RETHINKING MODERNISM

The Sugden House
&
The Mother’s House

A thesis submitted to the University of Wales in candidature for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

By

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Summary

This thesis is primarily concerned with how two important buildings of the twentieth century – the Sugden House, 1955-56, by Alison and Peter Smithson and the Mother’s House, 1959-64, by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown – have provided significant critiques of post-war architecture. Playing with ‘ordinary and vernacular imagery’, each house represents an alternative to what both pairs of architects saw as the reductive limitations of modern architecture and this study looks closely at the similarities and differences between them.

Reviews of the Smithsons’ and the Venturis’ early education years and the post-war architectural development that they found themselves in as young architects are presented. They revealed that while both the Smithsons and the Venturis were moving in overlapping circles, they were also similarly searching for an alternative to modernism by examining contemporary art thinking and sociology.

Despite the similarities, further examination revealed profound differences between the design approaches of the Smithsons and the Venturis. The critical analysis chapters of this study show that the Smithsons’ architecture demonstrate strong allegiance to Modernist thought in its prohibition against decoration or ornament, whereas the Venturis relied on explicit historical details and references to meet the contingencies of location and use. The Sugden House is consistently committed to the idea of functionalism in its direct, natural and honest take on materiality and construction, while the Mother’s House is mostly ambiguous, inclusive and is made up of residual spaces and detached skins. In urban planning terms, the Sugden House represents a new order to the city, one that sensitively rose from a deep understanding of family and community needs, whereas the Mother’s House represents an acceptance of suburbia and its noisy tendencies, a non-judgmental acceptance of ‘what people’ want.

A review of the Smithsons’ and the Venturis’ architectural vocabulary in subsequent projects and the influences of the houses on contemporary architecture confirms further the disparity of their approaches. It is suggested, at the end of this thesis, that the Sugden House’s influence is perhaps more enduring than the Mother’s House because it is grounded on the concrete – inhabitation, tectonics and functionalism – rather than matters of style and meaning.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

This study is an attempt to look at how two important buildings of the twentieth century- the Sugden House, 1955-56 by Alison and Peter Smithson and the Mother's House, 1959-64 by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown1 - have shaped Modern architecture in Britain and America. The houses were built amidst their designers' formulation of significant polemics and manifestos that went on to change the course of Modernism: the Smithsons with the New Brutalism2, 1955 and the Venturis, with Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture3, 1961 and Learning from Las Vegas4, 1972. The Smithsons and the Venturis belong to a small group of architects for whom writing and building have been mutually necessary; the writing necessary to the building, as inspiration and justification; the building necessary to the writing, as realisation and demonstration. It is their ability to do just that that singled them out from the rest. They are considered significant intellectuals who powerfully summarised the direction which architecture might go. As David Dunster has remarked of the Smithsons, an observation which I suggest is also applicable to the Venturis, (They are) '.....always writing with one eye on the drawing board, never travelling with words alone but always sensitive to the meanings which words on architecture so rarely adequately convey.'5

Both houses were built within the quarter century following the Second World War, which is seen by many as a time of uncertainty and where developed an obsession in

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1 The house was mainly designed by Robert Venturi, while Denise Scott Brown gave comments on the last versions of the design. She also contributed to Venturi's Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. She wrote: 'I read and commented on the manuscript of the Complexity and Contradictions in Architecture, and critted the final version of the Mother's House.' They started full collaboration in projects in 1969 when Scott Brown joined Venturi's firm as a partner. Confirmed by Robert Venturi in an e-mail to author dated 7th July 2003 and by Denise Scott Brown in an email dated 20th August 2004.
the search for new forms and new directions. William J. Curtis wrote, for example, of the dilemma confronting young committed architects during the period:

‘...should he pretend that there was a core of modern architectural principles which he ought to uphold to get modern architecture back on its true path? Should he maintain that the modern spirit require a constant quest for innovation in relationship to changing technologies and values? Or should he perhaps abandon the operation of modern architecture as one which was failing, and turn to other traditions in his formulation of a language?’

Alison and Peter Smithson, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, all born in the 1920s and 1930s, had their early years as architects strongly impressed by the search for a new direction in the post-war period. Their vocabularies were similarly established against the background of the expiring modernism of the twenties and thirties, and both turned to the late works of the masters, such as Le Corbusier, Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, in their own search for an architecture of greater robustness and complexity.

Both the Smithsons and the Venturis did not reject the idea of modern architecture but are concerned with revitalizing the genuine traditions and principles in terms of mid-century programs just as Le Corbusier was concerned with reorienting the architecture of the twenties in terms of vital issues of that day. The Smithsons wrote in their book, Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-1972, for example:

‘When Le Corbusier assembled Vers Une Architecture, he gave to young architects everywhere a way of looking at the emergent machine-served society, and from that, a way of looking at antiquity and rationale to support his personal aesthetic. In this essay, based on material written between 1955 and 1972, we try to do the same as these architects before us. ....We write to make ourselves see what we have got in the inescapable present......to give another interpretation of the same ruins......to show a glimpse of another aesthetic.’

Robert Venturi rejected the reductive limitations and blandness of ‘orthodox modern architecture’ in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, published in 1966. However, ‘orthodox modern architecture’ turned out to mean not so much the entire architectural production of the previous century as Venturi singled out both Le Corbusier and Alvar Aalto for special praise, but more of the simplistic modern design that had been prevalent in America in the post-war period. Venturi, for example, wrote, ‘….the characteristics of complexity and contradiction in their (Aalto and Le Corbusier’s) work are often ignored or misunderstood’. However, as with the Smithsons, he strongly feels that architecture now should respond to a very present position:

‘At the same time that the problems increase in quantity, complexity and difficulty they also change faster than before….. And today the wants of program, structure, mechanical equipment and expression, even in single buildings in simple contexts are diverse and conflicting in ways previously unimaginable.’

Measuring their task by the highest of standards, the Smithsons and the Venturis believed that their polemics were in the direct line of development of the Modern Movement. Like the modern masters before them, both pairs of architects set out a similar search for an architecture valid for contemporary times and they seem to have met intellectually at the Sugden House, 1955-56 (Figure 1. 1) and the Mother’s House, 1959-64 (Figure 1. 2). Playing on scale, symmetry and imagery derived from the typical suburban house, both buildings demonstrate their designers’ similar interest in the architectural expression ‘ugly and ordinary’. Drawing from these empirical observations, a potential exists within this research to broaden the discussion of the Smithsons’ and the Venturis’ work. Hence, the main objective of

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9 Ibid, pp.18

this study is to look at the similarities and differences between the designers' theory and practice that revolved around both houses.

Figure 1. 1 : The Sugden House 1955-56

Figure 1. 2: The Mother's House 1959-64

One of the first points to establish is the trail of connections between the lives and works of the Smithsons and the Venturis. Chapter Two looks at the education and early activities of both pairs of architects, which are crucial in enabling a deeper understanding of their maturing design ideas. This chapter takes a close look at their
student projects, influential individuals who have taught them and their cohorts at the university. Chapter Three focuses on the post-war architectural development that the Smithsons and the Venturis found themselves in as young architects. Their early work is also examined as they provided important critiques of post-war architecture of both sides of the Atlantic in the fifties and sixties, which was then dominated by various strains of modernism. This chapter continues by looking at the important roles they played in the architectural debate of the eternal dialectic of opposing poles between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ approach prevalent during this period.

Chapter Four extends the examination on the similarities and differences between the two pairs of architects’ work, giving particular focus to their references to the ordinary and existing in their approaches. In this context, the ‘as found’ theory is of prime relevance, as is the influence of the Independent Group and American Pop Art in the Smithsons’ and the Venturis’ respective search for a modern vernacular. This chapter will firstly attempt to demonstrate the parallels in the architects’ examinations of the existing, in particular those shaped by popular and commercial culture. The discussion will continue by examining how the architects dealt with popular culture and commercial artefacts in their acceptance of the ordinary. The theories behind their architecture that facilitated the assimilation of these artefacts into the aesthetics and form of their buildings will also be examined in detail.

Chapter Five, on the other hand, attempts to establish the trail of connections between the Smithsons and Venturis in the fifties and sixties. It looks at the overlapping circles they seem to be moving in. This chapter starts off by looking at Team 10 activities on both sides of the Atlantic and the role the Graduate School of Fine Arts at the Pennsylvania University played in encouraging the transatlantic connection. In this context, Louis Kahn emerges as a central figure because of his role in the development of architectural philosophies and idioms of both British and American groups. Kahn’s influence is examined in detail as he played a particularly important role in shaping Robert Venturi’s architectural thinking in the early years as well as that of the Smithsons.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight are case study chapters, and each examines in detail the architecture of Sugden House and the Mother’s House. While Chapter Six looks at
the procurement and composition of both houses, Chapter Seven provides a critical analysis of both houses in comparison under relevant headings such as functionalism, ambiguity, materiality, ornamentation, signs and language. Chapter Eight studies the urbanistic character of both houses: their role and relation to others in an existing urban tissue and their new urban functions in town planning terms.

After having examined in great detail the Smithsons' and the Venturis' architectural thinking in theory and practice revolving around the Sugden House and the Mother's House, Chapter Nine proceeds to look at how such ideas helped shape later projects. A careful selection of later works by both pairs of architects are put together for comparison and analysis, in order to examine the impact the early houses had on their subsequent work. This is followed closely by looking at their influences on the architecture of the present day. Chapter Ten concludes this study.
Chapter 2
The Education Years

Introduction
This chapter looks at the education and early activities of both the Smithsons and the Venturis. The examination of their early architectural development is crucial in enabling a deeper understanding of each pair of architects' architectural thinking in the design of the Sugden House and the Mother's House. This chapter takes a closer look at their student projects, individuals who have taught them and their cohorts at university, as well as their early practice and teaching activities, which have all contributed to the shaping of their architectural thinking.

Figure 2.1: The Smithsons

The Smithsons
Born in Stockton-on-Tees in 1923, Peter Denham Smithson met Alison Gill, born in Sheffield in 1928, when they were both studying at the school of architecture at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, then part of Durham University. Peter Smithson had started the architecture course first in 1939 but was forced to interrupt his studies when he was
enlisted in the army in 1942 to serve with Queen Victoria’s Own Madras Sappers and Miners in India and Burma. Peter Smithsons was assigned to the engineers, where he said ‘he got to know all about carrying and assembling Bailey Bridges’¹. Bombay was the first foreign town that Peter had ever been in, and it made an enormous impression.

At the architecture school in Newcastle, the Smithsons met a number of people who later became influential in shaping British architecture in the post-war years. In Peter Smithson’s first year at the school, he met Gordon Ryder, who later teamed up with Jack Lynn, another Newcastle student, to enter the Golden Lane Competition as the Smithsons had done in 1952². Like the Smithsons’ entry³ (Figure 2.2), Ryder and Lynn’s proposal had broad and open access ways at every third floor level. However, while the Smithsons had proposed a development prototype where high level decks will link-up throughout the city, Ryder and Lynn’s proposal involved a simple, formal and symmetrical arrangement of four blocks demonstrating Lubetkin’s influence⁴, for whom Ryder worked for after Newcastle. While Peter left Newcastle to join the army half way through his studies, Ryder who was unable to do so, stayed on to finish and then, teach⁵. He taught Alison in her first year. Alison Smithson, according to Robin Middleton in his article of 1967, was ‘one of a febrile and active group of students – the others were David

¹ Bailey Bridge is a demountable steel bridge system devised during the Second World War for the Royal Engineers by Sir Donald Bailey. Carolin, Peter (editor), Reflections on Hunstanton, arq: vol 2: summer 1997.
² The competition attracted interest and a large number of entries because it focussed on the post-war agenda of providing quality high-density housing. Chamberlain, Powell & Bon won the competition, while the Smithsons were unplaced. The results of the competition were extensively reported in the architectural press, for example, Golden Lane Housing Competition, The Architect’s Journal, 6th March 1952, pp.298-310 & pp.358-62.
³ The Smithsons entry consists of 16-storey wall of housing in a brutal, no-nonsense aesthetic, with pedestrian decks at ground and upper levels crossing the site, linking at ground level to the surrounding streets. Each individual unit was provided with a high-level ‘yard’ or private open space which owed its inspiration not only to Le Corbusier but to the Smithsons’ encounters with the patterns of life in the East End.
⁴ Berthold Lubetkin is an outstanding architect of the thirties in England. He had studied in Paris at the Atelier Perret, where he had been initiated into the secrets of reinforced-concrete construction, and had absorbed the principles of Le Corbusier’s ‘five points of architecture’. As principle of Tecton, he has designed a number of well-known works such as the Penguin Pool at the London Zoo and the High Point flats in London, both in 1933. Tecton was also active in post-war reconstruction. One of the projects they carried out was the design for flats at the Spa Green for Finsbury Borough Council between 1946-50.
Witham, Ronald Simpson and Jack Lynn. Jack Lynn, soon after Golden Lane, teamed up with Ivor Smith to build the infamous Park Hill flats in Sheffield in 1957. In many ways, these flats translated into practice the new ideas explored by Lynn and the Smithsons in their entries for the Golden Lane Competition.

Figure 2.2: Golden Lane Housing, 1952, Alison & Peter Smithson

After the war, Peter Smithson returned to Newcastle in 1945 to complete the remaining two years of his course. Sir William Whitfield, then a young tutor at Durham, had described Peter Smithson as an exceptional student. In 1946, Peter Smithson won two

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6 *Ibid*
8 Sir William Whitfield is a successful architect who worked on many projects, one of which is the Masterplan of Paternoster Square, London.
scholarships. The first enabled him to do some drawing in London and Cambridge, while another enabled him to travel to Scandinavia. Scandinavian architecture, particularly that of the Swedish was minimally affected by the war compared to its neighbouring countries and could continue to explore architecture and building almost uninterrupted. Swedish architecture received considerable attention in Britain since the 1940s as it illustrated one way in which the modernism of the 1930s might be given a regional flavour and adapt to the qualities of a particular country. Gunnar Asplund’s memorial volume had been published in 1943 and there was a teacher at the school of architecture in Newcastle, Tom Ellis, who was interested in Asplund and Scandinavian draughtsmanship. In Sweden, Peter Smithson met Steen Eiler Rasmussen and Sven Markelius, and visited the Gothenburg Law Courts. He visited Asplund’s buildings including the South Cemetery in Stockholm, 1939 (Figure 2. 3). Peter Smithson also came across Sigurd Lewerentz’ Chapel of Resurrection, which impressed him, and of which he later remarked ‘was then beyond me’. In Denmark, he went to see Arne Jacobsen in Klampenborg.

Upon his return to Newcastle, he was assigned a design project, which was to be a final one before he graduated. Peter Smithson designed a crematorium at Gosforth (Figure 2.4), which was strongly influenced by Asplund’s South Cemetery in design and

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10 One of the first presentations of a modern architecture that seemed to depart from the International Style canon of the 1930s was the Review’s treatment of Sweden in September 1943 under the title ‘Swedish Peace in War’, where the editors presented Sweden as a country that Britain might emulate to advantage when setting about the task of reconstruction. See Swedish Peace in War, a Special Number on Sweden, The Architectural Review, September 1943.


12 Tom Ellis (1911-88) was later a partner in Lyons, Israel and Ellis, whose most important work had been the ‘Old Vic’ Theatre Workshops, 1958. Tom Ellis’ best known piece of writing is probably The Discipline of the Route published in Architectural Design, October and November 1960.


14 Sven Markelius (1989-72) was Professor of Architecture at the Royal Institute of Technology and City architect of Stockholm.

15 Smithson, Peter, Reflections on Hunstanton, arq, vol. 2, summer 1997, pp.34
draughting technique. The design contains a series of parallel and perpendicular buildings of simple volumes and articulation set along the edge of a lake. The design of the buildings can be seen as a first attempt at an ‘anonymous’ architecture and ‘calm’ grouping, which the Smithsons would pursue in later projects in their search for architecture ‘without rhetoric’. After his degree, he stayed on to study Town Planning and later to act as a studio assistant, in which capacity he taught his future wife and collaborator, Alison Gill.

Figure 2.3: South Cemetery, Eskende, Stockholm, 1939, Erik Gunnar Asplund

Figure 2.4: Crematorium, Gosforth Park, Newcastle, 1947

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The Move to London

Peter Smithson's ex-serviceman's grant was still available, so in 1948, he travelled to London to study at the Royal Academy Schools under Albert Richardson (1880-1964), who later became a Professor of Architecture at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College, London. Richardson's studio assistant was Marshall Sisson - a 'rabid classicist', according to Smithson. Under the direction of both men, Peter Smithson drew for eight to ten hours a day, with no lectures and classes to attend, which he found enjoyable. Among other things, he did drawings and watercolours of Somerset House and Wren churches.

Whilst Peter was studying in the Royal Academy, Alison Smithson was then still in Newcastle completing her final (fifth) year. Peter Smithson, had written then from London that he had discovered Mies in Phillip Johnson's book. Alison Smithson had received The Architect's Journal on a student subscription and on the 3rd January 1946 issue, there had been the first publications of Mies's work at ITT. When she came across it, she send the tear sheets of two articles, where the first full page illustration was a close-up perspective of part of a corner (Figure 2.5). Growing up in South Shields, Tyneside and taken by her father to visit the shipyards, Alison Smithson recalled in 1985 that it was 'quite incomprehensible why anyone should draw large, a rolled steel beam and stanchion and some brick joints. Bare steel sections for me had been the derelict shipyards of the 1930s, were the gantries of the shipyards; rivetted or welded, they were the skeletons of the ships'.

Peter Smithson completed two postgraduate projects at the Royal Academy, one of which was an extension to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Figure 2.6). An assembly of rolled steel section, metal and glass panels, the project followed Mies in a student way. He later wrote that, 'Mies's work interested me because it seemed a pure way of building

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19 Smithson, Peter, Reflections on Great Yarmouth, arq, vol. 2, summer 1997, pp.34.
and was something I could be capable of.23 Alison Smithson also designed a museum for her final student thesis at Newcastle for the Royal Academy in one of the most prominent riverside site in London: the South Bank24 (Figure 2. 7). As with the Fitzwilliam Museum, the design was inspired by the Modern Movement. Nevertheless, with its play of white cubic volumes, it was the vocabulary of Le Corbusier of the heroic period rather than that of Mies that was explored by Alison Smithson. Leslie Martin, then working on the design of the Royal Festival Hall25 on the same site, was the external examiner.

Figure 2. 5: ITT corner detail

Figure 2. 6: Extension to Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 1948-49, Peter Smithson

23 Peter Smithson in Carolin, Peter(editor), Reflections on Hunstanton, arq: Vol 2: summer 1997, pp.35.
25 The Royal Festival Hall was the first public building of significance built in Britain after the war. Designed by Sir Leslie Martin, it provided an opportunity to examine the response of the Modern Movement at the end of the 1940s to the challenge of designing a building that went beyond merely utilitarian concerns.
When the war ended there was much reconstruction to be done, but with few resources, most reconstruction work was carried out and financed by the local government departments. As a consequence, many of the jobs for architects were in the local government departments. Alison and Peter got married and moved to London in 1949, and together they joined the London County Council (LCC), where most of the brightest architectural graduates aspired to work, and consequently where the significant architectural debate occurred. Alison Smithson was assigned to the school division of the Council and there, she worked on an adapted ‘Hills’ system. It is a modular system widely used for prefabricated schools originally developed by the Hertfordshire County Architects Department. Whilst the Fitzwilliam Museum by Peter Smithson can be seen as a precursor to the design of the Hunstanton School in Norfolk, 1951, the exposure to prefabrication at LCC can be seen as a secondary input. The experience gained from the latter gave them the ability to detail the slim steel sections at Hunstanton (See figure 3. 16, Chapter Three) and to appreciate the beauty of assembly of raw materials.

Whilst working for the LCC they won the open competition for Hunstanton, only six months after Alison Smithson’s graduation. Their success with Hunstanton allowed them
to set up in practice together, with an office in South Kensington, and a flat above. This was the start of their meteoric rise to fame. Hunstanton defined a new approach to modernist architecture – called *New Brutalism* a few years later\(^\text{26}\) - that exploited the low cost and pragmatism of mass-produced materials and prefabricated materials, the aesthetic purity of traditional Japanese architecture and that of Mies van der Rohe.

By the time the Smithsons were working on the Sugden House, they had become the central figures not only in avant-garde architectural circles, but on broader cultural scene in 1950s London. They became firm friends with Reyner Banham, who had a history of art background, and had studied under Rudolf Wittkower at the Courtauld Institute. He was also an apologist for the Modernist position and was central to the London cultural scene in the early fifties. Together with other young architects such as Peter Carter and Colin St. John Wilson (Sandy), the Smithsons used to gather at the Banhams’ place to discuss the direction of contemporary architecture. Robert Maxwell recalled that: ‘*A focus for the scene was provided by Mary Banham, whose Sunday mornings in Oppidans Mews were a regular feature of life*\(^\text{27}\). This group of young architects was also associated with the Independent Group (IG), formed from the wider membership of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), as they shared similar pre-occupations for the search for form and content as well as vitality of modern life.\(^\text{28}\) For the IG, the secret was to look closely at pop culture and the realities of daily life. Through activities at the ICA, the Smithsons also formed a lasting friendship with two IG members in particular: Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi. They have collaborated closely on a number of art projects, which will be covered in greater detail in the ensuing chapters.

The Beaux-Arts Training of Robert Venturi

The Venturis, unlike the Smithsons, were born oceans apart. In fact, they did not meet until 1960, when Venturi was thirty-five and Scott Brown, twenty-nine. Robert Venturi

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was born in 1925 to Italian immigrant parents. His father’s father, a builder, had travelled from the Abruzzi region, east of Rome on the Adriatic Sea to Philadelphia, where he established himself as a produce merchant. Venturi’s father took over the business at sixteen, and he became a prosperous wholesaler, moving to suburban Upper Darby of Philadelphia when he married in 1924. His mother, Vanna Venturi, was born to poor immigrants from the region of Apuglia in southeastern Italy. She was a fiercely independent woman interested in literature and liberal causes. She had encouraged Robert Venturi’s penchant for history, as she was particularly interested in furniture and fashion. Venturi possesses an encyclopaedic knowledge of furniture, and can date almost any dress since the eighteenth century within a few years.

Figure 2. 8: Robert Venturi around the time of his graduation from Princeton University, 1947 and Denise Scott Brown, 1949

Denise Scott Brown was born Denise Lakofski in 1931 in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) in 1931. Her parents, both children of Latvian and Lithuanian émigrés, were born in Rhodesia. Her mother had studied architecture for two years at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa and Denise Scott Brown recalled growing up thinking that architecture was woman’s work29. The Lakofskis moved to Johannesburg when Scott Brown was two, and there, her father prospered as a businessman. She followed her mother’s footsteps to the University of Wittwatersrand, first to study the liberal arts program and later switched to the architecture program in her second year. The program stressed technical proficiency over recent architectural history

29 Scott Brown, Denise, A Worm’s Eye View of Recent Architectural History, Architectural Record, February 1984, pp.79.
or theory, but in which a respected tradition of early modern architecture prevailed and social questions in architecture and politics were of intense concern\textsuperscript{30}.

As with Denise Scott Brown, Robert Venturi knew from a very young age that he wanted to become an architect\textsuperscript{31}. He started his formal training in architecture at Princeton in 1944, at a time when the school was resistant to the modernizing trend of architectural education, epitomized by Walter Gropius’ transformation of Harvard into an American Bauhaus. Princeton studios were then still organized in the Beaux Arts manner\textsuperscript{32}, and the most influential instructors included the noted French Beaux-Arts-trained architectural design critic Jean Labatut and Donald Drew Egbert, a social and art historian. Both had been Venturi’s closest mentors at Princeton and their teaching inspired Venturi to take the path towards a historically informed architecture\textsuperscript{33}. The work of Frank Lloyd Wright has also had an impact on Venturi as a student. When he was young, he recalls having to take a stand: ‘you were for Wright or you were for Mies. I was a Wright man.’\textsuperscript{34} Indeed his undergraduate projects demonstrate his stylistic predilection for Frank Lloyd Wright


\textsuperscript{31} Venturi’s father who dreamed of becoming an architect, encouraged his son to become one. Venturi recalls that since a very early age, he knew he wanted to become an architect. For description of Venturi’s family, early years, see Venturi, Robert, \textit{Upbringing Among Quakers}, in Cateaua, Lida Brandi, \textit{Growing Up Italian}, William Morrow and Company, New York, 1987, pp.195-201.

\textsuperscript{32} For more description of Venturi’s education at Princeton, see Van Zanten, David, \textit{The Princeton System and the Founding of the School of Architecture, 1915-1920}, in Mead, Christopher, \textit{The architecture of Robert Venturi}, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1989, pp.34-44.

