, which gives barely a mention of the damage being sustained by the structures populating its pages – aside from a brief note on the totemic razing of Coventry Cathedral.⁷³

With this anxiety in mind, the ruin emerges as a critical element of the mid-century urban scene. It could hardly have been otherwise, given its persistent presence from the beginning of the blitz until long afterwards, with bombsites left undeveloped during the difficult early post-war years. A pattern of melancholy memorials to those who had lost their lives, these scattered, weed-covered fragments reminded of the terrors of the war, again recalling the far-from-peaceful situation in Europe at the time. Just as significantly, they presented an uncomfortable corrective to the wartime

⁷¹ For a series of studies into the anxiety-ridden context of post-war British art, see *British Art in the Nuclear Age*, ed. Catherine Jolivet (London: Routledge, 2014).

⁷² Vidler, ‘Air War and Architecture’, 38-39.

⁷³ Nicola Lambourne, *War Damage in Western Europe: The Destruction of Historic Monuments During the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 3-4. Subsequent editions gave only a brief commemorative note; meanwhile, the 1960 edition commented on the war as a temporary ‘barrier’ to effective architectural progress.

faith that as hostilities ended a better world would suddenly take shape. Austerity stubbornly persisted: shortages of labour, materials – particularly steel – as well as the awkwardness of adapting the economy to non-military production, all saw to it that the British cityscape took many years to return to a state of normality.⁷⁴ Even when empty sites were eventually filled, the replacements were hardly less pregnant signifiers of loss.⁷⁵ For, as we have seen, architectural writers at the time acknowledged the necessity of destruction in occupying ‘a very real place in the preliminary history of reconstruction programmes’, an admission that serves practically to render the fruits of this process themselves a strange species of war memorial.⁷⁶ All the same, when this preliminary fact of urban destruction did receive recognition, its treatment tended to be rather oblique: there is, in spite of the apparent willingness to accept the devastation of war, an element of cultural censure of the sort that Sebald identifies, most notably a practice of ‘looking and looking away at the same time’.⁷⁷

While the image of the damaged city presented a compelling argument for the need to plan a new urban order, its usefulness was not presumed to extend beyond the start of re-planning. The cover of *Living in Cities* is conspicuous not only in its invocation of the ruined city as representative of the present urban condition, but also in the absoluteness with which it affirms the autonomy of the God-like architect-planner in envisioning the shape of the future (Figure 3.2). To again draw on Sebald, these images make it appear as though ‘total destruction was not the horrifying end of a collective aberration, but something more like the first stage of a brave new world’.⁷⁸

Another, even more striking suggestion is given in a pair of illustrations produced by Oswald Batt, which accompany a commentary on the proposed re-planning of

⁷⁴ Anthony Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture: A History of Modern Architecture in Britain* (London: Architectural Press, 1970), 166; Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, 101. One of the period’s most conspicuous architectural statements built from steel, Hunstanton School, was also a prominent victim of material shortages. Alison Smithson would write many years later of how ‘between 1952 and 1953 we waited the better part of a year for sufficient steel’. See Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, ‘“Patio and Pavilion” Reconstructed’, *AA Files* 47 (2002), 44 n.6.

⁷⁵ Vidler, ‘Air War and Architecture’, 33.

⁷⁶ J.M. Richards, ‘First Instalment of a Survey of Bomb Damage’, 6.

⁷⁷ W.G. Sebald, foreword to *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), ix.

⁷⁸ Sebald, ‘Air War and Literature’, 6.

London (Figure 3.7). Authored by the writer and Garden City advocate Charles P. Purdom, *How Shall We Rebuild London?* offered a radical proposal in support of the dispersion the capital's population, while reorganising its functions and transportation system.⁷⁹ Batt's drawings provide a bold and symbolically suggestive amplification of the books argument, appearing in the manner of a prelude at the start of each chapter. In the first, the heroic planner, having abandoned his military uniform upon return from military service pulls up his sleeves as he sets to work before a map of London. Dramatically spotlighted, his shadow falls ominously onto the maze of streets charted on the wall behind his back. Meanwhile, his gaze is fixed on a collection of canonical planning documents pinned on top of the map – the Uthwatt Report of 1942, the *County of London Plan*, and the Royal Academy Planning Committee's 1942 interim report *London Replanned* – which collectively offer a new vision for the city whose present form they also seem to dismiss.⁸⁰ As a result, it is no surprise to find in the next image, the same figure dispassionately scrubbing the map clean in a literal articulation of the *tabula rasa*, with no suggestion of the piecemeal replacement of bombsites or any concern for the patterns of living that are written into the form of the historic city. In the space left behind, a schematic plan repeats all of the modernist standards promised by comprehensive reconstruction, from the orbital roads that bound a patchwork of self-contained neighbourhoods, to the isolated zones of industry and fingers of parkland creeping into the city centre. It is clear, here, that wartime destruction does not merely invite replacement and selective renewal, but rather provides a licence to address the city as a whole, filling-in areas far larger than those defined by mass-bombing.

In fact, the insistence on the priority of reconstruction and the practice of re-planning is telling – a point again made by Sebald and Vidler. Both highlight the instinct that sees historic disasters being met by an instinctive response to rebuild and efface any visible evidence that might draw recollections to the surface. Meanwhile, in the

⁷⁹ C.B. Purdom, *How Should We Rebuild London* (London: J.M. Dent, 1945).

⁸⁰ That these documents are chosen is revealing of the far from unified status of planning advocates during the war. While the Uthwatt Report and *County of London Plan* were received on all sides as significant milestones in the achievements of official support for a centrally organised planning machinery, the content of the material presented in *London Replanned* was deeply divisive due to its dismissal of modern movement planning principles in favour of a classical, Beaux Arts inflected approach the re-planning of the capital.

immediate aftermath, during the period before building work can practically be undertaken, Vidler notes a tendency to idealise the process of redesign, whereby prospects onto the future take precedence and the fragmentary condition of the city in the present is replaced by a unified and optimistic vision of what is to come. In short, an emphasis on architectural productivity promises to present in physical form an attitude of ‘business as usual’.⁸¹ There was no lack of this during the Second World War, when securing guarantees for a project of reconstruction became the overriding concern for town planners and other social campaigners. Indeed, the phenomenon can be seen at its most stark in the transformation that saw a war of reaction against external aggressors being gradually redefined, so that by 1945 its victorious conclusion was framed as a mandate for a politically progressive social settlement, summed up in the Labour Party’s electoral call to ‘Win the Peace’.⁸² This political and social project found its physical articulation in the renewal of the urban fabric, as planners embraced a rhetoric of virility and confidence in a conspicuous display of activity that denied the shattered reality of Britain’s cities.

Viewing reconstruction plans in this context – as responses, conscious or not, to the legacy of bomb damage – is of great interest in lending an alternative perspective on the architectural responses to the blitzed city. Although we have seen that modernist planning and its principles were at least to some extent formulated as a pre-emptive response to the threat of aerial attack, its content was presented as self-determined and based on rational principles. The prescriptive elements that constituted the schema for the modernist city were deemed to be beneficial in themselves, their application divorced from contextual considerations. In turn, there was a corresponding insistence on the need to ignore the inherited urban morphology whose contours had lately been obscured, though never actually obliterated.

⁸¹ Vidler, ‘Air War and Architecture’, 30-31; Sebald, ‘Air War and Literature’, 5-7. Sebald describes how ‘the now legendary and in some respects genuinely admirable reconstruction of the country after the devastation wrought by Germany’s wartime enemies, a reconstruction tantamount to a second liquidation in successive phases of the nation’s own past history, prohibited any look backward. It did so through the sheer amount of labour required and the creation of a new, faceless reality, pointing the population exclusively towards the future and enjoining on it silence about the past’.

⁸² Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 183-184.

There is a characteristic example of this in a book, authored by E.J. Carter and Ernő Goldfinger, which sought to provide an accessible guide to the *County of London Plan*.⁸³ Published by Penguin and liberally filled with diagrammatic maps, isotypes, and impressionistic renderings drawn from the original plan, its propagandist intention is clear. In the opening pages, a Gordon Cullen cartoon offers a rhetorical juxtaposition characteristic of the time, in which the ruined city of the present faces an image of its hypothetical future (Figure 3.8). It is this second, identically-framed, perspective that bears the weight of the polemic. We see a scene that looks much like the London of today, with narrow streets running between buildings old and new, with little uniformity in land use. Further variety is apparent in the survival of several of the buildings still standing in the prior image of the bombed city, but even new structures are diverse in their architectural treatment, which is broadly ‘modern’ although certainly not unified.

It is this disorder – a lack of planning giving rise to inefficiency and an absence of open space – that the authors lament in the accompanying text. They ask whether, after the blitz, London should ‘just return to the old unplanned city blocks, to the same old wild activity of private speculation, to recreate the same old jumble of courtyards and streets and competing facades? An inheritance for the future as grim as anything we know to-day’. Predictably, they instead offer as an alternative the planning of a city along modernist lines; a city that the authors claim would represent ‘our London’. While the book covers the County of London as a whole, it is revealing to find the illustration in question highlights a ruined area of the city: the emptiness of the prospect anchoring the sense of an ‘opportunity’ in the reader’s mind. To this end, Carter and Goldfinger write of how the blitz ‘has cleared some sites and we must clear many more – but for what? Has the Blitz cleared our vision too and made it possible to see what London might be?’⁸⁴ Having begun at the site left vacant by bombing, this passage moves stealthily to a wider affirmation of the need for physical reconstruction, with the suggestion that ‘many more’ spots must receive treatment.⁸⁵ As a result, the impact of the war acts as a vital impetus, a first

⁸³ E.J. Carter and Ernő Goldfinger, *The County of London Plan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

stage that provides the mandate for the comprehensive planning demanded by modernist theory, when all areas categorised as undesirable would receive attention. The ruin thus becomes a promiscuous symbol, extended from the war-ravaged building that *must* disappear to define also the future outlook of any building that *should* be condemned. Of course, this second verdict receives no real objective justification from the fact of bomb damage as a preliminary stage; however, by framing ruination as a harbinger of inevitable and wholesale architectural renewal, Carter and Goldfinger begin to clear the way for the acceptance of radical reconstruction.

However, there was at the same time another impulse among some advocates of modern architecture. These figures, rather than refusing the ruin and demanding that it be immediately scrubbed from the urban scene, instead embraced its presence. For, the war had certainly been traumatic, but it had also induced other, more productive emotional transformations. We saw, in chapter 2, how the experience of conflict had assisted the emergence of a collective spirit in favour of reconstruction: a phenomenon extremely advantageous to the cause of the modern movement in Britain. Anticipating this rising tide of support, several architectural writers began to embrace the reality of the wartime city by cultivating a contemporary ruin gaze that stressed the singularity and strangeness of the blitz ruin. Although their work certainly did not represent a calculated campaign to promote modernist architecture and town planning, this engagement with the concrete existence of the ruin in the city served simultaneously to emphasise its uniqueness, and also to consign it resolutely to history.

‘The Beauties of Our Fast Vanishing Architecture’⁸⁶

Modern town planning has sustained an uncomfortable relationship with the great metropolis. On the one hand, its ideals and principles are a direct development from

⁸⁶ Stephen Spender, introduction to *Air Raids*, 5.

the mass-urbanisation and industrialisation that arrived with the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth. At the same time, pioneering planners very deliberately pursued a programme that counteracted the negative qualities of these settlements by projecting an opposite image of open space and greenery, neighbourliness and community. Through much of its history, therefore, town planning culture has been suffused with a decidedly anti-urban inclination: a desire to efface the characteristics of the modern, industrial city, to arrive instead at the true ‘modern’ city. During the Second World War this ambivalence grew problematic, since the city began to enjoy a unique cultural prominence, quickly emerging as the archetypal site of ‘total war’.

In 1943 Stephen Spender gave an outline of this new phenomenon in his introduction to a book that collected together artists’ works addressing the theme of air raids. His argument seeks to locate the war experience of the mass-public decisively within the urban environment. Firstly, he suggests that ‘by “War Pictures” we mean, pre-eminently, paintings of the Blitz’, thus identifying air raids as *the* cultural signifier of the Second World War. With this reading established, so too does the iconic arena of the conflict become clear, since the ‘background to this war, corresponding to the Western Front in the last war, is the bombed city’.⁸⁷ Certainly, the urban impact the blitz was substantial. The daily experience of the inhabitants of inner-city areas underwent a radical transformation, with military mobilisation and bombardment from the air establishing new patterns in the collective way of life. Thus, contrary to the common rooting of English national identity in the land – specifically, the pastoral image of the countryside – the war saw the city shed its popular associations of alienation and cultural deviancy to become a legitimised object of attention among those concerned with the post-war settlement. With its way of life celebrated as communal, the bomb-ravaged city realised a new symbolic significance as the ‘*Gemeinschaft* metropolis’: the defining forum in which the mythology of the blitz was rooted.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 5-6.

⁸⁸ This phrase is drawn from David Matless’s discussion of the perception of the city during the war, see David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion, 1998), 187.

Correspondingly, the ruins preserved within British cities became valuable objects in the eyes of those concerned with the reconstruction of the urban environment, for they provided demonstrable evidence of city dwellers' newfound identification with their surroundings and, in a sense, with one another. Again, Spender alludes to this change: 'It has taken a Blitz to make crowds of people visit buildings in our cities which they had never noticed, perhaps, until they became, overnight, famous ruins'.⁸⁹ Indeed, such losses provided a major boost to the, still nascent, conservation movement in Britain: demonstrating a newfound appreciation for the built environment.⁹⁰ In 1941 the National Buildings Record was established – thanks in large part to the exertions of John Summerson – with the aim of documenting buildings endangered by enemy action.⁹¹ At a more official level, the Ministry of Works also appointed 300 'panel architects', who were tasked with the job of compiling lists of historically significant structures across the country. These were intended partly to protect the nation's prized architectural assets from hasty demolition in the aftermath of bombing; however, they also aimed to furnish planning experts with information that would be of use when the process of physical reconstruction began in earnest.⁹² By 1944 the enthusiasm for selective preservation had achieved sufficient acceptance that the new Town and Country Planning Act introduced an early version of the listing system.⁹³ While undoubtedly of great significance, it is worth noting that this development served to codify, alongside its standard of value, an expectation of general obsolescence.

Returning to Spender, he too assumes a relation between the new appraisal of the historical city and the presumed emergence of an enthusiasm for comprehensive reconstruction. He writes: 'So the fact that we have woken up to the beauties of our fast vanishing architecture ... is hopeful for the future. The crowds of people who

⁸⁹ Stephen Spender, introduction to *Air Raids*, 5.

⁹⁰ Interestingly, there is a large overlap between the promotion of modernism and the promotion of architectural preservation, with several key figures from the MARS Group also active in the Georgian Group in the 1930s and the Victorian Society in the 1950s. See Gavin Stamp, 'The Art of Keeping One Jump Ahead: Conservation Societies in the Twentieth Century', in *Preserving the Past: The Rise of Heritage in Modern Britain*, ed. Michael Hunter (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1996), 84, 89.

⁹¹ Andrew Saint, 'How Listing Happened', in *Ibid*, 123.

⁹² *Ibid*, 121-123.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 128-133.

visit the exhibitions of War Pictures may take an interest in post-war planning.’⁹⁴

The coupling, in wartime discussion, of destruction and reconstruction is here extended from an articulation of practical necessity, to an indication of an altered relationship between the general public and their architectural surroundings. Spender quietly constructs an unsubstantiated link, which infuses the anticipated architectures of the future with the affection felt for the buildings of the past, and assumes an affinity between the buildings that had formed, and would in future form, the background to public life.

Within this context the ruin became a powerful symbol. For, it summoned up memories of the communally formative war experience, as well as beckoning, through its heroic survival in fragmentary form, towards the reconstructed future that would see the built environment – and society itself – achieve a consummate wholeness. Certainly, on a more practical level, it was not unreasonable to have assumed that people whose homes and neighbourhoods had been destroyed would take an interest in the new structures that would soon arrive. It was this latter imperative that received most frequent attention from those promoting modern architecture and planning. Public opinion was, in short, tied to reconstruction through the fact of ruination and the presence of the ruin, which became both a legitimate proof of the need for reconstruction and, just as importantly, a plausible foundation on which to build a rhetoric of public support.

J.M. Richards, who we will see did a great deal to draw attention to the significance of ruined buildings during the war, was keen to elaborate their influence on the public. He wrote in 1942 that: ‘The public mind, without necessarily deluding itself that the air raid destruction has of itself done much to bring improvement nearer, has universally identified the destruction of the congested centres of our cities with the possibility of reconstruction’.⁹⁵ The allusion to the congestion of inner-city areas is the crux in his statement, of course: the point at which the concept of reconstruction receives a specific ideological tone against the timeworn and in favour of the new. Writing a year earlier, Richards had further emphasised the specific appraisal of

⁹⁴ Stephen Spender, introduction to *Air Raids*, 5.

⁹⁵ J.M. Richards, foreword to *Bombed Buildings of Britain*, 2.

architecture and town planning ideas, which, despite having ‘languished for years in the shadow of public inertia and disregard, have suddenly, as one result of the destruction of parts of our congested cities, sprung to life and become the focus of intense public curiosity’.⁹⁶

His comments are echoed by Frederic Osborn, writing soon after the war ended about the fact that the country had become ‘planning-conscious’. Osborn highlighted the irrelevance – in terms of popular impact – of the great government reports of the early 1940s, which did so much to help establish official support for centralised town planning, and again noted that he saw bombing as the primary cause of changing opinions. In a comment noted earlier, he outlined how the experience had meant that people ‘began to speculate on better things that might be built on the acres of rubble; and from this they went on to speculate how the out-of-date areas left unbombed might be replanned’.⁹⁷ Here, it is significant that – as implied by Richards’ announcement of wholesale epochal change – the historic city entire finds itself the object of the planner’s attention, rather than just those areas affected by aerial assault. Covered with literal ruins, these places were bound to undergo redevelopment when peace arrived; but Osborn extends his definition of the ruin to implicate also those buildings that remain still standing, albeit worn by time, and in the process also throws their future into doubt. Such rhetoric sees the ruin reframed as a motif for generalised architectural obsolescence, a sleight of hand afforded by the experience of bombing and the concurrent ubiquity of those ‘acres of rubble’. In turn, this negative reading of the historic city sees it assume a position as a binary opposite to the rationally-planned city of modernism, whose clarity, order, and consummate unity promised to overwrite, and overcome, the fragmentary urban condition that had prevailed before.

⁹⁶ Richards, foreword to *Architectural Review* 90, 2.

⁹⁷ Frederic J. Osborn, *Green-Belt Cities*, 47. Elsewhere, Osborn was less emphatic in identifying the centrality of bombing on the public’s perception of planning. In one instance, he explicitly disputes the primacy of destruction as a motivating force, and suggests instead that enthusiasm developed before the air raids as a consequence of 40 years of promotion of town planning led by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA). However, the fact that Osborn himself was Honorary Secretary to the TCPA and that the comment came in a pamphlet series produced by the TCPA, indicates a degree of bias and opportunism here. See Frederic J. Osborn, *Rebuilding Britain Series, No. 1: Overture to Planning* (Faber & Faber, 1941), 11.

But the exact orientation of support for reconstruction was not simple, and certainly not as monolithically directed as might be supposed from these examples. For instance, a very different viewpoint is evident, albeit briefly, in a book chronicling a series of BBC talks broadcast in the winter of 1941 to 1942, which had been organised by Osborn. Preceding the edited transcripts of the discussions – each one addressing a particular theme in rebuilding and composed of a panel of experts – was a section featuring the personal accounts of four individuals whose ‘way of life has been changed by the war’. Emphasising the everyday impact of bomb damage, these passages frame the body of the text and served to provide a sense both of the immediacy of the wartime context and the popular relevance of physical planning. The first of these is the most illuminating: offering the experience of a Mrs Heywood, ‘a Poplar housewife’ who returned to her home after a night of air raids to find her home completely destroyed. After a description of the exceptional support she received from the community, she describes the type of dwelling that she hopes to be provided with after the war. Of course, her aspirations clash somewhat with those of the experts whose discussions fill the majority of the book. She speaks of the importance of having ‘a door on the street’, proposing the vast – and among modernists thoroughly scorned – interwar suburb of Becontree as an exemplar.⁹⁸ These awkward suggestions are evaded in the subsequent discussion of housing, which uses the context of bomb damage as a backdrop for a straightforward discussion of modern movement ideals for housing design, in which the concern with technical factors displayed by John Leslie Martin and Richard Llewelyn Davies dominates the more subtle suggestions offered by Elizabeth Denby’s sociological expertise.⁹⁹ There emerges, across these discourses, a struggle for control over what destruction might signify, and what response it should receive.

⁹⁸ Mrs Heywood in *Making Plans: Based on the BBC Series of Discussions*, ed. Frederic J. Osborn (London: Todd Publishing, 1943), 7. For an impression of the contempt among town planners for the unplanned sprawl of this kind of suburbia, see Thomas Sharp, ‘The English Tradition in the Town, III: Universal Suburbia’, *Architectural Review* 79, no. 472 (1936): 115-120.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 10-13.

An 'Aesthetic of Destruction': The Wartime Ruin Gaze¹⁰⁰

We have already seen that a common response was to overwrite blitzed areas with plans for new development, its form absolutely denying the nature of the fabric that existed before. But the impact and experience of bombing had another, more unexpected, consequence. With Spender's suggestion that the sight of shattered historic buildings had spontaneously induced a popular sense of identification, there followed a shift of focus to the ruins themselves and their potential significance to the post-war city. Of course, the materialisation of a 'planning-conscious' public observed by Osborn and Richards was read more as a reaction to the impact of destruction than to the framing of its picturesque effects. Nevertheless, Richards certainly perceived the additional import of these ruins in his occupations both as historian and propagandist. The phenomenon was not isolated to the professionally interested, however, and the arrival of peace in particular allowed for more reflective consideration. Internationally, books appeared that documented the architectural victims of the conflict in an attempt to join all in a shared sense of loss, highlighting the universal nature of the war experience whether addressed at a German or an Anglo-American audience.¹⁰¹

Meanwhile, the end of wartime constraints in Britain granted an opportunity for the affection for blitzed buildings to receive fuller attention, prompting the inauguration of a curious alternative to the architectural guidebook, which documented instead meritorious structures that had emerged in a state of disrepair.¹⁰² In *The Lost*

¹⁰⁰ Richards, foreword to *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*, 2.

¹⁰¹ For instance, Henry La Farge's *Lost Treasures of Europe* (1946) and Alexander Randa's *Dämonie der Zerstörung* (1948): see Lambourne, *War Damage in Western Europe*, 193.

It is telling that one such example of the type, Henry La Farge's book *Lost Treasures of Europe*, makes no attempt to distinguish one nation from another, suggesting instead the undifferentiated totality of international heritage destroyed or damaged through fighting. Introduced by a series of annotations – offering brief, thoroughly neutral historical outlines of each building featured – there follows simply a monolithic catalogue of 427 photographs, organised by country, but with every shift discernible only by reading the note beneath each image. See Henry La Farge, ed., *Lost Treasures of Europe: 427 Photographs* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1946).

¹⁰² Immediately after the war, Europe emerged as a popular destination for American tourists, in part attracted by the novelty of the post-war situation in the continent. See Jennifer Cathryn Reut "'3000 Years in 15 Minutes": American Tourists and Historic Monuments in Post-War Europe' (PhD thesis, University of Virginia, 2011), 115-121.

Treasures of London, William Kent offered a series of seven ‘walks’, each one preceded by a map detailed with numbered points of interest, which led the tourist through areas of the city especially rich in bomb-ruined buildings.¹⁰³ The book is framed as an effort to catalogue the destruction caused and assist informed exploration of buildings that likely faced demolition, and, to this end, the accompanying text is less concerned with the aesthetics of ruin than with the historical and architectural background of each selection. However, its additional comments on the damage inflicted serve to foreground the fact of the monuments’ dereliction, intimating some specific interest in their post-war condition and memorialising a moment that hangs between destruction and reconstruction.

Yet the practice had started even earlier. Even as the bombs fell and Britain’s cities began to suffer unprecedented physical punishment, there materialised an appreciation for the aesthetic effects of the fragments left behind. Perhaps somewhat insensitive, and certainly surprising given the desperate circumstances of the time, this impulse also suggests an instinct to take advantage of the extreme circumstances of the time just as other figures were doing in government. In short, they represent a process among interested figures of moulding a particular attitude towards the bombed buildings that were destined either to make way or to remain as isolated fragments against a new urban arrangement.

As early as May 1941, a collection of photographs of bomb-damaged buildings had been published under the title *History under Fire*. These pictures, captured by Cecil Beaton, were also augmented with a commentary text provided by the travel writer James Pope-Hennessy.¹⁰⁴ Mainly, the book was cast as a showcase for Beaton’s striking images, and had little direct connection with reconstruction campaigning – its text directed more towards an evocation of the past and of the strange present of London’s buildings than to their future. Nevertheless, Pope-Hennessy still explained in the preface his intention to avoid ‘sentimentality over the wreckage’, at the same

¹⁰³ William Kent, *The Lost Treasures of London* (London: Phoenix House, 1947). This book was presented in association with more conventional London-based guidebooks authored by Kent, with titles such as *London for Shakespeare Lovers*, *London for Dickens Lovers*, *London for Everyman*.

