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At school with the avant-garde: European architects and the modernist project in England

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Abstract

‘New people create new buildings, but new buildings also create New people’, so wrote the German art critic Fritz Wichhert in *The New Building. Art as Educator* in 1928. The social and psychological legacy of the First World War was deeply profound and affected how people thought about the future. Children were seen to symbolise a new and better future and Modernist architects saw their role as helping to build a new society, a society where the design of schools was seen as an agent of social change. The focus of this article is on the role of the avant-garde in this reforming social project and its impact on school design. It is organised into four sections. The first section introduces the terms modernism and avant-garde in relation to (school) architecture, particularly British modernism. The second section focuses in on the experiences of émigré architects in conservative 1930s England, and in particular the support they received from refugee organisations and their treatment by the state as war in Europe became a reality. The third section discusses the role of these architects in the construction of modernist schools in England. In the fourth and final section the impact of émigré architects on modernist schools in England is discussed along with the concepts of transnational history and cultural transfer.

Key words

Modernism, avant-garde, children, school architecture, refugees

Introduction

The mass carnage and destruction which characterised the First World War had a profound effect on how people thought about the future. Children were seen to symbolise a new and better future. From Amsterdam to Vienna, from Frankfurt to London, from Copenhagen to Paris, and from New York to Stockholm modernist architects and designers committed themselves to building a new society, a society where the design of schools ‘was seen as an agent of social change.’ Schools, were to be centres of light and air, simple and flexible, with minimalist designs and using modern materials to provide an environment in which the modern child ‘could inscribe’ his or her own identity and in turn become a modernising agent

challenging the traditional tastes and values of society.¹The focus of this article is on the role that avant-garde ideas and practices had on the reforming social project that was modernism in 1920s and 1930s Europe and their impact on school design. The original intention was to focus on the role that exhibitions played in the circulation of these ideas and practices relating to school design and the power of the visual in carrying knowledge across borders. However, as with all research projects, other questions and diversions emerged to shape the contours of this journey from the past into the present. Central to this story are the lives of a group of modernist architects who sought refuge from the political and economic conditions in continental Europe in the 1930s. While the paper will address its original objectives there is an additional story here which links up with the field of ‘exile studies’ and is about the experiences of those who were forced to flee political repression and the reception they received in Britain,² a reception which the social scientist François Lafitte declared in August 1940 was ‘sordid and disreputable’.³

Modernism and the avant-garde

*The new artist does not imitate, he creates. He does not describe, he designs. What does he design? New Values for life. And life is not only materialistic, as romanticists of utility try to present it, but is spiritual as well.*⁴

Modernism was a loose collection of ideas which covered a range of movements in different countries and connected to social and political beliefs about the transformative power of art

¹ Juliet Kinchin, ‘Light, Air, Health’, in *Century of the child: Growing by design, 1900-2000* eds., Juliet Kinchin and Aidan O’Connor (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 89.

²See, e.g., Jutta Vinzent, *Identity and image: Refugee artists from Nazi Germany in Britain (1933-1945)* (Weimar: VDG, 2006); Alexander Stephan, *Exile and Otherness: New approaches to the experience of the Nazi refugees* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006); Shulamith Behr and Marian Malet (eds.), *Arts in exile in Britain, 1933-45: Politics and cultural identity* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2005); Daniel Snowman, *The Hitler émigrés: The cultural impact on Britain of refugees from Nazism* (London: Pimlico, 2003); Paul Tabori, *The Anatomy of Exile. A Semantic and Historical Study* (London: Harrap, 1972); and Marius Kociejowski, *God’s Zoo. Artists, Exiles and Londoners* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014)

³ François Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1940), 189.

⁴Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931), 1931 cited by Tim Benton, ‘Building Utopia’, in *Modernism: Designing a new world, 1914-1939* ed., Christopher Wilk (London: V&A Publications, 2006), 149.

and design. Central to its meaning were an embrace of abstraction and a rejection of tradition, ornamentation and decoration, a desire to reinvent and create a better world and a belief in the potential of the machine and technology to effect such change.⁵ Modernism in architecture drew on avant-garde ideas associated with cubism, futurism, De Stijl, constructivism and expressionism to produce a ‘new style of building’ which went beyond ‘fleeting artistic fashion or some new “ism”.’ It was a style which ‘renewed architecture’ and ‘its intimate connection with the spiritual life’ of the time was ‘attested by its international character – the fact that it has arisen in various countries simultaneously and with similar goals.’⁶ ‘Building art,’ as the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) commented in 1923, was ‘the spatially apprehended will of the epoch. Alive. Changing. New’.⁷ Buildings were to be constructed of ‘the new materials and methods’ of industry and the materials were to inform the design of the buildings. Architectural ideas circulated through national journals (e.g., *De Stijl*, *L’Esprit Nouveau*, *Cahiers d’Art*, *Veshch/Gegenstand/Objet*, *ABC*), books and translations (e.g., Le Corbusier’s *Versune architecture*, 1923; Gropius’ *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, 1935), exhibitions (e.g., *Internationale Architektur*, 1923), congresses (e.g., *Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne* (CIAM), 1928; *Kongres voor Moderne Kunst in Antwerp and Bruges*, 1920-22) and institutions (e.g., the Bauhaus in Weimar, 1919-1925, and Dessau, 1925-1933).

⁵ See Christopher Wilk, ‘What is modernism’, in Wilk, *Modernism*, 11-22. In this embrace of modernism a paradox occurs when taking into account that in progressive education a turn to “the concrete” instead of “the abstract” was often emphasised in order to cope with the complexities of modern society. The potential of the machine and technology in modernism furthermore contrasts with the way in which the First World War demonstrated that modernity was much more present in the modern war machinery than in, for instance, a standardized western style of dressing. See Christopher A. Bayly, *The birth of the modern world, 1780-1914: Global connections and comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). This “embrace of abstraction” in its relation to the machine and technology is nicely described as ‘the abstracting eye’ in Susan Sontag, *On photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1979; orig. 1973), 91.

⁶ Walter Curt Behrendt, *The victory of the New Building Style* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2006) 89; originally published as *Der Sieg des neuen Baustils* (1927). Particularly in literature and arts, modernism essentially refers to “modern isms.” See Jed Rasula, ‘The insignia of modernity and “le mouvement Apollinaire”’, in *Europa! Europa? The avant-garde, modernism and the fate of a continent (European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies, vol. 1)* eds., Sascha Bru, Jan Baetens, Benedikt Hjartarson, Peter Nicholls, Tanja Ørum and Hubert van den Berg (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 299.

⁷ Mies van der Rohe, 1923, cited in Fritz Neumayer, *The Artless World: Mies van der Rohe on the Building Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 241.