\textsuperscript{33} Venturi, reminiscing of the influence of his mentors, wrote: ‘Labatut, a convinced Modernist..., brilliantly illuminated principles of Modern design for us students as well, but Modern architecture for him did not represent “the word”. It was not a culmination for all time, but rather, a vocabulary appropriate for our time. He saw Modern architecture as a beginning, not an end – and a beginning interpreted in the context of history..... And history, for Labatut and Donald Drew Egbert....was not a way to prove points, but an objective basis for enriching our vision, and an instrument, ultimately, for liberating our work.’ (Emphasis in original). See Venturi, Robert, \textit{Essay Derived from the Acceptance Speech, the Madison Medal, Princeton University} (written 1985), in Venturi, Robert, \textit{Iconography and Electronics upon a Generic Architecture: A View from a Drafting Room}, The MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts & London, England, 1996, pp.94.

(Figure 2. 9). In 1948, Venturi travelled to Europe for the first time, touring sites around England where he saw works by baroque architects John Vanburgh and Nicholas Hawksmoor, and in France, Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye. His travel climaxed when he reached Rome, inaugurating a life long affair with the city of almost infinite layerings of history, and all the varieties of classical architecture.

Figure 2. 9: Half-way Cabin, Junior Sketch Problem, Princeton University, 1945

Figure 2. 10: Robert Venturi’s master thesis at Princeton titled *Context in Architectural Composition*, a design for a new chapel for the Episcopal Academy

Venturi returned to Princeton to complete his graduate year in 1949. His final master’s thesis project (Figure 2. 10), titled *Context in Architectural Composition* was a demonstration of the importance of context on the expression of building. The first part
of the thesis refers to an analysis of various historical and contemporary exemplars, such as urban spaces of Rome, nineteenth century American houses, modernist houses, twentieth century apartments, all chosen for their positive response and effect to setting. This analysis informs a design problem, which is a chapel for the Episcopal Academy in Pennsylvania. Here, we find a research and design method that bears strong resemblance to Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. One of his external examiners for this project had been Louis Kahn who was impressed with the young student’s work.

After completion of his education at Princeton, Venturi went to work for Oscar Storono\textsuperscript{35}, Kahn’s former partner. In Storono’s office, Venturi was involved in the design of an exhibition on the work of Frank Lloyd Wright at the Gimbel’s departmental store in Philadelphia and the Strozzi’s Palace in Florence. In 1951, Venturi moved on to work for Eero Saarinen in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, of which he wrote. ‘*I was a Wright man, which was not a popular position when I worked in Saarinen’s office in the early fifties.*’ Nevertheless, he worked there for two years, before coming home to Philadelphia to take over the family wholesale business from his ailing father. While running the business, Venturi also began to work for Kahn and teach at the University of Pennsylvania as Kahn’s assistant. In February 1954, he won a Rome Prize Fellowship to the American Academy in Rome. He left in October and spent the next two years in Italy. There he continued his explorations that he had begun in 1948 and immersed himself increasingly in all varieties of Roman urbanism and architecture. However, towards the end of his stay, it was mannerism and symbolism of Rome that caught his attention. In a lecture celebrating the centennial of the American Academy, Venturi reminisced: ‘*For me, I went there looking for space – among forms and in piazzas – but I fell in love with*

\textsuperscript{35} Oscar Storono is a German-born architect practising socially responsible architecture in Philadelphia. Venturi contributed to the designs of the Cherokee Apartments in Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, as well as to the design of an exhibition on the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, which was organised by Storono and shown in Gimbel’s department store in Philadelphia and Strozzi Place in Florence. For more information on Storono’s activities, particularly his relationship with Kahn, see *Chapter 1: Kahn and American Modernism: The Search for Community and the Turn Toward Monumentality*, in Golhagen, Sarah Williams, Louis Kahn’s Situated Modernism, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2001, pp.11-40.
attended Summerson’s course of lectures twice and was exposed to mannerism and the distinctive and sometimes quirky architecture of Britain⁴⁰.

During this period, New Brutalism was making itself felt. Peter and Alison’s ‘House in Soho’ project (1952, unbuilt) and the rugged steel-framed Hunstanton School (1949-1954) with its tough, no-nonsense vocabulary became the first exponents of Brutalism in England⁴¹. Scott Brown was introduced to the movement in 1953 as a student when she first heard ‘rumours that something strong and good had come out of an architecture school near Newcastle. It was strong, good, working class, socially concerned, and lively. It was an architectural preview of what the Beatles did later out of Liverpool.’⁴².

Denise Scott Brown found herself exposed and drawn to the Smithsons and Brutalism during her training in London. She was attracted to the idea of architecture that is based on the realistic social vision based on realities of ordinary communities. She was particularly drawn to what the Smithsons called, ‘active socioplastics’ – the combination of a neo-Dadaist ‘as-found’ aesthetic with an interest in community development. These twin notions reflected a move away from a sentimentalised version of places and things, which is essentially middle class, towards an appreciation of the natural, gritty reality of the working class community. And for Scott Brown, this balance is terribly important because ‘The New Brutalism suggested to me that social objectives might be achieved with beauty, if we could only learn to broaden our definition of beauty – and that doing so could make us better artists’⁴³.

This ‘architectural ethics’ evoked a sympathetic response in Scott Brown, deriving from her childhood and youth in Africa. She wrote, ‘A few great teachers in my youth suggested....that we would be better artists if we would look around us at the African landscape and learn. Interactions between artistic cultures, black and white or overseas and local, produced an exciting art. It opened my eyes to the vitality and poignance of “impure art”......’44. With this interest for ‘impure art’ already instilled in her, Scott Brown allied herself with like-minded students at the AA: ‘When, at the AA, I found a group of students looking intensely at what was immediately around them – popular culture, the industrial and commercial vernacular, and neighbourhood street life – I felt on sympathetic ground. More than anyone, it was the Smithsons who decreed the gap between the sentimentalism of British architecture’s domesticated Modernism and the facts (“brutal” and ordinary) of urban experience”45.

Peter Smithson started teaching at the AA from 1955 till 196046. Just after Scott Brown had left for America and therefore she was never under Peter’s direct tutelage. The first time they met, only briefly, was after a lecture Peter gave at the school before he was officially on the faculty47. However, the Smithsons’ influence was already widespread at the school during the early 1950s and the AA students often sought them out for advice. They became teachers of AA students even before they joined the faculty48.

Training at the Architectural Association retained some of the flavour of pre-World War Two modernism under the guidance of Arthur Korn, a German refugee. Scott Brown’s early project at the AA reflects the enthusiasms of the younger generation who looked up to Mies van der Rohe as hero of the day.49 Her student sculpture-gallery design (1953-54) reflects this with its rational structure and grid. It is reminiscent of the ITT building by Mies, combined with a manipulation of spatial sequences based on the temples of ancient Egypt. Nevertheless, her 1954 thesis project, a housing scheme called ‘Welsh Mining

44 Scott Brown, A Worm’s Eye View of Recent Architectural History, pp 69-81.
45 Scott Brown. ‘Learning from Brutalism’. pp 203
47 Scott Brown. ‘Learning from Brutalism’. pp 203
48 Ibid, p204.
Village' designed in collaboration with Brian Smith\(^{50}\) had strong Brutalist affinities, in that all dwelling units were on or near the ground – a decision made out of respect for the imagined desires of the inhabitants. The scheme was also presented in the Brutalist industrialised manner, which was then introduced at the AA. Scott Brown's and Smith's decision to propose low-rise structures corresponds to the Smithsons' belief that 'Family living, except in exceptional circumstances, is best served by relatively low density development, wherever its location....None of these requirements (for real space needs of family life), can be met simply and pleasurably at densities much above 70 persons per acre'\(^{51}\). Scott Brown and Smith appropriately chose the Smithsons as their informal critics. Recalling the final thesis 'crit' which took place at the Smithson's apartment, Scott Brown later wrote: 'The memory of their Brutalist apartment has stayed with me longer than the content of their criticism, but I think they found the grid base of our design too rigid'.\(^{52}\)

At the end of studies, the architect Robert Scott Brown, whom she had met in Johannesburg when she was studying architecture joined Scott Brown\(^{53}\) in London. After graduation in 1955, they got married and for three years they travelled and worked in several leading architectural firms in Europe, which included those of Erno Goldfinger in London and Giuseppe Vaccaro in Rome and South Africa. And the end of this adventure, they approached Peter Smithson in London for career advice on further architectural training and he recommended that they attend the Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where Louis Kahn had been teaching\(^{54}\). Kahn had emerged as quite an unexpected American confirmation of Brutalist ideas. Both his


\(^{50}\) Scott Brown, 'Learning from Brutalism', pp 22.

\(^{51}\) Smithson, Alison & Peter, Scatter, Architectural Design (London), April 1959, p.149-150. A number of urban dwelling schemes proposed by the Smithsons, such as Strip Appliance House (1958), Snowball Appliance House (1958) and their House of the Future (1957) illustrate the densities suggested.

\(^{52}\) Scott Brown, 'Learning from Brutalism', p203

\(^{53}\) Robert was killed in an automobile accident at the end of their first year at University of Pennsylvania which they attended after leaving Europe. Denise was then just twenty-nine. In 1960, Denise met Robert Venturi at the same University when Robert introduced himself after a faculty meeting. Robert Venturi and Denise got married in 1967 in Santa Monica, California in 1967.

\(^{54}\) Scott Brown, Learning from Brutalism, pp 204
Art Gallery for Yale in New Haven, Connecticut (1951-1953) and the bathhouse of the Trenton Jewish Community Centre illustrate close affinities to the qualities that mark a building as Brutalist. Scott Brown first heard of Louis Kahn and his work in the mid-1950s in London when she came across an article on Kahn’s Trenton Bath House, which she described as a ‘beautiful American building’. She added that, ‘Given our view of America, we had not expected to see such sympathetic architecture there.’

Denise Scott Brown at University of Pennsylvania

Denise and Robert Scott Brown, heeding Peter Smithson’s advice, enrolled in the graduate program in land and city planning in 1958. The Scott Browns were said to have been disappointed to find out that Kahn does not teach in the planning department but in the architecture department. However, disappointment turned to elation when Denise ‘found Herbert Gans and, later, the social planners preaching a similar philosophy (to Brutalism), minus the aesthetics’. German-born Herbert Gans, an American expert on popular culture, had been, in the mid-sixties, engaged in ‘participant observation’ of a new American suburb called Levittown (Figure 2.11) and living in a house bought for him by the Ford foundation. These observations were documented in the book entitled The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community. Gans moved from Chicago to University of Pennsylvania when the dean of the Graduate School of Fine Arts, G. Holmes Perkins recruited Gans and other urban sociologists such as John Dyckman, Britton Harris and Martin Myerson - all members of

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56 Scott Brown, A Worm’s Eye View of Recent Architectural History, pp.69-81.
57 The Scott Browns enrolled in the graduate program in land and city planning because applying at the last minute, they had no time to send a portfolio of drawings necessary for admission to the architecture department.
58 Scott Brown, Learning from Brutalism, p203.
59 The Levittown in question is located in the Willingboro Township, New Jersey, built in 1955 on a sparsely settled agricultural area seventeen miles from Philadelphia, by property developer Levitt & Sons, Inc. Before this there have been other Levittowns as well, scattered on the East Coast of America. The Willingbro Levittown was to be a full-fledged community, with 12,000 houses, and because Levitt had bought almost the entire township, with its own government as well.
the Chicago school - with the intention of balancing the philosophies which already existed at Penn\textsuperscript{61}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Levittown in Long Island with its standard Cape Cod design, which has since been modified in countless ways by its neighbours}
\end{figure}

Denise Scott Brown attended Gans's lectures in urban sociology at Penn and found teaching something akin to the Smithsons' 'socioplastics'. Gans at the time was writing \textit{The Urban Villagers}, a study of communities in West End Boston, and one of the required readings in his course was Young and Willmot's study\textsuperscript{62}. Scott Brown also took the subjects of housing, economics and statistics in her first semester at Penn and recalled; \textit{'We didn't know how we could lived our life till then without all that information'}\textsuperscript{63}. Herbert Gans and other social planners at Penn such as William Wheaton, Robert Mitchell, David Crane and Paul Davidoff later became mentors to Scott Brown.

After completing her planning degree at Penn, Scott Brown was promoted to assistant professor, where she was teaching both architecture and planning students. One of the courses she was running was based on a pedagogical theory plan devised by Dean G. Holmes Perkins. Perkins developed a holistic approach where students would be introduced to the disciplines of architecture, urban design and planning. Hence, Scott Brown’s task was to teach planning and urban design to architecture students under the course title *The Theories of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Planning*, where incoming students in a graduate programme were not given an individual building to design, but rather a neighbourhood in the city. The theory course, thus, concentrated first on urbanism, allowing students to expand their responsibility not only to the individual but also to the collective structure to which they belong. For Scott Brown, teaching both planning and architecture was an uncomfortable dual position that can be traced back to her student days. If, as a student at the AA, she found herself at the nexus between ‘formalism’ taught by her lecturers and ‘socioplastics’ advanced by the Smithsons; as a lecturer at Penn, she was right in the middle of architects and planners, between the appreciation of physical design and social sciences, where she was ‘...pulled and buffeted as each side seemed so right except when it was all wrong’.

She would later sav. she was a ‘circus rider trying to keep together the two horses – Architectural Formalism and Social Concern.’

However, despite this duality of concern, Scott Brown tended more towards sociology in her work, a tendency greatly influenced by her experience growing up in Africa, her association with the AA School and Brutalism in London, and Gans at Penn. This ‘morality’ had a profound impact on her collaborations with Venturi, who sympathises

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64 G. Holmes Perkins became Dean at the Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania in 1951 and he pursued a coherent philosophical core around Louis Kahn. Together with Romaldo Giurgola and Robert Venturi, he forms part of the rubric ‘Philadelphia School’. The polemics of Team 10 had a great influence on the thinking of GSFA faculty members since his appointment as dean. During his tenure, Perkins established a programme that stressed the interaction of city planning and architecture to effect social change. See Scott Brown, Denise, *A Worm’s Eye View of Recent Architectural History*, Architectural Record, February 1984, pp.69-81, pp. 73-74

with the ideas of social planners, influenced probably by his socialist mother\textsuperscript{67}. Venturi’s social tendencies may have also originated from his association with Oscar Stonorov. Stonorov’s commitment to the modern movement was found less on stylistic than on ideological convictions. He believed that the architect should work not simply for those who hired him but for the greater social good. His projects are mainly housing which he regarded as not ‘so much a question of naked shelter only, it is the demand for reorganization of rotten communities into stable, sane and healthy societies’\textsuperscript{68}.

When Venturi and Scott Brown first met 1960, the former was in the midst of writing Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture\textsuperscript{69} and designing a house for his mother. They both started exchanging ideas, and by this time too, both have started collaborating in teaching, with Scott Brown running Venturi’s theory course seminars and workshops while he gave lectures\textsuperscript{70}. Some of Scott Brown’s ideas appeared in the last part of the book\textsuperscript{71}, which was published in 1966. Therefore, when the book took a turn from historical and formalist argument to popular culture and sociology on the last two pages, with its positive reference to the messy commercialism of an American Main Street, captioned ‘Is not Main Street almost all right?’,\textsuperscript{72} (Figure 2. 12) it did not come as a surprise to many who knew them both. Their next collaboration, on the study of Las


\textsuperscript{67} Venturi’s american-born mother, like Denise, was unconventional and powerful. According to Brownlee, she was a pacifist and a socialist who became a Quaker and voted for Norman Thomas, she sent her son to a Quaker elementary school and then to the aristocratic Episcopal Academy, not only for the excellence of the education but also to escape the mandatory flag saluting of public schools. Brownlee et al., Out of the Ordinary: Robert Venturi Denise Scott Brown Associates, pp.7

\textsuperscript{68} Stonorov, quoted in Bacon, Edmund, Oscar Stonorov and the City in the special issue on Stonorov in L’architettura: Cronache e storia 18 (June 1972), pp.116.


\textsuperscript{70} Brownlee et al., Out of the Ordinary: Robert Venturi Denise Scott Brown Associates, pp 6.

\textsuperscript{71} Scott Brown’s contributions to Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture are confirmed by Robert Venturi in an electronic mail to author dated 7\textsuperscript{th} July 2003.

Vegas\textsuperscript{73} saw Scott Brown's greater influence with its emphasis on the importance of communication through signs and symbolism based on the analysis of the commercial vernacular based loosely on Herbert Gans's work on suburbia. Scott Brown wrote, 'we applied... academic, historical-architectural analysis, as Jean Labatut would have performed it, to the imitation history of Las Vegas. In a similar vein, we attempted to take Gans's analysis of suburbia into architectural areas he himself would not penetrate'.\textsuperscript{74}

Nevertheless, collaboration in design with Venturi began in earnest in the late sixties when Scott Brown joined the office officially as partner in 1969.\textsuperscript{75} Before then, she claimed to have some input in the early design projects. She wrote of having 'critted' the Mother's House as well as other designs by Venturi in the early sixties\textsuperscript{76}. Although her input is small, it is significant and the Mother's House must be seen as the beginning of their collaboration.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Peter Blake's photograph of Main Street U.S.A. as it appeared in the last pages of Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{74} Scott Brown, \textit{A Worm's Eye View of Architectural History}, pp 69-81.

\textsuperscript{75} In 1960, Venturi formed an architectural partnership with William H. Short, and John Rauch. They set up an office in a row house at 333 South 16 Street in Philadelphia. Denise joined the firm officially as a partner in 1969, after resigning from her position of co-chair of the Urban Design Program at UCLA.

\textsuperscript{76} As confirmed by Denise Scott Brown in an electronic mail sent to author dated 20\textsuperscript{th} August 2004.
Chapter 3
The Post-war Debate

Introduction
During the early 1950s, the Smithsons had an astonishing range of achievements. The enormous prestige that came with winning the Hunstanton School (1949-1954) and their leadership of Team 10, despite losing competitions with exceptional designs, was concurrent with wide-ranging intellectual development. Their work played an enormous part in the architectural debate of the eternal dialectic of opposing poles between ‘backward look’ and ‘forward look’ prevalent during this period. The first, led by formalist critics, such as John Summerson, Rudolph Wittkower and Colin Rowe, revolves around the idea that there was true classical lineage originating in the Renaissance. The other, derived from Art Brut of Dubuffet, Pollock, béton brut of Le Corbusier and based largely on the works of the Smithsons and members of the Independent Group, concentrates on content rather than form, performance rather than aesthetics in the search for the source of vitality in modern life. Reyner Banham, perhaps the most influential theorist at the time, became a major proponent of the latter critique of modernism. Through his writings he directed the younger generations towards a neo-futurist faith in technological innovation where industrial design and popular culture issues are used to annul the traditional boundaries between high culture and the marketplace.

Similarly, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown’s work provided an important critique of American post-war architecture in the late fifties and sixties, which was then largely dominated by the works of Modern masters Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe. Louis Kahn, a major talent and an inspiring teacher, played a major role in breaking the grip of the ‘International Style’ enabling the younger generation of architects in America to break free from the chain of modernism. He encouraged a respect for the past and an understanding of the role of ideas in architectural expression. One of his prominent students had been Venturi. His Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture was trenchant in that it indicated a way to resolve, or at least to go beyond the post-war dilemma of how to represent values in architecture. In reaction to what Venturi saw as the blandness of ‘orthodox Modern
Architecture’, he said that architecture did not need to be ‘heroic’ and ‘original’. Instead it could draw upon a broad range of references, but he was especially partial to historical forms and the ordinary American landscape. *Learning from Las Vegas* concentrates on one particular type of ordinary landscape – that of commercially orientated Las Vegas – in its attempt to answer questions about an architect’s role in balancing originality and aspiration of ordinary people. Like the Smithsons, the Venturis played an important role in the post-war architecture in the sixties that revolves around two opposing factions - modernism and realism – both of which were conceived and concocted in the elite American architecture schools. It soon became known as the contest between the ‘whites’ and the ‘greys’, with the Venturis taking the leadership of the former.

The Smithsons and Venturis played important roles in the shaping of post-war architecture in Britain and America respectively. A deeper understanding of their work and activities in relation to the general architectural development of this period is thus necessary in understanding both the Sugden House and the Mother’s House. Thus, this chapter will focus on the influences prevalent during the period on both sides of the Atlantic, by exploring the work of some of the representative practitioners and academician, whose works typify in their excellence the principles of formal and informal point of view.

**Post-war Britain**

After the Second World War, Great Britain continued to be in a state of distress, with rationing persisting until 1954 and urban reconstruction and the provision of housing becoming pressing problems\(^1\). Arising from this situation was an obsession in the search for forms to create a better world, but the means by which this was to be achieved was a source of much disagreement. Practising architects tended towards a socialist doctrine and supported ‘The New Empiricism’, which was based on the architectural paradigm of the welfare state architecture of Sweden, which had been relatively little affected by the war. Eric De Maré’s first article, *The New Empiricism: Sweden’s Latest Style*, opened with contrast between the passing revolutionary phase

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of ‘functionalism’ and the growing interest of the younger generation of Swedish architects in humanising the new architecture. This development has had a profound influence on the British architects’ own attempt at ‘humanised’ modern architecture, which they had equated with the English vernacular and a triumph of regionalism. Actively promoted by the Architectural Review and reinforced intellectually by their editors, Nikolaus Pevsner, JM Richards and Eric De Maré, and with the graphic illustration of Gordon Cullen, ‘the New Empiricism’ was adapted in vast reconstruction exercises encouraged by the 1943 London County Plan and the 1946 New Towns Act. The Royal Festival Hall of 1951 (Figure 3.1), by Sir Leslie Martin, with its tidy elegance, attached coloured tiles and Scandinavian touches of detail, designed by a team headed by Leslie Martin was a fitting monument to the continental-inspired movement.

Figure 3.1: Royal Festival Hall, 1951

However, the younger generation would have nothing of it. They saw the Swedish style as both a compromise and a discontinuity in a movement of the avant-garde, which started in the 1920s. They also saw themselves as part of a Modern Movement

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2 Eric de Mare was an architect, photographer and an editor of the Architects’ Journal, and himself half Swedish. His article appeared in de Mare, Eric, The New Empiricism: Sweden’s Latest Style, The Architectural Review, Jun 1947, pp.199-204.


lineage and, as such, responsible for forging the plans for the future. The Second World War, to them, was just an interruption in the continuing practice. Recalling the general feeling among the young at the time, Robert Maxwell wrote, 'All of my generation were under the spell of Le Corbusier and we believed that if his ideas were followed the world would not only have better architecture, but would be a better place'.

In Britain, the hard-line modernists were born around the turn of the century and trained in the 1920s. They championed ideas derived from the continental avant-garde, from Gropius and Le Corbusier. This generation of architects first attracted attention in the early 1930's with schemes such as Amyas Connell's High and Over at Amersham, finished in 1930 (Figure 3.2) and the first example in Britain of fully fledged continental modernism. This is followed by a number of more prominent buildings such as Kensal House by Maxwell Fry, 1934-36 (Figure 3.3), the De la Warr Pavillion, Bexhill by Mendelsohn and Chermayeff, 1934-35 (Figure 3.4), the Penguin Pool, London Zoo, by Tecton, 1933-34 (Figure 3.5). By the end of 1930s, the buildings of younger modern architects working in Britain had won international recognition. In 1937, the New York Museum of Modern Art devoted its spring exhibition to modern architecture in England, and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, a leading progenitor of modern architecture in the United States, praised Britain for 'providing opportunities for architectural talent of the highest technical and aesthetic ingenuity'.

Figure 3.2: High and Over, Amersham, England, 1930, Amyas Connell

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In the mid-fifties, a shift occurred in Le Corbusier’s work that was to divide the view of modern architecture among the younger generations. The shift, from the rational principles, formal proportions and machine aesthetic, which are the basis of the modern movement, to an honest, basic and direct use of structure and materials was
first brought to attention in Britain by James Stirling when he brought back slides of Maisons Jaoul (1953) from Paris and showed them in London in late 1953. Stirling later published articles titled Garches to Jaoul (1955), Ronchamp (1956) on this shift and Regionalism and Modern Architecture (1957) which describes the general trend towards regional architecture.

The slides and articles describe how the ‘Dom-ino’ structure and sophisticated urban form of Le Corbusier's early houses went through a significant change in direction towards more humane and romantic forms of ‘Mediterranean vernacular’ models. The contrast was dramatic, for the deliberately crude Jaoul houses (Figure 3.6) with their rough external brickwork, exposed concrete frames and roof vaults topped with turf roof, stood less than two miles from the Maison Cook and the Villa Stein at Garches. It was a shift that created a widespread sense of ambivalence, with architecture viewed as suspended between culture and nature or classicism and romanticism. A parallel development to this shift in modern thinking was also apparent in the work of another architect of great talent in America, Louis Kahn. His Yale Art Gallery, 1951-52 (Figure 3.7) and Trenton Bath House, 1954-55 (Figure 3.28), characterised by hard unfinished surfaces, bold sculptural forms and strongly articulated parts, coincided with Le Corbusier’s own search for an architecture which extended principles from the past.