¹⁰⁴ James Pope-Hennessy, preface to *History under Fire: Photographs of Air Raid Damage to London Buildings, 1940-41* (London: Batsford, 1941).

time neglecting an attitude of complete disinterest by punctuating his descriptions with contemptuous asides that condemn Victorian attempts to restore medieval buildings: a stance that would have found sympathy among many modernists.¹⁰⁵ It was appreciated by most that the city's present condition was a temporary stage, and the likelihood of radical reconstruction was tacitly embraced – indeed, William Kent's collection of exploratory walks for the history enthusiast went so far as to advise readers interested in the future to consult Purdom's *How Shall We Rebuild London?*

In a publication much closer to modernist concerns, the *Architectural Review's* 'Destruction and Reconstruction Special', John Summerson's descriptions of razed buildings of architectural note adopted a similar attitude, in their mixture of reserved connoisseurship and historically selective reproof, to that evident in the writing of Pope-Hennessy.¹⁰⁶ These compilations, gathered by Richards and annotated by Summerson, appeared throughout the blitz in the pages of the *Architectural Review*. After their advent in the 'Special' – whose contents had been as much a rallying call for reconstruction as a eulogy to the past – they filled monthly supplements thereafter, until the whole collection was eventually drawn together and published separately by the Architectural Press in 1942.¹⁰⁷ *The Bombed Buildings of Britain* constitutes a curious specimen: the recent memory of the thousands killed apparently presenting no obstacle to the scholarly documentation of the sites at which they had died. The book had, Richards explained, two purposes: 'to provide an obituary notice and a pictorial record'. By the first, Richards intimated his occupation as a historian, a role that demanded he discover 'what of real architectural value has in fact been lost, and to have the history and character of these buildings recorded'.¹⁰⁸ It is revealing that the text is framed in terms of 'obituary', rather than being a mere study. Certainly, *The Bombed Buildings of Britain* covered many buildings whose condition was well beyond any reasonable state of repair or restoration, and – in

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, v.

¹⁰⁶ *Architectural Review* 90, no. 535, 'Destruction and Reconstruction Special' (1941). These tendencies towards a lack of sentimentality and a criticism of Victorian restoration work have been noted in a study of the wartime appraisal of ruined buildings by Mark Pohlád. See Mark B. Pohlád, 'The Appreciation of Ruins in Blitz-Era London', *London Journal* 30, no. 2 (2005), 3; 11-13.

¹⁰⁷ Richards, ed., *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*.

¹⁰⁸ J.M. Richards, foreword to *Ibid*, 2.

keeping with his work on the National Buildings Record – Summerson’s annotations did demand that those structures that that escaped with minor damage be saved.

All the same, Richards’ framing does tend to encourage the sense of the passing of an old order: the ruins, he writes, represent ‘living architecture reduced to memories and legends’; and, having confirmed their expiration, he moved to narrate just what legends those ruins would connote, elaborating a conception of how they ought to be judged.¹⁰⁹ In the first place, the reference to ‘real architectural value’ – aside from establishing the concept of value itself in the built environment – stealthily imposes a selective standard that remains undefined yet evident throughout in the emphasis on pre-Victorian buildings, with a particularly striking bias towards spare and elegant Georgian design. We are assured that since there can be no exact definition of historical or architectural merit, the selection is partly personal. Nonetheless:

the aim has been that it should be as representative as possible and, though completeness is not claimed, I do not think, as a matter of fact, that many buildings of obvious architectural importance that have been badly damaged are missing.¹¹⁰

In this comment it becomes clear that the book does not simply set out to record, but to define what is worth recording – and what is not. This is not to suggest that Richards was uninterested in, or refused to recognise the virtues of, quotidian architectures; in fact, from 1938 he had begun documenting nineteenth-century building types that had often been left outside the boundaries of pure architectural interest.¹¹¹ But in the context of the city wrecked by bomb damage, for which radical plans were being hastily sketched, the instinct to specify value with such distinction hints at a generally loose attitude towards conservation.

It is a record is dominated by images, each case represented by a large photograph of the building, usually in a fairly fresh state of ruination, as well as a small engraving

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹¹ Andrew Higgott, *Mediating Modernism: Architectural Cultures in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2007), 100. These researches came to form the basis of Richards’ conception of the ‘Functional Tradition’ in English architecture, which he and Eric de Maré would develop in the pages of the *Architectural Review* during the 1950s.

to provide an illustration of its appearance prior to bombing. Sourced primarily from newspapers and government agencies, the photographs do not display the self-conscious artistry of Cecil Beaton's work in *History under Fire*, instead marking the origins of the selection in the previous year's 'Destruction and Reconstruction' supplements in the *Architectural Review*.¹¹² The choices of image had, at that time, not been particularly discriminating and aimed for an immediate, hastily-assembled record of destruction as it was occurring, rather than a coherently developed aesthetic vision. But, in spite of this, Richards uses the book's preface to articulate a reading of the ruin as 'an architectural phenomenon in its own right', whose precise form – the result of extensive inner-city bombing – had little experiential or aesthetic precedent across Britain.¹¹³ This peculiarity receives direct recognition, as Richards delineates how the blitzed ruin 'takes much of its distinctive character from the suddenness of destruction's onslaught, a very different affair from the imperceptible, natural process of decay which has produced the mouldering ruins the connoisseur of architecture already knows so well'.¹¹⁴ As opposed to the more picturesque tradition of ruin gazing, therefore, we are instead presented with an 'architecture of destruction [that] not only possesses an aesthetic peculiar to itself, it contrives its effect out of its own range of raw materials'.¹¹⁵

A figure who shared these concerns was the painter John Piper. From 1939 he had started a close collaboration with Richards producing articles in the pages of the *Architectural Review*, for which he had written throughout the latter half of the decade.¹¹⁶ At the same time, Piper's paintings, in which he had previously developed an abstracted approach to landscape, began to focus almost exclusively on representations of buildings – a shift that was clearly informed by his activity at the *Architectural Review*, as well as his work compiling the Shell Guide for the county of Oxfordshire, which he had undertaken at the request of another important writer at

¹¹² For more information on the origins of the photographs, see Pohlád, 'The Appreciation of Ruins in Blitz-Era London', 6n30.

¹¹³ Richards, foreword to *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*, 2.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ D.F. Jenkins, *John Piper: The Forties* (London: Philip Wilson, 2000), 20; David Mellor, ed., *A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain, 1935-55* (London: Lund Humphries, 1987), 34.

the periodical, John Betjeman.¹¹⁷ The latter understood the guides as a means of encouraging the public to better appreciate the buildings around them: a desire to ‘make the public *see* with a new eye’.¹¹⁸ It was this aim to create a spiritual link with architecture that also motivated Piper. As the war commenced, it was therefore no surprise to find Piper enlisted to work on the *Recording Britain* project, which sought to provide employment to British artists, commissioning them to document the characteristic natural and built environments across the country at the time. Not long after, when Britain’s architectural heritage was further imperilled with the start of air raids, a request to paint bombed churches arrived in November 1940 from the War Artists’ Advisory Committee (WAAC), set up by the Ministry of Information the previous year to further support British artists.¹¹⁹ Already, before the war, Piper had shown an interest in the pictorial qualities of ruins such as the abandoned Hafod House in Wales, but the WAAC commission saw his perception sharpen as he produced a series of iconic images of churches unfortunate enough to have suffered damage.¹²⁰

Drawing on his work for the WAAC, Piper also produced writings on the subject of ruins, contributing a brief article on ‘The Architecture of Destruction’ for the *Architectural Review*’s ‘Destruction and Reconstruction Special’. Deliberately fragmented, this text offers an evocation of the sensory impact of a series of bombed buildings, their spontaneous and haphazard creation calling to Piper’s mind various bizarre images. He describes a church with walls, ‘flaked and pitted, as if they had been under water for a hundred years’, its appearance rendered alien yet exotic ‘like a travel-book water-colour of a Luxor temple’. Another church stands burnt out and gutted, such that its tower has become ‘an enormous hollow chimney’.¹²¹ By summoning these analogies Piper sustains a constant sense of the shock of bombing, the intrusion of a volatile unreality into the cultured metropolitan setting. What is more, his descriptions echo Richards in their unconventional stance towards the

¹¹⁷ Jenkins, *John Piper*, 14.

¹¹⁸ Philip Irving Mitchell, “‘Love is Greater than Taste’: The Moral Architecture of John Betjeman and John Piper”, *Christianity and Literature* 63, no. 2 (2014), 274.

¹¹⁹ Jenkins, *John Piper*, 24-29.

¹²⁰ See John Piper, ‘Decrepit Glory: A Tour of Hafod’, *Architectural Review* 87, no. 523 (1940): 207-210.

¹²¹ John Piper, ‘The Architecture of Destruction’, 26.

tradition of ruin-gazing, and place wartime ruins in a unique artistic category marked by the violence of their creation. Yet at the same time the scenes are lyrically expressed, with a perceptually-rich, artist's eye: indeed, his readings, after an initial comment on the 'strange new smell that this war has produced', are insistently visual.¹²²

Richards too, true to his avowed concern for 'the pictorial aspect of bomb damage' presents what appears a self-consciously poetic picture of the impact of a blitzed building. Although highlighting the uniqueness of the bombed ruin, he also moves to dissociate it from the process of destruction, writing that the aftermath:

... is of a different pictorial character from the bombing itself ... Instead of the confused, dynamic drama of active destruction, and the human heroism that went with it, here is its architectural by-product, the residue left high and dry after the wave of destruction has passed on. Its quality, by contrast, is altogether impersonal and static, even reposeful.¹²³

Such an outlook, he suggests, leaves room for the appreciation of an 'aesthetic of destruction'. Of course, presenting these ideas was not uncontroversial given the proximity of the tragedy, a fact acknowledged by Richards: 'At first mention it may appear unfeeling that the connoisseur of ruins should regard as material for objective appraisal scenes which for most of us symbolise the horror of lives lost and irreplaceable treasures destroyed'.¹²⁴ It is certainly curious that, even with the trauma so raw, the ruins that recalled the experience were approached with such a coolly objectifying eye. The underlying ethical dilemmas of the practice were apparent too to painters working for the WAAC, as they received commissions to represent bombed buildings. When dispatched to Coventry, Piper had felt intense unease at the prospect of sketching amid the confusion with the fires still burning, bodies still being recovered from the rubble. Unwilling to visit the homes and factories that promised dreadful human tragedy, he instead concentrated on the remains of the cathedral, finding a conveniently discreet spot at the window of a nearby solicitor's

¹²² *Ibid.*, 25

¹²³ Richards, foreword to *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*, 2.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

office, from which he produced the preparatory sketches for one of his most significant paintings of the war.¹²⁵

Graham Sutherland was also sensitive to the feeling of intrusion while working on pictures of damage to houses in the East End – to the point that he asked permission to on occasion photograph the buildings affected, ‘as it is difficult to draw in some places without rousing a sense of resentment in people’.¹²⁶ An environment that he found more conducive to artistic appraisal was the City of London, whose lack of inhabitants was complemented by a surfeit of dramatic architecture, allowing for startling effects that could be more comfortably – and less inhumanely – appreciated. ‘The City’, Sutherland wrote, ‘was more exciting than anywhere else because the buildings were bigger, and the variety of ways in which they fell more interesting. But very soon the raids began in the East End ... and immediately became more tragic. In the City one didn’t think of the destruction of life’.¹²⁷

These comments recall the emotional and political significance that war ruins held, a fact that can easily be forgotten when reading *The Bombed Buildings of Britain* with the attitude either of the historian or the ‘connoisseur of ruins’.¹²⁸ The images of bombed buildings dating from the war – whether Cecil Beaton’s mannered photographs in *History under Fire*, Richards’ and Summerson’s selection of press photos that catalogue the historically significant victims of the blitz, or paintings by war artists like Piper and Sutherland – all occupy a curious position. The very fact that the Ministry of Information felt it necessary to employ British artists to document bombsites attests to the emotive potential they were perceived to hold, particularly when translated by Sutherland into an angry record of the absurdity and terror of war.

Despite most air raids across Europe never being presented as specific acts of cultural destruction, there remained an appreciation of the damage done to morale by

¹²⁵ Jenkins, *John Piper*, 33-34.

¹²⁶ Graham Sutherland to WAAC Secretary, 16 May 1941, quoted in Ronald Alley, *Graham Sutherland* (London: Tate Britain, 1982), 95.

¹²⁷ Graham Sutherland, quoted in Lambourne, *War Damage in Western Europe*, 109.

¹²⁸ Richards, foreword to *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*, 2.

attacking historic monuments. They were deemed to hold sufficient significance that the great tourist cities of Britain were specifically targeted in the infamous, so-called ‘Baedeker raids’ on Exeter, York, Norwich, Bath, and Canterbury, themselves a response to strikes on Lübeck and Rostock that it was claimed had the same intention.¹²⁹ An article in *Life* magazine in 1942 reported an even more dispassionate erudition than that of Richards, as Hitler’s ‘spokesman explained how: “Our art connoisseurs know the English *Baedeker* ... thoroughly. They know where all the historic Tudor houses are, the exact position of Canterbury, where the spas are situated, and most of the famous castles of the nobility”’.¹³⁰ We have seen how such attacks on historic buildings were utilised by the architecturally interested in presenting the ruins of the blitz as a symbol of epochal change, but here their positive significance is clear – as Stephen Spender identified.

However, the visceral experience of a bombsite – the human loss and the shock of the destruction of a beloved object of national heritage – was evaded even as it received attention. Their popular resonance was useful to those concerned with rebuilding, but the trauma that they also suggested was overlooked in favour of a reading that saw them as a picturesque ornament, a passive memorial to the historic city that had been superseded. In short, they were treated as aesthetic objects and drained of overt political meaning. While artists and photographers were able to focus on the bombsites, the Ministry of Information was, tellingly, cautious of what was shown, and an edict was issued that ensured any images were sanitised by avoiding the depiction of dead bodies.¹³¹ The images of bombsites are without doubt visceral in themselves, as the buildings metaphorically hint at the presence of the broken bodies within them.¹³² In turn, ruined buildings were in many cases a temporary phenomenon, as the remaining fragments were often demolished quickly to allay concerns over safety and morale. Reviewing *History under Fire* in 1943, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote of how US soldiers in Britain had ‘expressed surprise that

¹²⁹ Lambourne, *War Damage in Western Europe*, 35; Pohlad, ‘The Appreciation of Ruins in Blitz-Era London’, 6.

¹³⁰ ‘The Spring Brings Bombs with Blossoms’, *Life* 12, no 22 (1942), 23.

¹³¹ Wasson, *Urban Gothic of the Second World War*, 135.

¹³² This point is also made by Ian Walker in his discussion of a pair of famous blitz photographs by Lee Miller and Cecil Beaton. See Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade*, 156.

there are so few visual reminders of the fury of the German bombings of 1940-41'.¹³³ If buildings were not demolished, they were tidied of rubble, which, for Richards, removed much of their 'vivid, spectacular character'; in time, he predicted, their presence would become 'only a memory'.¹³⁴

'Fragments of Distinction': The Ruin in the Modernist City¹³⁵

Today there are indeed very few reminders of the blitz in British cities. However, as the conclusion of the war had approached, with the evidence of many years under assault still scattered through the streets, there were some calls to preserve a select group of these ruins as monuments. While introducing the photographs of bombed buildings, Richards made a brief comment in favour of such retention, though, predictably, he emphasised the non-political significance the monuments would connote. They should act not 'as object-lessons for future war-mongers or for any other moral purpose', he wrote, but ought to survive instead for the 'intensely evocative atmosphere they possess in common with all ruins ... and frankly for their beauty'.¹³⁶ We see, here, a repeat of the aestheticisation of ruined buildings: their treatment as politically neutral objects with which to embellish the post-war city.

The proposal reappeared in August 1944, when a letter was published in *The Times* on the subject of 'Ruined City Churches', which did acknowledge the potential of these fragments to function as meaningful memorials – an indication of the less fraught atmosphere that prevailed in Britain by that time. Signed by diverse cultural heavyweights, ranging from Kenneth Clark, T.S. Eliot, and H.S. Goodhart-Rendel, to Julian Huxley and J.M. Keynes, the letter asked 'that a few of our bomb-damaged churches should be preserved in their ruined condition, as permanent memorials of this war', citing a suggestion made in an article in the *Architectural Review* earlier

¹³³ W.E.B. Du Bois in *The New York Times*, 26 December 1943, quoted in Pohlard, 'The Appreciation of Ruins in Blitz-Era London', 16.

¹³⁴ Richards, foreword to *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*, 2.

¹³⁵ *Bombed Churches as War Memorials* (Cheam: Architectural Press, 1945), 4.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

that year.¹³⁷ The focus remained on ‘fragments of distinction’: a suggestion that limited the selection to only a few notable churches in the City. Yet, the letter’s authors did express a sensitivity to the harmful impact of uncompromising urbanisation in their concern that, in the hastily developed post-war city, ‘a potent source of emotional experience would be lost to future generations’. They added that soon ‘no trace of death from the air will be left in the streets of rebuilt London’: granting a rare glimpse of the sinister, far from politely picturesque, associations of the ruin in the 1940s.¹³⁸

These proposals were elaborated in further detail in a book, published the following year, which imagined how a few of the fragments of the bombed city might be placed into relation to the new fabric that would grow around them. *Bombed Churches as War Memorials* thus made the highly speculative proposal – independent of any prospect of official realisation in the short term – that two or three churches might be preserved in London and perhaps one in each provincial city. Its status was not entirely obscure, however, as is clear from the authorship of its central essay by so distinguished a figure as Hugh Casson.¹³⁹ An important presence at the *Architectural Review* and the *Architects’ Journal*, Casson had worked during the last year of the war within the newly created Ministry of Town and Country Planning; his influence would soon reach its height when he was selected to act as director of architecture for the Festival of Britain.¹⁴⁰

In fact, parts of the book were reproduced in the *Architectural Review* itself, and the content of its argument displays a careful negotiation in the values and meaning of old and new buildings, along the lines we have already seen.¹⁴¹ The most notable aspect of the campaign is its specific focus on the desirability of churches to function

¹³⁷ *Bombed Churches as War Memorials*, 4.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Hugh Casson, ‘Ruins for Remembrance’, *Ibid.*: 5-21.

¹⁴⁰ Coinciding with the tendency of blitz ruins to receive guidebook treatment, Casson had before the war written a guidebook, *New Sights of London* (1937), and would several decades later produce books on London, Oxford, and Cambridge. See Alan Powers, ‘Sir Hugh Maxwell Casson (1910–1999)’,

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed, Jan 2007, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/72656>, accessed 27 Feb 2015.

¹⁴¹ ‘Save Us Our Ruins: Argument’, *Architectural Review* 95, no. 565 (1944): 13-14.

as war memorials, an inheritance from the plan for Plymouth that became a standard practice in ruin preservation after the war. In their 1943 plan Watson and Abercrombie had advised that Charles Church remain standing in its ruined state ‘to symbolize the city’s grief and honour in the triumphant survival of the trials of this tragic war’, citing the emergence of another church in the city, St Andrews, as an ad hoc open-air site of worship.¹⁴² This tendency highlights how religious buildings naturally suggested themselves as objects of spiritual significance, tied to civic ceremonial functions and to the public act of mourning that was part of the projected significance of ruins as monuments. Even before the scheme was proposed, some bombed-out churches were already being appropriated for open-air services.¹⁴³ Casson advised this practice be continued, with the book also including a prospective planting scheme by Brenda Colvin for Christ Church, Newgate Street, and an architectural proposal produced by Jacques Groag, envisaging the conversion of St Anne’s Church in Soho into both a chapel and a memorial to the dead.¹⁴⁴

Yet it is also evident that the pre-existing connotations of churches as free-standing monuments meant that they could be quietly incorporated into new schemes without threatening the new spatial order that was being introduced. On the contrary, such buildings had long been afforded a special place within the modernist ideal of the city. In Le Corbusier’s publication of the canonical *Plan Voisin*, he had made a point of emphasising the project’s preservationist credentials. Despite making his well-known proposition to clear vast areas of central Paris, the Swiss architect assures us that ‘the ancient churches would be preserved. They would stand surrounded by verdure; what could be more charming!’¹⁴⁵ But churches are not the only survivors, Le Corbusier also highlights the presence of ‘certain historical monuments, arcades, doorways, carefully preserved because they are pages out of history or works of

¹⁴² J. Paton Watson and Patrick Abercrombie, *A Plan for Plymouth* (Plymouth: Underhill, 1943). In the event, Charles Church was indeed allowed to survive as a ruin and monument, although the poignancy of the gesture was rather undermined by its preservation as the centrepiece of a traffic roundabout.

¹⁴³ ‘Save Us Our Ruins: Argument’, 13.

¹⁴⁴ Brenda Colvin, ‘A Planting Plan’, *Bombed Churches as War Memorials*: 23-30; Jacques Groag, ‘A Building Plan’, *Ibid*: 31-48.

¹⁴⁵ Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: John Rodker, 1929), 287.

art'.¹⁴⁶ His description is revealing in presenting two roles for any pre-modernist structures fortunate enough to grace the remodelled metropolis. In the first place, some survive for reasons of historiography – or, perhaps more accurately, museology. Surrounded by rolling parkland and new slabs and towers, such artefacts would provide city dwellers with a selection of representative examples from the past that had been swept away, to furnish a curated history of architectural style. Others, meanwhile, are allowed to endure purely for their aesthetic qualities: in short, they are elevated, and thus isolated and objectified. Their passivity and separation from the everyday functions of urban life substantiates the notion of historical rupture that animated the imaginaries of Le Corbusier and successors, clearing a path for the city of space, light, and efficiency. In each case, moreover, the fragments are rendered exceptional and strange. Whether rare paragons of beauty or samples from the pattern-book of history their purpose is narrated in a way that naturalises and legitimates the, in fact, far-from-natural environment to be assembled around them. They become an 'other', a renegade framed against the mainstream narrative to be written by modernist architecture.

Echoes of Le Corbusier's prejudices are unquestionably evident in the patrician values and faith in connoisseurship that defined the discourses of figures associated with the *Architectural Review*, among others. It was also a concern that we have seen restated in the rise of the preservation movement, and especially in the boost it received during the war. As soon as the bombs started falling, of course, Richards and Summerson had set out to identify meritorious architectural casualties, their judgements sanctioned by the unimpeachable authority of the historian. In the process they were effectively isolating an official pre-history of modernism, whose status was to remain very definitely *historical*. What is more, in *The Bombed Buildings of Britain* the dominant typology among the damaged structures deemed to enjoy 'architectural merit' was that of the church: they were cherished items of architectural heritage, and could thus be easily appropriated as polite urban *objets d'art*, with most other blitz survivors sacrificed to the onward march of progress. A deference to received expertise was also evident in the Casson-led campaign, which

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

emphasised the role of the Church in leading the way forward, suggesting that the future course must be directed by its ‘expert advisors’, who would take into account not only technical, functional, and economic requirements, but also ‘public opinion – our opinion’.¹⁴⁷ Here, Casson also assumes a position as spokesperson for public opinion, in part due to the lobbying intention of the text, while also inevitably acting as expert and educator himself. Additionally, the primacy of the planner had been intimated in the foreword by Walter Matthews, the Dean of St Paul’s, who – while stressing the importance of the ‘intangible and spiritual’ – nonetheless affirmed: ‘Nothing but good can come from the expression of opinions by experts on this subject’.¹⁴⁸

Turning to the proposals themselves, illustrated by Neville Conder, we see that they advance what is, in effect, a visual complement to these tendencies. For, they show the ruined churches incorporated into the modernist city in a manner that takes advantage both of their specifically picturesque qualities, and of their capacity to quietly complement a more robustly modern setting. An example of the first case is a drawing that imagines St Mary Aldermanbury and St Alban, Wood Street, repurposed as memorial ruins (Figure 3.9). Assuming the position of a passer-by, discovering them suddenly in the urban landscape, we find these remains in a mature and varied setting of foliage and artfully distributed rubble – the latter intended as an informal war memorial.¹⁴⁹ Their spatially fluid arrangement repeats the more diffuse positioning of the modern slabs that surround them, creating compelling juxtapositions and varied vistas whose essential attractiveness serves to naturalise the status of the new buildings that have appeared. The text alongside, corresponds to this: speaking of how ‘the two churches stand out in rich contrast to the smooth towering flanks of the new office buildings beyond them’, emphasising their difference, but turning it to the advantage of both.¹⁵⁰ Of course, this is only a rendering, and it is unlikely the actual encounter of these structures would not have been quite so evocative. Yet through Conder’s use of a low-lying, sharply-

¹⁴⁷ Hugh Casson, ‘Ruins for Remembrance’, *Bombed Churches as War Memorials*, 5.

¹⁴⁸ W.R. Matthews, foreword to *Bombed Churches as War Memorials*, 3.

¹⁴⁹ *Bombed Churches as War Memorials*, 13.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

foreshortened perspective, he successfully conjures an image that is visually dense: a highly attractive stylisation of the London of the future.

Other images in the book were even more candid about the dominant aura that modern buildings were likely to project. But these too appropriate the ruined churches to their advantage, most strikingly in another Conder image of St Alban (Figure 3.10). Here, a comparison is drawn with the setting of the church in the nineteenth century and that anticipated of the future. While previously, ‘miscellaneous buildings of every size surrounded the church obliterating its character and outline’, we are assured that such a condition will no longer be the case. This is not due to a lack of architectural ambition: rather, the church would in future be screened by the pristine, repetitive forms of modern structures around. The text added: ‘against the scale of our century the churches will acquire a new meaning as monuments, small, intimate, and informal, contrasting frankly and not competing with the giant facades surrounding them’.¹⁵¹ Again, the ruin serves to legitimise the standing of the new insertions into the urban scene, buildings whose own aesthetic value is quietly evaded, in favour of a display of deference to those of the past. The modern structures are, thus, able to justify their radical appearance in the post-war city by means of their relative worth, without having to concede any aesthetic ground. What remains is a melancholy sight: a lonely church surrounded by towering monoliths. It recalls another of Le Corbusier’s comments about the fragments of the historic city in his *Plan Voisin*: ‘For material things too must die, and these green parks with their relics are in some sort cemeteries’.¹⁵² With this morbid metaphor, we are granted a fitting illustration of the role of the ruin in modernist discourse: a rather cursory memorial to the historic city, as well as a conclusive confirmation of its passing. In short, the ruin stands as a guarantor of the new, its roots in trauma and collective struggle serving to strengthen the status of modern architecture, with ruination turning to renewal.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 15.