The Bauhaus has been described as ‘the opening chapter to the narrative of twentieth century design’ and for more than a decade ‘the paramount centre of creative energy in Europe.’⁸ From its inception it was committed to liberating student’s creativity through the notion of ‘unlearning’, of a ‘return’ to the state of childhood, of the ‘child’ as ‘artist.’ These ideas had previously been promoted by Johannes Itten (1888-1967) and Franz Cizek (1865-1946) in Vienna, Hermann Obrist (1862-1927) in Munich and Adolf Hölzel (1853-1934) in Stuttgart, but the Bauhaus transformed these ideas into a new form of pedagogy which applied a more rational and industrial vocabulary.⁹ The Bauhaus was at the same time ‘a laboratory for handicraft and for standardisation; a school and a workshop’¹⁰ and brought together artists, craftsmen, and engineers to work with architects. It focused on training students to understand those elements of the visual that could be described as elementary and essential. Students were introduced to composition, colour, materials and three-dimensional form which familiarised them with the techniques, concepts and formal relationships fundamental to all visual expression.¹¹ The Bauhaus, according to its third and final director, Mies van der Rohe (1930-1933),¹² was ‘not an institution with a clear programme – it was an idea,’ and this idea brought into synergy a commitment to the humanism of craft production alongside a determination to champion the values of standardisation associated with mass production.¹³

The connection between childhood and architectural and design practice was also reflective of the social and psychological results of total modern warfare where children were seen to symbolise a new future. Architecture was seen ‘as an active agent in the educational process’ as architects and designers aligned themselves with the advocates of progressive

⁸ J. Abbott Miller, ‘Elementary School’, in *The ABC’s of...: The Bauhaus and Design Theory* eds., Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 4; Nicholas Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design. From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960), 38.

⁹ Abbott Miller, ‘Elementary School’, 4-5, 20. See also Juliet Kinchin, ‘Bauhaus Play and Pedagogy,’ in Kinchin and O’ Connor, *Century of the Child*, 74-77 and Siân Roberts, ‘Exhibiting children at risk: Child art, international exhibitions and Save the Children Fund in Vienna, 1919-1923’, *Paedagogica Historica* 45, no. 1-2 (2009): 171-190.

¹⁰ Pevsner, *Pioneers*, 38.

¹¹ Hans Wingler, *Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1969); Abbott Miller, ‘Elementary School,’ 4-21.

¹² The first Director of the Bauhaus from 1919-28 was Walter Gropius who was followed by Hannes Meyer, 1928-30.

¹³ Mies van der Rohe, 1954, cited in Wingler, *Bauhaus*, 17.

pedagogy.¹⁴ Exhibitions were organised to showcase designs for the new modernist school. In Zurich in 1932, for example, architects associated with CIAM worked with a health reformer and a progressive pedagogue, showcased a design which balanced questions of ‘space, hygiene, light, and pedagogy’ and according to the influential Swiss critic Peter Meyer (1894-1984) eschewed ‘all pompous falseness.’¹⁵ In the same year *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York new American designs were presented alongside European exemplars and conferences were organised for school teachers to discuss the links between the new architecture and modern trends in education.¹⁶ The design of these new schools did not stop with the shape and fabric of the building, but also involved the furnishing of schools.¹⁷

In Britain the impact of modernism and the avant-garde was limited before the 1930s. Futurism had produced an ‘echo’ from the British avant-garde in the form of ‘Vorticism’ in the years immediately before the outbreak of the First World War, but the conflict robbed the movement of momentum by fragmenting the group and claiming the lives of leading activists.¹⁸ No British architect attended the meetings of the CIAM. However, three key events happened in 1933 which acted as connecting catalysts between a group of like-minded British artists and architects and their modernist European counterparts. The first was the launch in London of the Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS) which formed a link

¹⁴ Kinchin, ‘Avant-Garde Playtime’, in Kinchin and O’Connor, *Century of the Child*, 89; see also Frederik Herman, Angelo Van Gorp, Frank Simon, Bruno Vanobbergen and Marc Depaepe, ‘Modern architecture meets new education: Renaat Braem’s design and the Brussels Decroly school (1946)’, *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis (Journal of Belgian History)* 41, no. 1-2 (2011): 135-66.

¹⁵ Juliet Kinchin, ‘The New School’, in Kinchin and O’Connor, *Century of the Child*, 99-102. For Meyer, see Ákos Moravánsky, ‘Peter Meyer and the Swiss discourse on monumentality’, *Future Anterior* 8, no. 1 (2011): 1-20.

¹⁶ Aidan O’ Connor, ‘A Setting for Childlife: The new school in the United States’, in Kinchin and O’ Connor, *Century of the Child*, 105. The American designs were by William Lescaze (1896-1969) and Richard Neutra (1892-1970), both of whom had migrated from Europe to the United States in the early 1920s, and the European designs included work by the German architect Ernst May (1886-1970). For Lescaze and Neutra see Amy F. Ogata, *Designing the Creative Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), Chapter 4.

¹⁷ See, for example, Frederik Herman, Angelo Van Gorp, Frank Simon and Marc Depaepe, ‘The school desk: From concept to object’. *History of Education* 40, no. 1 (2011): 97-117.

¹⁸ Vorticism is the specifically British avant-garde movement that was inspired by the founder of the Italian Futurist movement, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944), see Christopher Adams, ‘Futurism and the British avant-garde’ in *Blasting the Future! Vorticism in Britain 1910-1920* eds., Jonathan Black, Christopher Adams, Michael Walsh and Jonathan Wood (London: Estorick/Philip Wilson Publishers, 2004), 9-17.

between modern architects from Britain and CIAM's activities.¹⁹ MARS aimed to act as a support structure for architects, engineers and theorists isolated in conservative 1930s Britain and functioned as an organizational link with the continental modern movements in art and design, and in particular contact with Walter Gropius (1883-1969) and László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) at the Bauhaus.²⁰ MARS engaged in 'propaganda, seeking to sell modernism to intellectuals and opinion formers' and 'above all else, (...) [it] was a meeting point for people who wanted to establish what it was to be modern.'²¹ The second was the founding of the Artists International Association to fight for peace against Fascism, to establish a social role for the artist and to broaden the audience for contemporary art.²² The third, and most significant, was the ascendancy of fascist politics in Germany and the subsequent arrival as refugees in Britain of a number of leading modernist architects.

A 'sordid and disreputable scandal'

As the economic and political landscape in mainland Europe became more unstable in the 1930s Britain became home to many refugee architects, artists, designers and academics. They fled Nazi Germany after 1933, Czechoslovakia after the German occupation, Austria after the Anschluss in 1938 and Spain after the fall of the Republic. However, such movement involved refugees in a series of identity checks and surveillance as was reported by Osbert Peake (1897-1966), Home Office Under Secretary in the House of Commons. Each German-Austrian refugee who had come to the country since 1935 had been sponsored and their character vouched for by either a refugee organisation or by a private individual, their 'bona fides' examined by the British Consul abroad, their status scrutinised on arrival by immigration officers and then they had to report and register with the local police.²³

¹⁹ Eric Mumford, *The CIAM discourse on modernism, 1928–1960* (Cambridge, MA/London: The MIT Press, 2000).

²⁰ Maxwell Fry, *Autobiographical sketches* (London: Elek, 1975), 140-42; William Whyte, 'MARS group (act. 1933-1957)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, online ed.); John Summerson, 'The MARS group and the thirties', in *English architecture, public and private: Essays for Kerry Downes* eds., in John Bold and Edward Chaney (London/Rio Grande: The Hambleton Press, 1993), 303.

²¹ Whyte, 'MARS group'.

²² Lynda Morris and Robert Radford, *The story of the AIA: Artists International Association, 1933-1953* (Oxford: The Museum of Modern Art, 1983).

²³ Osbert Peake, House of Commons, July 10 1940, quoted in Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens*, 40-41.