These new developments in modernism had a profound effect on the younger generation. They saw a direct lineage of the Modern Movement in the two opposing architectural ideas: one was a retreat to the formal order of Le Corbusier’s early villas and the other, a new consciousness concerning the primal relationship between man and nature. The principal voices for these two tendencies belonged to two historian cum architectural critics: Reyner Banham and Colin Rowe, who was also a former student of Rudolf Wittkower. A sort of Banham-Rowe axis declared itself in the 1950's in England with Banham taking the anti-formalist but inherently historicist position and Rowe representing a formalist quest for form over content.

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Peter Smithson, in his article called *The Idea of Architecture in the 50's*, stressed the coexistence of these two tendencies in this period. One was a reaction to the excesses of the Royal Festival Hall and Empiricism which was a retreat to formalism and "this means to architects geometry and system of proportion, and to English architects, it means particularly Wittkower's Seminars, and his "Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism"... Coexisting with this (surprisingly), and triggered off by the first

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119, March 1956, pp.154-161 and *Regionalism and Modern Architecture*, Architect's Year
European sight of Pollock ('49ish) was the relationship with the Dubuffet-Paozzozi-Appel "revalidation of the human image" phenomenon, and the confidence inspired, especially by Pollock, that a freer, more complex yet quite comprehensible idea of "order" might be developed without the—now fully returned to academic status (1953) — DIVINA PROPORTIONE."9.

Crucial to the formal side of the debate is Rowe's article called The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa10, 1947, which reveals, among other things, a similar proportional system in a Palladian and Corbusian villa. Their geometrical similarity revealed that both villas are deeply embedded within the European Tradition. This revelation was profoundly important, as it introduced to the modern generation a formal critical procedure to apply in architecture, where discussing and drawing inspiration from architecture of all periods are valid as if its qualities were always accessible to its designer. Expressing the significance of Rowe's work, Robert Maxwell wrote, it strengthened 'the conviction that material science alone could not account for evolution, and that the artist was not to be constricted by current conditions but was free to take in any achievement, of any period, in his quest for the new.'11.

Colin Rowe was a student at the Warburg Institute, under the tutelage of Rudolph Wittkower who had been working for thirty years on his Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism12 of 1949, a book that was to influence the idealist tradition. He sought to prove, through mathematical systems of proportion, that Renaissance architecture, especially that of Palladio, was primarily symbolic and not abstract. Thus Rowe's publication of The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa in 1947 did not come as a surprise to many associated with the Warburg. Following this was another influential article by Rowe in the early fifties: Mannerism and Modern Architecture13. Like the

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9 Smithson, Peter, The idea of architecture in the '50s, Architect's Journal, January 21, 1960, pp 121-126.
earlier publication, this article gave the younger generation of architects a metaphorical sense of the past, of history, of references as a viable generator of present form, by demonstrating, among other things, the presence of the mannerist device in modern works of the 1920’s and 1930’s. Together, both Wittkower’s and Rowe’s publications were particularly influential on the thinking of young architects after the Second World War.

When Rowe moved to America to take up the position of Professor of Architecture at Cornell University in 1962, he expanded his formalist approach to cover studies of urban form and urban planning. *Collage City*, 1979, co-written with Fred Koetter, develops a contextualist approach to urban form, which had a profound influence on much of the urban and architectural discourse both in Europe and the United States. The approach described in the book is based on studies of Camillo Sitte’s drawings and Nolli’s seventeenth century map of Rome - the opposition between solid and void, or figure and ground. Rowe and Koetter arrived at the conclusion that utopian visions of ‘total planning’ and ‘total design’ are no longer relevant as a city is basically a ‘collage’ of fragments which develops incrementally over the years. They suggest using ‘bricolage’ as a technique to knit and sometimes jam the past and the present together, and mediate between the solid urban tissues and the void of public realm as this method ‘might be a means of permitting us the enjoyment of utopian poetics without our being obliged to suffer the embarrassment of utopian politics’ (Figure 3.8).


*14* For example, Le Corbusier’s Cité de Refuge, 1932-33 and Mies van der Rohe’s Brick Country House of 1923.

*15* He held the position until 1985. Thereafter, he was made Andrew Dickson White Professor in Architecture (Emeritus) between 1985 and 1990. Rowe died in Washington DC on 5th November 1990.


*17* Ibid. p.149.
If the historical constants in Le Corbusier's early villas were to provide a formal and an academic alternative, his later projects sparked a less idealistic and more casual attitude towards process and form\textsuperscript{18}. It is an attitude concerned with social content, where man's relationship with nature, technology, community and the city in which he lives is profoundly important. The central figure to this 'other' new disposition was Reyner Banham who became the focus of a number of intellectual circles on the London scene. The first, architects, most of them neighbours: Colin St. John (Sandy) Wilson, the Smithsons, James Stirling, Alan Colquhoun and Robert Maxwell; and the other, artists: Eduardo Paolozzi, Bill Turnbull, Richard Hamilton, with Nigel Henderson, the photographer and Laurence Alloway, the critic\textsuperscript{19}. Most of these architects and artists were also members of the Independent Group. As members, they met informally to discuss on a wide range of art subjects at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, between 1952 and 1955. Nevertheless, Mary Banham recalled that the most regular of such meetings were the Sunday coffee

\textsuperscript{18} Apart from Maisons Jaoul, le Corbusier's later projects which demonstrate the shift includes the Unité d'Habitation, Marseilles (1947-53) and the Notre-Dame-du Haut, Ronchamp, (1950-54).

mornings at the Banham’s flat in Primrose Hill, where the discussion centred on the future that had to be “new and improved” with technology as the means.20

Reynner Banham, who convened the second session IG meetings of 1953, had already been a major influence upon historically significant shifts in thinking about aesthetics and design with his articles from 1951 on. In a review for the ICA’s Growth and Form show21, Banham argued for the reception-based aesthetic that IG subsequently developed: ‘aesthetic value is not inherent in any object but in its human usage’22. Later, reviewing a ‘Shell-Mex/BP petrol station’ exhibition in 1952, Banham observed that its ‘façade architecture’ is a psychological and commercial necessity23, a view which echoes that of the Venturis, who saw importance and validity in the signs and billboards of mainstreet Las Vegas. Another important idea would be the one on the theory of expendability, derived from American car design, which he first presented in an IG meeting on ‘machine aesthetic’ in 195324, and later in an article called Industrial Design and Popular Culture25, first published in 1955.

These views on contemporary aesthetic and technological solutions were to have a profound influence on IG’s character and direction. The Smithsons, who themselves were already using anti-art sources at the time – Pollock’s all over composition, Dubuffet’s city as texture (Figure 3. 9), anthropology and sociology – found two like-minded friends/artists at the IG: Eduardo Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson. Through this

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20 According to Mary Banham, intermittent but quite frequent parties were also held at the home of Magda Cordell in Cleveland Square, at Alison and Peter Smithsons’ house in Limerston street, and at Richard and Terry Hamilton’s house in Highgate. Recalling the discussions that they had then, Mary Banham wrote, ‘In the early 1950s the recent past and the austere present was something we did not like to dwell on. Tomorrow had to be “new and improved”. The women, all young and some with children, believed most strongly of all. We threw our best efforts into the ongoing discussion; opened our homes to provide the places; worked on publicity; designed and installed exhibitions; and talked, listened, and wrote. See Retrospective Statements by Mary Banham in Robbins, David (editor), The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1990, pp.187-188.

21 The Growth and Form exhibition was held at the Institute of Contemporary Art between 3rd July and 31st August 1951. Organized by Richard Hamilton, it introduced the concept of a multi-media show with non-art imagery, with the exhibition to be seen as an art form in itself. See Robbins, The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty, pp 16.

22 Ibid, pp. 169.

23 Ibid, pp.169

24 Ibid, pp.169

association, the Smithsons developed a fascination with the ‘as found’ social and physical realities of London’s working class streets, influenced particularly by Henderson’s photographic documentation of everyday life in Bethnal Green (Figure 3. 10). The Smithsons were also influenced by ideas of mass consumerism and popular culture actively discussed by members at IG meetings. The Smithsons’ interests, according to Helena Webster, during the Independent Group period ‘reflected the apparently opposed ideas of the technological future, American product design and consumerism, on the one hand; and of the future reconnecting with man’s primitive past, of which nature was a crucial ingredient, on the other.’ Their House of the Future Project, 1956, (Figure 3. 11) which is closely related to issues of mass production and technology represents the former concern, while major exhibitions organized by the Independent Group, in which the Smithsons actively took part, namely Parallel of Life and Art held at the ICA between September 11th to October 15th 1953 (Figure 3. 12) and This is Tomorrow which opened on 9th August 1956 at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London’s East End, saw their struggle to come to terms with the latter.

In 1955, Reyner Banham wrote The New Brutalism for the Architectural Review in an attempt to connect the anti-formalist side of the Smithsons with the work of Paolozzi and Henderson, by aligning them all with Dubuffet and Art Brut. The Hunstanton School (1949-1954) and the competition design for Sheffield University (1953) became paradigms of New Brutalism. From these buildings, Banham extracted qualities which mark them as Brutalist: ‘1, Memorability as an image; 2, Clear exhibition of structure; 3, Valuation of materials “as found”.’ This ‘direct’ use of ‘as found’ materials Banham linked with moral or ‘ethical’ truth that was to become the central tenet of the New Brutalism, and according to Helena Webster, ‘one which put it firmly in the tradition of the Modern Movement and which the young saw a relevant and exciting’.

27 Robbins, The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty
30 Webster, Modernism Without Rhetoric: Essays on the work of Alison and Peter Smithson, pp. 30.
Figure 3. 9: Dematerialisation, Jean Dubuffet

Figure 3. 10: Everyday life in Bethnal Green: Petticoat Lane Market, East London, 1949/52,
(Photograph by Nigel Henderson)

Figure 3. 11: The House of the Future, 1956
Formal & Informal

The Smithsons' early-unbuilt schemes, such as the Coventry Cathedral competition entry, 1951 (Figure 3. 14) and the house in Soho, 1953 (Figure 3. 15), demonstrate the influence of Wittkowerian ideas. The Coventry scheme is a raised structure based on a plan of Neo-Palladian symmetry, while the Soho house has formal axial plans and elevations. The Smithsons' first built project, the Hunstanton School (1949-1954), not only demonstrates the architects' brutalist handling of materials 'as found', but also
formal references to Mies van der Rohe (Figure 3.16). As already mentioned, neither Peter nor Alison had actually seen any of Mies’s buildings, but drew references from a book on Mies by Phillip Johnson and tear-sheets from The Architect’s Journal with the steel details of a small building by Mies at the Illinois Institute of Technology. There are also influences of Palladio and Japanese architecture in Hunstanton with its near symmetry, formal composition and calm aesthetic. Reyner Banham called these formal influences ‘historical interference’ when he wrote, ‘... here one can safely posit the interference of historical studies again, for, though the exact priority of date as between the Smithsons’ design and the publication of Professor Wittkower’s Architectural Principles of the Age Humanism is disputed (by the Smithsons) it cannot be denied that they were in touch with Wittkowerian studies at the time, and were as excited by them as anybody else’. Hunstanton’s explicit reference to the past was apparent and perhaps due to this, it was later attacked for being an impossible school for school children.

Figure 3.14: Coventry Cathedral, England, 1950-51

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31 Alison related to this when she wrote: ‘When I was in fifth year at Newcastle, PS (Peter Smithson) was at the Royal Academy Schools in London. He wrote that he had discovered Mies in Johnson’s book. I received the Architect’s Journal on a student subscription and in this had been the first publications of the Mies work at ITT – I sent tear sheets of the two articles as I did not value them. I may not, at first sight, have realised the same man made the Barcelona Pavilion and the ITT. The first full page illustration was a close-up perspective of part of a corner; quite incomprehensible why anyone should draw large, a rolled steel beam and stanchion and some brick joints’. Smithson, Alison & Peter, Changing the Art of Inhabitation: Mies’ Pieces, Eames’ dreams, the Smithsons, Artemis, London, 1994, pp 41.


Despite indications of formality in their early schemes, the Smithsons were not, and never have been, neo-classical architects. Together with Banham and members of the IG, they were united in their distaste for the suavity of the English cultural elite and in their interest in continental ideas. Deriving from icons of contemporary life such as machine design, advertisements and the 'bric-a-brac' of street life, they refused to indulge in an interest for Renaissance symbolic proportions. Inherent in their seemingly 'formalist' schemes is a demonstration of the reconciliation of conflicting tendencies, between the artifice of art and directness of life. Their contrasting direction is made clear in their contribution to Parallel of Life and Art\textsuperscript{14} exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1953, which they had organized with artists Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi. Dominating the show are 'images' mostly in the form of photo enlargements of micro-organisms, minerals, human parts and plant structures, which according to Robert Maxwell, 'seemed to celebrate the view of Nature as a marvellous designer, and to suggest that below the surface of things clues for living art lie around in abundance'.\textsuperscript{35} Peter Smithson publicly disassociated himself from the formalism and academicism of the neo-Palladians at the introduction of the exhibition to an AA student debate with the pronouncement in capital letters:

\textsuperscript{34} Robbins, The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty, pp.124-130.
'WE ARE NOT GOING TO TALK ABOUT SYMMETRY AND PROPORTION':\textsuperscript{36} Commenting on this action, Charles Jencks wrote: 'The break was clean: instead of a Platonic architecture with some conceptual scale there was to be an architectural equivalent to the present cosmology of endless and continual space. Instead of a Virgilian dream of urbaneitv, there was to be a direct, realistic approach to existing city situations\textsuperscript{37}.'

Therefore, despite the demonstration of Palladian formality in the Smithsons' early schemes, the deeper characteristics are rather original in tone. With Hunstanton, for example, they transformed the steel-frame vocabulary of ITT by Mies van Der Rohe into an asymmetrical plan and left the materials and services deliberately exposed and crude. Peter, commenting on this evolution, wrote, 'Mies's work interested me because it seemed a pure way of building and something I could be capable of. But the taste for Mies is not an easily acquired thing........I found his details formalistic--too studied: far more likely, at this period, was my affection for the simplicity and directness of Bailey Bridge\textsuperscript{38}. Hunstanton was also different from Mies's ITT building in that rather than designed components, it was based on a composition out of common existing items such as the pre-cast slab, standard steel sections, Braithwaite water tank and standard light fittings. And the way these are put together is closely related to appropriateness, use and function: '....we believed that a consonance would arrive if things were sized for their function\textsuperscript{39}'. Hunstanton is perhaps the first demonstration of the Smithsons' 'as found' theory, which they had first described in 1990 as 'a new way of seeing the ordinary, an openness as to how prosaic "things" could re-energise our inventive activity. A confronting recognition of what the postwar world actually was like. In a society that had nothing.'\textsuperscript{40}


\textsuperscript{38} Quote obtained from Smithson, Peter, (written out and edited by Peter Carolin), Reflections on Hunstanton, arq: vol.2 : summer 1997, pp32-43.

\textsuperscript{39} As explained by Peter Smithson of their intentions in Hunstanton School in \textit{Ibid}, pp. 36.

The Hunstanton School is a work of theory in the making. It re-established a relation between theory and practice that emerged out of a feeling of dissatisfaction with the diluted modern architecture of the post-war period. It was based on an honest and direct approach to architecture with strong allusions to social realism, all of which later came to characterise much of their subsequent work such as the Sugden House, Watford, 1955-56, the Upper Lawn Pavilion, Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire, 1959-61 (Figure 9.2, Chapter Nine) and Robin Hood Gardens, London, 1964-70 (Figure 9.4, Chapter Nine). Its success as a piece of architecture that directs turned the Smithsons into the frontrunners of a new post-war generation, able not only to do, but to say what should be done and how it should be done.

Figure 3. 16: Hunstanton School, Norfolk, 1949-54

41 The Sugden House is studied in great detail in comparison to the Mother’s House in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, whilst The Upper Lawn and the Robin Hood Gardens are discussed in Chapter Nine under the topic, The Influence of the Sugden House and the Mother’s House.
Post-war America

The Venturis' architectural thinking, like that of the Smithsons before them, were established against the background of the declining modernism or International Style as it is more commonly known in the United States\textsuperscript{42}. And like the Smithsons, they turned to the late works of the masters in their own search for architecture of greater robustness and complexity. The depression and the Second World War in America largely postponed the construction that was then considered necessary. In the decades after the war there was unprecedented opportunities to build for American architects, particularly with the prosperity and the baby boom that occurred throughout that period\textsuperscript{43}. The greater opportunity to build brought upon great debate about the direction architecture of the post-war period should go. Just as in Great Britain of the post-war period, one of the striking features of this period had been the battle between the groups of professionals intent on a tired international formula, and groups seeking a revitalisation on the basis of a new post-war state of mind.

Modern developments in America have started early, as seen in the works of Richard Neutra, the experiments of Richard Buckminster Fuller and, the uncategorizable works of Frank Lloyd Wright. Neutra, trained in Vienna and influenced by Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos, moved to Los Angeles only in 1932, where he soon began a productive practice. His house for Dr. Phillip Lovell, Los Angeles, California (Figure 3. 17) was an intriguing hybrid of International Modern Architecture, the organicism of Wright and Neutra's own vision of the healthy and natural way of life. More

\textsuperscript{42} It was through the Museum of Modern Art Show on Modern Architecture of 1932 organised by Alfred Barr, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, which gave popular currency to the term International Style. The exhibition contained photographs, drawings and models of recent European buildings as well as a few American examples. Through the exhibition, the three organisers had attempted to illustrate and define the basic visual motifs and modes of expression without regard to the social content of the new architecture: \textit{There is first of all a new conception of architecture as volume, rather than as mass. Secondly, regularity rather than axial symmetry serves as the chief means of ordering design. These two principles with a third proscribing arbitrary applied decoration mark the productions of the International Style,} Bare, Alfred; Hitchcock, Henry-Russell and Johnson, Philip, \textit{The International Style: Architecture Since 1922 Catalogue}, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

importantly, with its steel skeleton in which the steel casement windows were fully integrated, it was a house that celebrates innovation in steel construction. Whereas, the concern of technological application in architecture and the building process is of the utmost importance in Buckminster Fuller’s Dymaxion House of 1927, which was designed to be mass-produced like an automobile\(^{44}\) (Figure 3. 18). It captured the imagination of critics and continued to be the subject of discussion throughout the thirties. Frank Lloyd Wright in the 1930’s enjoyed a second burst of success with a series, of prominent buildings where he continued his earlier explorations of the integration of architecture and nature. The white horizontals of cantilevered slabs of Fallingwater, the Bear Run, Pennsylvania 1936 may illustrate the influence on International Style, but deeper, the house is infused with meanings and associations that alludes to a democratic ideal concerning the primacy of the free life lived in nature (Figure 3. 19)\(^{45}\). Venturi once wrote that being a young architect, ‘you were for Wright or you were for Mies. I was a Wright man.’\(^{46}\) Wright, who was personally opposed to modern houses that look like boxes\(^{47}\), was making architecture that caught the attention of a younger generation whose thinking was already at odds with the philosophical and compositional tendencies of the European Modern Movement.

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\(^{44}\) Designed to hang from a central mast, the 4D or Dymaxion House was factory-made, quickly erected, and stabilized by guy wires. Virtually free of water, it contained a ten-minute atomizer bath which used only a quart of water, which was then filtered, sterilized, and re-circulated. The toilets contained a packaging system that mechanically stored wastes for pickup and processing. Laundry was automatically washed, dried, ironed and placed in storage units. Dusting and sweeping were done by compressed air and vacuum systems. Beds had air-filled mattresses; other furniture was made as light as possible. The house had no rooms in the traditional sense. Instead space was divided by storage units with movable shelves and hangers.

\(^{45}\) The owner of the house is Edgar J. Kaufmann and his son assessing the house years later, said among other things, ‘Sociability and privacy are both available, as are the comforts of home and the adventures of the seasons. So people are cotsset into relaxing, into exploring the enjoyment of life refreshed in nature. Visitors too, in due measure experience Wright’s architecture as an expansion of living.’ As quoted in Curtis, William J.R., *Modern Architecture since 1900* (second edition), Phaidon Press Limited, London, 1987, pp.200.


\(^{47}\) Wright, for example wrote, ‘Human houses should not be like boxes blazing in the sun, nor should we outrage the Machine by trying to make dwelling places too complementary to machinery. Any building for humane purposes should be an elemental, sympathetic feature of the ground, complementary to its nature environment.’ As quoted in Curtis, William J.R., *Modern Architecture since 1900* (second edition), Phaidon Press Limited, London, 1987, pp.200.
Figure 3.17: House for Dr. Phillip Lovell, Los Angeles

Figure 3.18: Dymaxion House, 1927

Figure 3.19: Fallingwater, Bear Run, Pennsylvania, 1936

The migration of modern architecture to the United States occurred in earnest when two of the Modern Masters, Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, moved to live
and work in United States in the thirties\textsuperscript{48}. Both men brought with them the authority of the founding masters. Gropius left Germany for America in 1934, upon acceptance of the position of Chairman of the Department of Architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. In this capacity, he preached a Bauhaus-inspired architecture of ‘functional spaces’ and ‘rational construction’. Such teaching at Harvard marked for it an era where Beaux-Arts inspired instruction came to an end\textsuperscript{49}.

Mies van der Rohe, on the other hand arrived in the United States in 1937 where he was appointed Director of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology, in Chicago. Unlike Gropius, it is through productive practice that he has made most impact on modernisation of American architecture. From his first American design, the 1938 project for the Resor House in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to his best known work, the Seagram Building (1954-58) in New York (Figure 3. 20), Mies tried to articulate a language of post-war architecture with his stern intellectual quest for neutrality and the potentials of high-quality American steel craftsmanship. Mies’s universal work has also come to represent the antithesis to Wright’s arts and crafts tendencies. Mies’s Farnsworth House of 1946 (Figure 3. 21), illustrated that his ideas could be applied on domestic typologies, with a supremely anti-natural attitude: the obverse of Wright’s landscape Romanticism.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{seagram_building.jpg}
\caption{Seagram Building, New York, 1954-58}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{48} Unlike Gropius of Mies, Le Corbusier built little in the United States. Except for the United Nations Headquarters, in the design of which he was only partially involved, Le Corbusier’s only building in the United States was the Carpenter Centre for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, built between 1960 and 1963.
The work of these ‘heroic generation of form givers’, Wright, Gropius and Mies, had an impact on the direction of ‘second generation architects’ of formalists, refiners and redefiners – Phillip Johnson, Eero Saarinen, Paul Rudolph et al. – among the Americans who came to maturity during the uncertain post-war years\(^{50}\). Johnson’s Glass House at New Canaan of 1951 was clearly based on his own representation of Mies (Figure 3.22). Without the freshness of inventive detailing, it inevitably became a chic evocation of high living different in tone from the originals. Another offspring of Mies is the Eames’ own house in California of 1949 (Figure 3.23). Embodying ideas similar to the Smithsons’ Hunstanton School, the building was assembled from standard parts and sensitively composed, which reflects a refined sense of the ‘ordinary’ and interest in Japanese wooden-frame construction. Mies’s lasting impact, nevertheless, was more on commercial and office buildings, epitomised by the glass and steel curtain wall virtually synonymous with American corporate architecture\(^{51}\).

If Mies van der Rohe dominated the early fifties America, then late Le Corbusier dominated the early sixties. Le Corbusier’s only American building, Carpenter Centre for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A., was built between 1960 and 1963 (Figure 3.24). This and the convent of La Tourette in France, with their rough concrete piers, heavy egg-crates of brise-soleil and rugged

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overhangs, inspired ‘Brutalist’ replicas all over the country, from city halls to departmental stores\textsuperscript{32}. One prominent architect who picked up on the robust and primitive air of the late Modern Master was Paul Rudolph. Rudolph, educated at Harvard Graduate School of Design, in his maturing work demonstrated a rebellion against Walter Gropius’ functionalism and reductivism. Rudolph’s architecture concentrated on architectural shape and expressionism. He used reinforced concrete, which he sometimes finished with a corduroy-like texture, to create architecture of extraordinary intricacy in plan, elevation and section. Concentrating on shape enabled him to achieve the Wrightian goal of breaking the modern architectural box. His buildings such as the Art and Architecture Building at Yale University, 1953-63 and Crawford Manor, 1962-66 both in New Haven, Connecticut (Figure 3. 25) are highly complex manipulation of space, structure, services, and materials that resulted in a dynamic form. Nevertheless, as William Curtis had pointed out in \textit{Modern Architecture since 1900}, Rudolph’s expressionism seemed overdone, ‘giving the feeling that all these displays of virtuosity perhaps contained no social content’\textsuperscript{53}. It was exactly such shortcoming that Venturi and Scott Brown were referring to when they compared Rudolph’s Crawford Manor with their Guild House, 1960-63\textsuperscript{54}(Figure 3. 26).