¹⁵² Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow*, 287.

Chapter 3 – Illustrations



Figure 3.1) Jules Dassin, *Night and the City*, 1950, film still, 1:14:00.

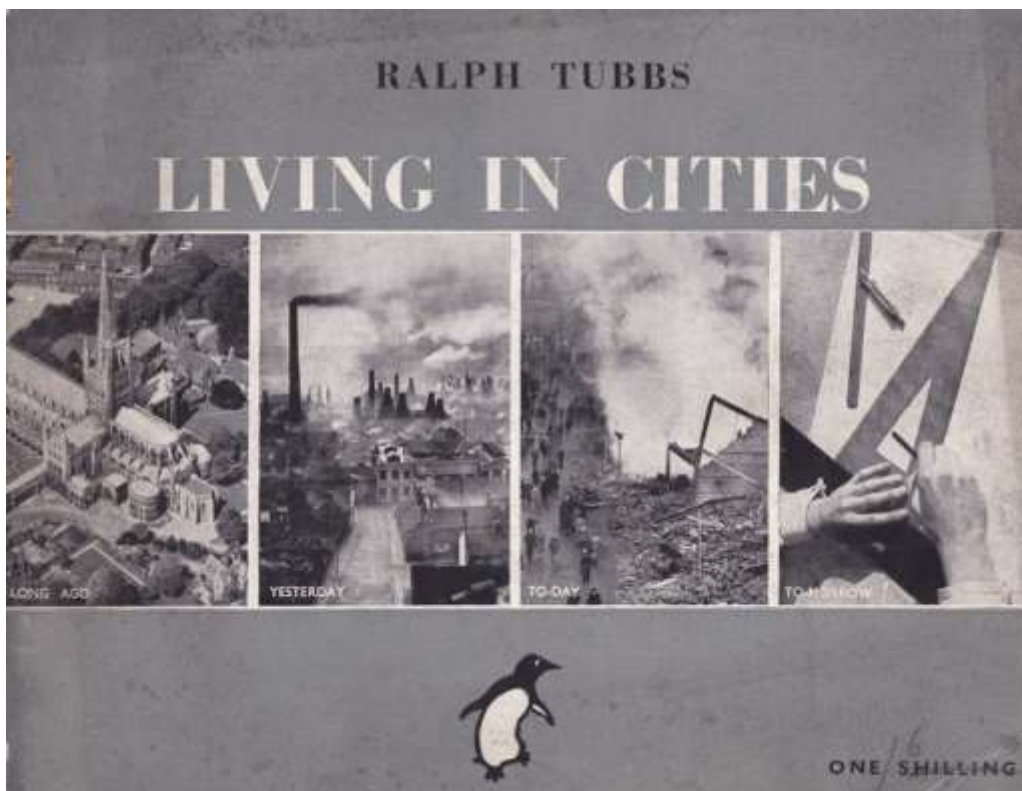


Figure 3.2) Ralph Tubbs, *Living in Cities*, 1942, front cover.



Figure 3.3) Gustave Doré, *The New Zealander*, 1872, wood engraving.



Figure 3.4) *New Homes Rise from London's Ruins*, 1951, Festival of Britain poster.



Figure 3.5) Bomb-damaged pub, c. 1941, photograph.

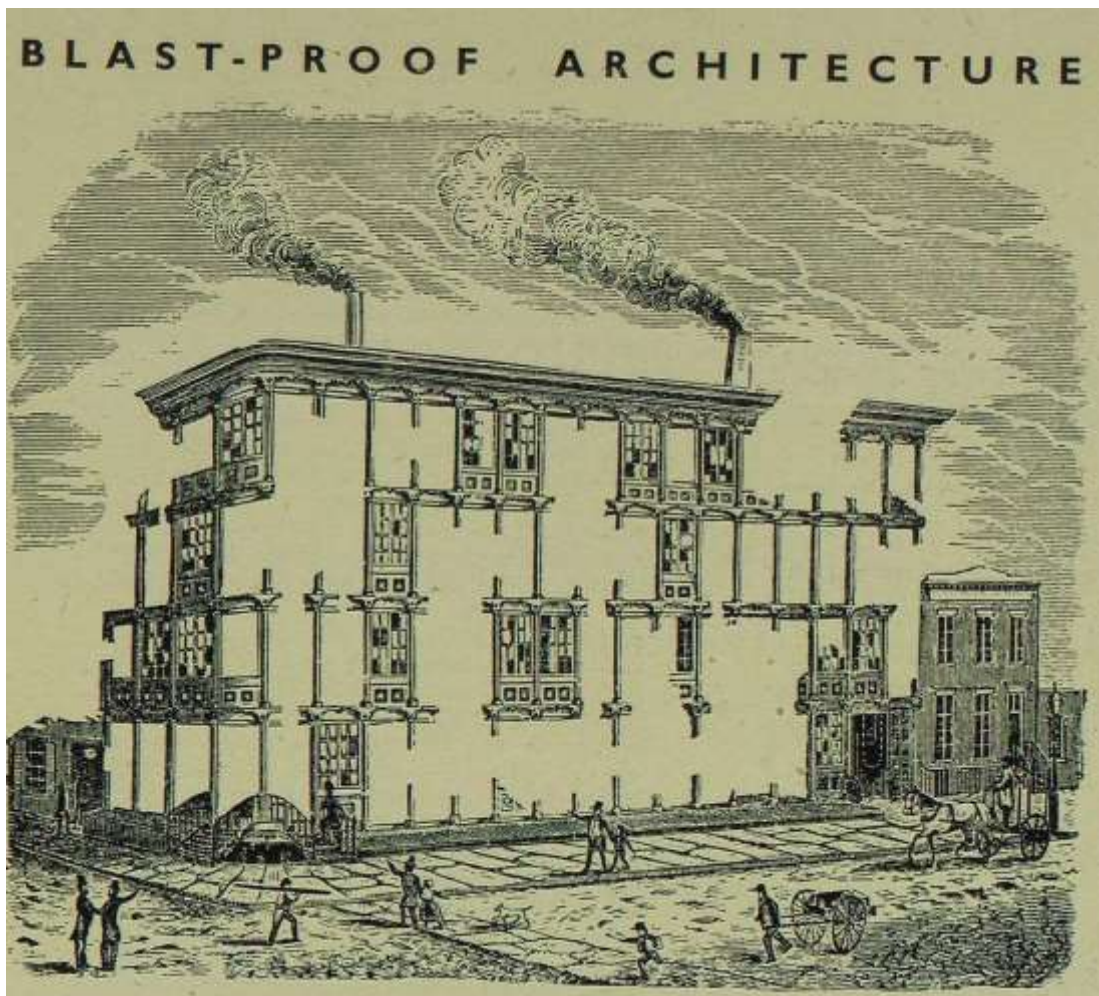


Figure 3.6) James Bogardus, image from *Cast Iron Buildings*, 1856, engraving.



Figure 3.7) Oswald Batt, *The Planner*, 1945, drawing.

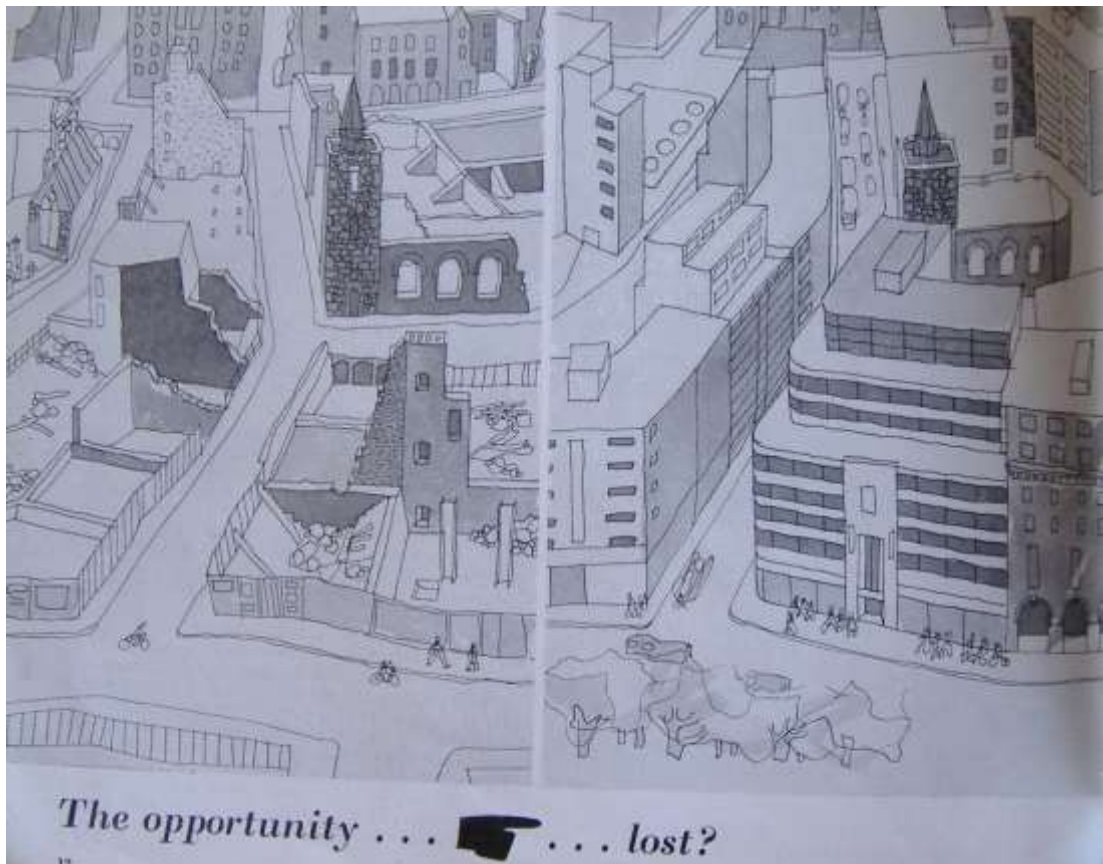


Figure 3.8) Gordon Cullen, *The opportunity... lost?*, 1945, drawing.



Figure 3.9) Neville Conder, *St Alban, Wood Street*, 1945, perspective drawing of prospective scheme.

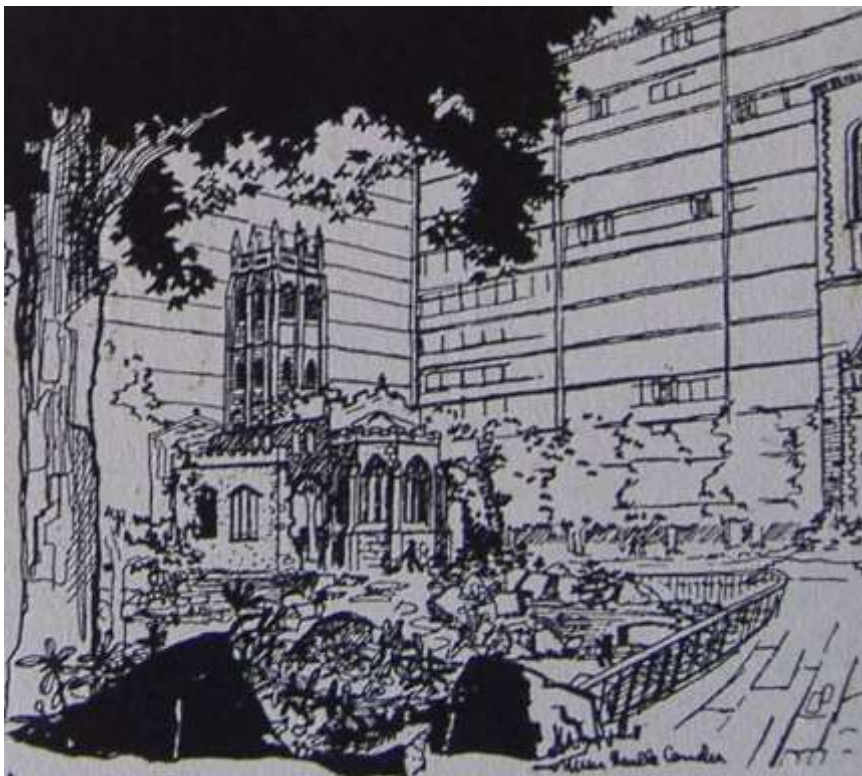


Figure 3.10) Neville Conder, *View of St Mary Aldermanbury and St Alban, Wood Street*, 1945, perspective drawing of prospective scheme

CHAPTER 4 – Personal Histories: The Present in the Past

Introduction

Of course, at the end of the Second World War not all buildings were in ruin. The experience of bombing may have left deep emotional scars, and forever altered the psychological geography of the European city, but soon the process of rebuilding must begin. Inevitably, the architectural survivors of the Blitz would be incorporated into the new schemes – but they too had come to embody new meanings. A consideration of the discussions about these survivors – in particular, St Paul’s Cathedral – reveals much about conceptions of the historic fabric in British cities at the end of the war, and hints at the new relationship now imagined between these old buildings and the new structures that would emerge beside them. Many large-scale plans produced during the war had projected extensive clearances of urban areas, with little regard for the complexities of architectural preservation, but elsewhere it is possible to detect a more nuanced approach emerging. The celebrated plans of wartime tended – despite their frequent emphasis on compiling and analysing detailed research – to take a top-down approach, subordinating this data to the presupposition that master-planning must take place at the scale of the city and region. This method was eased by the devastating bombing raids of the war, which left huge inner-city sites vacant and presented an invitation to adopt a policy of radical reconstruction. Planners, in turn, embraced the damage and adopted it as a mandate to address also any unaffected fabric that was in a state of disrepair.

But the experience of bombing, and in particular the startling visual effects left in the aftermath, also encouraged a different perspective. As the previous chapter showed, several architectural writers were intensely stimulated by urban bombsites, conjuring up impressions of scenes by turns surreal, romantic, and picturesque. Photographs of ruined buildings are similarly striking, whether taken for purposes of reportage or

with a more self-consciously artistic approach. Much of this impact came from the potency of dynamic juxtaposition, a feature particularly evident in the images produced by Cecil Beaton and Lee Miller, who carefully framed the fragments they found for maximum effect.¹ While the sight of mass-devastation is undoubtedly powerful, the impact becomes even more acute when seen in contrast with the signifiers of everyday life. Thus, in many wartime photographs even the most mundane details are suddenly rendered bizarre and fantastic when discovered in a setting of otherworldly chaos, and vast desolate areas of the city achieve pathos when framed by the undamaged buildings that once stood as their neighbours. While, to an extent, this was merely a response to the shock of aerial assault – spontaneous and passing – the process also described a gradual revaluation of the unique charms of the old city, which became particularly apparent later as attention shifted from a short-term indulgence of *Ruinenlust* towards the more pragmatic consideration of the structures that had survived.

Reassessing a Ruined City

One subject that enjoyed particular command in this respect was St Paul's Cathedral. Albeit never an obscure monument, its remarkable escape from major damage saw it achieve a certain supremacy in the imagery of the Blitz, its massive, solid form appearing repeatedly as either foil or focus in photographs of the gutted structures surrounding it. The City of London had been targeted especially intensely by the Luftwaffe's attacks and yet its cathedral emerged substantially intact, presenting an enormous unbroken footprint amid the acres of rubble around. This accident of history quickly transformed itself into a positive expression of national pride, St Paul's unbroken dome seeming to be a statement of defiance and bluff self-

¹ Both Beaton and Miller had selections of their blitz photographs published in 1941. Presented, respectively, in *History under Fire* and *Grim Glory*, these images exhibit the same surrealist qualities that we encountered in the previous chapter: see Ian Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 149-156.

confidence at a time when the outcome of the war was still far from clear.² An article in *The Times* spoke of the Cathedral as ‘a symbol of the unconquerable spirit that has sustained the fight’; meanwhile, J.B. Priestley, speaking in 1941 in his role as a popular spokesman in the *Postscripts* talks, saw it as ‘an enduring symbol of reason and Christian ethics’.³ It is notable that even so distinctive a critical voice as Ian Nairn, writing more than two decades later, was moved to comment that in St Paul’s ‘the principle of English freedom has been given spiritual form’.⁴ He added, resorting almost grudgingly to cliché, that it ‘is hard not to sound like a bad Churchillian parody, but in fact this is why we fought the war’.⁵ St Paul’s thus became the pre-eminent icon of the Blitz, an articulation in stone of the vaguely defined body of values that constituted the ‘Blitz spirit’ and a popular compositional feature for photographers. The most famous instance is Herbert Mason’s photograph of the cathedral dome and west towers mounting a cloud of smoke and reaching towards the light: this uplifting vignette offset by the fractured silhouettes around the bottom of the scene (Figure 4.1). Appraised in the *Daily Mail* when it was published on New Year’s Eve 1940 as ‘War’s Greatest Picture’, it represents a particularly potent example of the genre.⁶

However, one of the main reasons that the image is so captivating and, specifically, so heroic, is its disembodied viewpoint high above the city streets on the roof of the *Daily Mail* offices. It is in other photographs that we get an impression of the rich appearance of survivals among the ruins. While somewhat less grandiose than Mason’s famous image, these scenes, their perspective tied to the passer-by on the ground, demonstrate the impact of finding a building in a setting remote from the everyday. Such images document a moment of rediscovery, as seemingly familiar buildings are relocated in a new visual collage and seen afresh. This layering is

² Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 250; Nicola Lambourne, *War Damage in Western Europe: The Destruction of Historic Monuments During the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 116-117.

³ Uncited article from *The Times*, quoted in William Kent, *The Lost Treasures of London* (London: Phoenix House, 1947), 33. J.B. Priestley, quoted in Lambourne, *War Damage in Western Europe*, 117.

⁴ Ian Nairn, *Nairn’s London* (London: Penguin, 2014), 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶ As testament to the enduring power of the image, it was used again by *The Sun* newspaper in the aftermath of the bombing of London on 7 July 2005.

apparent in one of Beaton's most compelling wartime photographs, in which the distant towers of St Paul's are framed within the entrance arch of a blasted Victorian façade (Figure 4.2).⁷ The blackened aedicule, emaciated by fire, forms the immediate foreground of the scene; further back, broken architectural remains are partially masked by smoke, which thins as it rises leaving the cathedral bell towers hazily apparent – though no less recognisable – in the distance. Even with the cathedral reduced to the barest outline, the juxtaposition of parts invokes unequivocally the idea of the Blitz. However, more important to this discussion, the visual diversity of the whole lends it a powerful aesthetic appeal of the sort that would be embraced by proponents of the picturesque from the mid-1940s, especially insofar as the ensemble is rooted in a historic and distinctive terminating object. It is telling that the cover of the *Architectural Review*'s 'Destruction and Reconstruction' special issue of July 1941, which continued to appear as a supplement for many months afterwards, carried a similar image – on this occasion Wren's dome rearing up between two shards of broken walling (Figure 4.3).

Of course, part of the appeal of St Paul's was its prestige not only as a symbol of British pugnacity and steadfastness, but also in the status it held as the defining monument of a project of architectural reconstruction conducted centuries before: that is, the rebuilding of the City of London after the Great Fire of 1666.⁸ The parallels with the contemporary situation were urged by Ernő Goldfinger in an article in the *Architectural Review* towards the end of 1941 in which he pinpointed the cathedral's stylistic singularity at the time of its completion in having been 'erected in the continental, modernistic style': a historic case of modernisation in aesthetics that ought to be resumed.⁹ But this attendance to the content of the building itself

⁷ This picture featured in a John Piper article discussing 'The Architecture of Destruction: John Piper, 'The Architecture of Destruction', *Architectural Review* 90, no. 535 (1941), 28.

⁸ Interestingly, in 1940 a significant study of the post-Fire project of rebuilding was published. In the introduction, its author noted that since 'this book appeared, London has been repeatedly bombed. Much damage has been done and in considerable though scattered areas every building is now demolished. Rebuilding, forbidden in most cases until the war ends, has been for that reason the more widely discussed. Inevitably, references to the rebuilding after the Great Fire have been freely made'. See T.F. Reddaway, *The Rebuilding of London After the Great Fire* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), 19.

⁹ Ernő Goldfinger, 'Urbanism and Spatial Order', *Architectural Review* 90, no. 540 (1941), 165. Elsewhere in the *Architectural Review* this analogy was extended with the suggestion that 'the principles of order and dignity that Wren's churches may be said to symbolize will be much more

shaded frequently into a concern for its prominence relative to the surrounding area. We saw, in the previous chapter, that air raids were welcomed by many planners insofar as they removed any possibility of compromise in the reconstruction of designated slum areas, but their impact also had a bearing on the treatment of buildings left behind. As the tight-knit streets around St Paul's were progressively reduced to rubble, the cathedral became ever more visible, and the expression of new scenographic possibilities became a commonplace.

Commenting in 1943 on the impact of the air raids, Stephen Spender perceived a more benevolent plan at work. He suggested that selective wreckage could liberate society from a 'dead and inhibiting' tradition that had been allowed to persist 'without being appreciated'. In its place there would emerge a new recognition of the buildings left behind, focussed most importantly on the cathedral. There was, for Spender, 'a kind of rightness in the obscured views to St Paul's being released by the terrible destruction of the City fires; and people feel this rightness, even amid the horror and wickedness of destruction'.¹⁰ Like Goldfinger, Frederic Osborn looked to the history of the cathedral's origins, and found cause for optimism in its current situation. 'For the first time since St Paul's was rebuilt after the Great Fire of 1666', he wrote, 'Londoners are able to see Wren's masterpiece in its true perspective'.¹¹ In such accounts, besides the apprehension that bombing has enhanced the qualities of a historic monument itself, it is also apparent that freedom of vision becomes the key instrument of appraisal.¹² The official plan for the City of London, produced by Charles Holden and William Holford in 1947, confirmed these convictions by

typical of the new city we shall build afterwards'. See *Architectural Review* 89, no.530 (1941), unnumbered.

¹⁰ Stephen Spender, introduction to *Air Raids* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 7.

¹¹ Frederic J. Osborn, ed., *Making Plans: Based on the BBC Series of Discussions* (London: Todd Publishing, 1943), unnumbered.

¹² The positive appraisal even extended to tourist guides, with the first English Baedeker to be produced after the war, published in 1951, noting of St Paul's: 'The German air attacks of the Second World War have cleared of buildings a vast area to the North and East of the cathedral, so that the beauty of the exterior can now be better appreciated'. Quoted in Lambourne, *War Damage in Western Europe*, 199.

maintaining as a condition in the re-planning of the area the ‘preservation of the best views of the Cathedral and its great dome’.¹³

This approval of the visual liberation of St Paul’s was articulated also by J.M. Richards in the *Architectural Review* in 1941 – although he offered certain qualifications that anticipate the campaign for a picturesque planning method later in the decade. Taking issue with speculative proposals by ‘the thoughtless’ in favour of “opening up” the site of the cathedral’, he suggests that the image of St Paul’s set in its shattered environs:

...is still the traditional view of it – glimpsed unexpectedly over rooftops and framed in passages – and one that should be kept in mind when rebuilding is done. For the cathedral and the City churches were conceived for such situations. Rebuild by all means for health and efficiency, but appropriately.¹⁴

This opinion was repeated too by Holden and Holford, who commented that the cathedral’s wartime significance required that its surroundings ‘deserve the most careful and sympathetic treatment that the planner can contrive’, maintaining that new plans in the area would not make ‘an excessive demand for open space’.¹⁵ But the terms of this pledge were flexible, tempered by a prevailing appreciation for expansive views and the generally exaggerated scale of public space that was deemed appropriate to modern architecture.

¹³ C.H. Holden and W.G. Holford, ‘The Consultants’ Final Report to the Improvements and Town Planning Committee’ (1947), in *The City of London: A Record of Destruction and Survival* (London: Architectural Press, 1951), 297.

¹⁴ J.M. Richards, ‘This Time’, *Architectural Review* 90, no. 535, ‘Destruction and Reconstruction Special’ (1941), 33.

¹⁵ Holden and Holford, *The City of London*, 80; Holden Holford, ‘The Consultants’ Final Report’, 297.

'Vistamongering' vs. Intimacy: Two Approaches to Re-Planning the City of London

Ever since it had become apparent that an extensive programme of rebuilding would have to be undertaken in the City the consensus among town planners had tended to favour a radically unfamiliar spatial pattern in the area. Richards' attack focussed explicitly on 'the stereotyped avenues of the beaux arts school', an approach that would define the plan for London then being readied by the Royal Academy Planning Committee, which had formed at the beginning of 1940 under the chairmanship of Edwin Lutyens.¹⁶ Taking advantage of a sudden rush of public interest in physical reconstruction, the Committee's interim findings were exhibited in October 1942 and simultaneously published as the booklet *London Replanned*.¹⁷ Although not a comprehensively conceived scheme – it was principally an elaboration of the proposals presented in the 1937 Bressiey-Lutyens Report, which examined necessary road improvements in the capital – the Academy's plan did place aesthetic considerations at its core, addressing in particular 'the architectural aspects of the new routes and of the adjacent sites affected by them'.¹⁸ Consistent with its incomplete state, Lutyens was cautious in presenting the Committee's findings. The scheme, he wrote, 'is put forward ... as an ideal possibility', with this speculative approach apparent in its illustrations of a dramatically reimagined London.¹⁹ As was noted at the time, the plan was not produced in expectation of being enacted; instead, it represented a self-consciously academic riposte to the rising current of international modernism that flavoured other major plans for the reconstruction of the capital.²⁰

¹⁶ Richards, 'This Time', 33.

¹⁷ Royal Academy Planning Committee, *London Replanned: The Royal Academy Planning Committee's Interim Report* (London: Country Life, 1942).

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 15.

¹⁹ Edwin Lutyens, foreword to *London Replanned: The Royal Academy Planning Committee's Interim Report*, by Royal Academy Planning Committee (London: Country Life, 1942), 2.