As events unfolded and there was a growing diasporas of displaced persons organisations emerged to aid refugees and these included religious groups (the Jewish Refugees Committee, 1933; the Society of Friends German Emergency Committee 1933; the Catholic Committee for Refugees, 1938), non-denominational bodies (the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany, 1938; the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, 1938) and refugee led organizations (the Free German League of Culture, 1938, the Austrian Self-Aid Committee). There were also organizations linked to professional bodies. For example, in response to Nazi assaults on academic freedom in March 1933 the Academic Assistance Council [AAC] was established ‘to assist scholars and scientists who, on grounds of religion, race or opinion, were unable to continue their work in their own country.’ University academics working with among others, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of the British Empires, by 1935 had helped ‘1,300 University teachers displaced in Germany (...) [and] assisted refugee scholars from Russia, Portugal and other countries.’ In the following year the AAC, faced with the continuing ‘devastation of the German Universities’ and the worsening situation for academics in other European countries deemed ‘politically unreliable,’ was succeeded by the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning.²⁴ The organisation was not without its critics and was attacked from the extreme right for being pro-Jewish, pro-communist and anti-British.²⁵ The British Federation of University Women also established local refugee committees to assist women academic refugees.²⁶ Another ‘specialist’ organization was the Artists’ Refugee Committee which was created by the Artists International Association in response to an appeal for help dated 28 November 1938 from a group of German artists in Berlin known as the *Oskar Kokoschka*

²⁴ ‘Memorandum on Formation of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning’, in William Beveridge, *A Defence of Free Learning* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 129-32. A refugee counterpart to the Society was the *Notgemeinschaft Deutscher Wissenschaftlerim Ausland* (Emergency Association for Exiled German Scholars). For detailed account of the work of the AAC (1933-36), later the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL) (1936-98) and today the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) see *In Defence of Learning. The Plight, Persecution and Placement of Academic Refugees, 1933-1980s* eds., Shula Marks, Paul Weindling and Laura Wintour (Oxford: British Academy/Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁵ David Zimmerman, “‘Protests Butter No Parsnips’: Lord Beveridge and the Rescue of Refugee Academics from Europe, 1933-1938’, in Marks et al, *In Defence of Learning*, 38.

²⁶ Susan Cohen, ‘In Defence of Academic Women Refugees: The British Federation of University Women’ in Marks et al *In Defence of Learning*, 161-76; Id., ‘Crossing borders: Academic refugee women, education and the British Federation of University Women during the Nazi era,’ *History of Education* 39, no. 2 (2010): 175-182.

Bund,²⁷ who had escaped to Czechoslovakia but were threatened with arrest and incarceration in a camp and sent to a number of British artists and critics, including the sculptor Jacob Epstein (1880-1959), the painter Paul Nash (1889-1946) and the anarchist and art educator Herbert Read (1893-1968).

The émigré architect Berthold Lubetkin noted in 1937 that ‘England has become almost the only country in which modern architecture can flourish with comparative freedom. This circumstance has (...) attracted many foreign architects fleeing from political restrictions or economic stagnation in other countries.’²⁸ Lubetkin was an economic migrant who arrived in Britain from Paris in early 1931. Another modernist architect who arrived in London as an economic migrant was Ernő Goldfinger, who according to James Dunnett was attracted by the nucleus of modern architects forming there.²⁹ Other architects, who as the situation in Europe deteriorated arrived as political refugees were often dependent on the intervention of enlightened individuals such as Herbert Read, the architect Maxwell Fry (1899-1987), and the modernist designer and entrepreneur Jack Pritchard (1899-1992) to aid their resettlement. It was Fry, one of the founding architects of MARS, who with Pritchard was instrumental in bringing Walter Gropius out of Germany in 1934. Pritchard was influenced by the experimental ideas of designers and craftsmen and architects in northern Europe, had visited the Bauhaus School in 1931, and established the Isokon Furniture Company to work with new materials. He was also one of the founders of the research institute Political and Economic Planning (PEP) alongside Leonard Elmhirst of Dartington Hall Trust.³⁰

On his arrival in England Gropius settled in the Isokon Building, Lawn Road, Hampstead, London, an experiment in collective housing commissioned by Pritchard and designed by the

²⁷ Named after the Austrian expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980).

²⁸ Charlotte Benton, *A different world: Emigré architects in Britain, 1928-1958* (London: RIBA, 1996), 7.

²⁹ James Dunnett, ‘Goldfinger, Ernő (1902–1987)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn., May 2008 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39984>, accessed 28 Sept 2016. Goldfinger received support and commissions from Marjorie and Paul Abbatt, known for the manufacture of toys, see Juliet Kinchin, ‘Ernst Goldfinger and the Abbatts: From toys to urban health’, in Kinchin and O’Connor, *Century of the Child*, 111-13.

³⁰ See R. C. Whiting, ‘Political and Economic Planning (act. 1931–1978)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/95962>, accessed 28 Sept 2016.

Canadian architect Wells Coates (1895-1958).³¹ Fry set up a partnership which enabled Gropius to practise until he emigrated to the USA in 1937. Their designs were not fully collaborative, but according to Alan Powers both partners benefitted as Fry's 'graphic skills and sympathetic attitude helped in the realization of Gropius's ideas in an alien culture.'³² A. E. Proskauer (later Aubrey Edward Prower), another émigré modernist architect, worked as Gropius's personal assistant in the Fry and Gropius office.³³ Pritchard worked to find Gropius design commissions and introduced him to Henry Morris (1889-1961), Chief Education Officer for Cambridgeshire, a meeting which Pritchard later described as "Enlightened architect met enlightened educationist: result: orgasm".³⁴ Gropius also worked as controller of design at Pritchard's furniture manufactory.³⁵

Herbert Read also helped to promote for an English readership the Modernist principles behind Gropius' method of design, writing in 1934: 'I have no other desire in the book [*Art and Industry*] than to support and propagate the ideas (...) expressed by Dr. Gropius; ideals which are not restricted to the written word, but which have been translated into action (...)' He then offered a summary of the modernist project:

Essentially it is a policy based on a rational conception of aesthetic values. Our need is the wider recognition of art as a biological function, and a constructive planning of our modes of living which takes full cognisance of this function. In every practical activity the artist is necessary, to give form to material. An artist must plan the distribution of cities within a region; an artist must plan the distribution of buildings within a city; an artist must plan the houses themselves, the halls and factories and all that makes up city; an artist must plan the interiors of such buildings – the shapes of

³¹ Andrea Hammel, 'Jack Pritchard, refugees from Nazism and Isokon design', in *Exile and patronage: Cross-cultural negotiations beyond the Third Reich* eds., Andrew Chandler, Katarzyna Stokłosa and Jutta Vinzent (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), 23-32. The brief for the Isokon building was drawn up by Pritchard's wife Molly and was based on the Minimum Flat concept stated at the CIAM conference of 1929, see <http://www.isokongallery.co.uk/>, accessed 28 Sept 2016.

³² Alan Powers, 'Fry, (Edwin) Maxwell (1899–1987)', rev. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn., Sept 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39983>, accessed 1st September 2016].

³³ Benton, *A different world*, 197.

³⁴ Quoted in Harry Ree, *Educator Extraordinary. The Life and Achievements of Henry Morris* (London: Peter Owen, 1985) 70-71.