\textsuperscript{32} The most famous of American corporate buildings built in the decades after the war were built by ‘corporate’ architects such as Skidmore, Owings & Merrill who designed the Lever House, 1951-52 and Chase Manhattan Bank, both in New York City.
\textsuperscript{33} For example, the Boston City Hall, 1962-67 by G. Kallmann, M. McKinnel and E. Knowles.
\textsuperscript{34} The Venturis wrote, ‘...the architectural elements of Crawford Manor abound in associations of another, less explicit, kind....We criticize Crawford Manor not for “dishonesty”, but for irrelevance today’. Venturi, Robert; Scott Brown, Denise & Izenour, Steven, \textit{Learning from Las Vegas} (Revised Edition), The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England, pp.93&101.
Figure 3. 22: Glass House, New Canaan, 1951

Figure 3. 23: Eames House, California, 1949

Figure 3. 24: Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968-63
Against the setting of formal terms on the one end and of organicism on the other, Louis Kahn emerged as the 'unofficial' leader of an opposing faction that tried to break free from the grip of Modernism, which included the likes of Robert Venturi, Romaldo Giurgola and Charles W. Moore. Collectively known as Philadelphia School, it is a designation enunciated by an editor of a New York magazine for a group of architects associated with University of Pennsylvania and with similar
approaches to architecture rather than an apellation for a formal relationship. Born in Estonia, Kahn came to the United States with his parents in 1905. He was trained at the University of Pennsylvania between 1920 and 1924, which was then Beaux-Arts orientated under the direction of Frenchman Paul Phillippe Cret. Since graduating up until the Second World War, Kahn worked mainly on housing projects, for and with, among others, Paul P. Cret, George Howe and Oscar Stonorov. Whilst Kahn’s work during this period were unexceptional extensions of the International Style, his true sense of what architecture should be seems to have occurred in the early fifties, and to have been prompted by Kahn’s stay at the American Academy in Rome, and his travels through Greece and Egypt in 1951. Kahn was deeply steeped in history but his work is rarely pastiche. He separates the making of buildings into a two-fold process leading from ‘Form’ to ‘Design’ and back again. For him, architecture did not involve fitting uses into dimensioned areas. Kahn wrote, ‘Form has nothing to do with circumstantial conditions. In architecture, it characterizes a harmony of spaces good for a certain activity of man’. Thus, ‘Form’ and ‘Design’ is about ‘realization,'

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57 Kahn was in Rome for only a brief 3-month period, but it seemed to have an effect, for afterward the direction of his work began its decisive change. Upon return from Rome, he wrote to his colleagues in Philadelphia: ‘I firmly realize that the architecture in Italy will remain as the inspirational source of the works of the future. Those who don’t see it that way ought to look again. Our stuff looks tinny compared to it and all the pure forms have been tried in all variations. What is necessary is the interpretation of the architecture of Italy as it relates to our knowledge of building and needs. I care little for the restorations (that kind of interpretation) but I see great personal value in reading one’s own approaches to the creation of space modified by the buildings around as the points of departure.’ Letter, Kahn to Dave Wisdom, Anne Tyng and others. December 6, 1950, *Rome 1951*, Box LIK 61, Kahn Collection.

58 His sketches produced during his travels to Greece and Egypt in 1951 signals an appreciation of mass, geometric power and symbolic force of the edifices he saw. They suggest he was trying to get back to basics – to probe the central meaning of architecture. See Johnson, Eugene J., & Lewis, Michael L., *Drawn from the Source: The Travel Sketches of Louis Kahn*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996.

about the measurable aspects of our (architects’) work and about the limits of our work....

A key transitional project for Kahn had been the Yale Art Gallery, 1951-54 (Figure 3.7). It offered a critique of one of the quintessential monuments of American Modernism – Mies’s Crown Hall at the Illinois Institute of Technology (Figure 3.27). In the Yale building, the exterior of glass and steel façade of the ITT building was given a new irregularity and softness, whilst the interior contains an expression of tectonic elements such as exposed ceiling of concrete tetrahedrons, stair silo of poured concrete, exposed services throughout the building. It is a tectonically deterministic approach which is almost parallel to the Smithsons’ Hunstanton School in England, 1951-54 (Figure 3.16). Kahn’s subsequent buildings such as the Trenton Bath House, New Jersey, 1955 (Figure 3.28), Richards Medical Research Building, Philadelphia, 1957-64 (Figure 3.29) and Salk Institute, La Jolla, California, 1959-65 (Figure 3.30), saw the development of Kahn’s fundamental distinction between ‘servant’ and ‘served’ spaces. Such clear logical system of servicing and structure enabled Kahn to create buildings evocative of the antique qualities he had admired in Roman ruins and in the towers and townscapes of medieval Italy and France (Figure 5.13).

Figure 3.27: Crown Hall, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, 1952-56

Ibid

61 Reflecting on the discovery of served and servant spaces in the design of Trenton Bath House, Kahn in an interview said: ‘I discovered a very simple thing. I discovered that certain spaces are very unimportant and some spaces are the real raison d’être for doing what you’re doing. But the small spaces were contributing to the strength of the larger spaces. They were serving them.’ Khan, interview with John Peter, Philadelphia, 1961, in The Oral History of Modern Architecture: Interview with the Greatest Architects of the Twentieth Century, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1994, pp.214; also quoted in Goldhagen, Sarah Williams, Louis Kahn’s Situated Modernism, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2001, pp.107
Figure 3. 28: Trenton Bath House, New Jersey, 1955

Figure 3. 29: Richards Medical Research Building, Philadelphia, 1957-64

Figure 3. 30: Salk Institute, La Jolla, California, 1959-65
As well as being the major talent of the post-war years in America, Kahn was also an inspiring teacher. After September 1955, he taught mainly at the University of Pennsylvania, although he taught for short periods at MIT, Yale and Princeton. At Penn, he organised his studio in the manner of a seminar, engaging in open discussion about the importance of past and the understanding for the role of ideas in architectural expression with both students and fellow colleagues. Robert Venturi had been Kahn’s prominent student, and together they share a Beaux-Arts background and an enthusiasm for history as valid source in their rethinking of contemporary architecture.

Venturi began writing *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* in the late fifties, which he described as a gentle manifesto for a generation bored by the blandness of ‘orthodox Modern architecture’. Parodying the well-known Miesian jingle ‘Less is more’ with the retort ‘Less is a bore’, Venturi was in favour of a tension bred by perceptual ambiguity - a richness of both form and meaning:

> ‘Architects can no longer be intimidated by the puritanical moral language of orthodox Modern architecture. Orthodox Modern architects have tended to recognize complexity and inconsistently insufficiently. In their attempt to break with tradition and start all over again, they idealized the primitive and elementary at the expense of the diverse and the sophisticated.’

> ‘I am for richness of meaning rather than clarity of meaning; for the implicit function as well as the explicit function. I prefer “both-and” to “either-or”, black and white, and sometimes grey, to black or white. A valid architecture evokes many levels of meaning and combinations of focus: its space and elements become readable and workable in several ways at once.’

In reflection of his Beaux-Arts background, Venturi supported his case with numerous illustrations of buildings and plans from contemporary sources and past

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62 Kahn was appointed Professor of Architecture by the University of Pennsylvania between 1955 and 1974. Before this, in May 1947, Kahn served as thesis jury at Princeton University. This is followed by appointments at Yale University in the same year, firstly as visiting critic and subsequently as chief critic in architectural design. Kahn was also appointed Albert F. Bemis Professor of Architecture and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1956.

63 As already mentioned in Chapter Two, Louis Kahn had been Venturi’s external tutor for the latter’s final master’s thesis project at Princeton in 1949. In 1951, upon Venturi’s return to Philadelphia, Venturi began to work for Kahn and teach at the University of Pennsylvania as Kahn’s assistant.
periods in history. Lutyens, Hawksmoor, Soane, Le Corbusier, Aalto or an anonymous peasant dwelling might be used to illustrate a certain quality of complexity. Denise Scott Brown’s influence can be felt towards the end of the book, when Venturi applied some of his arguments to the existing American urban scene, claiming that ‘Main Street is almost all right’.

Venturi’s built projects of the early period can be seen as an attempt to demonstrate the application of theory in practice. Venturi’s Headquarters Building for North Penn Visiting Nurse Association, 1960, was a distorted box of complex composition (Figure 3.31), while the Guild House was a building of inflected plan to address the urban character of the street (Figure 3.26). These buildings contain a broad range of references, but what is most striking about them must be the free use of ‘ornamentation’. In the former, applied wood moulding and non-structural two-dimensional wooden arch are used to allude to ‘counteract the simplicity of the box’, while in the latter, the anodized aluminium television antenna, its round column of polished black granite and the big bold lettering were more ‘pop’ than historical. The Mother’s House too contains such broad range of references, and they are examined in greater detail in the Case Study Chapters of this study.

These projects illustrate Venturi’s departure from Kahn, whose tendency was to use historical references in a manner consistent with the modernist project and with abstract, geometrizing sensibility. The populism and informality underlying Venturi’s earlier publication was drawn out in greater detail in Learning from Las Vegas, written in collaboration with Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, a student of the

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65 Scott Brown’s contributions to Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture is confirmed by Robert Venturi in an electronic-mail to author dated 7th July 2003.
Venturi's at the University of Pennsylvania. As in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, its authors seek to address the problem found in 'orthodox modern architecture', but this time the problem lies not so much on the blandness such architecture create, but that architects have lost touch with the aspirations and needs of ordinary American people. Architects, they claimed, can learn to understand the needs of ordinary people in existing environments such as Las Vegas and Levittown, by paying particular attention to the symbolic signs and symbolic configurations.

Robert Venturi's work is so trenchant, especially in its critique of post-war American architecture, that no thinking member of the profession could avoid coming to terms with it. Other American architects to react against the blandness of cliché modern architecture in the fifties, are Charles Moore and Robert Stern. Moore's later works such as the Faculty Club for University of California, 1968 (Figure 9.39; Chapter 9) and Stern's Erhman House in Armonk, New York, 1975 (Figure 9.40; Chapter 9) are examples of architecture that associates itself with scholarly historical emphasis combined with certain aspects of popular culture.

![Figure 3.31: Headquarters Building for North Penn Visiting Nurse Association. 1960, Philadelphia](image)

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Venturis et al’s positions suggest that some of modernism’s guiding principles were losing hold, at the same time undermining some of the hard-won battles of the pioneers. Therefore, it is not surprising to learn that there is another faction emerging in the post-war period forming an antithesis to the Venturis’ search for a truly American vernacular architecture and which argues for a return to the true principles of ‘modernism’ as it was in the 1920s. This notion has its roots in Rudolf Wittkower’s work, particularly his Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism, which in Britain influenced the formation of one of two opposing architectural ideas in the post-war period: a retreat to the formal order of Le Corbusier’s early villas.

Across the Atlantic, Wittkower’s work had a profound influence on academics, architects and students, including the young Robert Venturi. ‘Wittkowerian’ ideas were to fuel Venturi’s passion for history which started in his early childhood and continued at Princeton University under the influence of academics such as the noted French Beaux-Arts-trained architectural design critic Jean Labatut and the social and architectural historian Donald Drew Egbert. Reading Wittkower in 1957, Robert was fascinated by Wittkower’s analysis of Palladio’s mannerism. Denise wrote, ‘Wittkower supplied... signposts to the Baroque and to an appreciation of complexity in the work of Borromini’.

The expanse of ‘Wittkowerian’ influence in America magnified when Rowe moved to America to take up the position of Professor in Architecture at the Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Design, Cornell University in 1962. From his outpost at Cornell his influence radiated right up to Princeton University where Venturi had been a student. Rowe’s introduction to the modern generation a formalist criticism in architecture was to have a profound influence on Venturi’s theoretical work. This method of hunting, selecting and organizing images according to their visual properties in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture is loosely similar to that used in Rowe’s Mathematics of the Ideal Villa. Also apparent in the former is a new respect for ‘open poche’ or open residual space’ found in late Roman planning which

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69 See Chapter One: The Education Years.
echoes Rowe’s contextualist view advanced in Collage City, derived after pondering hard on the large chunks of blackened areas in Sitte’s drawings, and at Nolli’s seventeenth century map of Rome.

The juxtaposition of Rowe’s and Venturi’s work suggests similarities in their tendency to favour form over meaning, the form being deeply embedded in the European tradition, past or present, as if its qualities were always accessible to the designer, at the same time avoiding the arid sociological and technical definitions of architecture. It is safe to say that Rowe had, in fact, opened a new way of discussing architecture, an approach regarded by many exploited by Venturi to entirely different effect some years later. Peter Carl, in an obituary for Rowe (who died in 1999), wrote, ‘The formalism of Rowe’s approach did not become apparent until the appearance, in the early 70’s, of a counter argument launched by Robert Venturi and Vincent Scully at Yale. They deployed similar means – readings of plan-configuration, architectural physiognomy and iconography...”

Nevertheless, Rowe’s formal approach, derived first and foremost from Le Corbusier’s work of the twenties and thirties, was to have a more profound and direct influence on another set of prominent architects in America in the late sixties, especially those linked with East Coast architecture schools such as Princeton and Cornell. Chief among them are five architects, known collectively as the New York 5: Peter Eisenman, Richard Meier, Charles Gwathmey, John Hejduk and Michael Graves. They picked up the formality of early Le Corbusier which the Brutalists in England rejected in the fifties, and developed an obsessive formal language often at the expense of content and function (Figure 3. 32). The sources for their work are taken from a variety of seminal models from Modern Architecture, such as the Schroeder House, the Villa Stein or the Casa del Fascio. Often elements from these models are juxtaposed to challenge expectations regarding their usual role in the

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72 New York Five’s domestic projects are well documented in Five Architects, New York, Oxford University Press, 1975.
73 Curtis, Modern Architecture since 1900, pp.354.
architects’ attempt to return to some ‘mythical and crystalline principles of ‘modernism’\textsuperscript{24}.

Rowe’s influence in America resulted in the revival of early modern forms and as such is seen as part of the second coming of the International Style\textsuperscript{75}. The revival of this style in America was in stark contrast to the Venturis’ architecture derived simultaneously from mannerism and American domestic sources. It was common in the seventies to contrasts the ‘whites’ (the New York 5) and the ‘greys’ (Venturi et al) in America in rather the same manner the critics had differentiated the ‘formalist’ from the ‘brutalists’ in England, namely as a contest between modernism and realism. Within the broader context of this formal/informal debate, it is possible to see the New York 5’s self-conscious interest in formal issues as a reaction against the sociological and technological issues advanced by Banham et al. William Curtis commenting on this circumstance, wrote, ‘....their stylistic emphasis on thinness, planarity and transparency may perhaps be seen as a formal reaction against the brutalist antics in heavy concrete of some of their predecessors. It is interesting, in retrospect, how little attention they devoted to late Le Corbusier, and how much they concentrated on the villas of the 1920s as sources\textsuperscript{76}.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid

\textsuperscript{75} The ‘first’ coming of the International Style to America occurred during the 1930’s and early 1940’s when European modern architects especially the leading figures at the Bauhaus in Germany such as Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Ludwig Mies van Der Rohe, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and others moved to the United States and started teaching at schools like the Harvard Graduate School of Design, the Illinois Institute of Technology (ITT), and the New Bauhaus in Chicago. The name ‘International Style’ was coined by architectural historian, Henry-Russel Hitchcock and the architect, Phillip Johnson. In a book (1966) of the same name (published originally in 1932 with the subtitle ‘Architecture since 1922’ and concurrently with an exhibition of the style at the Museum of Modern Art in New York), Hitchcock and Johnson identified what they viewed as a widespread practice based on the innovations of the avant garde. See Ockman, Joan, \textit{Toward a Theory of Normative Architecture} in Harris, Steven and Berke, Deborah, \textit{Architecture of the Everyday}, Princeton Architectural Press, Yale Publications on Architecture, 1997, pp122-152. Also see Chapter 19: \textit{Modern Architecture in America: Immigration and Consolidation} in Curtis, William J. R., \textit{Modern Architecture since 1900}, Phaidon Press Limited, London, 1982, pp 174-185.

\textsuperscript{76} Curtis, \textit{Modern Architecture Since 1900}, pp. 354-355.
Transatlantic Parallels

The path between the early fifties and the late sixties in England (Western Europe generally) and United States was one of a loosely felt consensus: a reaction against debased modern design. Rebuilding exercises and greater opportunity to build in this
period meant that creative transformation of architectural ideas was necessary, and this was particularly felt by the younger generation of architects. The architectural revolution of the twenties and thirties, the 'heroic period' as many have came to recognise it, had occurred and its influence have been wide spread. The architects seeking new forms in the forties cannot help but put themselves in a position as an extender of the tradition they inherited. Hence, many sought to infuse the reductive and rational modernism with other values in various different ways. In America, the second-generation architects who came to maturity during the post-war period such as Rudolph and Saarinen were practising modernism that emphasises the architectural shape and dynamism, while in Britain, we find the Architectural Review leading the path towards greater regional identity and values and Leslie Martin, in the design of the Royal Festival Hall, designed a modern-inspired building that went beyond merely utilitarian concerns.

Like the others just before them, we find the Smithsons and the Venturis too established their vocabularies against the background of the declining Modern philosophies. However, we find that both also relied heavily on the works of late modern masters for their own search for an architecture of greater robustness and complexity. The Smithsons' New Brutalism, relied heavily on Le Corbusier's béton brut vocabularies seen in his late Modern works, while Venturi, leant heavily on the historical sensibilities of Louis Kahn. We also find that the Smithsons' and the Venturis' rethinking of modernism is similarly stretched between concepts of formal order and social disorder. Both placed a high value on past forms and sought an overt revival, but running through the Smithsons' and the Venturis' thinking was also a strain of socialist realism which led both of them to pinpoint icons of contemporary life: the Smithsons with their tendencies for machine design, advertisements and the bric-a-brac of street life (which they called the 'stuff of the urban scene'), whereas the Venturis with the commercial strip and the suburban cracker-box house. Despite the Smithsons' and the Venturis' populist stance, we find that their architectural polemics were obviously directed at the initiated. Both pairs of architects used the strength of the written statement with the designed image so that the observer, at least,

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cannot distinguish which came first, or which was the creative trigger. And both assumed the role of leaders of the younger generation dissatisfied with the debased modern design and the role of the avant-garde, which they might never admit to, with their often highly-intellectualized academic approach.

Nevertheless, despite the similarities in each pair of architects' approach in their rethinking of modernism, we find striking differences in their application of theory in practice. The formal planning in the Smithsons' early schemes such as the Coventry Cathedral and the Hunstanton School alluded to formal principles Wittkower advanced, but they subverted the referentiality and accentuated abstraction with spatial and compositional techniques that were, in the end thoroughly modernist. The insistent honesty with which the Smithsons approached the handling of different composition in the schemes is evident in their handling of materials 'as found'. It is this rigorously honest approach to expressing the spatial composition and process of construction that is completely at odds with Robert Venturi's wryly ironic concept of a 'decorated shed'. He contrasted the 'decorated shed' to the concrete sculptural buildings of the early sixties, which he referred to contemptuously as 'ducks'. The Smithsons' self-consciously heroic work is insistently closer to a 'duck' than a 'decorated shed', and, ironically, is closer to Louis Kahn's late abstract vocabulary than any of that by the Venturis'.

Methodologically, however, both the Smithsons and the Venturis agree that the aggregation of buildings into cities requires something more than good design, and a lot more than systematic and rational organisation. And that something lies between form and content between the elements of high art and the simple directness of everyday life. Such tendencies by both architects to infuse contemporary architecture with values, incidentally, formed an antithesis to the intellectual development of opposing factions on both sides of the Atlantic, who sought to revive some of the white forms of the 1920s, influenced by early Le Corbusier and encouraged by the writings and teachings of Wittkower and Rowe.

78 The Smithsons' and the Venturis' references to popular culture is examined in greater detail in the next Chapter Four: 'The 'As Found' and 'Found'.
Chapter 4
‘As Found’ & ‘Found’: A Search for A Modern Vernacular

Introduction
Chapter Three focussed on the formal/informal debate prevalent in England and United States during the post-war period and the enormous role the Smithsons and the Venturis played in it. This chapter illustrates that there are strong similarities between them in terms of approach. Both pairs of architects had established their vocabularies against the background of the declining modern philosophies and both relied heavily on the works of late Modern Masters for their search for an architecture of greater robustness and complexity. We also find that both architects’ rethinking of modernism is stretched between concepts of formal and informal concerns. Within this sphere of interest and influences, there developed between the Venturis and the Smithsons a similar concern for the tangible, real and ordinary – in contrast to the high-flown visions and enraptured ideals - which set them apart from the modernist architects of their generation. Preoccupations with the real and ordinary meant that both pairs of architects saw popular culture and aspects of industrial design as important sources in their attempt to dissolve the boundaries between high and low culture.

However, despite the similarities, there are also striking differences in their theories and practice. Thus, this chapter will extend the examination on the similarities and differences between the two pairs of architects’ work. Particular focus will be given to the informal side – their references to ordinary, pop and commercial - in their approaches. In this context, the Smithsons’ ‘as found’ theory is of prime relevance, as is the influence of the Independent Group and American Pop art in both pairs of architects’ search for ‘a modern vernacular’. This chapter will firstly attempt to demonstrate the parallels in the architects’ examinations of the existing and the ordinary in particular those shaped by popular and commercial culture. The discussion will continue by examining how the architects dealt with popular culture and commercial artefacts in their acceptance of the ordinary. The theories behind their
architecture that facilitated the assimilation of these artefacts into the aesthetics and form of their buildings will be examined in detail.

A Modernist Tradition
The Smithsons and the Venturis are architects of the post-war period who went on to continue the modernist tradition of ‘bringing about a revision of values’ in architecture, by allowing what already exists to provide stimulus and produce new insights. The Smithsons’ writing on modernism’s heroic period—in Architectural Design in 1965, later published as a book called The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture in 1981—bear witness to their awareness of their role, under new circumstances after the war, to create works which are just as important and authoritative as those that emerged in the 1920’s. In fact, they measure their standards to those set by the modernist greats such as Le Corbusier and Mies. In Without Rhetoric, they wrote:

‘When Le Corbusier assembled Vers Une Architecture he gave to young architects everywhere a way of looking at the emergent machine-served society, and from that, a way of looking at antiquity and a rationale to support his personal aesthetic. In this essay, we try to do the same.’

Venturi’s Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, was aimed particularly at ‘orthodox modern architecture’, and as such, is seen as an antithesis to the modern idiom. Vincent Scully regarded it as probably being the most important writing on the making of architecture since Le Corbusier’s Vers une Architecture of 1923. Writing the Introduction to Venturi’s book, Scully claimed that it ‘will annoy some of those

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who profess to follow Le Corbusier now, exactly as Le Corbusier infuriated many who belonged to the Beaux-Arts then. The term vernacular usually means architecture not designed by architects, but rather created by ordinary people to accommodate a common set of social practice. This preoccupation with the vernacular is part of modernism’s goal to produce architecture representative of the time. Early modernism developed an enthusiasm for the ‘exotic others’ such as Western Medieval society, non-industrialised peoples and Eastern culture and from these primary sources evolved an architecture true to its own structural and functional nature. Later developments of modernism saw Le Corbusier referring to grain elevators and anonymous Mediterranean models as sources for modern forms. After World War II, this reference to the vernacular was amplified

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5 Ibid
6 The term ‘vernacular’ needs further defining. The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture defines it as buildings in indigenous styles constructed (without architects) from locally available materials following traditional building practice and patterns. Examples of vernacular architecture are for example, North American farm houses, often of clapboard; or in England medieval barns or timber framed houses of which the Wealden house was a notable type. The vernacular forms provided important source of inspiration throughout history. In the mid to late nineteenth century, professional architects associated with William Morris and Arts and Crafts movement (notably Devey, Phillip Webb, Norman Shaw and Voysey) drew inspiration from them in their search for a way out of historicism while preserving contact with national or local history and traditions. More recently, vernacular architecture has been emulated and its materials – brick, rubble-masonry, knapped flint, wood etc. – favoured in contrast to the impersonal concrete and glass of the International Modern style. See Fleming, John; Honour, Hugh; Pevsner, Nikolaus; The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture, Penguin Books, London, New Edition 1991, pp.465.
7 Richard Weston in his examination on the roots of modernism in the early nineteenth century, wrote: ‘...numerous styles (were) explored: the Gothic came back in favour; archaeological research revealed more fully the miracles of Greece and Egypt; and travellers brought back detailed knowledge of distant China’. According to Weston, from these eclectic sources, ideas were synthesized gleaned from the riches of history. However, towards the later periods of the nineteenth century, the challenge of machine production and structural ingenuity led to an architecture true to its own structural and functional nature. In a widely read publication called Entretiens written by Viollet-le-Duc in the 1860s, he strongly advocated ideas of structural functionalism. Viollet wrote: ‘All architecture proceeds from structure, and the first condition at which it should aim is to make the outward form accord with that structure. Hence, if we would invent that architecture of our own times which is so loudly called for, we must certainly seek it no longer by mingling all the styles of the past, but by relying on novel principles of structure.’ See Weston, Richard, Modernism, Phaidon Press Limited, London, 1966, pp.21-39
8 The Domino system (1914-1916), according to Le Corbusier - in a lecture given fifteen years after the system was devised – was inspired by the traditional houses of Flanders, with their almost totally glazed street frontages. The Jaoul houses (1952-56), on the other hand,
when James Stirling, in the mid-fifties wrote a number of articles, the most important being *The Functional Tradition* where he observed past anonymous forms as examples of the direct expression of the "actual accommodation volumes" of architecture.  