²⁰ On this aspect, see: T.A.D.B., review of *London Replanned: The Royal Academy Planning Committee's Interim Report*, by Royal Academy Planning Committee, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 91, no. 4639 (1943), 326. Unsurprisingly, given its source, the review is broadly complimentary of the plan, and suggests that despite its negative professional reception, 'it would have failed in its purpose if it had not [upset the critics], for its deliberate intention was to stimulate comment and discussion'.

Its basic form was defined by an encircling ring road, within which London's major transport arteries were reorganised into a simplified pattern that would be better able to cope with new traffic demands. But there were also sequences of extreme formality, where the road system resolved itself into grandiose axial arrangements to augment London's most famous landmarks. One such saw the area around St Paul's Cathedral dramatically rethought with these twin considerations in mind (Figure 4.4). The bomb damage that had mutilated the tight and irregular space around the cathedral walls provided a mandate for the creation of a broad and symmetrical piazza, which would be echoed to the west with a grand space replacing Ludgate Circus and extending further south. Linking these two, the plan projected a tree-lined east-west boulevard on axis with the cathedral nave (Figure 4.5). There were similarly academic gestures to the north and south, where wide avenues were envisaged running towards Christchurch and the Thames Embankment, respectively. Finally, a new route would reach away to the north-east – extending as far as Moorgate Street Station – and, like the other three, would align with the cathedral dome. Not only were these alterations contrived to generate a powerful formal impression, the concern for increasing traffic demands also contributed to the greatly expanded scale of the new spaces.

Due to its academic orientation, it is not surprising to find that the Committee's plan received a cool reception. Either ignored or criticised by the professional press, the plan's monumentality and the extreme formality of its layout were particularly unpopular, leading to accusations of 'vistamongering'.²¹ Indeed, such claims given support by the text of the committee's own report, which repeated throughout the importance of visual appeal. In describing the proposals for the area around St Paul's, the virtues of opening-up vistas onto the cathedral were relentlessly restated – referenced in the description of each new avenue.²² Even away from these more obviously telegraphed views, sensitivity to the cultivation of viewpoints remained paramount. Thus, having described the new, entirely uncharacteristic, appearance of the cathedral from the new Ludgate Circus, the plan reassures that the 'oblique view

²¹ L. Dudley Stamp, 'Replanning London', *Geographical Review* 35, no. 4 (1945), 665.

²² RAPC, *London Replanned*, 14.

of St. Paul's from Fleet Street is preserved by control of the height of new buildings in between, and in all essentials would be the same as at present'.²³ However, this latter concession to pre-war layout is faintly absurd when considered in light of the dramatic changes in orientation posited for the area as a whole. Since the 1930s restrictions on building heights had been in place around the cathedral in order to maintain its prominence locally, but such regulations were rendered trivial by the Royal Academy proposals.²⁴ The prevailing impression was ultimately that of a *tabula rasa* giving rise to a novel spatial pattern, and the new vistas proposed did not seek the more intimate atmosphere that Richards had in mind when he wrote of the architectural flavour of the City either before the war or when in ruins.

Holden and Holford's official plan was entirely different in its conception of architectural treatment, but did similarly pursue a more open spatial arrangement. Despite its authors' professions of sympathy to the urban texture of the area around St Paul's, they made an assumption that more space would be provided, citing the positive impact of bomb damage in the area. This was part of a rethinking of the City's layout that would see the quantity of public open space increased by more than three times, albeit primarily through the creation of small resting places.²⁵ One of the most substantial gains was to come in the area of land south-east of the cathedral, where the churchyard would be enlarged in order to preserve a view that, they wrote, 'is now appreciated by thousands who would never have remarked on it but for the dramatic way the intervening buildings were cleared'.²⁶ This space would extend all around the cathedral's south side, its outline delineated by a major road that would divert the traffic that had once approached the building directly up Ludgate Hill, leaving the vacated area to become a new forecourt before the west front. The plan invoked the historic foundation of the cathedral in suggesting that the scale of the encircling precinct promised to approach 'the proportions originally

²³ *Ibid*, 17.

²⁴ Gordon E. Cherry and Leith Penny, *Holford: A Study in Architecture, Planning and Civic Design* (London: Mansell, 1986), 160.

²⁵ Holden and Holford, *The City of London*, 75.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 80. Elsewhere the preservation of this view is described as a 'thank-offering for the almost miraculous preservation of the Cathedral': *Ibid*, 201.

proposed by Christopher Wren and Nicholas Hawksmoor', a detail that was, tellingly, also referenced as a motivation for the Royal Academy design.²⁷

However, other aspects were more sympathetic to the existing grain of the City, while also incorporating a concern with visual perception. Four years after Holden and Holford first submitted their report an augmented presentation of its proposals was released. Besides outlining the details of the plan itself, *The City of London: A Record of Destruction and Survival* also contained a lengthy historical account of the development of the City up to the present, and a catalogue of damage done to the most intensely bombed areas, illustrated with select plans and photographs and providing brief comment on how these places would be changed in the years to come. Also, augmenting these suggestions of continuity, the text underlined the significance of the City's 'pedestrian ways' in guaranteeing the survival of its unique identity. While, we are told, the most functionally efficient method of organising an urban centre would see towers rising across uninterrupted areas of open space, in turn divided into roads, parking areas, and parkland, this sweepingly monotonous pattern was inappropriate in such a prestigious location. Instead, a more *ad hoc* arrangement was necessary, adapting 'the myriad paths and circulations both horizontal and vertical that have come into being in the course of centuries' to modern requirements.²⁸ But, as the pedestrian's course should be clarified, so there must also be an effort 'to combine the convenience and accessibility of hundreds of pedestrian circulations with the visual amenities and pleasures that building forms can give'.²⁹ Thus, the imperative of vision was conceived as central to the development of the plan, taking the experience of 'the sightseer' – whether the tourist or the momentarily pleasure-seeking City worker – as a test of its success. Views onto key monuments were not the imperative here, for the sightseer would be sure to find value in 'the accidental, as well as the famous, views of the City', given the diversity of its environments.³⁰ Rather, Holden and Holford concentrated on crafting 'minor circulations': individual, but interconnected, circuits that would run

²⁷ RAPC, *London Replanned*, 16-17; Holden and Holford, *The City of London*, 80.

²⁸ Holden and Holford, *The City of London*, 72.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

through the dense fabric and knit old paths together with new, passing shopfronts, buildings of interest, and buildings of little interest, as well as navigating a course around roads whose volume of traffic was due to grow. Through this strict separation of pedestrians from the major traffic routes the demands of a modern inner-city quarter were to be met, at the same time preserving the role of the pedestrian: realising historical continuity by assuring freedom of motion – that is, a continuous and coherent sequence of viewpoints – for the wandering sightseer.³¹

The book concluded with an imagined tour, following a route along one of the possible pedestrian ways, which meandered from the Bank to St Paul's Cathedral (Figure 4.6).³² The chapter was introduced by a map, marked at points with arrows matched to the images punctuating the description that followed. A mix of photographs and drawings by Gordon Cullen, these images offered a glimpse both of the present state of the City and of how selected locations might appear when complete, and were effective in addressing the plan's stated concern with historical continuity. In the first place, Cullen's delicately coloured perspectives were exceptionally restrained, characterised by softened lines and an informality that made the boldly reimagined cityscape seem quiet, familiar, and unthreatening (Figure 4.7). The scenes are peopled by archetypal figures of English city life – policemen talk with street cleaners, dockers truck goods, shoeshine attend to City gentlemen – and they go about their business unflustered by uncompromisingly novel surroundings, perhaps reassured by the familiar presence of tearooms, pubs, and fish shops. Elsewhere, the new slots in beside the old: modern buildings sit innocuously in the background, their cartoonish outlines covertly mellowing the contrast with their more timeworn neighbours. However, the simultaneous inclusion of photographs of the existing sites was also significant. Despite the claim that these presented a contrast between the present-day and future conditions of the area, the alternation between the real and imagined scenes – similarly framed and lit, and peopled by the same cast of quaint City characters – in fact, eased the conceptual juxtaposition of the old and the

³¹ *Ibid.*, 72-80.

³² *Ibid.*, 231-264. This method was to be further developed by Cullen in his elaboration of a concept of Townscape: John Macarthur, *The Picturesque: Architecture, Disgust and Other Irregularities* (London: Routledge, 2007), 199.

new. Putting especial emphasis on this issue of synthesis, the text began by asserting the need to realise a cohesive architectural scene. The rebuilt City would contain a blend of ‘new traffic routes with old streets and new buildings alongside those that survived the Blitz’, advancing a bricolage of elements whose union would be enacted, ultimately, by the eye of the pedestrian.³³

Although one of the main emphases of the scheme as a whole was on improvements to the system of roads, with major engineering projects proposed that would see the insertion of large underpasses and raised expressways, the attention to the identity of the pedestrian ways alters repeatedly the accent of the plan. Emphasis remains on the comprehensive co-ordination of circulation in the City; different orders of circulation are treated rationally and integrated to create a system of maximal efficiency. But Holden and Holford insist that the pedestrian ways should be seen as an integral part of this system, so that foot and vehicular traffic each receive equal priority.³⁴ Indicative of this expectation was the inclusion at especially gridlocked locations of new roundabouts, which were dubbed ‘traffic places’ in a linguistic synthesis of technological dynamism and the tradition of the urban square. As traffic flowed by at ground level, pedestrians would be able to circulate beneath on a network of subways, while the central spaces would form public squares surrounded by shops and cafes. Consequently, the activity of cars and people were matched, at separate levels, and the traditional pedestrian mode of circulation was accommodated alongside the demands of modernity: as the plan stated, the pedestrian ways were therefore ‘both useful and preservative’.³⁵ Cullen’s cartoons imagined a few of these spots, rendering them with an animation that such spaces rarely realised in reality (Figure 4.8), an optimism about the happy co-existence of pedestrians and heavy traffic that is repeated in the text. At one point, in the description of an underpass running into the background of a scene, we hear of how the ‘quiet gleam of light at

³³ *Ibid*, 231.

³⁴ The plan states: ‘The aim of the proposals as regards pedestrian ways may be summed up as being to give them continuity throughout the City and to recognize them as important traffic routes, without lessening their charm. If this aim were fulfilled the places visited on the walk just described would not be isolated islands any more, but would be linked by passages under the main vehicular traffic routes. ... Wide streets are still needed but they should not monopolize attention. Today more people pass through the alleys, passages and narrow streets than in medieval times, and the City’s second circulation should be made as fit for the traffic it carries as any of the main streets’. See *Ibid*, 255.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 255.

the end of the tunnel is in contrast with the roar of traffic and towering buildings above'.³⁶

Misguided or not, the definitive role of the pedestrian – and the pictorial imagining of his or her passage through the city – is indicative of the visual emphasis of the plan, and of wider debates in town planning and architecture. Of course, this preference is in part motivated by the particular identity of the City of London, whose narrow alleys and abundantly changing vistas we saw celebrated by J.M. Richards in his criticism of approaches to the future of St Paul's. But the priority of the pedestrian and the projection of intimate, irregular scenographies was also part of a process seeking to find a place for modern architecture in Britain's cities, and to justify its existence. After all, Richards was certainly not advocating architectural conservatism: there was an implication that rebuilding must take place. His suggestion had been: 'Rebuild by all means for health and efficiency, but appropriately'.³⁷ Propriety, then, was the key, and vision represented the means of reappraising the new, with the suggestion that it could be brought into sympathy with what remained by being composed in the same scene. Neatly pulling all of these threads together, and looking to the future, we find Nikolaus Pevsner – who will dominate much of the remainder of this chapter – discussing the form that the City should take, in a lecture to the Architectural Association in November 1945. Having lauded the special character of its lanes and alleys, he said that the 'odd vistas in the City are a very great stimulus indeed, showing what possibilities there are': an insistence on the perils of ignoring lessons from history.³⁸ Meanwhile, Cullen's pictures attest to the seductiveness of animated visual combinations, simultaneously reproducing the sort of strategies we saw in the Blitz photographs trained on St Paul's.

One of his City of London Plan drawings in particular echoes the image used on the 'Destruction and Reconstruction' cover: each terminating at Wren's dome, which is

³⁶ *Ibid*, 236.

³⁷ See footnote 14.

³⁸ Nikolaus Pevsner, 'Visual Planning and the City of London', *Architectural Association Journal* 61, no. 699 (1945-1946), 34. This was a paper that Pevsner presented to the AA on 27 November 1945.

framed by a complex array of urban objects (Figure 4.9).³⁹ The viewer's eye is drawn alternatively down a half-hidden passage to a pub – its cosy entrance enlivened by the elaborate Victorian patterning of which Cullen and his colleagues at the *Architectural Review* were particularly fond – and up a broad stairway towards the cathedral.⁴⁰ At the top of this stair, a terrace is fronted by structures that are unobtrusively pallid and grey. A rippling canopy on one side provides shelter to walkers, above which a play of projections, recessions, and varied fenestration is at once vaguely sketched and sculpturally rich, providing a complementary, yet understated, companion to the next stage. Here, beyond a road that introduces a partial screen of buses, stairs ascend to a further terrace, running through a corridor of older buildings that frame the cathedral at close-quarters. While this ensemble at the very centre of the scene is darker and more finely detailed than the rest, the willful intricacy of the whole tends to naturalise the new arrivals, and even the intervention above of a planned elevated road serves quietly to enclose the composition. The picturesque ruins have vanished, transformed into a newly picturesque arrangement, all of which is endorsed by the cultivation of deliberate vistas that unify by studied juxtaposition.

However, the observation that the attractive visual co-existence of contrasting buildings may tend to legitimise that co-existence is rather superficial: practically meaningless unless it can be related more clearly to theory and practice in post-war architecture. Some hint of this is evident in Holden and Holford's thinking in terms of discrete viewpoints that promote visual synthesis, a feature that remained influential in the area thanks to Holford's continued presence as chief consultant in the planning of the precinct around St Paul's.⁴¹ During the protracted and turbulent development of this scheme, Holford came to receive the support of Nikolaus Pevsner and other figures at the *Architectural Review*, for whom the marriage of visual arrangement and design method had become a singular preoccupation. They

³⁹ Holden and Holford, *The City of London*, 254.

⁴⁰ The *Architectural Review* was sufficiently interested in the environs of the pub to publish a special number on the topic, which traced its history and instigated a competition to design new pub interiors: see 'Inside the Pub', special issue of the *Architectural Review* 105, no. 634 (1949).

⁴¹ For a detailed account of Holden's work on the St Paul's precinct, see Cherry and Penny, *Holford*, 160-174.

had come to pursue a project that found them searching for a fixed set of architectural values: an approach whose legitimacy within the modern movement could not be questioned, but which would also speak to the history of British architecture that had been left depleted by the war. The conclusions they reached, while definitely framed in terms of the modernist tradition, betrayed a nostalgia not unlike that of the Royal Academy plan. Indeed, their prescriptions were opposed vehemently by the younger generation.⁴²

For this venerable grouping of historians and critics, in particular Pevsner and Hubert de Cronin Hastings, focused their efforts on advancing a theory of ‘visual planning’ that would build on the historical pedigree of the picturesque as a mode of design in England.⁴³ Reyner Banham subsequently observed that had Pevsner ‘deliberately set out to infuriate the young, he could hardly have done better’.⁴⁴ Many years later, in 1959, one of those radicals – Peter Smithson – continued to attack what he perceived to be a damaging tendency in English planning of insisting on theories that were ‘based on a pictorial concept’.⁴⁵ ‘Visual planning’ represented an attitude to design that it was hoped would foster results reminiscent of those examples of English urbanism that Pevsner and his colleagues most admired: Oxford, Cambridge, Bath, and sequences in London such as Regent Street and the Inns of Court. What made these exemplary was their informality: a curious harmony of unlike parts that resided not in a rational conceptual order or the self-conscious arrangement of monumental set-pieces, but rather in a spirit of compromise and piecemeal accumulation that was not comprehensively planned and could only be apprehended on the ground, as the visitor passed through the urban scene. This campaign sought directly to re-establish ‘the supremacy of the eye’.⁴⁶

⁴² For an account of this conflict, see Reyner Banham, ‘Revenge of the Picturesque: English Architectural Polemics, 1945-1965’, in *Concerning Architecture: Essays on Architectural Writers and Writing Presented to Nikolaus Pevsner*, ed. John Summerson (London: Allen Lane, 1968), 265-269.

⁴³ Also enthused by the picturesque at mid-century were John Piper and John Betjeman, who furnished similarly personal aesthetic readings that had a more Romantic content than Pevsner was willing to concede. For an account of their attitude towards the picturesque, see Philip Irving Mitchell, ‘“Love is Greater than Taste”: The Moral Architecture of John Betjeman and John Piper’, *Christianity and Literature* 63, no. 2 (2014), 262-268

⁴⁴ Banham, ‘Revenge of the Picturesque’, 267.

⁴⁵ Peter Smithson, quoted in Alison Smithson et al., ‘Conversation on Brutalism’, *October* 136, no. 2 (2011), 42.

⁴⁶ ‘50 Years’, *Architectural Review* 101, no. 601 (1947), 1.

It was the sentimentality of this attitude that made it so objectionable to younger designers still loyal to the early masters of modernism; for it stood in complete contradiction to the Continental elaboration of normative modes of design that laid claim to a rationalisation of structure and function. Symbolic of the *Architectural Review*'s departure was the emphasis on *vision* as a determining criterion of urban and architectural design. This element served to confirm the empiricist priority of 'visual planning', with the streetscape receiving appraisal purely in terms of its pictorial aspect as apprehended sequentially by the urban explorer on the ground. Correspondingly, the overriding attitude was permissive. It was a method explicitly formulated to maintain the old alongside the new, its authors having worked in conscious opposition to the convention of the *tabula rasa* in planning, which had frequently been presented as the only response to rebuilding extensively bombed urban areas. Although the stress on individual vision may seem to indicate a regression into private architectures of personal taste, this feature was in fact conceived as one of the foundations of its claim to universality.

In 1945 Pevsner wrote that 'the subtle art of conscious or unconscious visual planning' needed to be reclaimed from the past and applied to the post-war context 'if the England reconstructed after the war is not to be a dead place to live in'.⁴⁷ During a talk at the AA that same year Pevsner further elaborated the virtues of such 'visual planning', suggesting that it provided a corrective to the aesthetically damaging impact of too great an emphasis on pragmatism, and could add an element of pleasure to augment the dour preoccupations of social planning. Admitting the virtues of plans motivated by technical and sanitary concerns, he added that 'we also want something for our eyes to enjoy. 'The pleasures of the eye are not everything, but they are something which we deserve to have when we live in towns', they constituted, Pevsner went on, 'one of the necessities of a good life'.⁴⁸ Here, we see an admission that visual pleasure did not follow directly from functional propriety,

⁴⁷ Nikolaus Pevsner, 'Frenchay Common or Workaday Sharawaggi', *Architectural Review* 98, no. 583 (1945), 26.

⁴⁸ Pevsner, 'Visual Planning and the City of London', 33.

but must instead be attended to specifically as a universal condition of human happiness.

Meanwhile, we find Hastings refining this generalised claim to focus his argument on the priority of visual planning as an inherently national tendency, recognisable in England's cities and buildings, and instinctively pursued and appreciated by its citizens. He writes: 'a national picture-making aptitude exists among us, and has done for centuries'.⁴⁹ The influence of the *Architectural Review* ensured that this new standard was firmly established, either as a model to follow or a mistake to condemn. Reflecting, not uncritically, on these developments in the early 1950s, the historian Basil Taylor identified the unique proximity in Britain of 'pictorial and architectural values'. He concluded with a comment that will act as a preface to the preoccupations of the period: stating that the nation seemed to have 'decided that the picturesque is our particular métier and we are going to make all our arts conform to the conception'.⁵⁰

'A Rather Restless, Cultureless Life': The Threat of Modernity⁵¹

Again, St Paul's played a central role in this debate. At the start of 1956, the publication of a new William Holford scheme for the surrounding area had induced a public outcry, and a parliamentary motion was called to stop the proposals from

⁴⁹ The Editor, 'Exterior Furnishing or Sharawaggi: The Art of Making Urban Landscape', *Architectural Review* 95, no. 565 (1944), 5. Although published anonymously, it has subsequently been demonstrated that this article was authored by Hastings: see John Macarthur and Matthew Aitchison, 'Pevsner's Townscape', in *Visual Planning and the Picturesque*, ed. Matthew Aitchison (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 14-15.

⁵⁰ Basil Taylor in 1953, quoted in Foreword to *Architects' Year Book 5*, ed. Trevor Dannatt (London: Elek Books, 1953), 7. The quote is drawn from one of a series of BBC radio talks in which Taylor criticised Pevsner's conception of the picturesque: see introduction to Nikolaus Pevsner, 'The Picturesque and the Twentieth Century', in *Pevsner: The Complete Broadcast Talks, Architecture and Art on Radio and Television, 1945-1977*, ed. Stephen Games (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 218.

⁵¹ George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1941), 55.

coming to fruition in their present condition (Figure 4.10).⁵² While Holford sought to arrange a relatively dense cluster of irregular buildings around the western and northern sides of the cathedral, enclosing precincts reminiscent of those he had advised a decade earlier, the popular consensus and that of the current Minister of Housing and Local Government, Douglas Sandys, favoured a more grandiose approach. Pevsner enjoyed the privilege to comment publicly on the affair thanks to his status as a regular cultural spokesman at the BBC, a position that had seen him contribute to radio broadcasts on a range of subjects since 1945. Presenting a talk in May 1956 on the subject of Holford's scheme and the uproar surrounding it, Pevsner made an argument that rests heavily on the evocation of visual experience.⁵³

In what was effectively a propaganda statement aligned with his own personal architectural agenda, Pevsner sets out the main points of his conception of a 'visual planning' and the necessity of the picturesque as a mode of design in English cities. The general preference for a monumental scheme introduces to his discussion the memory of the Royal Academy Plan, by then fourteen years old, an antithesis to Pevsner's enthusiasms. While this scheme was certainly grand and matched the undeniable grandiosity of the cathedral itself – 'the most monumental moment in English architectural history' – Pevsner felt it misguided to assume one should set out to mimic the other. Aside from the impracticality of imposing a monumental, axial layout on the centre of London and Pevsner's contention that such a plan would lessen the cathedral's unique artistic force, it was also decisively out of step with the functional life of the City and with a characteristically English tradition of informal planning.⁵⁴ Holford, instead, was a figure who 'stands in that tradition', capable of addressing the needs of the City worker and the sightseer, incorporating traffic considerations and accommodation for tenancy holders, but especially keeping 'in

⁵² Cherry and Penny, *Holford*, 166-168; Michela Rosso, "'The Rediscovery of the Picturesque': Nikolaus Pevsner and the Work of Architects and Planners During and After the Second World War', in *Reassessing Nikolaus Pevsner*, ed. Peter Draper (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 200-201.

⁵³ Nikolaus Pevsner, 'A Setting for St Paul's', in *Pevsner: The Complete Broadcast Talks*: 317-324. This talk was given on the BBC Home Service, Sunday 6 May 1956, 10.25pm-10.50pm. Elsewhere, he would similarly recommend the speculative proposals for the area around St Pauls submitted by the *Architectural Review* in 1946: see Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art* (London: Architectural Press, 1956), 172-173, 180. See, also, the plan itself: 'The Plan', *Architectural Review* 100, no. 599 (1946): 142-145.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 242-245 (242).

his heart the vision untarnished of the delight, the manifold delights to the eye he wanted to create'.⁵⁵ Speaking on the radio the previous year, in one of his famous Reith lectures, Pevsner had emphasised the need for the planner to consider 'what is practical for the walker as well as the driver, for the man in a hurry and the man with leisure to stand and stare, for the shopper on foot and from the car', in a statement of solidarity with the increasingly marginalised experience of the pedestrian.⁵⁶

In the 1956 talk, he attempted to illustrate the success of the proposal by conducting his listeners on an imaginary tour, just as Holden and Holford had done when leading the reader around the pedestrian ways of their preliminary plan for the City as a whole. Beginning with an approach to the cathedral up Ludgate Hill, Pevsner described the impression of the new precincts and the lawns nearby, in order to give his listeners 'an inkling of the variety of pleasures' they would offer the pedestrian.⁵⁷ His emphasis was constantly on the informality and intricacy of the arrangement, which would present the visitor with ever-changing vistas and surprises, with the buildings engaged in a perpetual dialogue with St Paul's Cathedral:

... not one of these pleasures is not devised in relation to Wren's building, to lead the eye to it, at the best moments and in the best ways, to increase its scale, to provide a foil now for the rotundity of the dome, now for the crowded columns, volutes, bulgy curves of the tops of the front towers.⁵⁸

The nationalist and functional emphases evident in the BBC talk were, in Pevsner's mind, closely interlinked, and sat at the heart of a project that played a major part in his work during and after the war: the elaboration and promotion of a concept of 'visual planning', which, in turn, involved a sustained engagement with the tradition of the picturesque. Emerging around 1942, when Pevsner was employed as interim

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 246. Echoing Pevsner's analogy between Holford's scheme and the tradition of the picturesque, Cherry and Penny have spoken of the approach to the design process as being 'reminiscent of the eighteenth century', since the team involved had been 'strongly influenced by history, precedent and with the design of a "stage setting" for street life and ceremonial events'. See Cherry and Penny, *Holford*, 166.

⁵⁶ Nikolaus Pevsner, 'The Genius of the Place', in *Pevsner: The Complete Broadcast Talks, Architecture and Art on Radio and Television, 1945-1977*, ed. Stephen Games (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014): 307-316

⁵⁷ Pevsner, 'A Setting for St Paul's', 247-248.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 248.

editor of the *Architectural Review*, this campaign continued well into the following decade. Although initially directed to the subject by the periodical's owner and co-editor, Hubert de Cronin Hastings, Pevsner came to pursue it with great enthusiasm, constructing a complex argument that he aired repeatedly over more than a decade in books, articles, lectures, and radio broadcasts.⁵⁹ He also spent many years planning a book on the subject that never came to fruition, but nevertheless provides some indication of his commitment to the campaign.⁶⁰ Although fragmentary, and left unfinished, the book has recently been speculatively reconstructed for publication by Mathew Aitchison, whose research into the subject has been invaluable in producing the present chapter.