³⁵ Tim Benton, 'Modernism and Nature' in Wilk, *Modernism*, 335.

the rooms, their lighting and colour; an artist must plan the furniture of those rooms, down to the smallest detail, the knives and forks, the cups and saucers and the door handles. And at every stage we need the abstract artist, the artist who orders materials till they combine the highest degree of practical economy with the greatest measure of spiritual freedom.³⁶

Read returned to the modernist project, the work of Gropius and the implications for school design in *Education through Art* published in the midst of the Second World War, of which more later.³⁷

Gropius' Bauhaus colleague László Moholy-Nagy followed him to London in 1935. In the previous year Moholy-Nagy had written to Read describing the atmosphere in Nazi Germany: 'The situation of the arts around us is devastating and sterile. One vegetates in total isolation, persuaded by newspaper propaganda that there is no longer any place for any other form of expression than the emptiest phraseology.'³⁸ Fry's friend the designer Ashley Havinden (1903-1973) found design commissions for Moholy-Nagy and Fry himself developed a close friendship with him, collaborated on a series of projects and described Moholy-Nagy as having an imagination 'so fertile (...) that ideas tumbled out of him too fast to put to account.'³⁹ Fry, Gropius and Moholy-Nagy were all involved in an exhibition in 1937 on *Design in Education* organised by the Council for Art and Industry (CAI), which attempted to show, according to Frank Pick the Chair of the CAI, 'how, by a right choice, the materials used for teaching in elementary schools might have a beauty and a quality which are the first understanding of design.' Over a two week period the exhibition was visited by 11,000 people concerned with education.⁴⁰ Another Bauhaus émigré Marcel Breuer also arrived in 1935 and designed the *Isobar*, a clubroom on the ground floor of the Isokon Building which became a favourite meeting place for many members of the modernist movement in London,

³⁶Herbert Read, *Art and Industry: The principles of industrial design* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935),40.

³⁷ See David Thistlewood, 'Herbert Read (1893-1968)', *Prospects* 24, no. 1-2 (1994): 375-390; and Ian Grosvenor and Gyöngyvér Pataki, 'Learning through culture: seeking "critical case studies of possibilities" in history of education,' *Paedagogica Historica* 53, no. 3 (2017), 246-67.

³⁸Moholy-Nagy to Read, 24 January 1934 in Kristina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy* (London: Thames and Hudson 1985), 405.

³⁹ Fry, *Autobiographical Sketches*, 146.

⁴⁰Ian Grosvenor, "'The Art of Seeing": Promoting design in education in 1930s England', *Paedagogica Historica* 41, no. 4-5(2005), 518-28.

including Read, the sculptors Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975), Naum Gabo (1890-1977) and Henry Moore (1898-1986) and the painter Ben Nicholson (1894-1982). Breuer later designed furniture for Pritchard.⁴¹ Also in 1935 the architect and interior designer Michael Rachlis (1884-1953) lived as a tenant at Lawn Road Flats and Egon Riss (1901-1964), who escaped to England in 1938, also stayed for a short time and produced some furniture designs for Pritchard including the Penguin Donkey bookcase.⁴² Another architect with Bauhaus connections, Arthur Korn (1891-1978) also worked with Fry following his arrival as a refugee in 1937 and was involved with Pritchard's Isokon Furniture Company in 1939-40 before being interned, and Eugene Rosenberg (1907-1990) who arrived in England in 1939 had connections with Fry.⁴³ Fry later described his role as acting as 'a bogus employment agency' for 'refugees from Germany'.⁴⁴

Sometimes, as Charlotte Benton has documented, jobs promised on the strength of which émigrés had come to England failed to materialize. There were also problems around proficiency in the English language and in particular the terminology and practices of the building site. Professional contacts 'even with introductions, were not always either easy to establish or rewarding' and precarious employment prospects were compounded by the possibility of non-renewal of work or residence permits.⁴⁵ Peter Moro (1911-98), for example, came to England in 1936 having been promised employment by Gropius who then claimed to remember nothing about it and Riss sought Fry's help in obtaining architectural work in 1939, but without success.⁴⁶ Further, not everyone connected with the arts in Britain welcomed the refugee architects, artists and designers. Anxieties, for example, were expressed in the journal

⁴¹Benton, 'Modernism and Nature,' 335. Pritchard was, for instance, also an early supporter of Edith Tudor-Hart [née Suschitzky] (1908-1973), a Viennese photographer who as well had studied in the Bauhaus and moved to London after her marriage to an English doctor in 1933. The "Viennese legacy of a progressive pedagogy [during the 1920s, Suschitzky was trained as a Montessori teacher in Vienna and London]" remained active in her documentary photography. See Duncan Forbes, 'Politics, Photography and Exile in the Life of Edith Tudor-Hart (1908-1973),' in *Arts in Exile in Britain 1933-1945: Politics and Cultural Identity* eds., Shulamith Behr and Marian Malet (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005) 75; see also Duncan Forbes, 'Tracking' Edith Tudor-Hart,' *History Workshop Journal* 84 (2017), 235-47.

⁴²Benton *A different world* 198, 200; Ian Christie, 'Mass Market Modernism' in Wilk, *Modernism*, 398.

⁴³Benton, *A different world* 177, 203.

⁴⁴Fry, *Autobiographical Sketches*, 146.

⁴⁵Benton, *A different world*, 45-47.

⁴⁶ See <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-peter-moro-1179587.html> accessed September 1st, 2016; Benton, *A different world*, 200.

The Artist about immigrant artists damaging the English trade in art,⁴⁷ and in the journal *Parthenon*, with uncertainties about the economy in the late 1930s, a leading article concluded:

Any addition to the number of people at present competing for work would seriously affect our fellow countrymen (...). Conditions in this country could only be worsened by an influx of fresh competitors whose willingness to work for next to nothing would (...) be exploited by those who already show little appreciation of professional qualifications.⁴⁸

Such negative fears had already been promoted by right wing extremists in an attack on the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1934 which clearly framed the issue as a matter of ‘race’:

At a time when so many of our young and vital architects are in a desperate position, the Royal Institute of British Architects chooses to welcome alien architects and to encourage them in professional practice with this country (...). We have been affronted by the spectacle of prosperous British architects lavishing on these aliens (...) encouragement which they conspicuously withhold from the younger architects of their own race (...). Thus the Royal Institute of British Architects, whose primary duty is presumably to protect the interests of British architects, betrays them by encouraging the professional activities in this country of those aliens who have found it advisable to free their native lands.⁴⁹

Similar sentiments were expressed by medical and dental associations who exerted pressure on the British government to increase restrictions and to ban outright the employment of German Jewish doctors and dentists from working in Britain.⁵⁰

There was also a conservatism within the architectural profession which generated a hostility to modernism, as is illustrated in what is referred to as ‘the fierce attack on modernism’ and

⁴⁷Morris and Radford, *The story of the AIA*, 52.

⁴⁸Benton, *A different world*, 69.

⁴⁹*Fascist Week*, quoted in Benton, *A different world*, 47.

⁵⁰Zimmerman, ““Protests Butter No Parsnips,”” 37.