For the Smithsons and the Venturis, their conceptions of the vernacular were based on wide-ranging sources borrowed from the past and the present that resist rationalising. Their sources varied from grand historical forms to primitive dwellings; from an appreciation of high culture artefacts to that of popular and commercial culture. These sources reflects both pairs of architects' apparently opposed ideas of the future reconnecting with man's past, on the one hand; and of the present, of which populism and consumerism were crucial ingredients. Nevertheless, these varying sources were examined and adapted by the architects within meaningful social context.

*Bath: Walks Within the Walls* exemplified the Smithsons’ sensitivity to all the nuances that give a particular place its uniqueness and richness. But more importantly, this piece of writing signified a sociological interest in the formal order. Thus apparent in the text was the Smithsons’ belief that a place should possess a certain sense of inherent order to signify everyday use: ‘......in Bath, the sense of control is also the result of a conscious application of rules. In the course of time, the rules become part of craft thinking – the formal language being understood and contributed by all’ (Figure 4. 1). In a similar vein, their illustration of the Bernini colonnade in Rome (Figure 4. 2) in their book *Without Rhetoric* shows it being improvised as a place for the everyday eventuality of sitting and casual meeting of friends, rather than as the grandiloquent gesture that was its principal meaning.

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*Le Corbusier’s direct referencing to the romantic forms of Mediterranean vernacular models with their rough exposed brickwork, exposed concrete frames and roof vaults topped with turf.*


11 Ibid, pp.1.

The Venturis too, in their conceptions of the vernacular, emphasised sociological concerns in the formal and past order. In *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Venturi had hoped that the dynamic jostling of order and the circumstantial of the Italian farmhouse at Domegge\(^{13}\) (Figure 4. 3) and in *Learning from Las Vegas*, the Baroque facades of Francesco Borromini\(^{14}\) (Figure 4. 4) would serve as examples that would inject new richness into contemporary architecture and reflect the true complexity of daily life.

It is for the same social concerns that the Smithsons and the Venturis turned to popular culture and its artifacts for inspiration. The pluralism of need that they found in the ‘marketplace’ fits in with their conceptions of the modern vernacular. It was for them a question of being honest to the conditions of the present day.

![Figure 4. 1: Streetscape, Bath](image)

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\(^{13}\) Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp. 46.

Figure 4.2: Bernini colonnade in Rome (as illustrated in *Without Rhetoric*)

Figure 4.3: Farmhouse in Domegge (as illustrated in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*)

Figure 4.4: Baroque facade of Francesco Borromini (as illustrated in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*)
As Found’ Theory

Crucial to the Smithsons’ acceptance of popular culture as a source was their ‘as
found’ theory. The Smithsons found considerable inspiration for the ‘as found’ theory
when it was first developed in the early fifties through photographer Nigel Henderson
and his partner, Judith Stephen, a sociologist\(^{15}\), both of whom were also their close
friends and neighbour in Bethnal Green. Nigel Henderson took telling pictures of life
on the streets that revealed elementary patterns of life created by adults socialising
and children playing (See Figure 5.1, Chapter Five). The Smithsons saw in
Henderson’s photographs, ‘a perceptive recognition of the actuality’\(^ {16}\). Inspired, the
Smithsons wrote in 1990 that ‘as found’ included not only the bric-a-brac of daily life –
‘children’s pavement play-graphics; repetition of “kind” in doors used as site
hoardings; the items in the detritus of bombed sites, such as the old boot, heaps of
nails, fragments of sack or mesh and so on’ – but ‘all those marks that constitute
remembrances in a place’\(^ {17}\). These ‘remembrances’ are to be read and respected so
that a new architecture in its place will be ‘specific-to-place’.

Judith Stephen’s work was also a source of inspiration for the Smithsons during the
fifties. Stephen trained in anthropology at Cambridge University and Bryn Mawr
College, Pennsylvania and at the time was engaged in field studies of the patterns of
association among the East London population in conjunction with a sociology course
whose guiding principles would have counted much to the Smithsons: ‘that a given
community is an organic unity whose attitudes reflect the historical evolution of that
community’\(^ {18}\). Through the Smithsons’ connection with the Bethnal Green couple,
they would have also come across a book called Family and Kinship in London,
written by urban sociologists Michael Young and Peter Wilmott\(^ {19}\). The book, among
others, describes patterns of association that take place in the street. Judith Stephen

\(^{15}\) Smithson, Alison & Peter, Urban Structuring. Studio Vista, London, Reinhold Publishing

\(^{16}\) Smithson, Alison & Peter, The ‘As Found’ and the ‘Found’, in Robbins, David (editor), The
Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of the Plenty, The MIT Press,

\(^{17}\) Ibid, pp.201-202.

\(^{18}\) Quote as appeared in essay by Robbins, David, The Independent Group: Forerunner of
Postmodernism? in Robbins, David (editor), The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and
pp.243.

was, apparently, closely involved in the study documented in the book and much of Henderson and Stephen’s work ran in parallel with the research and findings found in Wilmott and Young’s book.

The ‘recognition of actuality’ perceived in the Henderson and Stephen’s work soon led to the formation of concepts such as ‘identity’ and ‘hierarchy of human associations’ at four levels – the house, the street, the district and the city. These four levels of human habitation are interconnected, replacing the mechanical division of the city developed by CIAM (Congres Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne) into separate areas of living, working, recreating and circulating\(^{20}\). At the CIAM 9 meeting at Aix-en-Provence, Henderson’s photographs of children playing on the streets covers more than half of Alison and Peter’s presentation board (also known as CIAM grille) for the Golden Lane Estate competition entry of 1963, suggesting their notion of street as an extension of the house, the second hierarchy of human association after the home, the area where children first come into contact with the outside world and where everyday public life takes place.\(^{21}\)

Across the Atlantic, German-born Herbert Gans, an American expert on popular culture, was producing similar kinds of study to those of Young and Willmott in England. In the mid-1960s, Gans had engaged in ‘participant observation’ of a new American suburb called Levittown\(^ {22}\), living in a house there bought for him by the Ford Foundation. These observations were documented in the book entitled *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community*\(^ {23}\). Gans, who had trained at the Chicago School of Sociology, was apparently well-versed with the work of the English urban sociologists and drew parallels to their work in the Levitowners\(^ {24}\).

\(^ {21}\) Ibid, pp.21.
\(^ {22}\) The Levittown in question is located in the Willingboro Township, New Jersey, built in 1955 on a sparsely settled agricultural area seventeen miles from Philadelphia, by a property developer Levitt & Sons, Inc.
Gans moved from Chicago to University of Pennsylvania when the Dean of the Graduate School of Fine Arts, G. Holmes Perkins recruited him and other urban sociologists such as John Dyckman, Britton Harris and Martin Myerson, with the intention of balancing the philosophies which already existed at Penn. Gans was teaching at Penn, when Denise and Robert Scott Brown, heeding Peter Smithson’s advice enrolled in the graduate program in land and city planning in 1958. Denise Scott Brown attended Gans’ lecture in urban sociology at Penn and found in Gans’ teaching something akin to the Smithsons’ sociological tendencies. Gans, at the time was writing the Urban Villagers, a study of communities in west-end Boston, and one of the required readings in his course was Young and Wilmott’s study. Scott Brown also took the subjects of housing, economics and statistics in her first semester at Penn and recalled, ‘*We didn’t know how we could live our life till then without all that information*’.

The Independent Group

The platform for which the ‘As Found’ thinking was developed also included the contributions of numerous members of the Independent Group (IG). The IG was formed in the wake of a series of lectures held from 1951 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA). Its members included the Smithsons, Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi, John McHale, Magda Cordell, Richard Hamilton, Lawrence Alloway and Reyner Banham. Fundamentally, its members questioned the then current elitist conceptions of modern art by bringing into its sphere of interest film, popular music, popular objects and everyday culture such as illustrated reviews, cartoons, advertisements depicting everyday American life and science fiction. Modernist American-based texts such as Sigfried Giedeon’s *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948) and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy’s *Vision in Motion* (1947) were also

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influential to the Independent Group's discussion and criticism of modernist theory. Both publications addressed issues of interrelations between modern art, technology, and industrial design in consumer society.

Giedeon's book, researched in the United States in the archives of corporations such as McCormick, Westinghouse, and General Electric, and in the records of the Patent Office\textsuperscript{30}, traced the modes of emergence of industry and the mechanization of agriculture and daily life in Northern America. Gideon focussed on innovation and development of transportation, agricultural production and selected household appliances, at the same time proposing the industrial designer rather than the architect as the new hero of the consumer culture - an idea Banham particularly promoted\textsuperscript{31}. Moholy-Nagy's \textit{Vision in Motion}, on the other hand, contended that the 'direct visual impact' of photography is appropriate as a primary medium of consumer culture and 'the advertising arts'. Different technical 'photographic vision' - photomontage, photo collage, reportage, 'rapid seeing' of movement, microphotography or 'intensified seeing' and x-ray or 'penetrative seeing' - are all used to intensify 'the vision in motion of a motorised world,' since it presents 'the artist, architect, advertising and display man' with new challenges\textsuperscript{32}.

However, it is the visual component of \textit{Vision in Motion} and \textit{Mechanization Takes Command}, the latter with its incorporated captions designed for the 'hurried reader', which provoked strong reaction among the IG artists and which they analysed in great detail\textsuperscript{33}. In the Parallel of Life and Art Show of 1953 organised by the Smithsons,\textsuperscript{30,31,32,33}


\textsuperscript{32} Moholy-Nagy, \textit{Ibid}, pp.207.

\textsuperscript{33} Commenting on this tendency, Lawrence Alloway wrote: 'These books (Ozenfant's Foundation of Modern Art, Sigfried Gideon's Mechanization Takes Command and Moholy-Nagy's Vision in Motion) were being read by the British constructivists (Victor Pasmore, for example), but the artists around the IG valued the illustrations more than the texts, which carried too many slogans about a 'modern spirit' and 'the integration of the arts' for their
Eduardo Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson, for example, Moholy-Nagy's X-ray photograph of 'man shaving' was used for the cover of the exhibition catalogue (Figure 4.5).

![Parallel of Life and Art](image)

**Figure 4.5: Moholy Nagy's x-ray photograph of 'man shaving'. (catalogue cover of the Parallel of Life and Art Show)**

taste. It was the visual abundance of these books that was influential, illustrations that ranged freely across sources in art and science, mingling new experiments and antique survivals. I know that what I liked about these books, and other people then in their twenties felt the same way, was their acceptance of science and the city, not on a utopian basis, but in terms of fact condensed in vivid imagery'. Quote obtained from, Alloway, Lawrence, The Development of British Pop in Lippard, Lucy R., *Pop Art*, Thames and Hudson (Third Edition), London 1970 (First published 1966), pp.32.

Paolozzi, particularly, found excitement in the photographs accompanying Ozenfant's text which defended modernism as the recognition of 'universal laws'. Paolozzi recalls finding a copy of Ozenfant in a small public library while in the army, and thinking it a 'revelation' because of the range and impact of the illustrations - cars, machine parts, and the new photographic view of the universe along with Dogon masks, pre-Columbian sculptures and photos of tribal people. Mechanization Takes Command particularly influenced Richard Hamilton. Hamilton's *Growth and Form* show (1951) and *Man, Machine and Motion* (1953) demonstrate influences of Gideon's wide ranging manner of 'perception of technological form and process'. According to Press release for *Man, Machine and Motion*, the show contains photographs or photographic copies of drawing depicting 'the mechanical conquest of time and distance the structures which man created to extend his powers of locomotion, and to explore regions of nature previously denied to him.' See Robbins, D., Chapters called 'Modernist Sources' and *Man, Machine and Motion* in 'The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty', pp.55-57 and pp.131-133 respectively. Also Press release for *Man, Machine and Motion*, 23 June 1955, ICA archives.
Figure 4.6: Collage, *I was a Rich Man’s Plaything*, 1947, Eduardo Paolozzi

The study of these modernist texts led to major interest in American science fiction and American advertising within the Independent Group. American science fiction provided its members with suitably irreverent reference and source of imagery – both integral elements, as Graham Witham (who wrote on IG’s preoccupation with the subject) puts it, ‘in the touchability of information inherent in the fine art – popular art continuum’\(^{34}\). Typically, American advertising was also profoundly influential since it epitomised a popular aesthetic in a society of rapid consumption and obsolescence. Furthermore, these American ‘ad’ images, usually produced using advanced technological photographic and colour printing techniques, strengthened their aesthetic impact, and projected a visual environment more contemporary than anything anyone had ever seen in England. Paolozzi’s collage scrapbook contains images torn from American magazines (Figure 4.6) while the second series of Independent Group meetings, convened in 1955 by Lawrence Alloway and John McHale focussed on discussions of ads and commercial designs\(^{35}\).


The Smithsons joined in the cult of mass media and mass production in the fifties by strongly defining their position on the subject with their oft-printed article on collecting 'ads' of American consumer goods called But Today We Collect Ads in 1956 for ARK magazine.\textsuperscript{36} Within the art establishment, the article became an important piece in its contribution to pop thinking in Britain as it placed mass media issues that had been raised by the IG squarely within the tradition of the Modern Movement.\textsuperscript{37} In March that same year, the Smithsons designed the House of the Future for the Daily Mail's Ideal Home Exhibition (Figure 4.7), a significant project that entered into a dialogue with pop culture and industrial design thrust, exemplified by consumerist products arriving from the USA. The House of the Future was meant to be a housing prototype in the lineage of Le Corbusier's Pavillion L'Esprit Nouveau (1925), Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House (1927-29), and the Duncan-Bovis House (the Ideal Home of 1928). It was an experiment with standard parts rather in the manner of 'American car industry in its affluent years'.\textsuperscript{38} Designed in response to predicted 'changing working class objectives' influenced by mass ads, the house embraces new technology and standardization in a coherent manner with cave-like rooms made from replaceable curved units of 'plastic impregnated fibrous plaster'.

\textsuperscript{36} The Smithsons wrote: 'Traditionally the fine arts depend on the popular arts for their vitality, and the popular arts depend on the fine arts for their respectability. It has been said that things hardly "exists" before the fine artist has made use of them, they are simply part of the unclassified background material against which we pass our lives. The transformation from everyday object to fine art manifestation happens in many ways: the object can be discovered – objet trouvé or l'art brut – the object itself remaining the same; a literary or folk myth can arise, and again the object itself remains unchanged; or, the object can be used as a jumping off point and is transformed....

Why certain folk art objects, historical styles or industrial artefacts and methods become important at a particular moment cannot easily be explained.

\begin{quote}
Gropius wrote a book on grain silos,  
Le Corbusier one on aeroplanes,  
And Charlotte Perriand brought a new object to office every morning;  

But today we collect ads.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}


derived from the automotive industry. These units, arranged around a central courtyard, were equipped with modern and plastic domestic appliances and furniture. New materials, such as plastics were used extensively for domestic appliance and furniture. No openings are evident externally, apart from the entrance shutter gate, which suggests possibilities of proximate grouping of such houses into a 'dense mass'. And this point on density, according to the Smithsons, was 'overstated so that the accepted idea – that a prefabricated house had to mean a detached house in a garden – was broken down'.

![Image of a futuristic house setup]

**Figure 4.7: House of the Future, Daily Mail Exhibition, 1956**

Although American advertising and American science fiction was a major interest within the Independent Group; the Smithsons, Paolozzi and Henderson shared a further interest in anthropology, photography, surrealism, sociology and *art brut* by

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Dubuffet and Jackson Pollock. Together, their work in collaboration represented what ‘As Found’ stood for. The trio’s first joint-project - The Parallel of Life and Art of 1953 - was exemplary (Figure 3.12, Chapter Three). The material used in the exhibition consisted of images taken from archaeological, anthropological, and scientific sources, drawings by children, agency photos, x-rays, and images taken with microscopes. These images were neutralized and presented without hierarchy or order and it is up to the public to produce connections, draw conclusions, and develop associations. The anti-beauty nature of the display caused much dissent from the establishment, who considered it anti-art.

Whereas, the ‘Parallel of Life and Art’ was concerned with art derived from ordinary life and nature, the trio’s next collaboration, The ‘Patio and Pavilion’ of 1956 (Figure 3.13, Chapter Three) which was part of the This is Tomorrow Exhibition, was an equally powerful symbolic statement of the ‘as found’ theory, although this time seeking to express the fundamentals of basic human needs in its habitat: ‘a piece of ground, a view of the sky, privacy, the presence of nature and of animals when we need them, and symbols of the basic human urges – to extend and control, to move.

To some extent a parody of Nigel Henderson’s backyard in Bethnal Green, the installation consisted of a patio with its ground covered with sand, in which sits a

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43 The Smithsons were introduced to the Independent Group by Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi, who both taught with Peter Smithson at the Central School of Art during 1952; it was they who subsequently invited the Smithsons to collaborate on the design of the ICA exhibition: Parallel of Life and Art in 1953.

44 The images were all blown up in size to achieve certain standards of detail and assembled in the exhibition space without hierarchy.


46 Twelve groups, each comprising of an architect, painter and sculptor were formed to produce exhibits almost separately and independently from the other. At its opening on 9th August 1956, one of the most striking scene was Richard Hamilton’s borrowing of Robbie the Robot, the star of the then current film Forbidden Planet, who read the opening speech prepared by Lawrence Alloway.

pavilion with its structure built of mostly second-hand wood, and its enclosure built of
used boards, scobalite, to give a view of the sky and aluminium-faced panels which
subtly reflected the interior and was symbolic of light. In the patio and pavilion are
arranged Nigel’s and Eduardo’s tile, bricks, stones and sculptures in the manner of
archaeological collection – objects whose status ‘as found’ or artistically worked
artefacts gave a statement about occupancy and territory more than a program
announcing a particular style of approach.

These two exhibitions – ‘Parallel of Life and Art’ and ‘Patio and Pavilion’ – were
exemplary presentations of what ‘as found’ stood for: a process of finding something
which was not already obvious but which, once found, acquires an influence as an
idea and in its materiality. It was this thinking which influenced Scott Brown, when
she was a student at the AA in the fifties. It opened her eyes to what was immediately
around her. Discussing the IG influence upon her work in 1990, Scott Brown wrote:

‘Although I was not aware of its name, I did know of an exciting community of
architects, architectural historians, artists and engineers connected with the
architects Alison and Peter Smithson. I remember seeing Nigel Henderson’s
photographs and the Parallel of Life and Art show at the ICA and, like others at the
AA at the time, I knew the work of Eduardo Palaozzi and Reyner Banham. However,
because the Smithsons’ architecture and ideas were extremely important to me, it was
primarily through them that IG perspectives came to influence my thinking.’

The Independent Group’s influence in the fifties stretched to artists and architecture
students at other London art schools. At the AA School of Architecture, for example,
Scott Brown found,

‘a group of students looking intensely at what was immediately around them: popular
culture, the industrial and commercial vernacular, and the neighbourhood street
life…’

In addition to this development, there were other parallel movements of thinking,
particularly in literature, theatre and film making during this period. The play called
Look Back In Anger (1956) by John Osborne based on a book called Angry Young
Man (1951) by Leslie Allen Paul and films such as Every Day Except Christmas
(1957) directed by Lindsay Anderson and Together (1955) by Lorenza Mazetti shared

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48 Scott Brown, D., Learning from Brutalism, in Robbins, The Independent Group: Postwar
Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenly, pp.203-206.
a definite focus on the everyday and the unspectacular events of the working class\textsuperscript{50}. Often the existing city was used as location rather than studio reality and the films shot with direct camerawork without proper script.

Together, the people involved in this parallel of thinking in the field of architecture (Smithsons), visual arts (Paolozzi, Henderson and Hamilton), theatre (Osborne), literature (Allen Paul) and film (Anderson and Mazetti) became protagonists of what in recent years has become known as the 'As Found' movement\textsuperscript{51}. They did not form a homogeneous body but did share an attitude, which could only be described as a struggle against the conventions of academic art. Instead of using some romantic notions of what art should represent, they had allowed what already existed provide stimulus and produce new insights. And it was this attitude which surrounded Scott Brown during her stay in London\textsuperscript{52}.

In tune with these sentiments, Scott Brown started photographing ads and public lettering in London and Europe before leaving for America in 1958\textsuperscript{53}. Over there, to her collaboration with Venturi, which began when they were both teaching at the University of Pennsylvania in the sixties, she added her British background of pop influence. It was a collaboration that worked well, as according to Scott Brown:

'...we both bring a rule-breaking outlook to aesthetics – we like the same "ugly" things – and we both think that rule breaking should be not wilful but based on the demands of reality\textsuperscript{54}.

Hence, it was not surprising out of their examination of the environment around them, both Venturi and Scott Brown developed a strong appreciation for pop art, popular culture and the commercial vernacular.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, pp.203.
\textsuperscript{50} Lichtenstein & Schregenberger, As Found: The Discovery of the Ordinary, pp. 238-311
\textsuperscript{51} The book titled As Found: The Discovery of the Ordinary gives a comprehensive account of the parallels of thought in art, architecture, literature, theatre and film in the fifties and sixties in Britain. See Ibid
\textsuperscript{52} See Chapter 2: The Education Years of this study for the influences surrounding Denise Scott Brown in London.
\textsuperscript{54} Scott Brown, D., Learning from Brutalism, in Ibid, pp.203.
The Influence of Pop Art and Popular Culture

The work of the members of the Independent Group in the fifties in London generally laid the groundwork for Pop Art, in their discovery of artistic powers in the popular images from the world of advertising and science fiction. It was said that Pop Art was born twice: first in England and then again, independently in America.\(^{55}\)

The Venturis, like the Smithsons were strongly influenced by the work of contemporary artists of their time, and as such, see realism as relevant in the formation of form and space in the everyday world of post-war America. Their revolutionary realism were constructed from a sensibility which they inherited with bemused detachment from artists such as Andy Warhol (Figure 4. 8), Robert Rauschenberg (Figure 7. 32, Chapter Seven) and Jasper Johns.\(^{56}\)

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This sensibility was already evident in Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, where he had doses of popular culture overlaying his historical and formalist arguments. Phrases in the book such as 'Ironic convention is relevant both for the individual building and the townscape' and 'the honky-tonk elements in our architecture and townscape...are often the main source of occasional variety and vitality of our cities', strongly described Venturi's pop leanings. His book concluded, not with a mannerist façade but with a photograph of the messy commercialism of an American Main Street (Figure 2. 12, Chapter Two), which he contrasted with Thomas Jefferson's buildings in Charlottesville of the University of Virginia, proposing that both Main Street and the commercial strip were, 'almost all right'. Nevertheless, unlike the Smithsons who were close friends with pop artists through their association with the Independent Group, Venturi, who incorporated the general trends of contemporary work in his architecture, did not personally know the pop artists, nor did he make the media and semiotics the subject of systematic study.

However, like the Smithsons, Robert Venturi strove to connect elements of low art with that of high art. To him, a relevant architecture is one which is multi-level where the same building would communicate at one level to people belonging to high culture group such as architectural critics and at the same time could be understood and enjoyed by the ordinary man or woman on the street. As such, both Venturi and Scott Brown, in their joint effort, promoted elemental reference where they designed houses to look like houses and fire stations to look like fire stations. The ordinary and banal are employed but in an extraordinary way or 'by twist of context' to create

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57 Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp.44.
58 Ibid
61 Writing in 1992, Robert Venturi made clear these design intentions when he stated, 'We worked hard to make Fire Station No.4 in Columbus, Indiana, as well as the later Dixwell Fire Station in New Haven, Connecticut, look like a fire station. We consciously and explicitly made this inherently civic but modest building not heroic and original: we made it ordinary, conventional, familiar, in terms of its formal and symbolic image — conforming to your generic idea about how a fire station looked — representing perhaps how a child would think of it'. See Venturi, Robert, *Iconography and Electronics Upon A Generic Architecture: A
'new meanings within the whole' and make people see the same things in a different way.\textsuperscript{62} It is a method, according to Venturi, which corresponds to that of Pop Art:

'\ldots\ldots Pop Art of the mid-century represents a particular elitist movement involving sophisticated connections between perception and meaning via scale, symbol and context. It is usually based on the idea that change in context and scale usually causes change in meaning and it specifically employs ordinary and familiar commercial images that are usually enlarged and projected in extraordinary context – matted and framed on the wall of a gallery or living room – that become thereby at once extraordinary and unfamiliar'\textsuperscript{63}.