The project Pevsner undertook was vastly ambitious, rooted specifically in historical research, it involved extensive study in the evolution of English architecture and town planning, and sought to 'make the past available as precedent and inspiration for Pevsner's contemporaries'.⁶¹ As we will see, this was the great significance of Pevsner's campaign: he saw himself furnishing architects and planners with an active approach to design, which relied on the construction of an extensive, and at times entirely novel, pre-history for modern architecture in Britain. As a result he aimed to

⁵⁹ During a 1945 lecture, Pevsner commented on the peculiarity of the fact that despite not being English, an architect or a town planner he 'somehow or other ... became mixed up in a campaign for the re-establishment of certain principles or visual planning': Pevsner, 'Visual Planning and the City of London', 31. John Macarthur and Mathew Aitchison give a detailed account of the origins and aims of the project in John Macarthur and Mathew Aitchison, 'Pevsner's Townscape', in *Visual Planning and the Picturesque*, ed. Mathew Aitchison (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010).

The discussion over the following pages unites Pevsner's various discourses on the subject, seeking to present them as a unified argument. While Pevsner never wrote a single, definitive explication of his ideas regarding 'visual planning', or the picturesque, he undoubtedly conceived them as such. Despite being devised relatively quickly, his thesis had all of its parts in place by 1945, and the overall shape of his ideas remained remarkably consistent – even though he actively promoted them over such a lengthy period of time. Consultation of his diverse offerings on the topic reveals persistent theoretical overlap: certain claims reappear frequently in different media, variously expanded and developed, so that an obvious thesis can be extracted. The fact remains that, much like his reflections on English art, the overall narrative he constructed is often extremely dubious. Drawing on highly selective examples, all tenuously linked, and an underlying assumption of intentional patterns in the historical process, it is not difficult to find flaws in Pevsner's argument. Meanwhile, it is a great challenge to faithfully reproduce his line of thought, which becomes at times impossibly inconsistent and contradictory. These problems will be left mostly in the background, except where they become excessive obstacles to the discussion.

⁶⁰ The original material for this book – including around 500 pages of notes - is now held in the Getty Collection. See Nikolaus Pevsner, *Visual Planning and the Picturesque*, ed. Mathew Aitchison (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010).

⁶¹ Macarthur and Aitchison, 'Pevsner's Townscape', 1.

elaborate – or, perhaps more accurately, fortify – the historical foundations of modernism, discovering a legitimating historical tendency that could be re-applied by practitioners in the present. Part of the reason Pevsner set aside his work on these themes was the fact that he found another, more far-reaching, platform from which to present his case.

For, in 1955 he was invited to deliver the Reith lectures, by then an established annual feature of the BBC's radio schedule, and used the opportunity to outline a series of meditations on the unique formal qualities of English cultural production.⁶² Tellingly, he allotted a whole lecture to the subject of the picturesque: an indication of the key position it held in his conception of the English genius, both historically and for the future.⁶³ It represented, for a host of reasons, *the* defining expression of English identity, and *the* exemplar to be followed by contemporary architects and town planners. The unprecedented need to intervene on a grand scale in the centres of towns and cities forced an unprecedented dilemma onto England's town planners; however, due to its unique cultural inheritance Pevsner contended that 'no country is aesthetically better provided than England to solve it and thereby leave its imprint on other countries'.⁶⁴

His emphasis on Englishness reflects many contemporary concerns about the nature of national identity in modernity: an issue that the modern movement was commonly seen to evade.⁶⁵ Long before the Second World War began, confidence in the

⁶² These lectures were broadcast from 16 October to 27 November 1955 on the BBC Home Service. They are published in their original form in Stephen Games, ed., *Pevsner: The Complete Broadcast Talks, Architecture and Art on Radio and Television, 1945-1977* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014): 241-316. The series was subsequently revised for publication in expanded form: Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*.

⁶³ Pevsner, 'The Genius of the Place', 307-316. Upon publication, this lecture was retitled 'Picturesque England': Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, 163-180.

⁶⁴ Pevsner, 'The Genius of the Place', 312.

⁶⁵ Iain Boyd Whyte has explored Pevsner's interest in 'Englishness' in relation to his academic background in German art history, as well as his earlier cultivation of nationalist feeling in Germany. See, Iain Boyd Whyte, 'Nicholas Pevsner: Art History, Nation, and Exile', *RIHA Journal* 75 (2013), accessed 5 July 2015, <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2013/2013-oct-dec/whyte-pevsner>. Recent appraisals of the development of modernism in Britain have sought to question this reading, identifying local characteristics in its emergence. See Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity Before Reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2007); William Whyte, 'The Englishness of English Architecture: Modernism and the making of a national international style, 1927-1957', *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 2 (2009): 441-465.

universal benefits of the geographically anonymous imperatives of technology and efficiency had begun to seem excessively reductive – assuming, that is, they had ever been much more than rhetorical devices. Certainly, when the conflict commenced, the value of fostering individual cultural identities began to appear ever more apparent. Thus, an article in a 1943 ‘Rebuilding Britain Special’ of the *Architectural Review* outlined a statement of concern:

England after the war must be England, and not a schematically planned and blueprinted utopia, but it must not be the same England as before the war. By all means distrust the planner who promises an England gleamingly and glitteringly streamlined. We have a right to our countryside, our old towns, and our rhythm of life, different from that anywhere else, and we have a right to our own brand of imperfections.⁶⁶

Making a distinction between those periods before and after the war, the author asks that the mainstays of English identity, instanced typically here by the countryside and the old town, are not wholly jettisoned in favour of a technologically advanced, and culturally alien, future. In the battle for hearts and minds, promoters could reasonably summon those vague signals of social progress – *Zeilenbau* planning, strip-windows, cities of slabs perched above rolling green parkland – but even in the 1930s questions had arisen as to the real benefits of modernity to English life.

While the *Architectural Review* leaves the issue of modernisation for the future, setting it against a more traditional ‘rhythm of life’, George Orwell could write free of the demands exercised on the modern architectural propagandist. Addressing the question of the English character, he distinguished already in the interwar years the emergence of a new culture: one that must anticipate the shape of things to come. His conclusion to the opening chapter of *The Lion and the Unicorn*, written in 1941, affirmed in a manner not dissimilar to that noted above, that England would in the future ‘change out of recognition and yet remain the same’.⁶⁷ However, this celebration of national identity, produced just as the destructions of the war were demonstrating the fragility of human association and culture, also contained a rather equivocal appraisal of ‘the germs of the future England’ that Orwell found

⁶⁶ ‘Programme’, *Architectural Review* 93, no. 556 (1943), 86.

⁶⁷ Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 55.

coalescing in the outer-urban areas of the south east, and around other major conurbations.

These neighbourhoods, in Orwell's view, collectively represented the cradle of a quotidian modernity whose blandness stood far removed from the thrilling novelty and dynamism that had first excited the progenitors of the modern movement. Their essence was most clearly discernible through a survey of the enthusiasms and identities of the local population, a 'people of indeterminate social class'.⁶⁸ Born of general improvements in the standard of living, the indeterminacy that Orwell saw extended both to the economic and social status of these communities, and carries a dimly malign implication. Unlike the clear stratifications of the traditional, historic class structure in England, these new citizens represented an unknown quantity: a new type of *nouveau riche*, beneficiaries of the nascent consumer society, whose disposable identity seemed to threaten not one single class, but the cohesion and integrity of an entire national culture.

In those vast new wildernesses of glass and brick the sharp distinctions of the older kind of town, with its slums and mansions, or of the country, with its manor-houses and squalid cottages, no longer exist. There are wide gradations of income, but it is the same kind of life that is being lived at different levels, in labour-saving flats or council houses, along the concrete roads and in the naked democracy of the swimming-pools. It is a rather restless, cultureless life, centring round tinned food, *Picture Post*, the radio and the internal combustion engine. It is a civilization in which children grow up with an intimate knowledge of magnetoes and in complete ignorance of the Bible. To that civilization belong the people who are most at home in and most definitely *of* the modern world, the technicians and the higher-paid skilled workers, the airmen and their mechanics, the radio experts, film producers, popular journalists and industrial chemists. They are the indeterminate stratum at which the older class distinctions are beginning to break down.⁶⁹

In an architectural context, the passage holds an obvious importance for the attention it gives to the built environment. Assessing the effects of an emerging cultural phenomenon, Orwell immediately traces its impact to the development of buildings and settlements. As in the *Architectural Review* passage, the old town and

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 53.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 54.

countryside are cited as measures of cultural continuity, providing a historical articulation of the underlying cultural identities that attend each class of society and, in turn, forming the fabric of the nation. While the new territories evidently enjoy a certain glamour – apparent in the roll-call of their inhabitants – Orwell’s description betrays a prevailing uneasiness and apprehension. Ultimately, the distinctions between rich and poor remain in place. What is more, their external affluence represents a development about which Orwell evidently feels some equivocation, since it also accompanies a retreat from the vibrant divisions of the past and the extension of a reverential embrace of disposable commodities, supporting a banal and insubstantial material and spiritual life. This anonymity found its architectural expression in the bleakly functional roads, council houses, and ‘wildernesses of glass and brick’, all of which indicated that future towns and cities would be as anonymous as the communities that inhabited them. Although – when couched in terms of futurity and utopia – the idea of progress would forever seduce, Orwell succeeds in highlighting that its *experience* is often more banal, as the novel is consumed almost immediately as the normal.

In their study of the influences of American culture on the development of architecture in Britain, Murray Fraser and Joe Kerr warn against the promotion by critics and historians of ‘self-centred nationalist myths’. A common instinct in British architectural culture, such an outlook obscures the impact of processes of colonisation and globalisation on Britain according to Fraser and Kerr, additionally suppressing the hybrid nature of Britain’s national identity. Yet they do acknowledge that, although such chauvinism is inappropriate today, nationalism has played an important role historically as ‘a necessary temporary construct that enabled people to find a place within an industrialising, modernising, globalising world’.⁷⁰ In the case of mid-century architecture in Britain, this attempt to engineer a coherent identity is further entangled with the crisis of identity among designers at the time, as they navigated the contradictions involved in mobilising a rich and historically resonant conception of what the nation might mean within the limits of an aesthetic that was avowedly functional and international.

⁷⁰ Murray Fraser and Joe Kerr, *Architecture and the ‘Special Relationship’: The American Influence on Post-War British Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2007), 10.

The complexities underlying the articulation of a modern national identity that, inevitably, must find much of its content in a traditional view of the past, is well represented in a series of posters issued by the Army Bureau of Current Affairs in 1942.⁷¹ Produced for circulation among the forces, they each carry the tagline ‘Your Britain: Fight for it Now’, and address the relation between the general public and the built environment. They are of particular interest to the theme at hand in their efforts to describe the idea of nationhood through a clear, direct, and recognisable architectural image. This image assumes the guise either of individual buildings by prominent architects, or of the vernacular forms that have emerged in rural areas shaped by more anonymous intentions. The series saw the release of two distinct collections of images, both carrying the same tagline, but each designed by a different artist and achieving a markedly different approach to the theme. In broad terms, both sets of posters share the same foundation: offering up an image understood to represent ‘Britain’, they encourage in their audience a sense of patriotic feeling, playing on the associations of buildings inherited from the near or distant past. However, in each case the precise rhetorical method used is different, granting an insight into the resonance that the built environment was understood to enjoy in the eyes of the British public as a whole.

The more plain and direct series, with regard to the structure of its message, is that designed by Frank Newbould. Drawing on the unashamedly sentimental imagery of travel postcards, Newbould’s posters represent nostalgic scenes of country life, ranging from the more anonymous depictions of the South Downs (Figure 4.11) and a stereotypical village green (Figure 4.12), to recognisable locations – Salisbury Cathedral and a fair in the Sussex village of Alfriston. The evocation of tourist images was not uncommon in wartime posters, another series, produced by the National Savings Committee in 1944, explicitly made the link with travel postcards by rendering its nostalgic scenes from all over Britain in an imagined picture frame. Carrying the tagline ‘Worth Fighting for... Worth Saving for’, the intention was to evoke an idea of the nation through the representation of iconic views of landmarks

⁷¹ Darling, *Re-forming Britain*, 209.

located across Britain (Figure 4.13). As a result, the posters also highlight the simple fact that specific places and forms were – and, indeed, still are – perceived to hold an archetypal significance as icons of collective identity. Of course, Newbould’s images place particular stress on buildings and environments that were not only historically remote but also, for most, geographically inaccessible. The village green or country fair typify models of English community that were entirely alien to the experience of the majority of Britons at the time, yet each carried a collective significance, both as beacons of national identity and as a desirable condition in which to live: a utopia of sorts. Moreover, it was a utopia whose content diverged radically from the prospects onto the future offered by mainstream modernism around the same time.

In contrast to this series, the other collection of posters in the ‘Your Britain: Fight for it Now’ campaign drew on the negative perception of the inherited environment – most particularly the inherited *urban* environment – setting it against the anticipation of the clean and bright future to be inaugurated by modern architecture. Unlike the other series, these posters did not primarily draw on the familiar associations of vernacular architectural forms, but sought to exploit contemporary political enthusiasms to promote a socially progressive message. Produced by the notable graphic designer Abram Games, they presented caricatured images of the decaying modern city, with each scene of dilapidation symbolic of a separate field of welfare provision. Thus, we find an old school room, a row of houses, and a disease-ridden home inhabited by a sickly child, all of which are in a state of, presumably air-raid induced, dereliction.

But the posters also juxtapose these scenes with images of celebrated modern buildings from the 1930s: Impington College, by Walter Gropius and Maxwell Fry; Kensal House, by Fry in consultation with Elizabeth Denby (Figure 4.14); and Finsbury Health Centre, by Berthold Lubetkin under the banner of Tecton (Figure 4.15). There is a didactic intent that the other series of posters do not attempt: an element evidenced by the inclusion of a brief propagandist passage at the bottom right hand corner of each image, which seems almost to contradict the crisp immediacy of Games’ images and their message. These statements serve to

emphasise in particular the modernity and novelty of the developments in question, their healthiness, and also the links to a broader political project of social welfare provision. Thus, the schools poster reads ‘A school in Cambridgeshire where village children are learning to grow up in healthful surroundings. This building is characteristic of the best developments in welfare and education’.⁷²

There is a projective element to these latter buildings, since they are not represented as physical objects but appear instead as images rendered – or perhaps projected – on a blank brick wall dropped in the midst of the derelict setting. It is easy to forget these are not imaginative visions of possible buildings in a future society, but structures that are just as much a part of the historical, pre-war urban scene as the ruined terraces or schoolroom. Since they do not assume concrete form they are granted a privileged status. As images launched into their chaotic surroundings, the buildings remain untainted by the realities of their physical existence and instead act as ciphers of a social and political programme. They promise a better future of welfare support and modern architectural design and, therefore, entirely alter our reading of the phrase ‘Your Britain: Fight for it Now’. In contrast to the traditional icons of a pastoral England, the Games posters propose a new ideal: the ‘Britain’ that they summon is a hypothetical one, socially and politically reformed, existing in an as-yet-unrealised future. It is, moreover, a social ideal that is articulated architecturally: a utopian proposition founded on a marshalling of elements of the built environment and their popular associations, and tying them to specific political and aesthetic objectives.

Abram Games’ posters are indicative not only of the revolutionary social potential accorded to modern architecture, but also to the status of urban areas that did not satisfy the standards of modernist orthodoxy. Their impact lies as much in the nightmarish and destitute settings, beneath stormy skies in a barren landscape, as it does in the immaculately rendered projections of interwar modernist icons. Indeed, the poster promoting health provision was so forthright in its denunciation that Winston Churchill demanded it be removed from circulation and all copies

⁷² ‘Your Britain – Fight for it Now (School)’, Imperial War Museum, accessed 23 September 2015, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/10296>.

destroyed, objecting specifically to the cartoonish and unflinching depiction of a child with rickets.⁷³ But even if this most sensitive detail is ignored, all three scenes assume a stance that is remarkably critical within the context of wartime propaganda – additionally placing modern architecture in relation to the devastation of wartime. They show an enthusiasm to augment the modernist inheritance, investing modern buildings not only with the connotations of progress and purity, but also with a more compassionate appeal. While Pevsner’s ambitions were more explicitly nationalist, he did similarly seek to narrate an understanding of modernism that would grant it a more substantial foundation.

Pevsner’s Picturesque: An English Vision?

It is the prospect of this ‘restless, cultureless life’, and the dilemma it posed, that in part preoccupied Pevsner himself – as we saw, it certainly concerned his colleagues at the *Architectural Review*. Although modern methods of planning and design could legitimately promise to improve the standard of living, earning much of their support on these grounds, it became clear that the construction of post-war Britain must be based on something more sustained and satisfying. This nationalist focus was an enduring feature of Pevsner’s lectures and articles on the picturesque from the start. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s he repeatedly opposed a ‘French’ approach to urban design – marked by grandiose intentions and a subordination of function to formalism – against an English attitude of compromise and political liberalism, which also displayed an openness to the felicities of visual irregularity and visual intricacy.⁷⁴ If both of them were invested in the impression of urban architecture on

⁷³ ‘Your Britain – Fight for it Now (Health Centre)’, Imperial War Museum, accessed 23 September 2015, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/10300>.

⁷⁴ Most notably, in a lecture at the Architectural Association, 27 November 1945, Pevsner draws direct comparisons between Paris and Oxford, and between Regent Street and the Avenue des Champs-Élysées: see ‘Visual Planning and the City of London’, 31-32. See also, Nikolaus Pevsner, ‘Modern Architecture and Tradition’, *Highway* 38 (1947), 228-230; Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, 166-168.

Meanwhile, in his BBC radio broadcast on the subject of St Paul’s, Pevsner made the comparison using an additional reference to Italian urban design. Opposing the visual qualities of the axial layout apparent in St Peter’s Square in Rome and the more informal arrangement of St Mark’s Piazzetta in

the eye, the former planned specific moments of monumentality, co-ordinating emphatic viewpoints at which a chain of symmetries would align to exquisite effect; the English, meanwhile, were more relaxed: views disclosed themselves gradually to the inquisitive explorer, who enjoyed the autonomy to discover them by chance.

While Paris and Versailles represented the relentless will to order of the French, in England Pevsner selected as exemplars cities like Cambridge, Oxford, and Bath, all of which exhibited his favoured lack of uniformity. London too yielded abundant evidence of an inherent English genius for informality in urban design. The Inns of Court, for instance, formed chains of intimately bounded precincts, a feature that could also be found among the narrow passages and alleyways of the City. Pevsner even framed the squares and crescents of Bloomsbury and the West End in this category, for – in spite of their individual formality – they were each conceived in isolation resulting in a polycentric landscape free from any universal pattern, and practising a method of ‘individual design for small units’.⁷⁵ But for the town planner, John Nash’s design of Regent Street (entirely unlike the Champs-Élysées) posed perhaps the essential lesson in English urbanism. Unlike the previous examples which had accumulated gradually over time, Regent Street was created as a single project over a limited period of time, as would be expected of contemporary plans. However, the design faced obstacles throughout its passage from Carlton House to Portland Place and, consequently, exhibited the marks of repeated compromise and improvisation, resulting in a sequence of diverse architectural incidents and a cityscape whose total impact constituted more than the sum of its parts. The primary significance of each of these English cases, for Pevsner, lay in their picturesque irregularity, and its distinctive appeal to the eye of the pedestrian. Deeply impressed, he summarised that the realisation of such effects constituted a process of ‘visual planning’. This approach contrasted with more orthodox methods from town planning history, had worked ‘with maps rather than visually’, creating a townscape

Venice, he concluded brusquely that ‘France on the whole followed Rome, England followed Venice’. See Pevsner, ‘A Setting for St Paul’s’, 320. Elsewhere, he tentatively posits the Italian planning tradition as a third course, sitting somewhere between the English and French. Exemplified by Venice, the Roman Fora, and the Piazza della Signoria in Florence, this approach was instead ‘monumental without being rigid’: Pevsner, ‘Modern Architecture and Tradition’, 230.

⁷⁵ Pevsner, *Visual Planning and the Picturesque*, 90.

that lacked a consistent regard for embodied experience, however superficially conceived.⁷⁶

Resolving to discover the ‘underlying principles’ behind the historic development of ‘visual planning’, Pevsner’s research led him to begin an examination of English planning literature contemporary with the structures in question, in the hope that they would disclose an intentional philosophy that could be re-applied in the present.⁷⁷ However, he concluded that little evidence existed to suggest that the builders of Britain’s most charming towns and urban set pieces had acted self-consciously in conjuring their effects. The only relevant material he could find – material that became central to his thinking – was the enthusiasm for the picturesque that developed during the eighteenth century and inspired a distinct approach to landscape design that was emulated throughout the world. Writing in the *Architectural Review* in 1945, he described this as ‘the subtle art of conscious or unconscious visual planning ... between 1720 and 1820’: a subject he valued enormously, but which had received little scholarly treatment.⁷⁸ Towards the end of that century there had been several contributions to aesthetic theory that Pevsner found particularly important, particularly in the writings of Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight. These authors sought to locate the picturesque as a new aesthetic category between the sublime and the beautiful, identifying the pictorial principles that granted the landscape a potency to pique the viewer’s sensibility: variation, irregularity, roughness, intricacy. Cultivating a deep admiration for these writings, Pevsner aimed to find some confirmation that the qualities prized in the design of the English landscape in the eighteenth century had also informed the appearance of its cities.⁷⁹ But, by his own admission, despite exhaustive readings in

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 90.

⁷⁷ Pevsner, ‘Visual Planning and the City of London’, 33.

⁷⁸ Pevsner, ‘Frenchay Common’, 26. Christopher Hussey had written a book on the subject that Pevsner greatly admired, but it remained an isolated study and was almost twenty years old: Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (London: Putnam, 1927).

⁷⁹ Pevsner’s readings in these texts were extensive and he developed considerable expertise on the subject, producing a series of papers on eighteenth century aesthetics and the key authors involved. His contribution to the study of the connoisseur Richard Payne Knight was such that one scholar has suggested he was ‘all but rediscovered’ by Pevsner during the 1940s. See S. Lang, ‘Richard Payne Knight and the Idea of Modernity’, in *Concerning Architecture: Essays on Architectural Writers and Writing Presented to Nikolaus Pevsner*, ed. John Summerson (London: Allen Lane, 1968), 85.

the work of Knight and Price, as well as others like Joshua Reynolds and Humphry Repton, he could isolate only scant evidence of ‘any appreciation of the problem of visual planning in towns’.⁸⁰

Of course, the correspondences between this phenomenon and Pevsner’s ‘visual planning’ enjoyed a strained status given the cultural and historical diversity of the examples he had in mind. Some cases, such as the Inns of Court and the Colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, predated the elaboration of the picturesque landscape; some were more or less contemporary, while others emerged in the early decades of the nineteenth century. At this point, Pevsner’s argument appears to have run aground on his own scholarly exactitude. He was left with several disparate historical threads, with no obvious intellectual connection between them.

Similarly frustrating was the apparent absence of documentary evidence that Knight and his peers had conceived a ‘picturesque architecture’ in a great deal of depth.⁸¹ For, Pevsner additionally entertained the idea that picturesque principles could be seen to extend beyond town planning, manifesting themselves in architectural design as well. To this end, he cited Price’s comments appraising the visual appeal of ruins and of the casually grouped vernacular houses to be found throughout the countryside. But there were cases elsewhere that illustrated a more direct exercise of architectural intent. While much picturesque landscaping treated individual buildings entirely formally – exploiting symmetrical, classical buildings to provide a foil to the

On Knight, see: Nikolaus Pevsner, ‘Richard Payne Knight’, *The Art Bulletin* 31, no. 4 (1949): 293-320. He also produced a BBC radio broadcast on the subject: Pevsner, ‘Richard Payne Knight’, in *Pevsner: The Complete Broadcast Talks, Architecture and Art on Radio and Television, 1945-1977*, ed. Stephen Games (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014): 41-46. For Pevsner’s other writings on the subject of the picturesque in the late eighteenth century, see: Pevsner, ‘Heritage of Compromise: A Note on Sir Joshua Reynolds Who Died One Hundred and Fifty Years Ago’, *Architectural Review* 91, no. 542 (1942): 37-38; ‘Price on Picturesque Planning’, *Architectural Review* 95, no. 566 (1944): 47-50; ‘The Genesis of the Picturesque’, *Architectural Review* 96, no. 575 (1944): 139-146; ‘The Picturesque in Architecture’, *RIBA Journal* 55, no. 2 (1947): 55-61; ‘Humphry Repton: A Florilegium’, *Architectural Review* 103 (1948): 53-62; ‘Sir William Temple and Sharawaggi’, *Architectural Review* 106 (1949): 391-393.

⁸⁰ Pevsner, *Visual Planning and the Picturesque*, 145.

⁸¹ Pevsner’s insistence that Knight and his peers had failed to appreciate the qualities of informally planned buildings is a curious feature of his argument. On the contrary, Aitchison argues that there are many passages on the subject dating from the eighteenth century, and suggests that this may have been a not undeliberate omission by Pevsner. For, we shall see that his argument hinged on the notion that the full potential of the picturesque had never been fully appreciated, its virtues waiting to be fully disclosed in the twentieth century. Aitchison, ‘Pevsner’s Townscape’, 24-26.

scenery around – the possibilities of the picturesque were seized upon by some of its key protagonists, who styled their own homes corresponding to their intellectual tastes.⁸² From 1749, Horace Walpole supervised the construction of Strawberry Hill, which grew gradually from a small cottage into a grand house as it received a series of new additions, each one incorporating a mismatched variation on the overall gothic theme to playful effect. Meanwhile, Downton Castle was even closer to Pevsner's enthusiasms in this field. Built by Knight during the 1770s within his Herefordshire estate, it presented to the artfully untamed country around an asymmetrical, castellated profile, formed of alternating wings and towers that mimicked the piecemeal accumulation of parts exhibited by other, more authentic historical buildings.⁸³ In this instance, there was a demonstrable influence on architecture generally, as the fashion for picturesque caprices in lush, rural surroundings came to be exploited elsewhere, above all, by John Nash.