‘a diatribe against the New Architecture’ by ‘a custodian of the old’,⁵¹ the architect Reginald Blomfield (1856-1942):

Modernism or *Modernismus* as it should be called on the German precedent, has invaded this country like an epidemic, and though there are signs of reaction, its attack is insidious and far-reaching, with the wholly fallacious prospect of a new heaven and a new earth which it dangles before the younger generation.⁵²

This hostility connected to the broader field of the arts and was reinforced by Kenneth Clark (1903-1983), the Director of the National Gallery, who in 1935 condemned the international language of abstraction in favour of figurative art which he believed was of greater appeal to the public, promoted national allegiance, and allowed artists to acknowledge their Englishness.⁵³

Given the growing fears of a German invasion, the trauma associated with being a refugee and the uncertainties that accompanied this status it is not surprising that there was a certain level of pessimism within the refugee community; a pessimism which deepened in 1940. By 1940 the British government acknowledged that the refugee problem had become ‘too large to be dealt with by voluntary organizations and charitable money’ and a Central Committee for Refugees was established to administer government grants to voluntary organizations caring for refugees from Nazi oppression.⁵⁴ However, there was also a change in the status of refugees. In October 1939 German, Austrian and Italian refugees had been categorized as

⁵¹ Michela Rosso, ‘Between history, criticism, and wit: Texts and images of English modern architecture (1933-36)’, *Journal of Art Historiography* 14 (2016) 4. See also Nathan O’Donnell, ‘Opposing Modernismus: The variant modernisms of Wyndham Lewis and Sir Reginald Blomfield’, in *We speak a different tongue: Maverick voices and modernity, 1890-1939* eds., eds. Anthony Patterson and Yoonjung Choi (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 239.

⁵²Reginald Blomfield, *Modernismus* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1934), v. Also quoted in Andrew Higgott, *Mediating modernism: Architectural cultures in Britain* (London/New York: Monograph, 2007), 4.

⁵³Kenneth Clark, ‘The Future of Painting’, *The Listener* 14 (2 October, 1935): 543-544. See, also, Brian Foss, *Warpaint: Art, war, state and identity in Britain, 1939-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 179-84; Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2010), 106-09; and Stephen Calloway, ‘Recording Britain: Patriotism, polemic and romantic psychogeography’, in *Recording Britain* ed., Gill Saunders (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), 53-76.

⁵⁴Beveridge, *A defence of free learning*, 52-53.

‘enemy aliens’ and were required to appear before magistrate tribunals set up to examine and classify under three headings. Category A was for ‘dangerous enemies’ and they were imprisoned, Category C was for harmless refugees and Category B was for those about whom there was some doubt (see Table 1). Pritchard, for example, presented a testimonial note to an Aliens Tribunal in 1939 on behalf of Rachlis declaring that, ‘He [Rachlis] has already done some useful architectural work in this country and I am sure he would be an asset to us.’⁵⁵ By February 1940 the tribunals had completed their work assessing and classifying 73,000 cases. The vast majority were classed as Category C, including most of the 55,000 Jewish refugees.⁵⁶ However, the classification process as Lafitte noted at the time was not ‘consistently ‘applied.’⁵⁷ Charlotte Benton has identified over 60 émigré architects who came to Britain between 1928 and 1939,⁵⁸ however, Lafitte in 1940 was able to identify from tribunal records and surveillance dossiers related to ‘enemy aliens’ 137 German or Austrian architects (129 men and 8 women), 113 of whom were classed as refugees and 103 of whom were placed in Class C.⁵⁹ In May 1940, with risk of German invasion high, general internment was decreed for all men and women in Category B wherever they were living and some 27,000 ‘enemy aliens’ were sent to internment camps.⁶⁰ This figure also included Germans and Austrians regardless of their Category of classification who were resident in the south of England (see Table 1).⁶¹

Table 1. Emigre architects and designers in Britain⁶²

Name	Nationality	Date of Arrival	Internment
Bruno Ahrends 1878-	German	1939	Hutchinson Camp,

⁵⁵Benton, *A different world*, 198.

⁵⁶Roger Kershaw, ‘Collar the lot! Britain’s policy of internment during the Second World War’.

See <http://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/blog/collar-lot-britains-policy-internment-second-world-war/>, accessed September 2016.

⁵⁷Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens*, 37.

⁵⁸Benton, *A different world*, Appendix 1 Dates of Entry into Britain, 230.

⁵⁹Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens*, 38-41.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 55-62. See, also, Jutta Vinzent, ‘The political, social and cultural patterns of migration’, in Jennifer Powell and Jutta Vinzent, *Visual journeys: Art in exile in Britain* (Chichester: George Bell Institute, 2008); Vinzent, *Identity and Image*; Jennifer Powell, ‘Schwitters Interned with Friends’, in Emma Chambers and Karin Orchard (eds.), *Schwitters in Britain* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2013), 32-41.

⁶¹Kershaw, ‘Collar the lot,’ np.

⁶²Data extracted from Benton, *A Different World*; Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens*, *passim*; Chambers and Orchard, *Schwitters in Britain* and Powell and Vinzent, *Visual journeys*.

1948			Douglas Isle of Man
Joseph Berger 1898-1989	Austrian	1936	Hutchinson Camp, Douglas Isle of Man
Hans (John) Biel b 1907	Austrian	1934	Huyton, near Liverpool; Sefton and Hutchinson Camps Isle of Man
Marcel Breuer 1902-81	Hungarian	1935	
Bernd Engel (Bernard Engle) 1901-73	German	1935	Interned
Carl Franck 1904-85	German	1937	Isle of Man
ErnöGoldfinger 1902-87	Hungarian	1934	
Walter Gropius 1883-1969	German	1934	
Robert Gutmann 1910-81	German	1939	Interned
Fredrick Herrmann 1898-1983	German	1937	Huyton; Hutchinson Camp, Douglas Isle of Man
Günther Hoffstead b1921	German	1938	Isle of Man
Bronek Katz 1912-60	Polish	1936	
Eugen Karl Kauffmann (Eugene Charles Kent) 1892-1984	German	1933	
Arthur Korn 1891-1978	German	1937	Interned
Wilhelm (William) Kretchmer d 1984	German	c1938	
Berthold Lubetkin 1901-90	Georgian (part of the Russian Empire in 1901)	c1932	
Fredrick Lucas Marcus 1888-1975	German	c1939	Interned Isle of Man
László Moholy-Nagy 1895-1946	Hungarian	1935	
Peter Moro 1911-98	German	c1936	Huyton
László (Peter) Peri	Hungarian	1933	

1889-1967			
A.E. Proskauer (Aubrey Edward Prower) 1907-58	German	1933	
Michael Rachlis c1905- 53	Russian	1935	
Egon Riss c1901-64	Austrian	1938	
Eugene Rosenberg 1907-90	Slovakian (then part of Hungary)	1939	Interned – Australia
Hans Werner Rosenthal b1907	German	1936	Interned – Canada
Frederick Ruhemann 1891- 1982	German	1936	Interned
Walter Segal 1907-85	Romanian parents; brought up in Germany	1936	
Harry Seidler 1923- 2006	Austrian	1938	Interned – UK and Canada

Lafitte described internment as ‘a point at which ignorance and panic’ joined hands ‘with pigheaded reaction of the most dangerous character’, and while working for the research institute Political and Economic Planning was commissioned by Penguin books to gather evidence and testimonies about the internment process. His book was published in November 1940 with a print run of 50,000 copies and is marked by ‘indignation and amazement’ at the abuses committed and can be read as taking a stand on behalf of common sense and personal freedom against panic and arbitrary arrest.’⁶³ The book is full of testimonies, but two short extracts will suffice to indicate the dire conditions which internees found in the camps, the level of deprivation suffered and the emotional impact of being separated from their families. The descriptions in the book both described conditions at Huyton internment camp near Liverpool:

Completely shut up from the world. Barbed wire; watch towers with floodlights (...). No newspapers or wireless allowed. Wild rumours and therefore panic (...).Sanitary conditions scandalous. No soap, no toilet paper. No proper medical attendance. Higher danger of epidemics. People will all sorts of infectious diseases amongst

⁶³Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens*, 10.

others in crowded bedrooms and tents (...). Food is entirely insufficient and everyday absolutely the same.⁶⁴

Still no word from my wife. I do not know what to think (...) the people here wither away more and more from day to day. Due partly to the scarcity of food, partly due their worries. How long will all this last? The uncertainty wears us down (...).The catastrophe has come. A certain Mr Schiff has committed suicide in the cloakroom. It has gripped us all (...) all this is worse, because of the constant rumour that our women will be interned.⁶⁵

Lafitte's views were echoed in the liberal press and in subsequent parliamentary debates and in 1941 as the great invasion panic subsided a new Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison (1888-1965) reversed the policies denounced in Lafitte's book. Harry Seidler, who emigrated to England in 1938 after the *Anschluss*, was interned in both the UK and Canada and kept a diary of his experiences in which he declared the 4th October 1941 'the greatest day of my life (...) the day of my release.'⁶⁶

Émigré architects and the Modernist School

Despite the difficulties associated with resettlement in the 1930s émigré architects and designers were able to disseminate modernist ideas through books, exhibitions and commissions. When Walter Gropius' *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* was translated into English in 1935, the 'Introduction' was provided by Frank Pick (1878-1941) who praised the book for connecting architecture and everyday design so as to 'restore grace and order to society', with 'spatial harmonies' and 'functional qualities' making for 'a new architectonic arising out of a collective understanding of design in industry.'⁶⁷ In November of the same year Moholy-Nagy was involved with the artist and designer Edward Mcknight

⁶⁴Ibid., 107.

⁶⁵Ibid., 110-12.

⁶⁶<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/harry-seidler-351163.html> accessed September 2016. The diary, written in German, was published in English in 1986 as *Internment: the diaries of Harry Seidler, May 1940-October 1941* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987). For an interesting discussion on the impact of academics on the experience of being a refugee see Christian Fleck, 'Austrian Refugee Social Scientist' in Marks et al, *In Defence of Learning*, 193-210.

⁶⁷ Frank Pick, 'Introduction', in Walter Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), np.

Kauffer(1890-1954) in organising an exhibition against war and fascism.⁶⁸The following year, the architectural historian Nicholas Pevsner (1902-1983), another refugee from Germany, directly linked the Bauhaus to British architectural traditions in his *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* while Ernő Goldfinger designed a children's playroom as part of the Paris *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*.⁶⁹Lubetkin, Goldfinger, Gropius and Maholy-Nagy were all involved in the activities of MARS which from its inception had always intended to mount a public exhibition, but this was repeatedly deferred until 1938 when the 'New Architecture Exhibition' was at the New Burlington Galleries, London, between 11 and 29 January. Moholy-Nagy was directly involved in the exhibition's conception, but moved to the United States before its opening. The exhibition, which included the educationalist Sir Michael Sadler (1861-1943) as a patron, aimed to show that modern problems required modernist solutions, and a series of stands illustrated the ways in which research could reveal the architectural requirements of contemporary life. Goldfinger was responsible for the mother and child stand and the nursery school on display embodied all the ideals of the modern movement: light, air, space, freedom, no clutter or fuss. The exhibition attracted 7000 visitors and was described by Le Corbusier as 'a brilliant success' and a 'charming display of youth.'⁷⁰Meanwhile, Read had continued to promote the modernist cause including the work of artists such as Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948),⁷¹a close friend of Gropius, Gabo and Moholy-Nagy. Public interest in German art increased as more émigrés arrived in Britain and Read organized a survey exhibition in London of German art at the New Burlington Galleries in July and August 1938. The Exhibition of Twentieth Century German Art was conceived as a response to the Munich Entartete Kunst exhibition of 1937 which presented as 'degenerate' art 650 banned works of prominent avant-garde artists.⁷²The London exhibition was compromised though by the decision to maintain 'an apolitical stance and focus on artistic

⁶⁸Morris and Radford, *The story of the AIA*, 23-30; Margaret Heinemann, 'The People's Front and the Intellectuals', in *Britain, fascism and the popular front* ed., Jim Fyrth (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985), 164-165.

⁶⁹ Catherine Burke, *A life in education and architecture: Mary Beaumont Medd* (London: Ashgate, 2013), 69-70. Goldfinger also submitted a design for twenty-three storey block with communal facilities including a nursery and a school to the CIAM in Athens, 1933.

⁷⁰*Architectural Review* 83 (1938): 109; 'The MARS exhibition', *Architects' Journal* 87 (1938): 121-126; 'The MARS group exhibition', *RIBA Journal* 45 (1937-1938): 290-292.

⁷¹Read promoted contemporary German art in *Art Now*, first published in 1933 and reissued in several new editions in the 1930s, see Chambers and Orchard, *Schwitters in Britain*, 8, 13.

⁷²See Jacqueline Strecker, *Mad Square: Modernity in German art, 1910-1937* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2011), 255-289.

freedom rather than political comment’, thus aligning with the British government’s appeasement policies.⁷³



Figure 1: Brandlehow Primary School, Putney, London, design by Ernö Goldfinger (1952). Photograph by John Pantlin. © Courtesy of Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Collections.

Émigré architects also received commissions to design schools in England. Ernö Goldfinger was commissioned in 1934 by the Nursery School Association to design an inexpensive standardized timber nursery classroom. The design was later revised with the help of a young architect Mary Medd [née Crowley] (1907-2005) so that the parts could be multiplied to offer the flexibility to accommodate 40, 80 or 120 children.⁷⁴ It was an early form of prefabrication

⁷³ Emma Chamber, ‘Schwitters in Britain’, in Chambers and Orchard, *Schwitters in Britain*, 8. See, also, Bernard Causton, ‘Art in Germany under the Nazis’, *Studio* 112, no. 524 (November 1936): 235-246; Keith Holz, *Modern German art for thirties Paris, Prague and London* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 195-222, 234-36.