Hence, in the context of the dynamics of consumer culture, the Venturis suggested choosing elements they regarded as conventional and 'mass produced' and available in the market place, then customising those choices through often cosmetic but highly symbolic alterations. They asserted that the borrowed commercial elements should also be transformed by changing their context in order to create new meanings. Robert cited Pop Art as a case in point, whereby commonplace elements which go through change of contextual relationships of space and scale produces unfamiliarity and ambiguity\textsuperscript{64}. Like the Campbell Soup can in Andy Warhol's painting, pop artists use unusual juxtapositions of everyday objects in tense and vivid plays between the old and new associations to flout the everyday interdependence of context and meaning, giving a new interpretation of twentieth-century cultural artefacts. Therefore, using conventional elements in an 'unconventional way' in architecture can create 'new meanings within the whole and by 'twist of context' can make people see 'the same things in a different way'. Venturi stressed this point in \textit{Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture} when he wrote:

'(Architects).....should use convention and make it vivid. I mean he should use convention conventionally. By convention I mean both the elements and methods of building. Conventional elements are those which are common in their manufacture, form, and use. (They are) ...anonymously designed products connected with architecture and construction, and also to commercial display elements which are positively banal or vulgar in themselves and are seldom associated with architecture'.

\textsuperscript{62} Venturi, \textit{Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture}, pp. 43.
\textsuperscript{63} Robert Venturi made the statement when he was explaining to Robert Maxwell how Pop Art could be relevant to architects. See 'Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown: An Interview with Robert Maxwell' in \textit{Pop Architecture: A Sophisticated Interpretation of Popular Culture}, Architectural Design, Vol. 62, No. 7/8, July-August 1992, pp. 9
\textsuperscript{64} Venturi, \textit{Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture}, pp 44.
The architect should accept the methods and elements he already has. He often fails when he attempt per se the search for form hopefully new, and the research techniques hopefully advanced. Technical innovations require investments in time and skills and money beyond the architects reach, at least in our kind of society.

The architect thereby, through the organization of parts, creates meaningful context for them within the whole. Through unconventional organization of conventional parts he is able to create new meanings within the whole. If he uses convention conventionally, if he organizes familiar things in an unfamiliar way, he is changing their context, and he can use even the cliché to gain a fresh effect. Familiar things seen in an unfamiliar context become perceptually new as well as old.  

In Learning from Las Vegas, the authors (Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour) devoted not just one illustration to the commercial main street as Venturi had done in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, but an entire study. In it, the authors admired the forms, signs and night lights of Las Vegas (Figure 4. 9) and proclaimed the importance of advertising hoardings and asserted that one of the social functions of architecture – communication – was more important than formal manipulations of space and form. Preceding the Las Vegas study was a series of studio projects both Venturi and Scott Brown taught at Yale University, namely the New York City subway in 1967, Las Vegas (studio version) in 1968 and Levittown in 1970. Seen together, the studio projects demonstrate the range of sources the Venturis have derived from consumer and popular culture. For while the Las Vegas study necessarily focussed on iconography of roadside advertising, the subway study sympathetically concentrated on user’s preference in navigating their routes in the environment in which they find themselves. The Levittown study, on the other hand, examined the pluralism of need by looking at the suburban mass houses that people seemed to prefer and the way they shaped them to suit their needs. In all these studies, the Venturis emphasised the need ‘to question how we look at things’ in an ‘open-minded and non-judgemental investigation’. Denise contended that, ‘judgement is withheld in the interest of understanding and receptivity...... Judgement is merely deferred to make subsequent judgement more sensitive’. This sensitivity is applied

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63 Ibid
64 Venturi et al., Learning from Las Vegas.
66 Scott Brown, Denise, Learning From Pop, Casabella 35, nos. 359-360, December 1971, pp.23
in order to learn from the existing environment because 'high style architects are not producing what people want or need'.

Figure 4.9: Las Vegas: Iconography of roadside advertising (as illustrated in Learning from Las Vegas)

The Venturis' non-judgemental acceptance of the existing and the undesigned urban environment in their search for an architecture 'representative of our times' can thus be seen as parallel with the Smithsons' acceptance of the ordinary. Reiterating Le Corbusier's diatribe against 'eyes which do not see' the beauties of the peasant domestic architecture and liners, aeroplanes and automobiles, both the Smithsons and the Venturis, influenced by contemporary art thinking of their time, advocated a new way of seeing the ordinary and the everyday.

60 Ibid, pp.23.
Signs of Life

The positive attitude towards the ordinary in the Venturis’ approach can be seen clearly in their exhibition called the Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City at the Smithsonian Institution’s Renwick Gallery in Washington held from February 26 through September 30, 1976 (Figure 4.10). It was organised as part of the national commemoration of the American Bicentennial. The exhibition was not only an exploration of the commercial vernacular described earlier in Learning from Las Vegas, but also of the forms of the everyday urban landscapes of mid-twentieth century America: the traditional city street, the highway and its commercial strip, and the suburb. These and three common housing types: the Levittowner, a lower-middle class tract house, the Williamsburg, an upper-middle class suburban home, and the urban working-class Row House were all explored using techniques not dissimilar to the ones employed by the IG members. There is a definite pop-art quality in the assemblage of materials which mainly consisted of blown-up photographic images put together to form collages, a technique reminiscent of collages produced by Eduardo Paolozzi during the active years of the IG. The furniture and decorative elements in the homes ‘spoke’ in cartoon thought bubbles which gave symbolic reference of each item while neon lights and colourful billboards evoked the experience of Las Vegas at night. These visual techniques gave anthropological analysis with minimal text. Similar to the Parallel of Life and Art and Patio and Pavilion exhibits at the ICA in London in the fifties, the Signs of Life installation was carefully prepared and extensively researched to produce a display which was aesthetic-based but deliberately anti-beauty in nature and lacking in explicit theoretical articulation, leaving the viewers themselves to produce connections, draw conclusions, and develop associations. Like the ICA exhibitions, it too received equally dissenting reviews from critics who generally questioned the organisers’ absolute refusal to be judgmental.

70 The exhibition was discussed in great depth by Deborah Fausch in Fausch, Deborah, Ugly and Ordinary: The Representation of the Everyday, in Harris, Steven, and Berke, Deborah, Architecture of the Everyday, Princeton Architectural Press, Yale Publications on Architecture, 1997, p. 75-106. Also see Signs of Life: Venturi/Rauch, Architectural Design, August 1976, pp.496-498.

71 Most critics expressed bafflement and incomprehension by the exhibition’s anthropological aggregation of examples. Paul Goldberger, for example, writing for Artnews called Signs of Life ‘something of a disappointment’ and was not charmed by the ‘row house with asbestos shingles’: ‘the exhibition’s absolute refusal to judgemental is one of its serious
More importantly, the *Signs of Life* exhibition demonstrated the Venturis’ reiteration of the Smithsons’ plea – almost two decades later – for the acceptance of the existing, to deliberately engage with what was around and to follow its traces with interest. However, while the Smithsons revelled in ‘found’ everyday community relationships, *objet trouvè* and urban detritus in the fifties, the Venturis’, in the seventies, were more fascinated by artefacts shaped essentially by commercial and popular concerns. Scott Brown, in the article, ‘Learning from Pop’, wrote:

‘*Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Levittown, the swinging singles on the Westheimer Strip, golf resorts, boating communities, Co-op City, the residential backgrounds to soap operas, TV commercials and mass mag ads, billboards and route 66 are sources for a changing architectural sensibility.*

She believed that from the examination of these ‘found’ developments, one could find,

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`problems.....There are so many things in this show that.....work better than other things, that look better, that serve their users better.....we need Venturi and Rauch's expertise to help us make judgements about the broader set of architectural sources that is now commonly used'`. See Fausch, *Ugly and Ordinary: The Representation of the Everyday*, pp. 86.
'formal vocabularies for today which are more relevant to peoples' diverse needs and more tolerant of the untidiness of urban life than the "rationalist", Cartesian formal orders of latter day modern architecture.'\(^\text{72}\).  

Relevant to peoples' diverse needs they may be, but the commercial strip and the suburban crackerbox houses that the Venturis turned to were undoubtedly 'artificial' and mass produced, both examples traditionally despised by elitist planners. However, here we find the Smithsons sharing a similar vein in thinking with the Venturis on the subject. The Smithsons had been sympathetic towards several pieces of make-believe developments, notably Disneyland in America and Port Grimaud in South of France (Figure 4.11). In *Without Rhetoric*, the Smithsons appreciated these developments for their past forms and inherent signs indicating use and pleasure. They wrote:  

"In both Disneyland and Port Grimaud, streets widen at shops or levees, views are indicated by openings between buildings. The form-language springs from an accepted notion of pleasurable use, the style from a real past."\(^\text{73}\).  

In an earlier article by the Smithsons titled *Signs of Occupancy* (1972), which incidentally pre-echoed the Venturis' exhibition title i.e. *Signs of Life*, they wrote:  

"...it is through the old Disneyland in Los Angeles and, more recently, Port Grimaud, which are so unashamedly pleasure-indicating places that one suddenly begins to think differently."\(^\text{74}\).  

These two statements are to say, the style from the past and the articulation of public spaces in such developments, however kitsch and pastiche, were at once enjoyable, familiar and communicative, and above all, made sense. It is difficult to determine which one came first: the Smithsons' 'Port Grimaud is almost all right' or Venturi's 'Main street is almost all right'?\(^\text{75}\), the latter implied when the author in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) reprinted Peter Blake's photograph of Main Street, Times Square which was taken from Blake's book called *God's Own Junkyard*  

\(^\text{75}\) Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp. 104-105.
(Figure 4. 12). Both were not only an appreciation of the commercial vernacular but were calling attention to the defects of idealistic modern design.

![Image of Port Grimaud](image1.png)

Figure 4. 11: 'Port Grimaud is almost alright.'

![Image of Main Street](image2.png)

Figure 4. 12: 'Main street is almost alright'

Nevertheless, there are stark differences in what the Smithsons and the Venturis saw as valid lessons for architecture in their appreciation of mass-produced environments. While the Smithsons appreciated the calm and ordered environment of past styles being imitated to enhance the 'pleasures of use', the Venturis, on the other hand, seem to celebrate the inherent unity in the juxtaposition of often conflicting elements belonging to popular culture. The Smithsons, in their appreciation of Port Grimaud for its private air and peaceful environment, wrote:
‘at Port Grimaud, there is a continuous building face with only two arched gateways…wall says “private, peaceful inside”…..arched gateways say “too small for articulated truck, traffic not encouraged”’. The idea of closed or gated town is easily read: when past form-language is used it is an instant communicator. The past style (Provençal) engages a pleasant nostalgia.²⁶

Compare the above statement with that of Venturi’s on Main Street, U.S.A in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture:

The seemingly chaotic juxtapositions of honky-tonk elements express an intriguing kind of vitality and validity, and they produce an unexpected approach to unity as well….. It is not the obvious or easy unity derived from the dominant binder or the motival order of simpler, less contradictory compositions, but that derived from a complex and illusive order of the difficult whole²⁷.

Hence, the Signs of Life exhibition could also be seen as a reiteration of the Venturis’ attachment to the messy vitality of cities. Here we find an obvious parallel with IG’s interest in ‘the high impact image in a world of competing messages’.²⁸ Lawrence Alloway, a founding member of IG, in City Notes (1959), wrote, ‘It is absurd to print a photograph of Piccadilly Circus and caption it “ARCHITECTURAL SQUALOR”’.²⁹ Alloway propounded that the dense display in the city is part of the ‘real environment’ related to ‘popular environment’ which architects can never keep control of. Popular art in the city becomes a function of the whole city and not only of its architects. He concluded that if ‘the architect learns more about subjective and “illogical” human values from the study of popular art, then architecture will have gained and so will future users’.³⁰

However, not all IG members felt the same way as the Venturis and Alloway about ‘noisy and crowded cities’ and certainly not the Smithsons. While the Venturis saw intrigue and fascinating complexity in chaos, the Smithsons approached the city in a more avant-garde manner. The British architects’ translation of the city is more contemplative, structurally elegant and pragmatically organised. They seek to assign a

²⁶ Smithson, Signs of Occupancy, pp. 91-97.
²⁷ Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, pp. 104-105.
²⁹ Alloway, Lawrence, City Notes, Architectural Design, January 1959 and also see Ibid., pp.167.
³⁰ Ibid.
new kind of order, beyond style, from the social and physical realities of the existing city. A such, the traditional neighbourhood patterns of activity are to be relocated to high rise structures where children could play safely and people would gather on street decks. This approach can be seen in a number of their urban projects, the most obvious being, the Golden Lane Estate scheme (Figure 2.2, Chapter Two), where the street deck will link up to form a ‘framework, like drains, to which everyone connects up’ and extend over an entire urban region or district creating a multi-level city. In the reconstruction of Berlin Hauptstadt, 1957, (Figure 5.18, Chapter Five), the Smithsons proposed a system consisting of a pedestrian ‘platform net’ of variable mesh laid out on the permanently ‘ruined’ city – ruined in the sense that accelerated movement and change in the twentieth century were incapable of relating to the pattern of any pre-existing fabric.

Contemplative Objects

The Smithsons’ and the Venturis’ acceptance of the ordinary and the existing also included ‘pretty things that attract’, popular winsome objects, collectibles and everyday accoutrements, which are often associated with bad taste and scorned by ‘high culture public’. In their assimilation of these ‘low culture’ artefacts into their work, the architects saw the need to appropriate the objects using high art expertise – an unequal opposition that would not work the other way around. Although the Smithsons and the Venturis regarded themselves as being in tune with the needs or taste of the ordinary man, they also saw their role as one which belongs to fine art or high culture group. This, the Smithsons appeared to have assumed when they wrote

*But Today We Collect Ads:*

'Traditionally the fine arts depend on the popular arts for their vitality, and the popular arts depend on the fine arts for their respectability. It has been said that things hardly “exist” before the fine artist has made use of them, they are simply part of the unclassified background material against which we pass our lives.'

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83 Smithson, Alison and Peter, *'But Today We Collect Ads*', article reprinted in Robbins, *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, pp.185-186. (First written for Ark 18, November 1956)
Likewise, the Venturis too had conceived their approach as one half of a high/low dichotomy:

'To gain sight from the commonplace is nothing new: Fine art often follows folk art. Romantic architects of the eighteenth century discovered an existing and conventional rustic architecture. Early Modern architects appropriated an existing and conventional industrial vocabulary without much adaptation'.

In the attempt to appropriate the common ephemera into architecture, the Smithsons were careful to detach themselves from its chaotic and noisy tendencies. In an earlier publication called *Ordinariness and Light*, the Smithsons had affirmed a purist taste for well formed everyday objects where ordinariness represented contemplative ideality of types – as the Smithsons phrased it, 'the chair chair, the table table, the cup cup'. In a similar vein, towards the end of the article *But Today We Collect Ads*, the Smithsons have consistently placed the ‘mass produced’ within the context of Japanese aesthetics which they understood as possessing a certain meditative qualities and respect to materials. Consider the following citation from *But Today We Collect Ads*:

‘....To the architects of the twenties “Japan” was the Japanese house of prints and paintings, the house with its roof off, the plane bound together by thin black lines. (To quote Gropius “the whole country looks like one gigantic basic design course.”) In the thirties Japan meant gardens, the garden entering the house, the tokonama.

*For us, it would be the objects on the beaches, the piece of paper blowing about the street, the throw-away object and the pop package.*

*For today we collect ads.*’

It was this purist attitude towards everyday objects that set the Smithsons apart from the Venturis. The Venturis loved the chaotic tendencies of popular culture and all its

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84 Venturi et al., *Learning from Las Vegas*, pp.3.
86 Writing in *Without Rhetoric*, the Smithsons commented on what they meant by ‘Japanese Aesthetic’: ‘Our understanding — and so it might have been for Mies — was that for the Japanese their “Form” was only part of a general conception of life, a sort of reverence for the natural world and, from that, for the materials of the built world. It is this respect for materials — a realisation of the affinity which can be established between building and man — which was at the root of our way of seeing and thinking about things that we called New Brutalism’. See Smithson, *Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic 1955–1972*, pp. 6.
artefacts. When the Venturis visited Japan late in their career in 1990, it was not so much the minimalist and structuralist architecture of the temples and contemporary buildings that fascinated them but the 'eclectic urban juxtapositions of symbols, forms, scales, civilizations and patterns' of contemporary Tokyo and historical Kyoto. In Tokyo, they admired the seemingly complex urban infrastructure with the juxtapositions of different cultures and sophisticated electronic signs set amongst the myriad of traditional village dwellings, urban shrines, and contemporary buildings. Within historical Kyoto, they were delighted to find the pure and apparently simple architectural conventions of the shrines in their impure context, not at all corresponding to the minimalist and modular purity so admired by modernists. There were, as they put it, 'juxtaposition of the rich color, pattern and variety of the sublime kimono' and 'the range of objects that make up the market' which varied from sophisticated to Pop, crafted to kitsch - a manifestation of the celebrated custom of exchanging gifts in Japan.

In a sense, however, despite the differences, both pairs found a way of dealing with popular culture artefacts in the work of the great Californian designers Charles and Ray Eames. The Eames were part of the 'modern regionalist' group to have emerged on the West Coast of the United States immediately after the war. Their best known work - the Eames House (Figure 3.23, Chapter Three) - demonstrated the use of industrial components and a steel frame vocabulary which William Curtis described as designed "in a deliberate informal interpretation specially attuned to the luxurious hillside sites of Beverly Hills and Hollywood."
In the context of this study, the Californian designers’ more important contribution would be their examination of a new way of relating decoration to structure and the realisation of the importance of the unification of audience. For the Eames, it is the occupant’s daily life and his ephemera that leave marks in a house. In the Eames House, the real architecture was to be found in the endless arrangements of collectibles within it. The real space was to be found in the details of their everyday life.

Hence, it is not surprising that perhaps no others were so captivated by the Eames, and more lucid about their work than the Smithsons. In an article in *Architectural Design*, the Smithsons wrote:

‘There has been much reflection in England on the Eames House. For the Eames House was a cultural gift parcel received here at a particularly useful time. The bright wrapper has made most people – especially Americans – throw the content away as not sustaining it. But we have been brooding on it – working on it – feeding from it.’

During the sixties, in the Smithsons’ quest to find answers to the questions of design and furnishing of interior spaces, they started experimenting with Charles and Ray Eames’ ‘select and arrange’ technique. It was a decorating technique to express ‘a mood of wit and informality’ using household objects and furnishings such as plants, Mexican masks, paper flowers, toys and other winsome objects they had collected on their travels. Each object was selected based on the recognisability of its own definite character and thus recalled its origin. The qualities of the objects were enhanced and speaking more clearly of themselves by virtue of their arrangement.

The ‘select and arrange’ technique was crucial to the Smithsons as it fitted within the principles of their ‘as found’ theory. Alison in 1966 wrote:

‘It is possible Nigel Henderson could have led us to the ephemera of life – the penny whistle, the Woolworths plastic toy or Christmas decoration, the German pressed metal toy and the walking robots – via photographs of old boots, doors, bits of sacking, but I think it is to Ray and Charles Eames we owe the debt of the

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extravagance of the new folk purchase: fresh, pretty, colourful ephemera....The Eames gave us courage to make sense of anything that attracted....They are our Los Angeles – who providently provided us with the furniture to put in perspectives of buildings.  

As such, both the Patio and Pavilion installations and the Eames House can be considered as phenomena in parallel. The exhibition installation had various objects arranged in a manner of an archaeological collection within a hut and a surrounding enclosure built of old boards, polycarbonate and aluminium panel. A ‘solemn mood’ was achieved using used materials and artistically worked objects whose ‘as found’ status symbolically alluded to all human needs. Likewise, the Eames House consisted of elements artistically ‘arranged’ and ‘rearranged’ to make a statement. The house itself consisted of pavilions set into a territory defined by trees against which was played a content of individual objects, where both house and content are perceived in graphic terms.

A decade later, we find the Venturis being equally influenced by the aesthetic of Charles and Ray Eames. Relevant to the Venturis was the complex and unusual juxtaposition of everyday objects in the Eames’ interior. Analogous to Robert Venturi’s promotion of the ‘messy vitality’ of eclecticism over uniformity advanced earlier in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, the Venturis in 1973, applauded the Eames for,

'.......reinvent(ing) good Victorian clutter. Modern architects wanted everything neat and clean and they came along and spread eclectic assemblages over an interior.'

In one of Robert Venturi’s earliest works - the renovation of the James B. Duke house for New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts (1958-59) - he scrupulously preserved the eighteenth century interior and used furniture that was commonplace and standard to create ‘harmony between the old and the new through contrasting juxtapositions (Figure 4. 13).'  

This idea of assemblage of found objects and that of building as ‘shell’ waiting and inviting occupation is also apparent in Robert


Venturi’s other projects. The Mother’s House (1959-64) is one example. Venturi later wrote:

'I designed the house so my mother’s old furniture (circa 1925, plus some antiques) would look good in it. In those days interiors were expected to be purely modern. Although you could scatter some very old antiques about (and the Italians were masters at this), eclecticism was essentially out."

![Image](image-url)

**Figure 4.13: James B. Duke house for New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts, 1958-59,**

*Robert Venturi*

Typically, Venturi and Scott Brown’s home in the in-city suburb of Mount Airy, Philadelphia (Figure 4.14), was furnished with clashing juxtaposition and eclectic mix of period furniture collected over the years, colourful wall coverings and abstract chairs which they had designed themselves and pop art images.

Approaching decorating and furnishing in a more contemplative manner, the Smithsons’ used the ‘select and arrange’ technique or what they dubbed the ‘Eames aesthetic’ in the interior of their own house – The Upper Lawn Pavilion in Fonthill.

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96 This statement is made based on the observation of photographs of the Venturis’ home interior at Mount Airy which were featured in Brownlee et al., *Out of the Ordinary: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Associates*, pp.92 figure 128 and pp. 251.
Abbey, 1959–61 (Figure 4. 15) – with objects found, gathered and displayed: 'old iron implements dug up, apples picked or dried, fragments of glass and china, table settings, display of flowers, petals and berries, wasp's nests and cedar cones'. It was a technique, which allowed the Smithsons to 'accept the pretty' because 'it is the Eames who have made it respectable to like pretty things. This seems extraordinary, but in our world pretty things are usually equated with social irresponsibility.'

In retrospect, the Smithsons' and the Venturis' approach to decorative arts were at odds with the then current practice where architecture and the interiors were expected to be purely modern. In the Eames' work, both pairs of architects saw a way of dealing with popular culture objects. The Californian designers showed how high art expertise could be used to appropriate the low culture objects into fine art. It was all right to juxtapose the candelabra from Turkey or the plastic flowers from the hypermarket next to the classic Thonet or the standard equipment Le Corbusier used. It was by virtue of selecting what exactly was right and the attention to the last detail of arrangement that an art form developed.

Despite the Smithsons' and the Venturis' similar references to the Eames in their approach to pop objects and decorating, it is the question of honesty and integrity that sets them apart. While the Smithsons were strict in their use of objects - popular or fine art - in their 'as found' state, the Venturis did not hesitate to superficially use pieces of furniture and objects which they had reformulated and arbitrarily revised, creating in the process an aesthetic more abstract and artificial than that of the original. The series of chairs that the Venturis had designed for Knoll (Figure 4. 16) in

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99 Le Corbusier's fundamental argument was that domestic furnishings are 'tools,' or equipment, not decorative art. They reflect standard, universal needs and therefore should be standardized and rationalized in their manufacture and limited in number and type. In the Esprit Nouveau pavilion, which he designed for the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes, in Paris in 1925, Le Courbusier included furniture that he thought fulfilled these basic requirements: Thonet's B 39 chair (for dining and working), an English-type traditional club armchair for relaxing, tables assembled from industrial
the late seventies and early eighties were essentially an application of flat historical façades to a modern processed material – moulded, laminated plywood – and leaving the laminate layers exposed in profile. No such resolution would be possible for the Smithsons for whom ‘essences’ are still very real.

Figure 4.14: House of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Mount Airy Philadelphia

Figure 4.15: Interior, The Upper Lawn Pavilion in Fonthill Abbey, 1959-61, Alison & Peter Smithson

components, and especially made modular storage units – casiers, or cabinets – with standard exterior dimensions and variable interior fittings.

100 Brownlee et al., Out of the Ordinary: Robert Venturi Denise Scott Brown and Associates, pp.201-212.
Figure 4.16: Chippendale Chair for Knoll, 1978-84

Signs

The differences between the Smithsons and the Venturis in their assimilation of the ordinary and the everyday into their work lie largely on their disparate views on how an object, a building or a place should communicate to their users. The Venturis’ discourse on design practice may be regarded as predominantly visual in emphasis. For them, the surface of a building can be painted to reflect any image they regarded suitable for communication. The Smithsons, on the other hand, took a more virtuous approach. They believed that the inhering qualities in a building or an object should be able to speak for itself and to its users without having to resort to surface decoration.