Moving forwards, Pevsner traced the existence of a 'picturesque architecture' on through the nineteenth century, suggesting that the category became increasingly relevant in Victorian cities. As prominent cases, he cited Charles Barry and A.W.N. Pugin's Palace of Westminster and George Gilbert Scott's work at St Pancras Station; on a more domestic scale, but equally applicable, were the Red House by Robert Webb, and Norman Shaw's evolution of the Arts and Crafts house, all of which contained the requisite characteristics of formal irregularity and contrast, producing composite buildings rich in their modelling. Despite a resurgence of classical monumentality around the turn of the century, these latter examples remained significant in informing the designs of architects such as Charles Voysey and Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott, who ensured the survival of a 'picturesque architecture' on into the twentieth century.⁸⁴ In an effort to make sense of this longstanding trend, Pevsner maintained the validity of reading a relationship between all of his examples and the much earlier appearance of the picturesque in England – a

⁸² Pevsner, 'The Picturesque in Architecture', 55. This article provides Pevsner's primary statement on the evolution of picturesque forms in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century architecture. Typically, Pevsner illustrated his point about formal buildings in an informal landscape by drawing a comparison with a continental example, citing Nicholas Hawksmoor's mausoleum at Castle Howard and Donato Bramante's Tempietto in Rome. See *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 56; Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, 56-57.

⁸⁴ Pevsner, 'The Picturesque in Architecture', 57.

manoeuvre that served conveniently to consummate his prior intuition. Furthermore, he fortified this progressive schema, interpreting the march of exemplary buildings as confirmation of a steady ‘conquest of the town’ by the picturesque attitude, discernible since around 1800.⁸⁵ The picturesque of the late eighteenth century, therefore, represented the conceptual genesis of these architectural developments, forming the primary point of reference for the architect, critic, and historian.

In turn, the same process was evident in town planning, with Nash, again, a significant actor. We have seen the exemplary case of Regent Street in Pevsner’s conception of ‘visual planning’, with its casual disclosure of architectural contrivance and event, but the conclusion of Nash’s sequence in the intricately landscaped Regent’s Park introduced a further archetype in the picturesque invasion of the town. As city dwellers sought a retreat from the increasingly hostile effects of industrialisation, the urban park and private garden emerged as perhaps the most conspicuous territories where a movement born in the countryside could be shown to have made its mark on the urban environment. Meanwhile, landscaped squares restated the pseudo-ruralism of the park on a smaller scale, representing ‘exclaves of the country in the town’.⁸⁶ Each of these urban objects, particularly visible in the city from the early 1800s, was highlighted by Pevsner as part of the sustained submission of the city to picturesque principle.⁸⁷

Just as Pevsner admired the way the squares and crescents of London and Bath disregarded and warped any comprehensive spatial order, so he saw in their interiors a similar intention to subvert the domineering formalism paraded by his caricatured examples from the Continent, animating the urban scene and providing a complement to the dynamism of modern life. Also, just as was the case with his notion of ‘picturesque architecture’, the phenomenon remained apparent into the following century through the elaboration by Ebenezer Howard of the Garden City as a model for town planning, as well as in its sporadic implementation in various Garden Suburbs across Britain. While Pevsner admired the Garden City in its own

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 57.

⁸⁶ Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, 167.

⁸⁷ Pevsner, ‘Visual Planning and the City of London’, 33.

right as an exemplary English contribution to the history of European planning theory, he did nevertheless situate it within the progressive development of picturesque aesthetics: an evolution of themes first assembled over one hundred years before.

Pevsner's Picturesque: A Modern Vision?

Of course, this narrative is confined to the realm of historical analysis – however strained its presumptions and overall construction may have been. But, as the discerning reader might guess from the trajectory of his argument, Pevsner believed it carried fundamental insights into the development of modernism, both historically and as it moved forwards into the future. Although the focus on the picturesque movement may have seemed to isolate his thesis from post-war concerns, denying it any instrumental potency, we have seen in his support of Holden's St Paul's scheme that Pevsner insisted on linking the content and aspirations of modern architecture with the studied hedonism and pursuit of intricacy and visual delight advocated by Price and Knight. In addition, he substantiated the connection by tracing an unbroken line through the intervening century, marshalling along the way some of the central actors and objects in the received pre-history of the modern movement – among them, Pugin, the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the Garden City.

The picturesque remained the ever-present theme of Pevsner's discussion, highlighted not only for its supposed ubiquity, but also because he found its ingredients so attractive to the eye. However, his pivotal claim was that the various historical incarnations of the picturesque attitude had ultimately failed to realise their potential for enriching the city. Dropping his attitude of disinterested scholarship, he asserted the incompleteness of the process that, at either end of the nineteenth century, had seen picturesque attributes invade the town by stealth. First, the parks, gardens, and landscaped squares had missed their opportunity by neglecting the rest of the town. Creating small pockets of resistance, their promise of sanctuary from the

clamour of city life did not threaten the spectre of industrialisation that loomed beyond their limits. Secondly, the legacy of this failure saw the proponents of the second great urban picturesque movement – the Garden City – opt to abandon the town, addressing themselves to establishing new settlements on virgin territory in the countryside. In the process, they again rejected the modern city, whose inhabitants were denied the delights of ‘visual planning’, available only to those few privileged to participate in Howard’s experiment. Consequently, according to Pevsner, the efficacy of the picturesque was self-evident, since it promised to address hitherto unresolved problems of a purely urban kind.⁸⁸ The task that remained was to make it applicable to the present.

It is no surprise to find that his answer did not involve an exact return to the models of Downton Castle or Nash’s Regent Street. Rather, he maintained that ‘if we want to derive the maximum benefit from Price’s principles we must apply them as principles, and not take over such actual objects as the picturesque cottage or the landscaped square, or at least not excessively’.⁸⁹ The picturesque movement held little interest to Pevsner for its significance within history – the specific meanings it might have imparted at the time – it represented, instead, an abstract, purely aesthetic category, consonant with his emphasis on the role of visual apprehension.⁹⁰ As a result, his invocation of picturesque principles occupied a curious position. On one hand, Pevsner had applied diligent historical scholarship into the aesthetic theory of the late eighteenth century to isolate their supposed prescriptions, before threading them steadily through the canon of proto-modernist architecture and town planning. Meanwhile, the correlation itself was based on decidedly superficial analysis: a

⁸⁸ Pevsner did identify some areas of limited success. Above all, he identified Camillo Sitte as a significant early proponent of ‘visual planning’ through his *City Planning According to Artistic Principles* of 1889. When, in 1946, Pevsner reviewed its publication for the first time in English, he commended its appraisal of informal urban design, and Sitte’s method of abstracting basic principles from the past for the use of contemporaries. See Nikolaus Pevsner, review of *The Art of Building Cities*, by Camillo Sitte, trans. Charles T. Stewart, *Architectural Review* 100, no. 600 (1946), 186.

⁸⁹ Pevsner, ‘Visual Planning and the City of London’, 33. See, also, Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, 179: ‘there is plenty of precedent to make use of in our situation to-day – not by copying but by applying the same principles, the same great English principles’.

⁹⁰ A significant influence on Pevsner’s work in this respect was his art historical training under Wilhelm Pinder, whose concerns with national history and the role of perception have been highlighted by John Macarthur and Mathew Aitchison. See Macarthur and Aitchison, ‘Pevsner’s Townscape’, 4; Macarthur, *The Picturesque*, 206. For a more extensive discussion of Pevsner’s roots in the German art historical tradition, see Whyte, ‘Nikolaus Pevsner’.

process of nominating sporadic exhibitions of vague aesthetic formations through recent history, before contriving the existence of an intentional relationship between them and the English picturesque movement. The confusion resides in the blurring of two separate meanings of the picturesque: a universal aesthetic category, broad enough in its definition to fit many possible circumstances, and a cultural movement with its foundations rooted in a distinct period of English history. It was Pevsner's personal duplicity to suggest that the appearance of loose, irregular forms in England's towns during the past one hundred and fifty years revealed the legacy of Price or Knight, and that, collectively, these phenomena manifested an inherently English aesthetic sensibility. Summoning historical precedent, this manoeuvre neatly legitimised Pevsner's own – entirely circumstantial – aesthetic preference.

The circularity of his argument becomes most apparent when he addresses the case of modern architecture, towards which his whole thesis was ultimately directed. Of course, he was a devoted champion of the modern movement, convinced that the forms evolved during the course of the twentieth century represented the only architecture acceptable for the modern age, and, in many ways, his preoccupation with the picturesque and 'visual planning' was an effort to expand and nuance this claim. Just as he found picturesque principles to admire in English towns and cities, so too did he identify the operation of these same principles in the modernist canon. Looking back to the icons of the 1920s – citing such examples as Walter Gropius's Bauhaus building in Dessau, the houses designed by Le Corbuiser for the Weissenhofseidlung in Stuttgart, and his Centrosoyuz Building in Moscow – Pevsner underlined their various picturesque qualities:

... the free grouping of the individual building, a mixture of materials, synthetic and natural, rough and smooth, and, beyond that, the free planning of a whole quarter, with differentiation of levels, differentiation of vehicular traffic and pedestrian ways, with interaction between building and landscape (the tree inside the *Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau*), and between buildings of different shapes and heights.⁹¹

⁹¹ Nikolaus Pevsner, 'C20 Picturesque', *Architectural Review* 115, no. 688 (1954), 228.

As in the appraisal of Holden's St Paul's scheme, the terms of Pevsner's description are chiefly visual, relegating the functional determinants that would enjoy priority in a more orthodox reading. Thus, for instance, the use of diverse materials is not given any technical justification, only noted for the visual impact of the 'rough and smooth' surface. Although this comment also connotes the exercise of tactile perception, there is no doubt that Pevsner is here recalling the language of the eighteenth-century aesthetes he most admired: specifically, Uvedale Price's discussion of the characteristics that define the picturesque in opposition to the beautiful.⁹² Even when speaking of 'differentiation', by which Pevsner intends the dedication of individual areas of a building to specific functions, he does not fetishise the role of such organisational items, but instead reserves comment only for the visual consequences from the viewer's perspective. In fact, the constant stress on formal variety, with repetitive use of binary descriptive categories, begins almost to imply that indiscriminate sensual stimulation had been the principal goal in the architectural experiments of the 1920s.

However, Pevsner insisted that despite its picturesque attractions modern architecture had not been developed solely to 'please the eye': its main aim was always functional. Clearly summoning the memory of the Royal Academy Plan, Pevsner warned: 'Impose symmetry, impose axially and grids, impose rules even where the artist is feeling his way, and you reduce usefulness'.⁹³ The correct approach – exemplified by the best of modern architecture – should instead negotiate a route between practicality and visual delight, achieving exactly those qualities that animated the picturesque: an engagement of 'feeling disciplined by judgement'.⁹⁴ Commenting elsewhere, in more obviously architectural terms, he advised 'the free exercise of the imagination stimulated by the disciplines of function and technique'.⁹⁵

⁹² Pevsner picks out these theoretical trends in an article on Price in the *Architectural Review*: Pevsner 'Price on Picturesque Planning', 47-48.

⁹³ Pevsner, 'C20 Picturesque', 229.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 229.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 228-229.

It was in this respect that Pevsner ultimately identified the true moment for picturesque principles, citing as an example Impington Village College, designed by Maxwell Fry and Walter Gropius for an area of mature parkland near Cambridge (Figure 4.16 and 4.17).⁹⁶ Completed just before the war and widely publicised, Impington presented to the surrounding landscape a series of low-lying, modest forms built in brick. Composed, much like Gropius's Bauhaus, of a series of individual wings serving separate educational needs, the school demonstrated the formal diversity that Pevsner had in mind, while also hinting at a restrained, polite Englishness in its mellow brick and repetitive arrangements of bay windows.⁹⁷ Thus, he certainly was not dismissing the narrative that presented functionalism as a decisive factor in the history of the modern movement; instead, he was seeking to reposition the meaning of function, maintaining its connotations of objectivity and rationalism, while easing the sense of impersonality that tainted any claim to formal determinism. He achieved this seemingly paradoxical manoeuvre by annexing to his cause the agency of history: a figure demonstrably humane, and yet possessing an objectifying authority of its own.

The picturesque was, of course, the historical authority in question. It furnished Pevsner's argument with a tradition whose fruits he prized for their visual charm, and for their inherent Englishness – a fact sustained with reference to a catalogue of manifestations through history, all of which had unselfconsciously come to an aesthetic that he aligned with that of the modern movement. Thus, he could point to an eighteenth-century case of picturesque design such as Frenchay Common, near Bristol, identifying it as an arrangement that 'was never planned' – instead owing its formal disposition to legal and natural preconditions that were entirely accidental. The same was true of its superficial impact: 'The fact that the aesthetic outcome of this process of growth is so curiously attractive, at least to the English eye, is equally accidental. But it is no less real for that reason'. This absence of self-consciousness

⁹⁶ Pevsner, 'The Picturesque in Architecture', 58.

⁹⁷ On the attitude of Fry and Gropius to Englishness and the English landscape, and their work on Impington College: see Iain Jackson and Jessica Holland, *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew: Twentieth Century Architecture, Pioneer Modernism and the Tropics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 64-66, 75-77. Given Pevsner's nationalist emphases, it is ironic that the design of the school was undertaken principally by Gropius – although Fry did revise several details at the building stage: *Ibid.*, 75.

was critical to his conception both of an English cultural sensibility and of the mechanics of functionalism – and also dictates their conflation. By emphasising a lack of active calculation, Pevsner engages the potential of the historical process as an intentional force. Appropriately, his analysis goes on to liken such compositions to ‘hills, a river, and groups of trees’, illustrating the act of naturalisation taking place.⁹⁸

As we saw, his chain of English examples eventually led to the beginnings of the modern movement, in the Garden City and the Arts and Crafts house. On the architectural side, functionalism played a decisive role in confirming the genealogical link. For, Pevsner restated modernist orthodoxy in suggesting that the uneven, sprawling arrangement of his selection of ‘picturesque’ Victorian buildings had been principally dictated by functional imperatives. He also felt that the architectural significance of function had come to be recognised at the time, citing the writing of George Gilbert Scott and Charles Eastlake, as well as Pugin’s arrival at the more or less equivalent term of ‘convenience’ in his campaign for a return to gothic principles, an exploit that further excited Pevsner for having been addressed wholly in terms of visual outcome. Therefore, both the preoccupation with functional determinants and the attendance to their superficial consequences appeared to find approval from historical designers themselves.⁹⁹

More fundamentally, the evolution of a ‘picturesque architecture’ also attested to a certain pattern in the historical process, as the increasingly dynamic nature of modern society began to leave a mark on architectural production. Faced with a proliferation of building types, and organisational requirements of growing complexity, architects had evolved answers that were correspondingly intricate, creating buildings diverse and irregular in their composition, slowly groping their way towards a final outcome that would not materialise in its decisive form until the following century. When this end did arrive, the picturesque arrangement remained: although – as far as Pevsner was concerned – its very specific cultural heritage had not been recognised as such.

⁹⁸ Pevsner, ‘Frenchay Common’, 26.

⁹⁹ Pevsner, ‘The Picturesque in Architecture’, 57.

In this reading, modern architecture emerges as the final disclosure of picturesque principles immanent in several phases of English cultural history.

The protagonists of the historic picturesque movement had located many of these principles – already discernible in towns like Oxford and Cambridge – but failed properly to elaborate their discoveries into a body of theory for the use of architects or town planners. But over the decades that followed, practitioners found themselves urged towards incoherent expressions of this same picturesque spirit, induced by the pressures imposed by modern life. When, in the twentieth century, the fact of these pressures became clear, architects distilled them into a new style that displayed identical visual qualities to those of its ancestors, albeit abstracted. All that remained now was for this new architecture to be reacquainted with the aesthetic insights that the original theorists had devised. To this end, Pevsner summarised his view in a BBC radio talk in 1954, announcing that ‘no other aesthetic theory fits the demands of modern architecture and planning so well as that of Price and Knight’.¹⁰⁰

Pevsner’s Picturesque: A Personal Vision?

Although posited as a prescriptive theory, it is not clear quite how these insights might be translated into a practical approach to architectural design. Pevsner’s claim that the prejudicing of function leads beneficially to ‘the predominance of informal, asymmetrical planning in the individual building’, appears merely to recapitulate a position in favour of functionalism. Part of the problem arises from the constant slippage in his discussion between the fields of architecture and town planning, with varying levels of diligence displayed in each stage of his argument. The elaboration of a theory of ‘visual planning’ and advocacy of the picturesque are pertinent mainly to town planning, while Pevsner’s various reflections on architecture are far more speculative in tone. Little concerned to present architects with a practical methodology, his approach seeks instead to append layers of nuance, or obscurity, to

¹⁰⁰ Pevsner, ‘C20 Picturesque’, 229.

functionalist dogma, additionally reinforcing his thesis with an impression of theoretical comprehensiveness. Such problems were recognised at the time, provoking a range of responses – perceptive and revealing. Attending one of Pevsner’s lectures in 1947, John Summerson offered an observation regarding his colleague’s fixation with the picturesque that summed up its general vagueness. He suggested that Pevsner had ‘taken a word which, like many of our most valuable words, has a hopelessly imprecise meaning, and made it serve as a thread on which to hang an extremely profound and valuable theory of architecture’. In fact, summing up the diffuse theoretical content of his colleague’s claims, Summerson concluded, that what Pevsner had ‘described as picturesque architecture is simply architecture’.¹⁰¹

With this refutation, Summerson effectively dismisses the specifics of the project Pevsner was undertaking; yet, he still reveals, perhaps inadvertently, much of its underlying motivation. His pithy final comment alludes to the essential truth that Pevsner was not describing a new architectural alternative, simply applying a new term to the contemporary preoccupation with functionalism. In his treatment of architecture, Pevsner did not intend primarily to communicate the details of a fresh approach, he was seeking an all-encompassing historical justification for what he believed to be an all-encompassing architectural method: the picturesque was, in Pevsner’s reading, not simply an attractive aesthetic with a historically English pedigree, but also inherently functional and, therefore, deterministically valid in a social and historical sense. This was the great appeal of historical research: it granted practitioners the opportunity to – they hoped – discover naturalised formal standards that were in the process of developing unselfconsciously from a historical tradition, yet could be applied to create a demonstrably ‘modern’ architecture.

There is, of course, a historiographical agenda at play here. The apprehension of an emergent, inherently English, urban and architectural attitude is an articulation of Pevsner’s understanding of the dialectical unfolding of history. Rather than an arbitrary style, the picturesque lay at the heart of this dialectic, its adoption necessary

¹⁰¹ John Summerson, quoted in Pevsner, ‘The Picturesque in Architecture’, 58.

for the successful inauguration of twentieth-century modernity. Hinting at this millenarian attitude, Pevsner wrote in 1945 that eighteenth century ‘visual planning’ was ‘a lost art now, and one that must be recovered if the reconstructed England of after the war is not to be a dead place to live in’.¹⁰² Upon adopting this perspective, functional, modern architecture emerged enriched, newly embellished with a cultural, even transcendental, identity and justification. Pevsner’s argument thus advanced from an insistence on analysis in visual terms, on to the consequent inevitability of functional architecture as picturesque, and, finally, to the identity of these formal attributes with the English genius. Indeed, in his Reith lecture on the picturesque, the equivalence of functionalism and Englishness is explicitly stated in Pevsner’s claims that if practitioners ‘set out to design functionally, that is Englishly, they will succeed’.¹⁰³

Such an approach to modern architecture in fact grants considerable powers to the figure of the historian.¹⁰⁴ The architect gains legitimacy by his dialogue with a tradition whose construction is achieved by a mixture of scholarship and creative narration. Of course, this interaction between modern architecture and historiographical practice was increasingly common. Pevsner himself had just before the war augmented the historical identity of modernism with the publication of *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, a book whose aims and assumptions were not unlike those in operation throughout his post-war studies of the picturesque.¹⁰⁵ Not long after, Sigfried Giedion’s equally canonical study, *Space, Time and Architecture*, offered a more wide-ranging appraisal of the history of modernism, incorporating

¹⁰² Pevsner, ‘Frenchay Common’, 26.

¹⁰³ Pevsner, ‘The Genius of the Place’, 312. A very slight alteration was made when the text was prepared for publication in 1956 that has the effect of lessening the implication of equality between each concept. Here, Pevsner suggests instead if planners ‘design functionally and Englishly they will succeed’. See Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, 179.

On a similar note, during the same talk he states: ‘The informal is at the same time the practical and the English’: Pevsner, ‘The Genius of the Place’, 310.

¹⁰⁴ Modern architecture in fact finds one of its central guarantors in the figure of the historian. Anthony Vidler has explored at length the correspondences between historical scholarship and the development of theory, focussing on the work of Emil Kaufmann, Colin Rowe, Reyner Banham, and Manfredo Tafuri. See Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁵ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1949).

Pevsner's insights and many more in a work of prodigious historical depth.¹⁰⁶ Like Pevsner, Giedion did not stand aloof from contemporary architecture but rather insisted that a full engagement with contemporary concerns was an essential prerequisite to the writing of history. Consequently, he maintained a constant familiarity with architects, following new developments and playing an active part in the work of CIAM in his role as secretary-general. The historian must, he wrote at the start of *Space, Time and Architecture*, be 'permeated by the spirit of his own time' in order to 'detect those tracts of the past which previous generations have overlooked'.¹⁰⁷ Far from undermining his 'scientific detachment', such an investment in the present would ensure the historian would 'ask the right questions, raise the right problems'.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, the proximity of historical study and modern architecture was also maintained by a series of figures that bridged the divide between the two, among them John Summerson, John Betjeman, and Colin Rowe.¹⁰⁹

But while the fact of history has an objective existence, the historian's perspective does not. In mobilising the authority of history to his cause, Pevsner was obscuring the highly personal nature of his project. This fact was laid bare in the course of a discussion that took place after Pevsner had presented a lecture at the RIBA in 1947 on the subject of 'The Picturesque in Architecture'. Having outlined his reading of the English picturesque and its bearing on the tradition of modern architecture, Pevsner admitted that he did not believe it represented 'a patent medicine for all problems', but that it might be of some assistance to the contemporary architect. One such architect in attendance was Donald McMorrان, a figure significant on the post-war scene for the intelligence with which he – and his partner George Whitby – achieved a qualified appropriation of classical forms. Commenting on the preceding talk, McMorrان asked whether one ought simply to acknowledge the terms

¹⁰⁶ Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: University of Harvard Press, 1942).

¹⁰⁷ Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 5

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ On these figures' relationships with modern architecture and its historiography, see Alan Powers, 'John Summerson and Modernism', in *Twentieth-Century Architecture and its Histories*, ed. Louise Campbell (London: Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain, 2000): 153-175; Karin Hiscock, 'Modernity and "English" Tradition: Betjeman at the *Architectural Review*', *Journal of Design History* 13, no. 3 (2000): 193-212; Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present*, 61-104.

‘picturesque’ and ‘functional’ as direct synonyms.¹¹⁰ Perhaps inadvertently, McMorran here hits upon the central issue: Pevsner’s theory was not really a prescriptive approach, it did not offer much at all in terms of proposing an architectural method. Rather, it represented a very personal re-elaboration of the meaning of architecture in the post-war world: furnishing it with a specific historical lineage and justifying what might otherwise – in modern architecture – be seen as a departure from any such notion of inherited tradition.

In attempting to superimpose the forms and dictates of modern architecture onto the unique qualities of English culture, Pevsner’s project pretended to perform a miraculous act of discovery. By exposing the perfect identity of two distinct aesthetic traditions, it sought to substantiate their mutual predestination, in the process granting a prospect onto a strange, secular absolute. Given this grand ambition, it is ironic that his efforts were condemned to remain so obscure – ironic, perhaps, but certainly not surprising. It was a solitary project that attempted to lend universal validity to an idiosyncratic reading of the applicability of modernism in the English context. Of course, its intellectual vagueness and esoteric reasoning meant it was never likely to enjoy much popular appeal, just as we saw in chapter 2 that Rowse’s composite mind never escaped the fevered imaginings of its creator.

Indeed, there were other contemporary programmes that also recognised the appeal of drawing historical precedent into the present. One such was the newfound enthusiasm during the late-1940s for the application of classical canons of proportion in the composition of buildings: an outlook that enthused many of the younger architects who were so incensed by the *Architectural Review*’s campaign in favour of the picturesque. Inevitably, given his own personal inclination, Pevsner was not impressed by the new trend. At a discussion at the RIBA in 1957, while making the terse admission that proportional design was enjoying ‘wide success among the young’, he insisted its modern applications – such as Le Corbusier’s Modulor – represented nothing more than ‘a quack panacea’. He added that, ultimately, his

¹¹⁰ Donald McMorran, quoted in Pevsner, ‘The Picturesque in Architecture’, 60.

peers should not place too much faith in ‘the mystique of proportions’.¹¹¹ Of course, the use of classical proportion in architecture was no less riddled with mystique than Pevsner’s own pursuits. His blindness to this fact is really the consequence of a refusal to admit that his invocation of historical precedent was doomed to remain personal, partial – and, thus, fragmentary. It was a dilemma that, in essence, summed up the post-war condition.