⁷⁴Burke, *A life in education and Architecture*, 70. See also Mark Dudek, *Kindergarten Architecture: Space for the Imagination. Second Edition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 38-39. Crowley took part in a competition with Goldfinger in 1939 to design a children’s refugee camp. She would become one of the most important architects designing schools in the post-war period in the UK. She had her training at the Architectural Association (AA) in London, 1927-32 (see Burke, *A life in education and Architecture*, passim). In 2017, the AA celebrated the centenary of the admission of the first female students to the AA with a series of events including a conference, an exhibition and a book:

and a prototype was erected but it never went into mass production. It was not until after the end of the Second World War that Goldfinger successfully applied his prefabrication techniques using concrete to design two schools in London – Westville Primary School, Hammersmith and Brandelhow Nursery School, Putney (Figure 1).⁷⁵ Walter Segal (1907-1985) arrived in England in 1936 and the following year produced a commended design for the *News Chronicle* schools competition.⁷⁶ Moholy-Nagy designed the interior colour scheme for a school in Cambridgeshire.⁷⁷

Eugen Karl Kauffmann (Eugene Charles Kent) (1892-1984) arrived in England as a refugee in 1933. Previously, while practicing in Frankfurt he became interested in school design and with Franz Kade (1893-1987), a local pedagogue, published in 1930 *Die neue Dorfschule* and was later commissioned to build a school in Wörsdorf. In England he designed an extension for King Alfred's School, Hampstead and worked with Godfrey Samuel on the redesign of Herrlingen School at Otterden.⁷⁸ The sculptor Peter Peri (1898-1967), who also arrived in England in 1933, was in the post-war period commissioned to create low-relief wall murals and sculptures in schools in Leicestershire and Warwickshire.⁷⁹ Peter Moro, who as mentioned before arrived in England in 1936, became an architectural assistant in the office of Tecton, the architectural firm founded by Berthold Lubetkin that was pioneering the emerging modern movement style in Britain.⁸⁰ It was Lubetkin, Moro wrote in his

Lynne Walker and Elizabeth Darling (eds.), *AA Women in Architecture 1917-2017* (London: AA Publications, 2017).

⁷⁵ Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor, *School* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 107.

⁷⁶ Benton, *A different world*, 212.

⁷⁷ David Elliott, 'Gropius in England: A documentation, 1934-1937', in Benton, *A different world*, 121.

⁷⁸ Benton, *A different world*, 174.

⁷⁹ Matthew Palmer, 'Peter Peri (1898-1967): An Artist of Our Time?', *Eger Journal of English Studies* 10 (2010): 113-135.

⁸⁰ With a lecture on architecture in the U.S.S.R., Lubetkin participated, for instance, in the 'Present-Day Building in Europe' public lectures series that were organised by the Architectural Association (AA) in 1937. See AA Archives, 'Present Day Building in Europe' Lecture Series, 1937, AA/02/05/03/05/03. In 2015, the RIBA International Prize replaced the Lubetkin Prize for International Architecture, which name is an indication of Lubetkin's importance to British architecture. The AA's secretary and architectural photographer Frank Yerbury (1885-1970) was another participant in the public lectures series in 1937, with a lecture on modern architecture in Holland. With his lectures, photobooks and approx. 200 journal articles he contributed largely to the introduction of modernism in the UK. Over 3,000 photographs document his visits and study trips to continental Europe, the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. See, for instance, Andrew Higgott, 'Frank Yerbury and the Representation of the New', in *Camera Constructs: Photography, Architecture and the Modern City* eds., Andrew

unpublished autobiography, 'who first opened my eyes to the real meaning of architecture, an art based on reason'. In 1938, Moholy-Nagy gave Moro his first solo commission to design the entrance screen to the 1938 MARS Group exhibition held at the Burlington Galleries, London, and opened by Le Corbusier. After the war he established Peter Moro and Partners and carried out mainly public sector projects, including Fairlawn Primary School, Lewisham, 1957, of which Ian Nairn wrote in his guide, *Modern Buildings in London* (1964), 'some buildings get in this book through architectural elegance, more – not enough – through being humane and friendly places to be in. A very few are both, and this is one of them.'⁸¹ Wilhelm Kretchmer and Joseph Berger both joined the London County Council school architecture department after the war, with the former being involved in the design of Burlington School, the Christopher Wren School, and later Holland Park Comprehensive School, London and the latter designed Woodberry Down School.⁸² In the early 1950s Eugene Rosenberg and Carl Franck both won commissions to design schools.⁸³ However, the most important modernist school design produced by a refugee architect emerged out of the meeting between Gropius and the educationalist Henry Morris.

Morris believed that art and architecture were 'silent teachers'⁸⁴ and had earlier outlined ambitious plans for the development in Cambridgeshire of the 'Village College' and Gropius confirmed Morris in the opinion of designing 'all contemporary buildings without regard to traditional style.' Morris was determined to employ Gropius and Fry to design Impington Village College (Figure 2) and with Pritchard raised the money to pay their fees. Morris described Gropius' plans for Impington as 'superb: a veritable architectural seduction, chaste and severe, but intense' and the following year declared the design 'a masterpiece'.⁸⁵ However, to reduce its cost, Fry reworked Gropius's design and supervised its construction

Higgott and Timothy Wray (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 23-34; Ian Jeffrey and Andrew Higgott, *Frank Yerbury: Itinerant Cameraman – Architectural Photographs, 1920-35* (London: AA Publications, 1987); Howard Robertson and F. R. Yerbury, *Travels in modern architecture 1925-1930* (London: AA Publications, 1989).

⁸¹Neil Bingham, 'Moro, Peter Meinhard (1911–1998)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/71142>, accessed 28 Sept 2016; <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-peter-moro-1179587.html>, accessed 29 September 2016.

⁸²Benton, *A different world*, 40, 178.

⁸³Benton, *A different world*, 153, 204; Burke and Grosvenor, *School*, 107-108.

⁸⁴Stuart Maclure, *Educational Development and School Building* (Harlow: Longman, 1984), 45

⁸⁵Elliott, 'Gropius in England,' 112.

after Gropius's departure for the USA in 1937.⁸⁶ The College opened in 1939 and Pevsner, the architectural historian, described it as 'one of the best buildings of its date in England, if not the best.'⁸⁷ Such was the impact of Impington that Read devoted a chapter to it in *Education through Art* (1943).



Figure 2: Village College, Impington: view from the west showing the assembly hall entrance and two-storey block containing the domestic science and art rooms, design by Edwin Maxwell Fry and Walter Gropius (1939). Photograph by Dell & Wainwright. © Courtesy of Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Collections.

For Read, the design epitomised a 'practical demonstration of idealism in education' and 'a rallying point for all reformers who realise the importance of the environment and the functional structure of the school.' Nothing about the design was 'extravagant or luxurious,' everything was 'natural, functional and practical' and it also offered a model vision for the urban where there would be 'one large school in its own park' rather than the current 'five or six schools in back streets'. Such schools would embody 'our new ideals' and their building

⁸⁶ Powers, 'Fry, (Edwin) Maxwell (1899–1987)', accessed 28 Sept 2016.

⁸⁷ Grosvenor, "The Art of Seeing", 522-523. Gropius and Fry also designed a Village School for Papworth in 1937. The project was never realised although it was published in *Circle – An International Survey of Modern Art* edited by the architect John Leslie Martin (1908-2000), Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo.

would be greatly accelerated by the use of ‘pre-fabricated units’.⁸⁸ Impington continues today to attract attention and in 2015 was named as one of the ten most outstanding school designs in the United Kingdom.⁸⁹

The avant-garde and the making of the modern school

Over the last two decades there has been a growing interest in the exploration of ‘transnational history’.⁹⁰ This work has focused in general on understanding the ‘movement, ebb and circulation’ of ideas across borders and in particular on the ‘introduction, transmission, reception and appropriation of ideas’ through the process of cultural transfer.⁹¹ It is clear that the process of cultural transfer is at the core of this paper. Mass emigration from Europe in the 1930s brought ‘first hand advocacy’ of modernism to Britain and networks of change were mobilised through formal and informal professional relations. The circulation of ideas was though a product of forced movement as economic and political refugees sought greater security for themselves and their families. For some Britain proved to be a transitory ‘home’. Fear of invasion, economic uncertainty, the experience of being declared ‘enemy aliens’ and interned, and offers of employment matching their skills led many émigré architects and designers to migrate to the United States, including Gropius and Moholy-Nagy. Refugees arrived in Britain seeking safety and instead by 1940 were classed as ‘aliens’ and their liberty removed. It was as one politician stated ‘one of the most discreditable incidents in the whole history of this country,’⁹² and as another declared: ‘Frankly, I shall not feel happy, either as an Englishman or as a supporter of this Government, until this bespattered page of our history has been cleaned up and rewritten.’⁹³

⁸⁸ Herbert Read, *Education through Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 1944) pviii, 290-95.