In both Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture and Learning from Las Vegas, the readers are presented with largely comment – principally visually based – on a vast collection of photographic illustrations of the external facades of building and street signs. For example, in the former, Robert Venturi’s comments on the Cloth Hall in Bruges dwells on how the building is both a wall and a tower, because at street level it relates to the square, while the ‘violently disproportionate’ tower relates to the
whole town. Similar descriptions are found in the Las Vegas book. Their descriptions of the gambling halls and vibrant signs were based on what can be seen driving along the strip. For example they wrote:

‘The side elevation of the complex (the Aladdin Hotel-Gambling casino) is important, because it is seen by approaching traffic at a great distance and for a longer time than the façade. The rhythmic gables on the long, low, English medieval style, half-timbered motel sides of the Aladdin read emphatically across the parking space and through the signs and the giant statue of the neighbouring Texaco station, and contrast with the modern Near Eastern flavor of the casino front. Casino fronts on the strip often inflect in shape and ornament toward the right, to welcome right-lane traffic.’

From the visual examination of the past and commercial vernacular are extracted and manufactured design tenets. Once again, this exercise remains primarily on surface appearances:

‘We shall emphasize image – image over process or form – in asserting that architecture depends in its perception and creation on past experience and emotional association and that these symbolic and representational elements may often be contradictory to the form, structure, and program with which they combine in the same building.’

Visual materials taken from the surfaces of buildings and objects and from the cultural circumstances that gave rise to them were often condensed and arbitrarily revised, creating in the process an aesthetic more abstract and artificial than that of the original. As described in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, the process involves fitting in buildings ‘double-functioning’ or ‘vestigial elements’, ‘circumstantial elements distortions’, ‘expedient devices’, ‘eventful exceptions’, ‘exceptional diagonals’, ‘things in things’, ‘crowded or contained intricacies’, ‘linings or layerings’, ‘residual spaces’, ‘redundant spaces’, ‘ambiguities’, ‘inflections’, ‘dualities’, ‘difficult wholes’, or the ‘phenomena of both-and’.

The Venturis’ overwhelming attentions to matters concerning surfaces and shells are related to their theory of buildings as ‘decorated sheds’ and ‘ducks’. They believed that the ‘decorated shed’ where symbolic meanings are ‘applied’ on a conventional

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101 Venturi et al., Learning from Las Vegas, pp. 35.
102 Ibid., pp. 87.
103 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture
shelter was more relevant than the ‘duck’ where a whole building was a symbol\(^{104}\) (Figure 4. 17). To the Venturis, the manifestation of the ‘decorated shed’ is more idealistic for a communicating architecture as it allows for a thin surface or ‘appliqué’ which could be ‘painted’ to reflect any image. It is a two dimensional approach which emphasised process over form which Robert Venturi acknowledged when he later wrote:

*In Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* I analyzed spatial layering and ‘things within things’ \(^{105}\) These complex forms of appliqué I opposed to the \(...\) spatial configurations that late Modern architecture and substituted for symbolism and ornament. In *Learning from Las Vegas* we analyzed commercial roadside building as one model for a symbolic architecture and illustrated our Football Hall of Fame Competition entry which we call a building-board. From these sign-appliqués we developed the idea of the decorated shed as a building type and as a vehicle for ornament in architecture. In the progression of our ideas about appliqué, first as spatial layerings, then signboard, and then ornament, we came to appliqué as representation in architecture. Representation in this context involves the depiction as opposed to the construction of symbol and ornament. Manifestations of this approach to symbolism in architecture are essentially two-dimensional and pictorial.\(^{105}\)

(Emphasis in original)

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\(^{104}\) Venturi et al., *Learning from Las Vegas*, pp. 87-92.


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*Figure 4. 17: The Duck and the Decorated Shed*

Hence, in most of the Venturis’ schemes, decorative two-dimensional skin independent of space and structure was designed to contain symbolic meanings in architecture derived from historical and contemporary association. One such example that demonstrated this approach was their proposal for the National Football of Fame building at New Jersey (Figure 4. 19). Just as the cathedral at Amiens was ‘a billboard with a building behind it’ (Figure 4. 18), their proposal at New Jersey was
incorporated a similar 'two dimensional screen for propaganda'. Describing their scheme, they wrote:

'Our original idea was to make the building in the shape of a football. But we made a sign instead of a sculpture: an essentially two-dimensional billboard.......which is also a building.......the billboard corresponds to the largely false west façade of a Gothic cathedral.'

The West façade of Amiens cathedral, which is massive with its elaborate three-dimensional relief of religious statuary, conveys meanings of Christian spirituality:

'The impact of the façade comes from the immensely complex meaning derived from the symbolism and explicit associations of aedicules and their statues and from their relative positions and sizes in the hierarchic order of the kingdom of heaven on the facades.'

Therefore, presumably, the giant screen (100 ft. high by 210 ft. long) envisaged for New Jersey was to have conveyed 'the meanings' or 'the images' of a national sport. In this case, choreographs of famous football plays on the 'electronically programmed' billboard.

Figure 4. 18 Amiens cathedral, (as illustrated in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture)

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106 Venturi et al., Learning from Las Vegas, pp105.
107 Ibid. pp.116-117.
Such polemical separation would be impossible for Alison and Peter Smithsons. What they were searching for was an architecture of truth, free from rhetoric: 'We see architecture as the direct statement of a way of life'.109 The Venturis' idea of communication through appliqués on sheds would be too forced and unnatural a solution for the Smithsons. Alison's and Peter's search for the essence of 'natural' architecture led them to look at the characteristics of the vernacular and popular examples which they had considered as paradigms of non-rhetorical architecture. From these examinations they tried to formulate a design methodology which would result in a modern architecture which would exhibit these characteristics. Describing their search, the Smithsons wrote:

'What we are looking for is the gentlest of styles, which whilst still giving an adumbration of the measures of internal events and structures, (rooms, activities, servicing arrangements, supports), leaves itself open to – even suggests – interpretation, without itself being changed'.110 (Emphasis in original)

Their search for the 'gentlest of styles' led them to examine a number of vernacular developments which varied from the Georgian city of Bath to Disneyland and Port Grimaud to Housing at Kieithoek, Rotterdam by J.J.P. Oud111 (Figure 4. 20). In their examination, they found that these places had one thing in common: form language. According to the Smithsons, 'form language' refers to the characteristics of a place or building that acts as both an indicator and enhancer of everyday use:

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110 Smithson, Signs of Occupancy, pp.91-97.
111 ibid, pp.91-97.
(Form Language)....sets up a dialogue between object and user. The object suggests how it can be used, the user responds by using it well – the object improves; or it is used badly – the object is degraded, the dialogue ceases'.

The Smithsons suggested that in Georgian Bath, in the short period during which the city evolved, there existed ‘form language’ of townscape and a ‘formal language’ of building techniques. They wrote:

‘(There are).....‘hundreds of yards of “just houses” as livable and relaxed as anywhere and this is achieved through a rich and flexible form-language entirely based on the use of house – houses / street / service street / service yards / service buildings / gardens / houses’ ground.’

At both Disneyland and Port Grimaud, the Smithsons found past style and forms being used as an instant communicator of use. While these ‘popular’ developments demonstrate the evolution of the language of a whole period, at Kiefhoek, they found form language which had developed from common language of the time suitable for the architecture of an industrialised society, where every bit of wood, length of tube and change of road width are deliberately shaped and placed to speak of everyday use.

It was this form-language and pleasures of common use that the Smithsons sought to apply in their schemes. In the Robin Hood Gardens housing scheme (Figure 4. 21) for example, their design intentions based on the idea of form-language were clear:

‘What we have tried to do in the development of the basic idea....is to evolve the form and sub-forms so as to indicate clearly how the place is to be used. So that its occupiers are left in no doubt, yet be unaware of having been “told”, which is intended to be quiet part and which the noisy, where one is expected to walk and where to drive, where to play, where to deliver or bring the ambulance.’

As such, instead of resorting to a theory of signs, the Smithsons believed that a building should always signal how it was intended to be used. Signs are instructions for use, therefore signs of life, nothing more, in contrast to the Venturis who see signs as deliberate means of communicating visual meanings to its users. The Venturis presupposed a deterministic relation between surface features of buildings and the

112 Ibid
113 Ibid
114 Ibid
meanings which people assign to them; that is, a causal relation exists between surface configuration of facades of buildings and meanings. In *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Venturi pleaded for an architecture full of richness where there can be correspondence between a society and its architecture.

'...architecture which includes varying levels of meaning breeds ambiguity and tension...Simultaneous perception of a multiplicity of levels involves struggles and hesitations for the observer, and makes his perception more vivid'.

He argued that since life in an advanced industrial society is intrinsically complicated and full of contradictions that these qualities should be clearly evident in the design of individual buildings and in its built environment as a whole. Venturi advocated an architecture which 'yields several levels of meaning', which he believed will make a spectator's perception more vigorous, lively and intense.

![Figure 4.20: Form language found at Housing at Kieffoek, Rotterdam J.J.P. Oud](image)

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Conclusion

In the search for ‘modern vernacular’, the Smithsons and the Venturis turned to the existing environment and its artefacts for inspiration. Both have allowed pop thinking led by contemporary artists of their time to influence their work. The Venturis’ examination of the existing concentrated exclusively on the aesthetics of the commercial vernacular and forms of everyday urban landscapes of mid-twentieth century America: the traditional city street, the highway and its commercial strip, and the suburb. The Venturis believed that from these ‘found’ elements, architects would be able to develop formal vocabularies that are more relevant to people’s diverse needs. In this respect, we find the Smithsons sharing a similar appreciation of commercial developments, evident from their reference to Disneyland and Port Grimaud in their writing.

Nonetheless, while the Smithsons’ consideration of the existing revolved around a sense of calm and order, the Venturis appreciated its noisy tendencies and revelled on the complex juxtapositions of contrasting elements. The Smithsons’ translation of the city is more contemplative and sought a new kind of order beyond style and without rhetoric, from the social and physical realities of the existing city.
Even at the smaller scale of furnishing and decorating of interior space, there are differences in approach. One only need to look at the interiors of each couple’s house. The living room at Mount Airy, Philadelphia belonging to the Venturis was ‘noisy’ with complex juxtacpositions of furniture of different style and period. The furniture that they had designed themselves was based on ‘found’ aesthetics that have been reformulated and arbitrarily revised to become abstract pieces. These pieces decorated an interior space completely covered with, once again; abstract wallpaper and carpets based on common motifs. On the other hand, in the brutalistically conceived interior spaces of the Smithsons’ weekend home at Upper Lawn, Fonthill, were assembled objects in their ‘as found’ state, which gave rise to a poetic effect. Seen together, both building and decorative objects extended beyond the everyday only in a very subliminal manner – without rhetoric. Hence, the overall effect of the Smithson’s living room was almost primitive and modest, in comparison to that of the Venturis which seemed more exuberant, synthetic and noisy. In fact, the Upper Lawn can be considered a ‘duck’ to the Venturis’ homely ‘decorated shed’ in Mount Airy.

In retrospect, the Smithsons were perhaps more akin to the modernist practitioners in their belief that meanings should be communicated through an honest expression of structure and services. The Smithsons believed in what they called ‘form language’ where a building, without having to resort to any surface decoration, should always be able to signal how it was intended to be used. This honesty was still maintained even their work went through a shift in sensibility in the sixties and the seventies from the ‘raw’ Brutalism of the fifties to the gentler more refined architectural language. Describing this shift, the Smithsons wrote:

‘By the end of the sixties the conviction began to bear in more strongly that life was indeed the stuff and decoration of the urban scene but that a very great shift of mind was required if a formal language was to be found that could activate, not merely support, the dressings and interpretations of things and places.”

116 In their own publication called ‘The Shift’ (1982), the Smithsons looked back on their ouvre and wrote that a change of sensibility occurred in their work from ‘brut’ to ‘soft’, not only in terms of built form but also in terms of how they see it inhabited. The early puritanical plea ‘for ordinary things of life to be considered as the stuff and decoration of the urban scene’ was appropriate for a period of austerity such as the fifties. However, the propensity of the seventies demanded that architecture address the new egalitarian clientele and their desire to decorate. Alison and Peter Smithson: The shift, Architectural Monograph 7, Dunster, David (editor), Academy Editions, London, 1982.
If, in the fifties, the ‘as found’ ordinary things in life were considered by the Smithsons as the stuff and decoration of the urban scene, then in the sixties, they saw the city and building fabric as a backdrop for decoration by the users, maintaining that their buildings were incomplete until inhabited. In both cases, they make allowances in their buildings for the ‘as found’ inhabitation of society as well as the ‘as found’ commodities.

In the Venturis’ architecture, communication of meanings in buildings was via decorative two-dimensional skin containing symbolism derived from historical and contemporary association. This approach was dubbed the ‘shed’ as opposed to the ‘duck’ where a whole building is a symbol. The apparent thinness of surface figure to convey certain symbolism and associations was for Venturi and Scott Brown a question of being honest to the provisional conditions of today. They suggested using sources derived from ‘found’ commercial urban and suburban as well historical vernacular in unfamiliar ways by maintaining only a commentary of these popular and historical sources. The symbolism and the quality of appearance from these sources were selected, condensed, arbitrarily revised, and creating in the process as aesthetic more abstract and artificial, more subtle and complex, than that of the antecedent style.

The question of how buildings should communicate to ordinary people is perhaps one of the most pertinent factors distinguishing the Smithsons’ and the Venturis’ architecture. Nevertheless, basic to their work was a similar intention of making references to socio-anthropological roots of popular culture.

117 Ibid, pp. 61.
Chapter 5
Louis Kahn, Team 10 and the Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania

Introduction
In the previous chapters, we find that the Smithsons were perhaps the best known of all the younger architects in Britain for their anti-establishment discursive statements and they played a prominent role in confronting post-war versions of British Modernism. Apart from the ICA, providing a setting for ambitious young architects such as the Smithsons to study and discuss philosophies of architecture and urbanism suitable for the rebuilding of war-torn European cities, were the European CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) conferences. They were active delegates of CIAM and they soon saw themselves questioning the modern ideals of CIAM and at the same time leading a group of young like-minded European architects, collectively known as Team 10. Under the Smithsons’ leadership, Team 10 strove for architecture and urbanism that is partial and incomplete: toward philosophies where architectural and planning concepts are never autonomous but always working in relation to the existing state.

Across the Atlantic, a similar situation is discernible in the works of a group of architects running small firms and part-time teachers who were associated with Louis Kahn. Known collectively under the rubric ‘the greys’ or ‘Philadelphia School’, its most prominent members are Robert Venturi, Romaldo Giurgola, G. Holmes Perkins

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1 The first meeting of CIAM took place at the castle of Mme de Mandrot at La Sarraz near Lausanne in 1928, and discussions among some of Europe’s leading modern architects such as Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius focussed on the interrelationships of architecture and town planning. The British joined CIAM in 1933, five years after it had been established. The British national representative group was formed under the name of MARS, the Modern Architecture Research Society. See Landau, Royston, The End of CIAM and the Role of the British, Rassegna: The Last CIAMS, December 1992, pp.40-47.

2 One of the most important documents published by CIAM is The Charter of Athens, which was really a restatement of the Ville Radieuse philosophy. Reyner Banham, in discussing the Charter, wrote, (It).... ‘conceals a very narrow conception of both architecture and town planning and committed CIAM unequivocally to: a) rigid functional zoning of city plans, with green belts between areas reserved to different functions, and b) a single type of urban housing, expressed in the words of the Charter as ‘high, widely spaced apartment blocks wherever the necessity of housing high density population exists.’ As quoted in Curtis,
and Charles Moore\. They were strongly influenced by Kahn who - trained in the Beaux-Arts principles – was looking to return architecture to some semblance of historical form\. Kahn taught regularly at the Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania in the fifties where he encouraged a respect of the past as the basis for reinvestigation of primitive roots of architectural forms and typologies. Kahn presented his Penn pupils with a very different approach from their Harvard contemporaries, who still upheld the principles of modernism under the inheritance of Walter Gropius.

There were other movements seeking alternatives to modernism afoot in America, nevertheless, the similarity of ideals between Team 10 and Philadelphia School is evident. If Team 10, in challenging the rational and functional limitations of the modern movement, advanced an approach in which typology, urban context and human associations are privileged, then Philadelphia School members, especially Robert Venturi and Louis Kahn, were seen to be introducing similar issues of history, context and meaning into their work. Juxtaposed together, both Team 10’s thinking and the rationale behind the work of members of Philadelphia School seem to share similar essential humanist values of ‘place, identity, personality and homecoming’.

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4 Although Kahn was a prominent mentor to the members of the Philadelphia School, art historian Vincent Scully also had profound role in shaping their thinking. In his book on *The Shingle Style*, written as a doctoral dissertation for Yale University in the late 1940’s and published in 1955, Scully addressed the problem of modern classicism. In a slightly different approach from Kahn’s, Scully pictured history not as an alien world to which one only has access through a highly intellectualized process of analogy and abstraction, but rather as a world that has informed our own, through the local character and vernacular quality of the architecture in which we grew up. See Scully, Jr., Vincent J., *The Shingle Style: Architectural Theory and Design from Richardson to the Origins of Wright*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1955.

5 For descriptions of the differences in intellectual approach between the two schools, see Lobell, Mimi, *Postscript: Kahn, Penn, and the Philadelphia School*, Opposition 4, October 1974, pp.63-64.

6 Walter Gropius was invited to teach at the Harvard Graduate School of Design by Dean Hudnut in 1937. Gropius brought with him mature Bauhaus philosophies and vocabularies, and his arrival (together with Mies van Der Rohe) gave enormous prestige to the American International Modern movement.
This connection between the two polemical groups suggests that the driving forces revolving around Smithsons and the Venturis were located within wider critical circumstances during the post-war years. In order to comprehend fully the parallels and differences between both pairs of architects, it is imperative that the architectural and intellectual circle within which they were active is studied closely. As such, this chapter proceeds by looking at Team 10 thinking - which developed slightly earlier than its American counterpart - and how it settled onto Philadelphia soil through the activities of its members, particularly those of the Smithsons and Aldo van Eyck. This is followed by an examination of the exchange of ideas in the opposite direction, that is, how the ideas of Philadelphia School to which Venturi and Kahn helped shape came to influence the Smithsons.

Louis Kahn becomes almost a central figure in this chapter because of his role in the development of architectural philosophies and idioms of both the British and American groups. Nevertheless, Kahn was not the sole force nor was he a member of either group, but was a deep thinker who followed his own path. Kahn’s work paved the way for a new direction and steered his younger colleagues away from orthodox Modernism. He played an important role in shaping Robert Venturi’s architectural thinking in the early years and as well as that of the Smithsons. For the latter, Kahn became the only other American architect apart from Mies they seemed to have great respect for.7

Louis Kahn’s Philadelphia Urban Design schemes, which he developed between 1947 and 1962, are crucial in this chapter for a number of reasons. The issues surrounding the schemes represent a move away from the functionalist modern planning philosophies on both sides of the Atlantic during the post-war period. They also represent a return to historicism and contextualism, which were before absent in the universal language of orthodox modernism. The scheme had a strong influence on the

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7 In an article titled, *Letter to America* written in 1958, Peter Smithson wrote that, ‘...in the project work of Louis Kahn,...something approaching the European new way of thinking seems to be present.’ Whereas in another 1960 article on Louis Kahn, the Smithsons wrote that, ‘Louis Kahn owes his unique position and strength to the fact that he is the only American architect who is consciously trying to make, through architecture, a re-organised and re-validated city – without any ‘old hat’ notions of radically changing people’s way of life.’ See Smithson, Peter, *Letter to America*. Architectural Design, February 1958, pp.93-102
younger generation on both sides of the Atlantic as it opened a path to a new direction.

Team 10 and the End of CIAM

Team 10 was born out of a decision taken by the older members of CIAM to hand over control of the congress to the younger generation. At the CIAM Council meeting at Hoddesdon, it was agreed that, since CIAM would be 25 years old in 1953, the occasion of the next Congress (the ninth) to be held at Aix-en-Provence would be a good opportunity to ‘handover’ to the younger members. Alison and Peter Smithson and John Voelcker were among the British architects invited to lead and contribute to the next Congress. The Smithsons gained prominence in 1949 when their entry won the Hunstanton Secondary School competition. Since then they have emerged as outstanding architects well known for their anti-establishment sentiments and had been widely publicised for their formal and discursive statements against post-World War Two versions of British modernism.

Peter Smithson were initially invited to join a group of ‘angry young men’ in their thirties and forties which consisted of, in the first instance, Jacob D. Bakema and George Candilis and Rolf Guttman. This was later expanded to include Aldo van Eyck, Alison Smithson, William Howell, John Voelcker and Shadrach Woods. These individuals were to form a committee on Le Chartrè de l’Habitat in preparation for the CIAM 9 at Aix-en-Provence. Although these young designers scarcely knew each other, they found that they shared a mutual dissatisfaction with the analytical/functionalist mentality that continued to dominate CIAM despite post-war tendencies for urban renewal. They saw in each other’s work a recurrent theme that

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At the same meeting, two of the young members appointed onto the Council, would be George Candilis and William Howell. So, in preparation for the 9th Congress, William Howell would invite some of the ‘younger generation’ of British architects to contribute to the theme of “La Charte de l’Habitat” and those who were invited included John Voelcker and Alison and Peter Smithson. See CIAM Hoddeson Council Meeting Minutes: ’25 years of CIAM’. Also See Landsau, The End of CIAM and the Role of the British, pp. 40-47.

This information is extracted from Strauven, Francis, Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of Relativity, Architectura & Natura, Amsterdam, 1998, pp. 258.

Referring to their first encounter at the Aix-en-Provence conference in 1953, John Voelcker recalled, ‘We scarcely know each other but in the course of a fortnight we discovered and accepted that we all had an attitude in common, that we were all trying to find means through
was to form the basis of a strong alliance, as elucidated by Alison Smithson under the heading, The Aim of Team 10:

'Team 10 is a group of architects who have sought each other out because each has found the help of the others necessary to the development of their own individual work. But it is more than that. They came together in the first place, certainly because of mutual realization of the inadequacies of the processes of architectural thought which they had inherited from the modern movement as a whole, but more important, each sensed that the other had already found some way towards a new beginning. This new beginning, and the long build-up that followed, has been concerned with inducing, as it were, into the blood stream of the architect an understanding and feeling for the patterns, the aspirations, the artefacts, the tools, the modes of transportation and communications of present-day society, so that he can, as a natural thing, build towards society's realization-of-itself.‘

However, the Aix-en-Provence meeting was an awkward event. The leaders did not 'hand over' as they had suggested at Hoddesdon, but neither were they able to negotiate nor communicate with the younger members.

Nonetheless, the Smithsons made an impact at Aix-en-Provence with their 'CIAM Grille' featuring their entry for the Golden Lane Housing competition (Figure 2.2, Chapter Two). Based on notions of 'hierarchy of human association', the scheme was advanced as a direct criticism of the arbitrary isolation of the so-called communities of 'both English neighbourhood planning and the Unité concept of Le Corbusier'. The Golden Lane scheme was an attempt by the Smithsons to seek a

which this attitude could become an approach and in consequence of a positive force in urbanism.' See Ibid, pp.245. Originally quoted in Arena, June 1965, pp.12.


12 Alison Smithson, for whom this was to be her first full Congress, reported: 'the older generation... (were) quite aloof, for they were the "old family".....aloofness engulfed certain middle generations also.... (who were) not very communicative and offering less comradeship than complete strangers.....this lack of connective will was to prove the rotten core of CIAM.' See Ibid, pp.18.


14 Quote obtained from Ibid, pp.43. CIAM's analytical and essentially monofunctional approach, under Le Corbusier's leadership concentrated on the dwelling or habitat as an enriched form - the vertical neighbourhood - isolated amongst vast greenery. This notion took form in the completion of Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseille (1947-53) - its opening coincided with CIAM 9 conference at Aix-en Provence - where to the dwelling is added essential facilities thought to be useful for day-to-day family life, such as shops, domestic and health services, a creche, a kindergarten and a gymnasium. The Unité also represents the culmination of a long quest for collective order in Le Corbusier's philosophy. Its roots can be traced back to earlier schemes such as the Algier's viaduct, the à redent
more complex and sympathetic relationship between old urban tissue and new urban functions. Four structural levels - the house, the street, the district, and the city - were identified and each successive level describes man's social connections to his built environment which suggest an open and freer sort of social cohesion. Implying a critique of the freestanding isolated block, Golden Lane was meant to connect to form a framework over the permanently ruined city for a new kind of 'urban reidentification'\(^\text{15}\). A 'street deck' on every third floor will thus be continuous 'like drains, to which everyone connects up'. The street deck was designed such as to encourage chance encounters and informal exchanges and activities as they had witnessed from their empirical observation of biometric playing patterns of children and communal activities in the streets of East End London as captured in the photographs taken by Nigel Henderson\(^\text{16}\) (Figure 5.1).