Rudolf Wittkower’s Contribution: Another Perspective on Post-War Britain

The vogue for proportional design was a less esoteric pursuit than Pevsner’s picturesque enquiries. It enjoyed wide popularity, but also its basis in history was not the singular project of one man: in fact, the historian who could claim to have originated the phenomenon was rather surprised at his newfound status. Indeed, the publication in 1949 of Rudolf Wittkower’s *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* would seem to represent an unlikely signifier of change in the outlook of post-war architects.¹¹² An exhaustively researched study of the symbolic repertoire communicated by Italian architecture during the renaissance, it did not seem destined for success among those young designers hungry to get to work in British cities after the war came to an end. Reviewing the book in the *RIBA Journal* a couple of years later, A.S.G. Butler expressed his dissatisfaction at its scholarly rigours, which resulted in a text he found sufficiently obscure and difficult to bypass any hope of mainstream appeal. Yet, concluding on a note contrary to the prevailingly critical tone of his appraisal, Butler did offer a suggestion of the potential Wittkower’s thesis might hold in directing contemporary practice. Aiming a calculated swipe at the pragmatic preoccupations of architecture schools at the time, he advised the release of a more accessible rendering of *Architectural Principles*, in order to draw ‘our

¹¹¹ Pevsner, quoted in ‘Report of a Debate on a Motion “that Systems of Proportion Make Good Design Easier and Bad Design More Difficult”’, *RIBA Journal* 64, no. 11 (1957), 457

¹¹² Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (London: Warburg Institute, 1949).

young architects momentarily from the pursuit of ungoverned experiments in engineering'.¹¹³ Dismissive though these comments were, they did make a novel acknowledgement that Wittkower's thesis, although focussing exclusively on buildings constructed four centuries or more beforehand, presented insights that could receive application in the present.

Seeming to confirm in retrospect the relevance of *Architectural Principles*, Butler's review drew an almost immediate response from two young architects who would dominate post-war architectural culture: Alison and Peter Smithson. In their first appearance in a major journal, they produced a letter of complaint defending not only the content and approach of *Architectural Principles*, but also by implication the intellectual capabilities of the emerging generation in understanding and appreciating its potential. Far from being excessively specialist or aloof, they wrote, Wittkower 'is regarded by the younger architects as the *only* art-historian working in England capable of describing and analysing buildings in spatial and plastic terms'. As a result, his book represented 'the most important work on architecture published in England since the war'. To evidence this fact they cited a recent lecture given by Sigfried Giedion, in which the historian had informed the Institute of Contemporary Arts that *Architectural Principles* had been the most discussed book, along with Le Corbusier's *The Modulor*, in seminars held at Zurich and MIT that year.¹¹⁴ In fact there are many such statements affirming the book's popularity among architects at the time, contributing to the first edition selling out its print run in just three months.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ A.S.G. Butler, review of *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, by Rudolf Wittkower, *RIBA Journal* 59, no. 2 (1951), 59-60. Butler's opinion did not represent the common consensus however. For more positive reviews of the book, see James S. Ackerman, review of *Architectural Principles*, *The Art Bulletin* 33, no.3 (1951): 195-200; Kenneth Clark, 'Humanism and Architecture', review of *Architectural Principles*, *Architectural Review* 109, no. 650 (1951): 65-69.

¹¹⁴ Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, '*Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*', letter to *RIBA Journal* 59, no. 4 (1952), 140.

¹¹⁵ Henry A. Millon, 'Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism: Its Influence on the Development and Interpretation of Modern Architecture*', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 31, no. 2 (1972), 89 n.33.

Wittkower himself makes reference to the success of *Architectural Principles* among younger architects in the preface to the third edition of the book: see Rudolf Wittkower, preface to *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (London: Alec Tiranti, 1967), v. Nikolaus Pevsner spoke of its 'wide success among the young', and Reyner Banham wrote that the 'general impact of Professor Wittkower's book on a whole generation of post-war architectural students is one of the

Writing of the book's broader significance in the field not only of architecture but also scholarship, Alina Payne sees the originality of its outlook constituting a 'Wittkower phenomenon': a decisive paradigm shift in the practice of architectural history.¹¹⁶ The text was drawn together from a series of papers presented in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* between 1940 and 1945, concentrating primarily on the work of Leon Battista Alberti and Andrea Palladio.¹¹⁷ The significance of the book's approach lay in its insistence on reading the buildings in relation to the intentions of the architects themselves, and thus in relation to contemporary architectural theory, reconstructing the societal significance of specific forms and typologies, which Wittkower showed to be rooted in renaissance metaphysics and cosmology.¹¹⁸ Taking direct issue, respectively, with Ruskin's moral censure of a presumed renaissance paganism, and with the dissociation of form from cultural meaning present in Geoffrey Scott's *The Architecture of Humanism*, Wittkower rejected their privileging of the experience of the viewer in the present.¹¹⁹ Scott's 1914 book, whose title is faintly referenced in Wittkower's own, represented a particular target due its emphasis on renaissance buildings as exercises in disinterested aestheticism: 'an architecture of taste, seeking no logic, consistency, or justification beyond that of giving pleasure'.¹²⁰ What emerged was a revitalised apprehension of architectural practice, with the architect as a decisive actor in reconciling a society with the world around it, as it was understood at a particular moment in history. Adding further to its appeal in this regard, *Architectural*

phenomena of our time'. See Pevsner, quoted in 'Report of a Debate', 457; Reyner Banham, 'The New Brutalism', *Architectural Review* 118, no. 708 (1955), 358. See, also, James S. Ackerman, 'Rudolf Wittkower's Influence on the History of Architecture', *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 8/9, no. 4/1 (1989), 89.

¹¹⁶ Alina A. Payne, 'Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 53, no. 3 (1994), 323-324.

¹¹⁷ Rudolf Wittkower, preface to *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (London: Warburg Institute, 1949), unnumbered. For more detail on the original articles and their correspondence to the text of the book, see Payne, 'Rudolf Wittkower', 325 n.14.

¹¹⁸ As Wittkower wrote at the start of the first chapter, which looked at the tradition of the centrally-planned church, he sought to show 'that the forms of the Renaissance church have symbolical value or, at least, that they are charged with a particular meaning which the pure forms as such do not contain': Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 1.

¹¹⁹ Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste*, 2nd Edition (London: Constable, 1924).

¹²⁰ This passage was cited in a footnote at the start of *Architectural Principles*, as was a passage from Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*. Geoffrey Scott, quoted in *Ibid*, 1 n.1.

Principles also contained a discussion of the development of a conception of the architect as *uomo universale*, a transformation epitomised by Palladio's rise from anonymous stonemason to the leading architectural theorist of his age.¹²¹ Palladio was also the main focus of the final section of the book, which elucidated the theory and application of harmonic proportion.

While the book explored the assimilation of several aspects of classical culture – the tradition of the centrally-planned church, Alberti's application of classical motifs, and Palladio's engagement with Mannerist trends – it was the discussion of proportional systems that drew the most attention from modern architects. In the first place, Wittkower had shown that an analysis of the construction of renaissance churches and villas, revealed their conformity to a system of mathematical ratios, in turn repeating the unity of proportions in the human body. The motivation for this was simple: 'As man is the image of God and the proportions of his body are produced by the divine will, so the proportions in architecture have to embrace and express the cosmic order'.¹²² Beyond this capacity to signify, the fact that proportional order could be interpreted through a language of formal abstraction appealed to architects who, while willing to embrace the virtues of appropriating a historical tradition, remained committed to an architecture that substantially discarded surface ornament.

What is more, the evolution of proportion outlined *Architectural Principles* meshed well with another twentieth century standard: the faith in science as a model for architectural form-making. In Wittkower's analysis, the definitive shift in the artistic interpretation of the divine from the Middle Ages to the renaissance came in the 'new scientific approach to nature which is the glory of Italian fifteenth-century artists. It was the artists, headed by Alberti and Leonardo, who had a vital share in consolidating and popularising the mathematical interpretation of all matter'. This new outlook viewed architecture as 'a mathematical science' through which the application of geometry and proportional measure found a microcosmic analogy for

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 51-62.

¹²² *Ibid*, 89.

the universal truth manifest in the order of the macrocosm.¹²³ In proportional systems, therefore, modern architects believed they could access ready-made, easily applicable, and scientifically valid methods for unifying their buildings with a trans-historical conception of universal harmony, the latter a simplification of Wittkower's historically-specific analysis that he would subsequently renounce.¹²⁴ However, while he did not approve of architects failing to observe the specificity of particular historical systems, Wittkower did himself express a belief in the universality of the human search for system and order, writing that 'our psycho-physical make-up requires the concept of order and, in particular, mathematical order'.¹²⁵ As Payne suggests, this orientation was another aspect of the thesis that was highly conducive to mainstream modernist discourse, with its foundational belief in an eschatological will-to-order that must receive expression in architectural form.¹²⁶

These latter comments appeared in an article for the *Architects' Year Book* of 1953, its presence indicative of Wittkower's transition to a position of respect among practising architects, specifically in the dissemination of research into proportion. The subject received added legitimacy when Le Corbusier began to develop and promote the Modulor, his own unique approach to modelling proportions combining several historical systems and relating them to the dimensions of an ideal male figure.¹²⁷ Together, these developments formed the prelude to a flowering in the theory of proportion among architects and historians over the first post-war

¹²³ *Ibid*, 26-27.

¹²⁴ After a debate held by the RIBA in 1957, he offered the observation that: 'There were never any universal systems of proportion in the past. It was only that people who practised those systems believed that their own systems were universal systems'. See Rudolf Wittkower, quoted in 'Report of a Debate on the Motion "that Systems of Proportion make good design easier and bad design more difficult"', *RIBA Journal* 64, no. 11 (1957), 462.

¹²⁵ Rudolf Wittkower, 'Systems of Proportion', in *Architects' Year Book* 5, ed. Trevor Dannatt (London: Elek Books, 1953), 9.

¹²⁶ Payne, 'Rudolf Wittkower', 340. Payne additionally argues convincingly that the influence of *Architectural Principles* was not all one way. In fact, its methods and underlying assumptions, while highly original when taken together, represent a synthesis of a range of practices developed by German-based historiography up to that point. Correspondingly, there is a particular correspondence between Wittkower's basic reading of architecture and that of several pioneering historians of the modern movement, in particular that of Sigfried Giedion. See *Ibid*, 330-331; 338.

¹²⁷ Le Corbusier, *The Modulor: A Harmonious Measure to the Human Scale Universally Applicable to Architecture and Mechanics*, trans. Peter de Francia and Anna Bostock (London: Faber & Faber, 1954). The French edition was published in 1948.

decade.¹²⁸ A section at the Milan Triennale of 1951 was devoted to the subject of architectural proportion through history, and Wittkower contributed the following year to an international congress on proportion in the arts; additionally, he published frequently on the subject in journals, books and magazines and perpetuated his ideas through teaching.¹²⁹ Indeed, in spite of his oft-reported surprise at the reception of his book, Wittkower was certainly not innocent of developments in architectural modernism and of the potential impact his work might have in the present.¹³⁰

Correspondingly, as its conclusion approaches, the argument of *Architectural Principles* takes a definite turn away from scholarly detachment, consciously soliciting contemporary attention – albeit subtly – by carrying its account of the history of proportion beyond the renaissance and up to the present. Passing briefly over developments in France, Italy, and England of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Wittkower sketched the progressive cleavage of the ideas of proportional order from a universal understanding of the world and man’s place within it, with the architectural consequence that a priori systems of proportion were gradually discredited, and replaced by the arbitrary forms of individual judgement.¹³¹ Thus, the book concluded with an image of a society entirely alienated from the prospect of architecture as a signifier of palpable societal or metaphysical meaning: an ‘attitude to which most architects as well as the public unconsciously subscribe right down to our own days’.¹³² Here, the book was transformed finally from a simple work of

¹²⁸ For information on the popularity of proportion in Britain during this period, see Eva-Marie Neumann, ‘Architectural Proportion in Britain 1945-1957’, *Architectural History* 39 (1996): 197-221; Millon, ‘Rudolf Wittkower’, 83-87. A figure of great interest in the history of proportion in British modernism is Ernő Goldfinger, for he retained a concern with the subject throughout his career as an architect. For an account of the development of Goldfinger’s approach to proportion and its application in his buildings, see James Dunnett and Nigel Hiscock, “‘To this Measure of Man’: Proportional Design in the Work of Ernő Goldfinger”, in *Twentieth-Century Architecture and its Histories*, ed. Louise Campbell (London: Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain, 2000): 87-124.

¹²⁹ Millon, ‘Rudolf Wittkower’, 85. For more detail on the Milan conference, see Anna Chiara Cimoli and Fulvio Irace, ‘Triennial 1951: Post-War Reconstruction and “Divine Proportion”’, *Nexus Network Journal* 15, no. 1 (2013): 3-14; Matthew A. Cohen, ‘Introduction: Two Kinds of Proportion’, *Architectural Histories* 2, no. 1, Art. 21 (2015): DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/ah.bv>.

¹³⁰ On Wittkower’s familiarity with developments in contemporary architectural theory and practice, see Payne, ‘Rudolf Wittkower’ 338 n.106.

¹³¹ Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 124-134.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 134.

architectural history into a lament for the decline of architectural meaning, as well as a covert appeal for its return.

The final sentence came close to expressing this opinion openly in its optimistic observation that the subject of proportion 'is again very much alive in the minds of young architects to-day, and they may well evolve new and unexpected solutions to this ancient problem'.¹³³ In articles published elsewhere, Wittkower continued to exhibit an attachment to the value of proportional order in building, and the corresponding impression that its absence represented a unique, almost problematic condition. In the *Architects' Year Book* of 1953 he describes the modern outlook on proportion, and order in general, as 'almost without precedent' in human civilisation: another reiteration of his claim of an inherent instinct towards mathematical system and order.¹³⁴

Especially instructive was his identification of England as a decisive actor in this process of disintegration. Rather than looking to the usual Continental sources in the progressive evolution of European theory, *Architectural Principles* instead gave England a key role in laying out its unique anti-history, tracing the ultimate regression of architectural coherence to English soil: the country that finally saw 'the whole structure of classical aesthetics overthrown from the bottom', and replaced by the empirical aesthetics of William Hogarth, David Hume, and Edmund Burke, among others.¹³⁵ This focus must have appeared particularly compelling to British architects in 1949, above all among those who identified themselves with the modern movement. Over the last decade they had seen modernism rise to a level of unassailable legitimacy consonant with a widely held perception of its historical mission: a belief only reinforced by the successful conclusion of the war effort, which left an urban scene shattered and waiting to be re-made. Additionally, within the European modern movement itself, Britain was enjoying a position of increasing dominance. Emerging relatively unscathed from the disorders of wartime, and enjoying renewed confidence in light of modernism's progressive acceptance within

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹³⁴ Wittkower, 'Systems of Proportion', 9.

¹³⁵ Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 131-134.

the political establishment, British architects and town planners were in a position to dictate the agenda for international activity. A fact particularly apparent in the post-war history of CIAM, this control over architectural discourse saw congresses held at Bridgewater in 1947, and then Hoddesdon in 1951, with the latter organised to coincide with the great celebration of modernist self-assurance in the immediate post-war years: the Festival of Britain.

In this context, the propositions hinted at by Wittkower – that proportional composition offered a means of righting perceived historical false-steps and reconstructing a meaningful architecture – were evidently very seductive to students and practising architects. Britain, a minor actor in the interwar development of mainstream modernism, and implicated in an earlier forfeiture of architectural signification, now appeared destined to overwrite each of these past failings. But, it is important to make the point that the popularity of proportional systems is only the most obvious, because direct, reading of Wittkower's influence. While it is incorrect to identify *Architectural Principles* as a decisive source of multiple new directions in architectural practice – aside from the passing fascination with proportional systems – its method had a more generalised, but undeniably pervasive resonance among architects looking for hints of how to approach the task of rebuilding their war-ravaged surroundings. In describing the evolution of particular typologies and formal conventions as they corresponded to the societal practices and beliefs, Wittkower presented a highly affecting evocation of architecture as a potent instrument for the communication of meaning.

But just as pertinent as this elaboration of the sacred symbolism of built form – and perhaps obscured by his repeated claims to be revising a prior interpretation of renaissance architecture drained of religious meaning and betraying modern preoccupations – was the way he rooted his analysis in a historically specific location. The macrocosmic was of course vital, but it existed in constant relation to the microcosm summoned by architectural practice and, in turn, the total historical milieu within which the building took shape. Palladio's theories, for instance, were certainly important: but these only emerged within a decisively worldly context of

patronage, a culture that espoused the architect as a man of letters and *uomo universale*, and as part of an ongoing tradition that changed in relation to particular historical developments. Although the sacred significance that Wittkower detected could not be taken far in post-war architecture, his example of architects and their buildings embedded in a complex of social rituals did not demand a denial of the post-war situation. Far from it, the promise that architects could summon-up an architecture resonant and in touch with a dense symbolic world chimed perfectly in a disorientated post-war Britain seeking to repair the social and psychological fragmentations created by the war experience.

A Search for ‘Something to Believe In...’¹³⁶

It is surprising, therefore, to discover how rarely the specifically post-war context of Wittkower’s reception has been discussed. While his correspondence with tendencies in twentieth century modernism has been thoroughly mapped, the impact of what we have seen to be a quietly prescriptive programme on a situation of considerable insecurity is less clear.¹³⁷ Outside Britain, the conference at the Milan Triennale of 1951 has been highlighted as a significant moment in the negotiation of a new approach to building the post-war world.¹³⁸ James S. Ackerman, the only non-European contributor at the event, has subsequently outlined its origins in the post-war situation. Speaking in 2010, he described how the conflict had been ‘so destructive that there was a sense of seeking some kind of principle of order in the universe’, adding that there ‘was something almost religious about the commitment to the idea of universal harmony’.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Peter Smithson, quoted in ‘Report of a Debate’, 461

¹³⁷ Anthony Vidler has traced the network of discussions around Wittkower’s work in the work of Colin Rowe and Reyner Banham – in Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present*, 61-104.

¹³⁸ Matthew A. Cohen has discussed the specifically post-war significance of the conference into proportion, held at the Milan Triennale, see Cohen, ‘Introduction’. Triennale Anna Cimoli and Fulvio Irace have discussed the subject with passing regard to the question of reconstruction in Italy, see Cimoli and Irace, ‘Triennial 1951’.

¹³⁹ James S. Ackerman in 2010, quoted in Matthew A. Cohen, ‘Proportional Systems in the History of Architecture: A Conversation with James S. Ackerman’, *Architectural Histories* 2, no. 1, Art. 20 (2014), DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/ah.bk>.

This climate of spiritual yearning was no less apparent in the British context, as is evidenced by the retrospective overview of the late-1940s offered by Peter Smithson, when he spoke at an RIBA debate in 1957. Identifying his own youthful enthusiasm for the subject, he outlines the very particular circumstances surrounding the fashion for proportion, which emerged ‘as a matter of tooth and claw debate’. This, he said, represented ‘the right time for the Palladian revival’, a period when architects ‘were looking for something to believe in ... They saw in Palladio, as generations of Englishmen have, something that stood above what they were doing themselves’. His conclusion was that architects had, in effect, engaged in a tactical pursuit of order to ease the uncertainty that prevailed in post-war Britain: reaching a tacit understanding that it ‘was necessary to get back to something simple and comprehensible, and then from classical control move forward to a new sort of control’.¹⁴⁰ Given the circumstances – a context of physical destruction and moral self-doubt – Palladio, as interpreted by Wittkower, offered the comforting authority of tradition and universal order.

Reyner Banham too repeatedly emphasised the importance of Wittkower’s studies when reviewing the period in his seminal 1955 essay on the New Brutalism. However, he reminds that *Architectural Principles* was not necessarily understood to represent a direct solution to the post-war situation. It instead “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? [*sic*]’. Some embraced proportion explicitly, with the outcome that ‘Routine-Palladians soon became as thick on the ground as Routine-Functionalists’.¹⁴¹ But Banham saw others taking more creative directions: most notably, the New Brutalists, who were praised for embracing elements of both solutions. The formality of the Smithsons’ Hunstanton Secondary School and entry to the Coventry Cathedral competition was held by Banham to reveal the attraction

¹⁴⁰ Peter Smithson, quoted in ‘Report of a Debate’, 461. Similarly, that same year, the Smithsons wrote in *Architectural Design* that during ‘the immediate post-war period it seemed important to show that architecture was still possible’. See Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, ‘The New Brutalism’, *October* 136, no. 2 (2011), 37.

¹⁴¹ Banham, ‘The New Brutalism’, 361.

of classical principles, a desire to mimic directly the superficial harmony of arrangement illustrated in *Architectural Principles*.

Peter Smithson would elaborate on this sense of equivocation two years later at the debate noted above, providing a highly insightful commentary on the limitations of a stance uncritical of historical appropriation. Despite the enthusiasm the Smithsons had briefly shown for the classical ideals of order and symmetry, Smithson himself had later arrived, he said, at the conclusion that he was ‘unable to *believe* in systems of proportion. I do not *feel* that a valid solution can be achieved through them. I believe them to be an evasion’.¹⁴² In the first place, he disliked their prescriptiveness – their capacity to provide a normative justification for arbitrary formal gestures – citing his unease at Albert Einstein’s comment that the Modulor ‘makes evil difficult and the good easy’.¹⁴³ But, more pointedly, he underlined the reductiveness of applying in an ahistorical manner ideals supposedly drawn authentically from some period of the past. While the reading of proportional systems that many architects had extracted from Wittkower may have had roots in the beliefs and practices of historic civilisations, the predominantly visual approach to architectural composition that such principles had induced was unsuited to application in the present. For, Smithson claimed, he had over time attained an apprehension that architecture ‘exists in space and not in the flat’ and, consequently, one could not hope to coherently perceive the ‘magical’ system of relationships by which a building was animated: “‘experience’ is never direct, always loaded. One does not record in an instant an actual thing. One builds up an image in one’s head from all the experiences that have accrued during one’s visual and intellectual life’. He ended that he was not ‘against systems of control which arise naturally from a building’s organisation patterns ... [but] against systems of proportion that claim universal validity, rather than validity at a particular time in a particular place’.¹⁴⁴

In this passage, Smithson mounts a qualified critique of the positions assumed by the subjects of this thesis. In contrast to those figures’ search to establish for their

¹⁴² Peter Smithson, quoted in ‘Report of a Debate’, 460

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 461.

architectures an overarching historical justification, he instead affirms the specificity of the present situation: the need, concretely, to address the concerns of that present. For Smithson in the 1950s, these contingencies were too complex to be answered with a superficial appropriation of a half-understood historical tradition. Standing at a distance from the anxieties that had infused the profession in the 1940s, the Smithsons were able to redefine the terms of the discussion. Of course, the same year they made one of their most famous statements, insisting that as architects they were attempting ‘to be objective about “reality” – the cultural objectives of society, its urges and so on’, suggesting further that Brutalism ‘tries to face up to a mass-production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work’.¹⁴⁵

Another figure bridging the divide between the direct and indirect appropriation of Wittkowerian insights was Colin Rowe, a student of Wittkower with a corresponding fondness for bravura formal analysis.¹⁴⁶ Rowe’s celebrated comparisons of the plans and elevations of the villas of Le Corbusier and Palladio drew explicitly on Wittkower’s findings, tying the Swiss architect to a centuries-old tradition through – among other things – the imposition of ‘mathematical patterns upon his buildings’.¹⁴⁷ Although the formalist gymnastics of Rowe’s discussion constantly threaten to break down, he did nevertheless successfully fashion an understanding of Le Corbusier’s work that formed a considerable departure from the prevailing British image of ‘Corb’ as a doctrinaire functionalist. Above all, he exposed the modern movement as the latest development in a historical tradition that could acceptably be pushed back much farther than the nineteenth century. The expanded prospect onto the classical canon that he found in modernist aesthetics offered possibilities for the constructive elaboration of new approaches in both historiography and architectural theory. This amplification of the language of modernism, a recognition of its unstable range of meanings, serves well to explain the failures that we encountered in Pevsner’s picturesque project and the activities of architects enthused by systems of proportion.

¹⁴⁵ Alison and Peter Smithson, ‘The New Brutalism’, 37.

¹⁴⁶ Denise Costanzo, ‘Text, Lies and Architecture: Colin Rowe, Robert Venturi and Mannerism’, *The Journal of Architecture* 18, no. 4 (2013), 458; Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present*, 61-64.

¹⁴⁷ Colin Rowe, ‘The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa’, in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), 9.

Rowe's analysis in 'Mannerism and Modern Architecture', published in the *Architectural Review* in 1950, again repeats the comparative treatment of buildings and cultures dramatically separated in time, and also revolves around an acceptance of the caprices of formal signification. His discussion sketches a frankly Wittkowerian understanding of the differing motives of abstraction, respectively during the renaissance and modernity: the former, a rendering of the 'objective truth' of the 'the scientific working of the universe' as perceived by the renaissance artist, and the latter expressing instead 'a world of personal sensation and ... the private workings of the artist's mind'.¹⁴⁸ Having established this duality, he next moves to address the content of modernism's rhetorical foundation, with reference to the text of *Vers une Architecture*. Aside from the faith that Le Corbusier places in the chimerical absolutes of mathematics and geometry, Rowe claims that his argument is also flawed in its reliance on 'programs of social realism, by means of which architecture, generated by function, structure, or technique, is to acquire an objective significance as symbolising the intrinsic processes of society'. For Rowe, the problem is that:

...the essential "realism" of these programs cannot be converted into any system of public symbolism and that the attempt to assert an objective order appears fated largely to result in an inversion of the aestheticism which was, in the first place, so deplored. That is: the mathematical or mechanical symbols of an external reality are no sooner paraded than they are absorbed by the more developed sensuous reaction which they provoke; and abstraction, far from abetting public understanding, seemingly confirms the intensification of private significance.¹⁴⁹

Dismissing the notion of an unambiguous relation between functional program and aesthetic form, Rowe here announces the impossibility of a symbolic architecture ever attaining public understanding or objective validity. The more deeply architects indulged in the obscure language of modernism – driven by a desire to generate a collective architectural language – the more private and alienating would be their appeal to the public. Certainly, Pevsner never attained a wide appeal with his private

¹⁴⁸ Colin Rowe, 'Mannerism and Modern Architecture', in *Ibid*, 40-41.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 42.

campaign: an obstinate, highly scholarly programme, which sought to transcend its own obsessiveness. At the same time, the pursuit of proportion as a post-war panacea was hardly less strange. Both campaigns reveal the same futile search to discover a legitimate future for British architecture as the country returned to peace: a search, in Peter Smithson's words, 'for something to believe in'.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, it launched a series of discussions that, in the many revisions, revaluations, and renewals of post-war architecture, have only multiplied in the decades since.