⁸⁹ Ian Grosvenor, ‘From looking to seeing, or this was the future,’ in Kate Darian-Smith and Julie Willis (eds.), *Designing Schools. Space, Place and Pedagogy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017) 17.

⁹⁰ See, with regard to avant-garde, Piotr Piotrowski, ‘Toward a horizontal history of the European avant-garde’, in Bru et al., *Europa? Europa!*, 49-58.

⁹¹ See, e.g., Stefan Manz and Panikos Panayi, ‘Refugees and cultural transfer to Britain: An introduction’, *Immigrants & Minorities* 30, no. 2-3 (2012): 122-151; Gabriela Ossenbach and Maria del Mar del Pozo, ‘Postcolonial models, cultural transfers and transnational perspectives in Latin America: A research agenda,’ *Paedagogica Historica* 47, no. 5 (2011): 579-600.

⁹² Lord Cecil, House of Lords, 6 August 1940, quoted in Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens*, 144.

⁹³ Major Cazalet, House of Commons, 22 August 1940, quoted in Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens*, v.

Nevertheless, the émigré architects did leave a footprint on the English architectural landscape, to an extent even that in England modern architecture had been substantially an *émigré* phenomenon.⁹⁴ Miriam Bratu Hansen coined the phrase ‘vernacular modernism’ with which to describe ‘a whole range of cultural and artistic practices that register, respond to, and reflect on processes of modernization and the experience of modernity’⁹⁵ This is a useful phrase as it also captures the importance of place. Émigré architects brought with them ideas which changed the language of modern architecture, but at the same time they also absorbed or accommodated the ‘local.’ The transnational space onto which the avant-garde opened was one of tradition.⁹⁶ Impington, Herbert Read’s ‘practical demonstration of idealism in education’, is a case in point as the architect Charles Holden (1875-1960), who endorsed the project, noted:

Mr Fry brings to the partnership feeling for the English tradition and a highly developed practical sense, while Professor Gropius possesses one of the most original architectural minds of our time, deeply interested in the social aspect of building and most accomplished using all the results of modern research.⁹⁷

Refugees transported modernist ideas into Britain, but the combination of estrangement, displacement, and accommodation undoubtedly had an impact.⁹⁸ Edward Said in his *Reflections on Exile* (1984) foreground the lived experiences of refugees and pointed to the creative possibilities inherent in the status of exile:

Seeing ‘the entire world as a foreign land’ makes possible originality of vision. Most people are aware of one culture, one setting, one home, exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions ... For an exile, habits of life, expressions or activity in the new

⁹⁴ Alan Powers, *Britain: Modern architecture in history* (London: Reaktion, 2007), 49.

⁹⁵ Miriam Bratu Hansen, ‘The mass production of the senses: Classical cinema as vernacular modernism’, in *Reinventing film studies* eds., Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 333.

⁹⁶ Sascha Bru, ‘Borderless Europe, decentring avant-garde, mosaic modernism’, in Bru et al., *Europa? Europa!*, 8.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Elliot, ‘Gropius in England’, 120.

⁹⁸ As John Berger wrote in 1968 after the death of Peter Peri, ‘[he] was an exile ... He carried with him in his face a passport to an alternative world ... a world, which he was physically forced to abandon but which metaphysically he carried with him,’ John Berger, ‘Peter Peri’ in John Berger, *Selected Essays* ed., Geoff Dyer (Bloomsbury : London, 2001) 171-2.

environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally.⁹⁹

It may be in the context of this contrapuntal condition that we can best understand how first hand advocacy of modernist ideas, coupled with an originality of vision born of displacement and exile gradually achieved traction in the English architectural landscape as the transnational became filtered through the ‘local.’

Impington opened as war was declared and by the early 1940s the war, with its enormous social and civic upheaval, stimulated the idea of a national democratic project of reconstruction which informed legislation, planning texts, radio broadcasts and educational manuals (Figure 3).¹⁰⁰ It was an idea informed by a desire for an educational landscape populated by ‘modern schools’ for ‘modern times’ and ‘modern childhoods.’ Wartime devastation, a rising population, and a shortage of raw materials created an urgency for this project to be delivered. 16,000 schools in Britain had been commandeered by military and defence forces and 5,000 schools had been damaged by bombing. In London alone, of the 1,200 schools in use in 1939, only 50 had not been damaged or demolished by 1945.¹⁰¹ Innovations developed in the 1930s came to the fore with architects delivering schools which were flexible in design, utilized prefabricated materials and were economical. Emigré architects all designed schools which reflected both the modernist visual imagination and concerns with democratic, mass produced buildings.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Edward W. Said, ‘Reflections on Exile’, *Granta*, 13, 1984 reprinted in *Out There: Marginalisation and Contemporary Cultures* eds., Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh. T Min-ha and Cornel West (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) 358.

¹⁰⁰ This poster, printed along with two other similar posters on re-housing and health, was designed by Abram Games (1914-1996) to be issued to the forces through the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA). The text says: ‘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’” The image shows a vision of a future urban Britain and plays with the contrast between the old and the new, with the open architecture of Impington Village College representing the new and a roofless bomb damaged classroom representing the old, see <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/10296>, accessed 28 Sept 2016.

¹⁰¹ Burke and Grosvenor, *School*, 93.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 107-108. Catherine Burke, ‘Creativity in school design’, in *The Routledge international handbook of creative learning* eds., Julian Sefton-Green, Pat Thomson, Ken Jones and Liora Bresler (London/New York: Routledge, 2011), 421.



Figure 3: Your Britain – Fight for it Now (School), poster by Abram Games for the Army Bureau

of Current Affairs (1942). © Courtesy of Imperial War Museum (Art.IWM PST 2907).

However, for many children attending a ‘modern school’ failed to be a reality. To take just primary schools in England and Wales, a school building survey of 1962 identified that 44% of pupils were being taught in buildings erected before 1902. The survey also showed that 26% of primary schools had no warm water supply for pupils, 25% had no central heating system, 40% were classed as being of a sub-standard site – having less than two-thirds of the area prescribed as necessary by the 1959 School Building Regulations—and 66% had outdoor toilets.¹⁰³ In part this situation was due to the economic austerity of the decade which followed the end of the War, but it was also a consequence of a conservatism that was resilient in the architectural profession (and society) well into the 1950s. A conservatism which Maxwell Fry alluded to when he reflected in the 1970s about the impact of the Bauhaus vision on England: ‘[W]e realised that the task he [Gropius] set us would last our life-time, that we were concerned now not with architecture alone, but with society.’¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³See Nicholas Bullock, *Building the post-war world: Modern architecture and reconstruction in Britain* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁰⁴Fry, *Autobiographical sketches*, 147.