¹⁵⁰ See footnote 136.

Chapter 4 – Illustrations



Figure 4.1) Herbert Mason, *St Paul's Survives*, 1940, photograph.



Figure 4.2) Cecil Beaton, *The Western Campanili of St Paul's Seen Through a Victorian Shop Front*, 1940-1941, photograph.

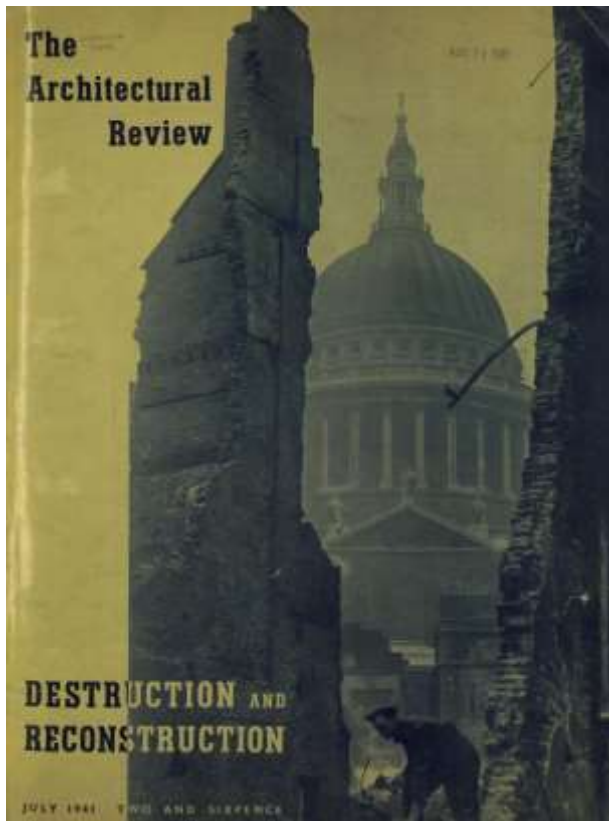


Figure 4.3) *Architectural Review*, 'Destruction and Reconstruction' special issue front cover, July 1941.



Figure 4.4) Royal Academy Planning Committee, *Plan of St Paul's and the Surrounding Area*, 1942, plan.



Figure 4.5) Royal Academy Planning Committee, *St Paul's Cathedral: Proposal for New Western Approach*, 1942, perspective

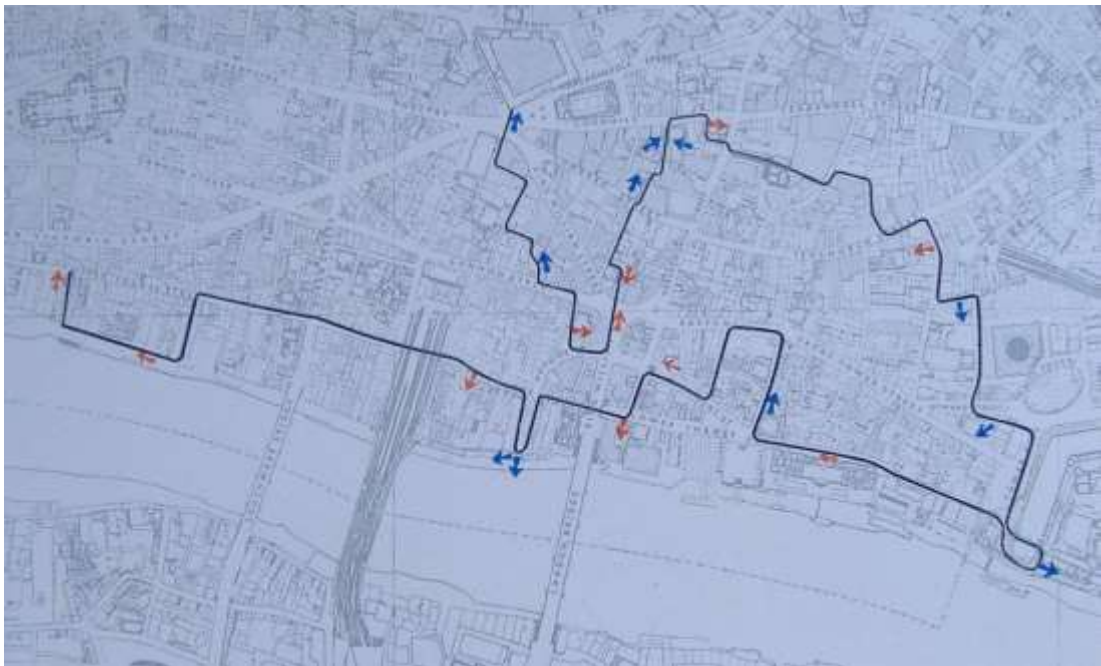


Figure 4.6) C.H. Holden and W.G. Holford, *Pedestrian Ways*, 1951, schematic plan with walking route.



Figure 4.7) Gordon Cullen, *An Impression of the low level concourse at London Bridgehead Proposed by the Consultants*, 1951, drawing.



Figure 4.8) Gordon Cullen, *An Impression at London Bridgehead, Looking North, Under the Proposed New Traffic Roundabout*, 1951, drawing.



Figure 4.9) Gordon Cullen, *An Impression of the Proposed New Approach to St Paul's from the River*, 1951, drawing.



Figure 4.10) William Holford, *Proposal for St Paul's Precinct*, March 1956, drawing.



Figure 4.11) Frank Newbould, *Your Britain: Fight for it Now* (South Downs), 1942, poster.



Figure 4.12) Frank Newbould, *Your Britain: Fight for it Now* (Village Green), 1942, poster.

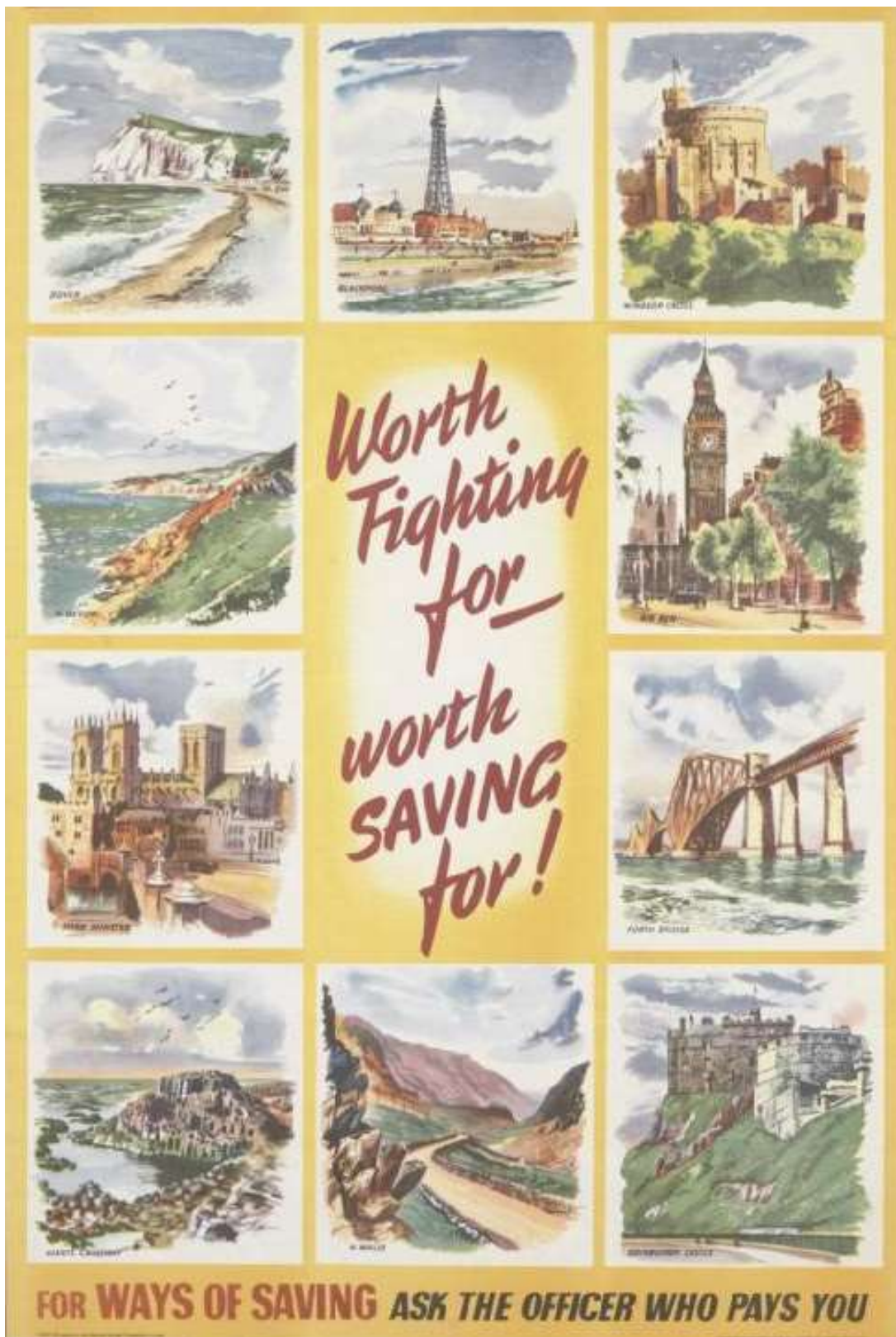


Figure 4.13) *Worth Fighting For – Worth Saving For!*, 1944, poster.



Figure 4.14 Abram Games, *Your Britain: Fight For It Now* (Kensal House), 1942, poster.



Figure 4.15 Abram Games, *Your Britain: Fight for it Now* (Finsbury Health Centre), 1943, poster.

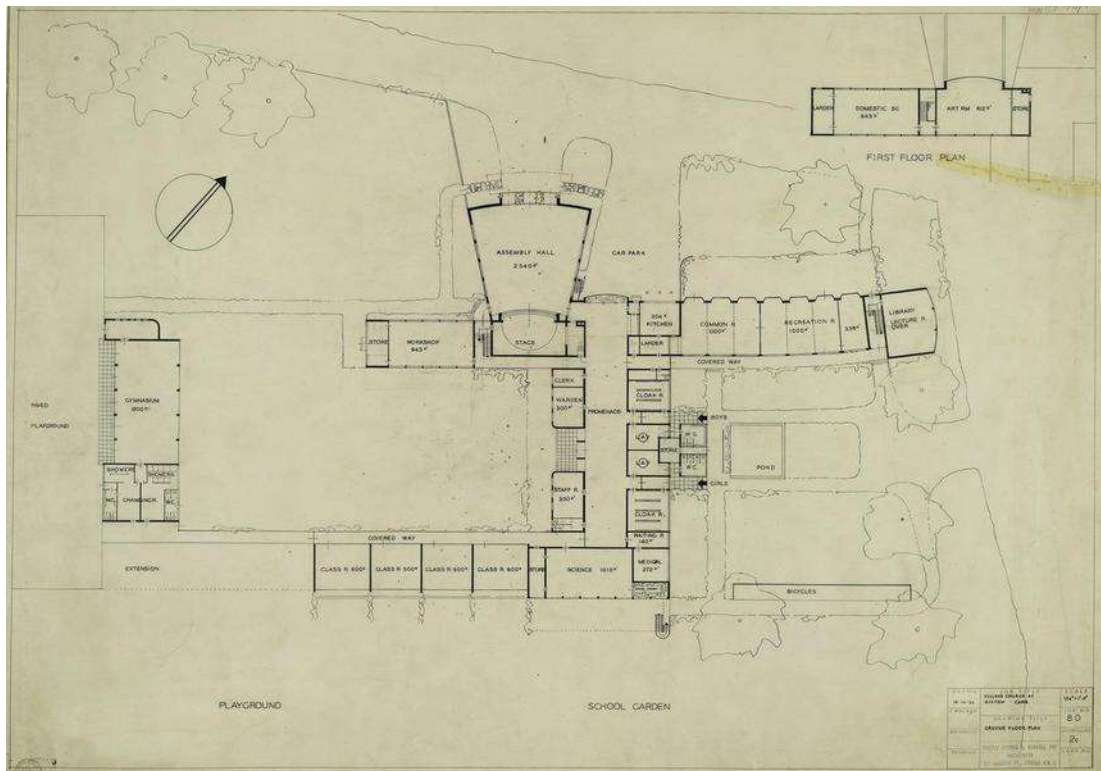


Figure 4.16) Walter Gropius and Maxwell Fry, Impington Village College, Cambridgeshire, 1938, plan.



Figure 4.17) Walter Gropius and Maxwell Fry, Impington Village College, Cambridgeshire, 1938, view of assembly hall and workshop block.

CONCLUSION – Recapturing ‘Pre-Naïve Positions’

Attending the same debate at which – in the previous chapter – we encountered Peter Smithson explaining the appeal he had found in classical proportion, we also find Rudolf Wittkower himself. When invited at the end of the meeting to offer his own opinion, the German historian delivered a series of judgements that expose the insoluble problem that stands at the heart, not only of the post-war situation, but of modern architectural culture in general. Although, Wittkower observed, renaissance architects had enjoyed the illusion that their own proportional systems were universal, this period of innocence had broken down during succeeding centuries. As a result, he said, ‘we have a period behind us which we cannot forget’: a shadow that lingered over the contemporary condition.

We cannot find a position of belief as individuals because a broader foundation is lacking, and I suppose that as long as such a position cannot be won back again on a broader level, a level of universal belief, it is no good the individual fighting for a system of general values.

Addressing the architect-dominated audience, Wittkower concluded that it was admirable that they should ‘try to recapture some of the obvious values which scale, proportion, unity and all those things bring about. But it is no good trying to recapture what one might call pre-naïve positions, positions which no longer exist’.¹ It is an assessment that would seem to be confirmed by the inevitably fragmentary projects outlined in this thesis; an opinion, moreover, whose scepticism has been vindicated by the advent of a postmodern embrace of multivalence and cultural relativity.

However, while this new outlook made room for a conscious appraisal of the virtues of ‘complexity and contradiction’ in architecture, a wealth of recent research has demonstrated that the tradition of the modern movement was not empty of symbolic

¹ Wittkower, quoted in ‘Report of a Debate’, 462.

richness, and it certainly did not deny the necessity of invoking historical tradition, or cultivating an appreciation for the spiritual content of architecture. One of the reasons this richness remained obscured for so long was perhaps a desire among interested parties to present a united front: a militant attitude towards the pursuit of modern architecture and town planning, just as it won ascendancy after the war and began to dominate the built output of the British welfare state. The rise of Britain after the war to a position of prominence within the international scene had matched the projection of a superficial confidence in the British profession, and preceded the realisation of vast projects of buildings during the several post-war decades. It was only as the unquestioned authority of modernism broke down, and its underlying ideas and assumptions were subjected to systematic critique, that this hidden diversity too began to receive recognition.²

Another reason why the richness of modernist discourse was overlooked was the fact that, although the members of the pre-war generation were urgently re-thinking their attitudes towards the modern city, they did not generally frame their new perspectives in terms of critical revision. Pevsner, for example, did not prepare his theory of the picturesque as a means of undermining the practices developed in the 'heroic' phase of the modern movement. His theory did evidently grow out of some desire to reconsider the intellectual basis of modernism, but – at least in his own mind – Pevsner was searching singularly to clarify and fortify the *universal* basis of that architecture. It is this attitude of genuine, earnest conviction that distinguishes the modernist architectural discourse from the underlying assumptions of today. Modern architecture and town planning in the mid-twentieth century were consciously framed in terms of convictions: *the* validity of scientific planning; *the* historical authority of the picturesque, or of *the* classical canon; *the* psychological depth of the New Humanism; *the* 'ethic' of the New Brutalism. Whether they located their principles in a trans-historical absolute, or in an intuition of the absolute concreteness of the present, these figures assumed, even in the doubtful post-war

² An early example appears in the work of William H. Jordy or, some years later, in Colin Rowe's mildly perplexed outing of Le Corbusier as 'a fox assuming hedgehog disguise'. See William H. Jordy, 'The Symbolic Essence of Modern European Architecture of the Twenties and its Continuing Influence', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 22, no. 3 (1963): 177-187; Colin Rowe, *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 91-93 (92).

years, a genuine sense of social responsibility, and a grasping after some sense of utopian certainty.

Across a multitude of media and in many different forums – in the MARS Plan and its sweeping re-distribution of London’s population; in the confidence of Rowse and his students that they were privileged to arbitrate the transition to a technocratically managed society; in the attempts to incorporate wartime ruins into the domain of the modern city; or in the grand historical projects that centred around the English picturesque and classical proportion – we have seen repeatedly the fierce conviction that architecture could, and must, discover its transcendental justification.

Meanwhile, the proximity of the war was key both to the intensity of these discussions and their variety. Surrounded by the ruins of modern civilisation architects became increasingly insistent that the unfolding of a justificatory narrative was necessary; the anxieties that informed their discourses consequently gave rise to a new abundance of perspectives: an unspoken querying of the received conventions of the International Style, and a search for a more secure foothold for their architectural convictions. Each of these projects’ singularity condemned architects and planners to ultimate failure, but this fact does not discredit their undertaking of the task in the first place.

Essentially, these were attempts to write what might be termed ‘narratives of legitimation’ – indeed, this phrasing has attended as a shadow to many of the foregoing discussions. Rather than simply seeking to describe developments in architecture and town planning, the figures that have featured in this study pursued their projects with more or less self-conscious propagandist intent. In this respect, their work had a pragmatic element, aiming to effect real change in the understanding of the built environment in general, and attitudes to the arrival of modernism in particular. In the first chapter, we explored the history and meaning of utopianism in architecture, eventually alighting on its value as a ‘functional’ category: its capacity to create a compelling image that enjoys sufficient potency to alter the way that people think, and can bring about a corresponding change in their actions. The apprehension of the functional role of utopia is not far removed from the

purpose of these narratives of legitimation, which represent an effort to frame certain – in this case, architectural – projects in such a way as to legitimise their revisionist content.

Turning to the subjects addressed in this thesis, and considering them in terms of narrative, it is clear that they all share a distinctively contradictory quality. Their external rhetoric repeatedly assumes a stance of detachment and disinterest – of objective analysis and universal validity. However, their status as narratives, written to justify and legitimate pre-conceived architectural prejudices and win support, places them in an entirely different category. The writing of a narrative is a creative process: it seeks to entertain, to seduce and convince. Therefore, this study has always sought to look beyond simply what is being said, to consider instead how it is framed and what effect it is intended to have. In the second chapter we addressed the obviously ‘progressive’ connotations apparent in the mid-century enthusiasm for conspicuous displays of scientific method and technological innovation. It is here that we see most clearly the curious co-existence of an attitude of detached objectivity alongside an indulgence in the seductive symbolism of science and futurity. The central involvement of Patrick Geddes as an originator of scientific planning, and specifically in his conceptualisation of the survey process as the basis for modern town planning, is telling. For, although imagined as a practical tool through which to discover objective solutions to design, the survey really represented a perfect example of a narrative written in order to win legitimacy. By undergoing an elaborate process of research, the planner was effectively narrating a compelling pre-history to the proposals that would eventually emerge, situating them variously in terms of regional conditions, standard practices of modernist urbanism, and the futuristic resonance of science and technocracy. Thus, the *County of London Plan*, to highlight one case, framed its research as a response to the capital’s diverse social character. Dividing the city fabric into a network of discrete ‘communities’, it promised to respect the urban grain of London while also supplementing and enriching the background to its own proposals with a sense of historical sensitivity. However, turning to the plans themselves, it becomes apparent that they really offer a stereotyped series of answers along the lines of countless schemes in the 1940s: from

the translation of ‘communities’ into repetitive systems neighbourhood units bounded by major roads, to the zoning of functions and dramatic decentralisation of population.

Of course, it is notable too that the *County of London Plan*, and countless others like it, was published in such a lavish format that exhibited its arguments in a striking and attractive form. This, again, might be seen as a distant inheritance from Geddes, whose understanding of the civic and regional survey, while ostensibly scientific, also involved the undertaking of a spiritual project from which a ‘scientist’ might retreat. He did not merely propose a detached analysis of data to serve the creation of a blueprint; he believed that once the planner had attained a comprehension of his or her region, this information – and the resulting diagnoses – must be *communicated* to the public in order to engender a continual social and spiritual evolution, as we saw in chapter 2. For this reason, he argued that the civic museum and exhibition were vital to the success of the plan, establishing the Outlook Tower in order to bestow upon the public a sense of collective self-knowledge. In short, the legitimacy of the survey process and its conclusions is manifested in the act of public reception, and the ‘discoveries’ of the surveyor thus attain a decisive reality when they come to be accepted by an audience, earning a certain motive power.

While this is evidently the case with the Geddesian survey, it is also true of the various other narratives on display in this thesis. Rowse was a vigorous promoter of his own schemes and design methods. He wrote extensively about ‘Town Plan’ in architectural journals, and encouraged its exhibition at the ‘Coventry of Tomorrow’ show of 1940, among others. Meanwhile, issues of exhibition were significant to most civic and regional surveys of the era, which when complete were often publicised in exhibitions along Geddesian lines, and were also published in lush, heavily illustrated editions. The discussion of the place of the ruin in mid-century architectural discourse similarly drew on printed matter. Although the writings of J.M. Richards and John Piper in the *Architectural Review* were consumed by a relatively small readership, some of its other episodes would have found a much broader public. The *Bombed Churches as War Memorials* campaign, above all, had

initially appeared in *The Times*, with the backing of some of the most famous figures on the British cultural scene, and the subsequent book was essentially a popular pamphlet that offered polite and friendly renderings to a very wide audience. Finally, at the same time that Pevsner was developing his idea of the inherent Englishness of the picturesque, and emphasising its capacity to legitimate the potentially alien qualities modern architecture, he enjoyed a significant platform at the BBC. Indeed, his radio talks afford the historian some of the most coherent expressions of the evolution of his thinking on the subject. Even Wittkower, an obscure figure in comparison to his compatriot, enjoyed a wide audience through the popularity of *Architectural Principles* and his eagerness to present his ideas before architects at schools, and events such as the Milan Triennale of 1951.

This enterprise – a shared commitment to communication – hints at the existence of a common theme that might be seized in order to arrive at a productive conclusion to these discussions. For, these actors' programmes of self-promotion also entail the inevitable imperative of 'reception'. Of course, the process of legitimation that we have been addressing is by nature *two-sided*: the authors of each narrative assume the existence of an audience to accept it. Much of this study has, admittedly, been dominated by displays of reverence for expertise, whether manifested in the authority of the scientist or that of the historian, scientific certitude or scholarly certitude. But, by acknowledging the attendant fact of public reception, we begin to realise a fuller appreciation of the representational strategies at play over the preceding chapters, as well as in mid-century discourse in general. In particular, the propagandist aspect of the plans of the 1940s can be hidden if we look only to the schemes themselves; they appear to present a monolithic picture of the emergence of modernism triumphant: an inevitable prelude to half a century of modern architectural production. Adopting an attitude of critique, this revelation serves to expose the relations of power that underlay post-war reconstruction and its claims to comprehensiveness. Several scholars have turned to this very aspect, spotlighting the frequent disparity between planners' insistence on consultation and survey, on one hand, and their general

failure to address the hopes and concerns of the public, on the other.³ All the same, in highlighting instead the process of legitimation – particularly the crucial stage of reception – we discern the ‘negotiated’ implications of these narratives, their address to a particular public, at a particular time and place. These insights raise an important and potentially highly productive question: who is the real architect of these narratives? Its emergence is in large part a consequence of the focus on the amorphous category of ‘discourse’ in architectural history, which was highlighted in the introduction to the thesis. By focussing not purely on built works, but also on the way they are represented and discussed – while also admitting those debates that did not necessarily enjoy a direct influence on design – it is perhaps possible to arrive at new ways of understanding the successes and failures of post-war architecture.

A commanding impulse that guided the direction of my research was an attraction to the perversity the kind of historical certitude that we have just seen thrown into doubt. There is something seductive in the confidence that a solution is possible, an approach that will lend a perfect legitimacy to the act of building. For, of course, Wittkower’s insights extend on into the present, where the possibility of discovering ‘something to believe in’ remains just as elusive as it did 70 years ago – inevitably so.⁴ Meanwhile, several decades of postmodern critique have left the desirability of this end uncertain, prompting a dissolution of architectural coherence to match the gradual erosion of the welfare state. While the notion of an authentically ‘modern’ architecture is clearly bound to fail, its folly guaranteed by the intellectual naivety of the notion of the ‘spirit of the age’, and of the transformative potential of architectural form, it is also disingenuous to submit the history of the modern movement as evidence of a will to control, to dominate, and to oppress. Rather, its prime object was to start a discussion: to establish a motive, a justification for the act of building that was sufficiently compelling to give it metaphysical weight. This thesis has, in its several narratives, reflected the heterogeneity of these expeditions into utopia: insistent anticipations of how the post-war world might be made.

³ See Peter J. Larkham and Keith D. Lilley, ‘Exhibiting the City: Planning Ideas and Public Involvement in Wartime and Early Post-War Britain’, *Town Planning Review* 83, no. 6 (2012): 647-668; Phil Hubbard and Lucy Faire, ‘Contesting the Modern City: Reconstruction and Everyday Life in Post-War Coventry’, *Planning Perspectives* 18, no. 4 (2003): 377-397.

⁴ Peter Smithson, quoted in ‘Report of a Debate’, 461.

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