Although Team 10 did not come into being until July 1954, already by January that year its members met unofficially at Doorn in Holland to discuss the state of CIAM and prepare for the next CIAM meeting (the tenth) at Dubrovnik to be held in 1956\(^\text{17}\). The outcome of the meeting was the Doorn Manifesto which promoted the study of habitat at a scale of associations which would run hierarchically: isolated buildings,

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\(^{15}\) 'Urban reidentification' is the title of an article by the Smithsons in which they lamented on the need to struggle free from the 'ideas of the Garden City Movement and the Rational Architecture Movement'. They called out for an 'urban reidentification' where the relationship between the individual and the collective is to be reassessed. They believed that this new way of thinking is already emerging and identified a number of built schemes as fine examples: House at Ronchamps by Le Corbusier, Town Hall at Saynatsalo by Alvar Aalto and mass housing in Morocco by ATBAT. They asserted that their own projects – Golden Lane Housing and Close Houses – display similar characteristics. See Smithson, Alison & Peter, *The Built World: Urban Reidentification*, Architectural Design, June 1955, pp.185-88.

\(^{16}\) Explaining the spirit of street they were trying to emulate in Golden Lane, the Smithsons wrote: 'in the suburbs and slums the vital relationship between the house and the street survives, children run about (the street is comparatively quiet), people stop and talk, dismantled vehicles are parked. In the back gardens are pigeons and so on, and the shops are around the corner: you know the milkman, you are outside your house in your street.' (Emphasis in original). Smithson, Ordinariness & Light: Urban Theories 1952-1960 and their application in a building project 1963-1970, pp. 43. For the Smithsons' connection with Nigel Henderson and indeed his wife, the sociologist Judith Stephen, see Chapter Four of this study.

villages, towns and cities\textsuperscript{18}. Although the diagram used to describe the pattern was based on Patrick Geddes' 'Valley Section'\textsuperscript{19} (Figure 5. 2), it was indeed the Smithsons' hierarchy of association thinking which influenced the Doorn Manifesto (Figure 5. 3). Hence, the key issue of CIAM 10 would be 'habitat' and 'its scale of associations' which Team 10 members hoped would provide a way of 'studying particular functions in their appropriate ecological field'\textsuperscript{20}.

CIAM 10 was not as plain sailing as the Team 10 members hoped, despite two years of preparation. There was no mutual agreement between the younger and older factions and the congress split effectively into two with barely any contact, intellectually or socially\textsuperscript{21}. Furthermore, there was the symbolic absence of the grand maitres: Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and Van Eesteren. Team 10 held its own congress at CIAM 10 and on this decision, they had the backing of Le Corbusier, as he was recorded to have said that 'the metamorphosis of CIAM should be based on the new generation', which he defined as 'those over 40 years in 1956, the only ones qualified to act in the new phase of CIAM'\textsuperscript{22}.

\textbf{Figure 5. 1: Children playing in Bethnal Green by Nigel Henderson}

\textsuperscript{19} For P. Geddes' 'valley section', see for example, Architect's Year Book 12, London 1968, pp.65-71. Geddes used the valley diagram to demonstrate how communities develop and adopt specific form according to the local natural conditions. Successive geological zones foster different occupations, and these result in turn in specific kinds of settlements.
\textsuperscript{20} See The Emergence of Team 10 out of CIAM, compiled by Alison Smithson, Architectural Association, London, pp. 34.
\textsuperscript{21} Landau, The End of CIAM and the Role of the British, pp. 43.
\textsuperscript{22} It is interesting to note that the Smithsons would not have been eligible under Corbusier's age categorization as Peter Smithson was born in 1923 while Alison in 1928. They were, at the time, 33 and 28 years of age respectively. Quote taken from Ref. Letter from Le Corbusier to Sert dated 23 July 1956 in Proceedings of CIAM 10 (unpublished) pp.0022B/23.
Based on the successive scale-levels of the Doorn diagram, the Team 10 members independent from the elders, hung thirty-nine grids. Each presented their own interpretations corresponding to the hierarchy of associations. The Smithsons submitted no less than five housing projects (Figure 5. 4) corresponding to five levels of association:

1. Burrows Lea Farm, an isolated country house in Surrey,
2. Galleon Cottages, an extension to a small village,
3. Fold Houses, an infill exercise with individual house type in a large village,
4. Close Housing, a group of dwellings conceived as part of a rural new town and
5. Terraced Houses, a compact housing complex in an industrial suburb of a large city
At the same time, Aldo van Eyck explored community structures through explicit geometrical, universalistic language. This approach is explored in his presentation of children’s playground projects in Amsterdam (Figure 5. 5) and Nagele Schools (Figure 5. 6)

The next Congress, The CIAM 11, of 1959, held in Otterlo and organised by Jacob Bakema was entitled ‘CIAM: Study Group on the Interrelationship between the Social and the Formal’ and for the first time it identified with the Team 10 Agenda. It was

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23 For other architects’ contributions to CIAM, see Smithson, *CIAM 10 Projects*, pp.286-289.
organized differently from any previous Congress bearing CIAM’s name. Individuals rather than delegates or representatives, were invited to present their work and were subjected to a critical confrontation by members of the floor. While Aldo van Eyck presented his ideas on the ‘shape of the in-between’ through his Municipal Orphanage project in Amsterdam, the Smithsons presented their ‘London Roads Study’ (1959), a plan for a new urban motorway and urban megastructures to organize movement and functions in cities, which was attacked by Ernesto Rogers and the Italian contingent for its tabula rasa approach.

![Figure 5.5: Children’s Playground, Saffierstraat, 1950-51, Aldo van Eyck](image)

25 Ibid, pp. 27-34.
27 Ernesto Rogers was recorded to have said, ‘I think your contribution destroys history completely. .....I think in your capacity, and with your ideas, you are being much too drastic; much too free.....I really do not see what will remain of the character of London in the future.’ Newman, CIAM ’39 in Otterlo: Groups for Research of Social and Visual Inter-relationships, pp. 77.
Oscar Newman's book, *CIAM '59 in Otterlo*\(^{28}\) records the proceedings of the meeting and documents the clear lack of cohesion between the younger and older members of CIAM. At the end of the meeting, it was clear that the future of CIAM was desolate. The meeting culminated in an elegant closing talk by Louis Kahn who attended the meeting at the invitation of the Smithsons. Kahn's talk emphasised the importance of 'the essence of architecture', which in many ways represent an attempt to reconcile the differences between the younger and older delegates\(^{29}\). For example, Kahn mentioned that there was perhaps too much emphasis among delegates on the 'circumstantial aspects' of design problems, but not the real issues of urbanism. According to Kahn, the essential thing in a design is the 'existence will' of a place, meaning 'what a thing wants to be'. For example, the street – an element of urban association that was widely discussed at the conference – wants to be a building, so that one will be immediately sensitive to real needs\(^{30}\). Whereas the ordering of cities has little to do with 'orderliness' (as opposed to CIAM’s rigid functionalist approach to urban planning), but more to do with the defining the character of existing place and space. Kahn demonstrated his ideas with the presentation of a number of projects such as Richards Medical Research Building (Figure 3.29, Chapter Three) and the Philadelphia Urban Projects\(^{31}\) (Figure 5.11 & Figure 5.14).

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\(^{28}\) Newman, *CIAM '59 in Otterlo: Groups for Research of Social and Visual Inter-relationships.*

\(^{29}\) Ibid, pp. 205-217.

\(^{30}\) Kahn elaborated on this as such: 'But if you think of it (the street) as being that which it really wants to be – and that is a building – you will not have to dig it up every time a pipe goes bad. You will have a place for these things. You will have a place for walking under, you will have a place for other things,.....and then you will realize that you are actually walking on or riding on the roof of this building. This is a very important thing to realize about a street in the middle of a town, because it is really a contour, it is really a level, and it is really a building.' Quoted from Ibid, pp.206.

After Otterlo, Team 10 continued to meet, this time in a small-scale context of selected members, individual programs and informal gatherings up until the death of Jacob Bakema in 1981\textsuperscript{32}. The Smithsons attended throughout.

**Team 10 at Penn**

Team 10’s direction toward the partial and incomplete: toward philosophies where architectural and planning concepts are never autonomous but always working in relation to the existing state and other concepts such that the relationship between hierarchies becomes as important as the concepts themselves is palpable in the work of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. The Venturis based their philosophies on notions of how to live with complexity and contradiction and the need for the individual and community to accommodate each other through the design of buildings as two separate linings: the inside and outside independently answering to differing needs. This vein of thinking in the Venturis’ work means that they share with the Smithsons a respect towards the individual or groups and towards the cohesion and convenience of the collective structure to which they belong, as eloquently put forth by Alison Smithson in Team 10 Primer, *'No abstract Master Plan stands between him and what he has to do, only the 'human facts' and the logistics of the situation.'*\textsuperscript{33}

A similar feeling of uneasiness influenced early developments in Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown’s architectural career in America, particularly over the limited structural vocabulary of rational modernist planning. This ‘feeling of uneasiness’ seemed to have emanated from the Graduate School of Fine Arts (GSFA) at the University of Pennsylvania in the fifties and sixties. There, some of its more prominent teaching staff – Venturi and Guirgola, who both taught history, and G. Holmes Perkins, who became Dean at the school in 1951 – were seen to be pursuing an approach which later became an obvious antithesis of CIAM ideals. During this period, the architectural department enjoyed an active intellectual exchange where it became a place of *'serendipitous meetings, paradoxical insights, and evolutionary*

\textsuperscript{32} For a record and personal rememberings of Team 10 meetings see Smithson, *Team 10 Meetings: 1953-84*

\textsuperscript{33} Smithson, Alison (editor), *Team 10 Primer*. Studio Vista, 1968, London, pp.3.
ferment\textsuperscript{34}, as its charismatic members began questioning the limitations of functional Modern planning as their contemporaries – members of Team 10 - were similarly tackling across the Atlantic.

Not surprisingly, the polemics of Team 10 had a great influence on the thinking of GSFA faculty members, particularly since the appointment of Perkins as dean.\textsuperscript{35} During his tenure, Perkins established a programme that stressed the interaction of city planning and architecture to effect social change\textsuperscript{36}. He became what Scott Brown described as 'a link between architectural thought on both sides of the Atlantic', owing to his connections with Walter Gropius and with the English new town planners of the period\textsuperscript{37}. Through him, the ideas of CIAM, including those of Team 10 were introduced. Perkins could recall the Smithsons' hierarchy of human associations' diagrams almost accurately, often stressing in lectures that a sense of community should be encouraged at all levels of social organization, "from family to city".\textsuperscript{38}

The polemics of the loosely grouped Team 10 members permeated discussions at the GSFA when the department hosted an exhibition of projects presented at the tenth CIAM conference in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia\textsuperscript{39} between March 18 and April 5, 1957. The exhibition was organised by Blanche Lemco, a member of the Penn faculty and

\textsuperscript{34} Lobell, Mimi, \textit{Postscript: Kahn, Penn, and the Philadelphia School}, Opposition 4, October 1974, pp.63-64.


\textsuperscript{36} It is worth noting that G. Holmes Perkins, together with Kahn, was on the committee of ASPA (American Society of Planners and Architects). Modelled on CIAM (the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne), the ASPA was set up to provide American modernists the means to build stronger ties between city planning and architecture. See \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{37} Scott Brown, Denise, \textit{A Worm's Eye View of Recent Architectural History}, Architectural Record, February 1984, pp.69-81.


\textsuperscript{39} The CIAM 10 congress was held in Dubrovnik in 1956, where Team 10, backed by Le Corbusier, decided to go its own way in accordance with ideas it had been developing during the previous two years of preparation. For records on the GSFA exhibition, see \textit{Committees: Exhibitions 1956-57}, UPB 8.4, box 96, University of Pennsylvania Archives.
wife to Dutch Team 10 member, Daniel van Ginkel. Blanche had also attended the European CIAM conferences and intellectually contributed to Team 10 thinking\(^{40}\).

Shortly after the exhibition, in September and October of 1957, Peter Smithson visited America for the first time. There he was invited to lecture at the GSFA and spent enough time with Kahn to become his friend\(^{41}\). Before Smithson went to America, he wrote on the state of architecture in America where he lamented that widespread still is the belief in ‘square, rational architecture – a continuing to live off the impulses of 1913’\(^{42}\), while Europe has started to embrace new ideas. Nonetheless, Smithson found in Kahn’s work an exception as ‘something approaching the European way of thinking seems to be present’\(^{43}\). For Smithson, the European way of thinking is characterised by ideas he had been developing within Team 10. He wrote:

‘You may ask what are the characteristics of the New Modern Architecture in Europe.....I think that it is pragmatic, (its basis is a sort of active socio-plastics) rather than old style rational (i.e. diagrammatic with right angles). As to its imagery, the magic having flown from the rectangle is much freer in its use of form, more rough and ready, and less complete and classical. Technologically it accepts industrially produced components as the natural order of the architect’s vocabulary, not as something special or magical that will do the architect’s work for him. Its key words are: cluster, growth and change, mobility. Around which stones you can roll your own snowballs.’\(^{44}\)

In October 1959, the Smithsons were included again in another exhibition at the GSFA, titled *Work of Three English Architects*.\(^ {45}\) Following this, in 1960, Kahn convinced Dean Holmes Perkins to invite Peter Smithson to the GSFA to teach, but Smithson declined.\(^ {46}\)


\(^{41}\) In an interview between Peter Smithson and Sarah Williams Goldhagen, Smithson recounted that he and Kahn became fast friends. This is confirmed by, for example, Kahn to Smithson, *Master File Correspondence October thru December 1957*, box 9, Kahn Collection.


\(^{43}\) Ibid

\(^{44}\) Ibid

\(^{45}\) There were actually four architects; the other two were James Stirling and William Howell, See Committee: Exhibitions 1958-59, UPB 8.4, box 104, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

During spring of 1960, another prominent member of Team 10, Aldo van Eyck, was invited to the GSFA and in his case, as a visiting professor. Vincent Scully in his introduction to Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, noted the interaction between Venturi and various people who contributed to his development as an architect: 'from Frank Furness to young Sullivan, and on through Wilson Eyre and George Howe to Louis Kahn. 47 On van Eyck’s role in Venturi’s development, Scully wrote, 'The dialogue so developed, in which Aldo van Eyck of Holland has also played an outstanding role, has surely contributed much to Venturi’s development' 48.

Venturi first met the Dutchman at the GSFA. Venturi was at the time an assistant professor and was teaching one of the country’s only Architectural History and Theory courses 49, which he would later develop to become the book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* 50. Van Eyck’s activity at the GSFA was writing *The Child, the City and the Artist*, which is a typescript of a book written on commission of the Institute of Urban Studies of the University of Pennsylvania, with a grant from the Rockefeller Institute 51. Subtitled *The In-between Realm*, the gist of the collection of essays is a continuation of van Eyck’s exploration of ideas on ‘doorstep’ and the ‘in-between realm’ 52. The term ‘doorstep’ is a borrowing from the Smithsons, who originally meant by this as no more than the transition between the home and street, a

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48 Ibid, pp.10.
49 Venturi began teaching a course in architectural history and theory at the GSFA, University of Pennsylvania in 1962.
50 Describing Venturi’s History and Theory course, Scott Brown wrote, ‘Bob’s lectures were...profound, scholarly and well prepared...He (Venturi) listed the elements that define architecture today. This list included the Vitruvian elements but was expanded to deal with 20th-century exigencies such as mechanical equipment. Each element had a lecture devoted to it and, for each, a review of history was made, to derive theoretical positions. That was the scholarly part. How did Gothic architects deal with the problem of letting light into buildings and how did this compare with the view of Renaissance architects and of Louis Kahn on the same problem. ......Although the course was scholarly in its span and in its analysis, it was more professional than academic in its approach. Elements of history were viewed non-chronologically and comparatively and related to modern practice and problems, so that young architects could learn from them lessons suitable for their practice today.’ See Scott Brown, Denise, *Between Three Stools: A Personal View of Urban Design Pedagogy*, Urban Concepts: Architectural Design Profile 83 (London: Academy Editions 1990) pp. 9-20.
contrivance to link the first level of association with the second in their diagram of hierarchy of human association. Van Eyck expanded the term ‘doorstep’ as an ‘in-between’, elaborating it further as a manifestation which occurs not only between the first two but all levels of association:

'There's one more thing that has been growing in my mind ever since the Smithsons uttered the word doorstep at Aix (CIAM 10 meeting, Aix-en-Provence, 1957). It hasn't left me ever since. I've been mulling over it, expanding the meaning as far as I could stretch it. I've gone so far as to identify it with what architecture as such should accomplish'.

Subsequently, through van Eyck's writing in the Dutch magazine Forum, as well The Child, the City and the Artist, the ‘doorstep’ idea was developed into a symbolic essence of architecture. His ideas on this theory were articulated clearly at CIAM 11 held in Otterlo in 1959. He presented at the conference what he calls ‘Otterlo Circles’ (Figure 5.7) where he identified basic values which must be reconciled in architecture. In the first circle, the basic values were shown drawn from three main traditions: the Classical tradition, the tradition of spontaneous building and the Modern tradition, each characterised by a fitting paradigm. The first, with the temple of Nike in the Acropolis of Athens, the second, with a group of houses from the village of Aoulef in the Algerian Sahara and the third, with one of Van Doesburg’s contra-constructions from the 1923 Maison Particulière. The values from these traditions must be reconciled as they are connected with a different reality, that is, of human inter-relations symbolized by an archaic image of Kayapo Indians from the Orinoco basin in Venezuela.

The second circle symbolizes the reality of human inter-relations, which in a way relates to the Smithsons’ hierarchy of human associations. The circle portrays three images: a Sardinian statuette of a sitting woman with child, an Etruscan statuette of a

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53 According to Francis Struven, the Smithsons’ work appealed strongly to van Eyck, ‘especially as they have given concrete form and striking imagery to each relational level of their hierarchy of human relation’. Struven added that, ‘van Eyck felt a particular kinship with their effort of using concrete images such as “house”, “backyard”, “doorstep” and “corner” to evoke social/spatial quality of urban buildings’. Ibid, pp 251.
54 Newman, CIAM '59 in Otterlo: Group for research of social and visual inter-relationships, pp.27.
standing man, and beneath this a Cypriot burial gift, a round dish decorated with a little community of people. Archaic as these images are, they portray the transcultural permanence of the elementary relational structures of man-woman-child, family and individual community.

Figure 5. 7: Otterlo Circles, Aldo van Eyck

For van Eyck, these two realms - tradition and human inter-relations - are interconnected, and thus must be reconciled. In a rather abstract manner, van Eyck sought to structure the two realms in analogy with human reality: 'Man still breathes in and out? Is architecture going to do the same?' To van Eyck, since human existence is marked by the complexity of dualities such as interiority-exteriority, mind-matter, reason-emotion, constancy-change and individuality-collective, architecture must correspondingly do the same. Architecture can reconcile the polarities by establishing an 'in between' realm or an articulated 'doorstep', a place where different spatial polarities can be made to interact. Van Eyck explained his theories through his presentation of four schemes at the Otterlo conference: the

\[^{36}\text{Ibid, pp.27.}\]
Orphanage in Amsterdam, 1958-60 (Figure 5.8) and the Congress Hall for Jerusalem, 1958 (Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.8: The Municipal Orphanage, Amsterdam, 1955-60, Aldo van Eyck

Figure 5.9: Congress Building in Jerusalem, 1958, (unbuilt), Aldo van Eyck

Van Eyck’s reference to the classical tradition and archaic essence in architecture in his search for architecture that reflects the complexities of human existence must have
appealed to Robert Venturi. Venturi did not attend the Otterlo conference\(^{57}\) nor has there been any direct exchange between the two men during van Eyck’s stay at the GSFA\(^{58}\). Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the American architect is well versed in his Dutch colleague’s work. In *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, published in 1966, Venturi drew quotes from van Eyck in the latter’s plea for richer architectural language.

*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* is based on Venturi’s course teachings at Penn\(^{59}\) as well as his Beaux-Arts education at Princeton and teachings of Kahn. It became a direct antithesis of the reductive simplification of functionalism as much as Team 10’s philosophies did. Lamenting ‘less is a bore’\(^{60}\), Venturi recommends a richer architectural language rooted in tradition in opposition to modernism. In supporting his argument for what he calls a ‘gentle manifesto mainly for myself’, Venturi firstly appeals to the poet T.S. Eliot and secondly to Aldo van Eyck. The Dutchman’s plea for the ‘constant rediscovery of constant human qualities’ at the Otterlo Congress appeared in Venturi’s introduction in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*:

‘Modern architects have been harping continually on what is different in our time to such an extent that even they have lost touch with what is not different, with what is always essentially the same.’\(^{61}\)

In the return to tradition, both van Eyck and Venturi and indeed the Smithsons, argue for an architecture that does not concentrate exclusively on one thing but also includes the other. In van Eyck’s Municipal Orphanage in Amsterdam, for example, the in-

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\(^{57}\) It is probably worth noting that Louis Kahn was at CIAM 11 at Otterlo at the invitation of the Smithsons and there, Kahn and van Eyck became acquainted with each other and developed a mutual appreciation for each other’s work. The had both aimed for an architecture based on archaic essence and the classical tradition. In the closing talk by Kahn at Otterlo, he expressed his admiration for his Dutch colleague: ‘…..I mean to show my appreciation to Aldo who simply talked about a door. …..The mere fact that one can get to be totally preoccupied with this sort of thing is wonderful, because it can grow many wonderful things; it could lead a man to realizations which go far beyond the problems of a door or a gateway.’ See Newman, Oscar, CIAM ‘39 in Otterlo: Group for research of social and visual inter-relationships. Alec Tiranti Ltd. London, 1961, pp.214.

\(^{58}\) Robert Venturi confirmed this in an e-mail to author sent on 7\(^{th}\) July 2003.

\(^{59}\) Venturi’s teaching stint at the Graduate School of Arts at the University of Pennsylvania started initially as Kahn’s teaching assistant and instructor which began upon his return from Rome in 1956, then an assistant in 1961, and later as an associate professor in 1964.

\(^{60}\) Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp.17.
between manifests in ‘transitional’ and sometimes ambiguous zones such as large urban squares, interior piazzas, meandering interior streets, courtyards which blurs the boundaries between the inside and outside. Robert Venturi too wishes to construct an approach based on a concept of plurality so that a building evokes many levels of meanings and combinations of focus. Through his concepts such as ‘both-and’, ‘double functioning’ and ‘inside-outside’, a building will speak of complex and contradictory architecture reflecting the richness and ambiguity of modern experience. In explaining his intentions, Venturi once again refers to van Eyck’s Otterlo presentation in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture:

‘Architecture should be conceived of as a configuration of intermediary places clearly defined. This does not imply continual transition or endless postponement with respect to place and occasion. On the contrary, it implies a break away from the contemporary concept (call it sickness) of spatial continuity and the tendency to erase every articulation between spaces, i.e., between outside and inside, between one space and another (between one reality and another). Instead the transition must be articulated by means of defined in-between places which induce simultaneous awareness of what is significant on either side. An in-between space in this sense provides the common ground where conflicting polarities can again become twin phenomena.’

This idea of socio/spatial cohesion so lacking in contemporary modern architecture but advocated both by van Eyck and Venturi can be traced back to the Smithsons and their thinking on the concepts of ‘pattern of association’ and ‘identity’. Both the American’s and the Dutchman’s concept of plurality represent a variation of the bending of the individual and the community to accommodate each other. This approach can also be found in the Smithsons’ architecture. The interstitial spaces between elements in their ‘hierarchy of associations’ are just as important as the primary elements themselves, that is house, street, district and city. For example, for their Robin Hood Gardens housing scheme (Figure 4. 21, Chapter Four), the Smithsons wrote on the significance of ‘alcoves off the street deck’:

62 For a full description of the Municipal Orphanage in Amsterdam, see Strauven, Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of Relativity, pp.284-325.
They ... "are intended as shielded 'pause-places' before entering the house - a stoop rather than a doorstep. These spaces offer themselves naturally for potted plants, flower boxes etc., - the normal paraphernalia of domestic outside show. They are the equivalent of the 'yard-gardens' of the Golden Lane project, providing the identifying elements of the individual dwelling."  

The Smithsons recognized the many levels of complexity in everyday life and are determined that their designs accommodate this phenomenon. Similar to van Eyck and Venturi, they see history not as an alien world, accessible only through highly intellectualized process of analogy or abstraction, but rather as a world that informs the contemporary one, continually transformed through local character and vernacular usage. Instead of recreating historic forms, the Smithsons attempted to seek poetry from an understanding of the old way of working:

'Our concern is for the poetry of movement, the sense of quietude, for the workplace to feel like a workplace, for the city of the machine to be able to be enjoyed with the same directness and deeply felt contentment we can still feel in the fishing harbour, the market place, the quayside, where older technologies and ways of doing things still hold.'

The Venturis, through their association with Kahn and Pennsylvania University, would have been receptive to the Smithsons' work as well as that of other Team 10 members. The European architects' projects were published globally in magazines such as the Architect's Journal and Architectural Design and their projects were exhibited at the GSFA. It has already been established that there had been intellectual exchanges between Kahn and Peter Smithson and Aldo van Eyck within the walls of the architecture department. That such an exciting meeting of minds occurred at the GSFA should hardly be surprising as the school, in the late fifties and early sixties, was a focus of energy and creative expansion that resulted from a convergence of sympathetic minds on all levels: administration, faculty, students, community and city government.

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65 Smithson, Urban Structuring: Studies of Alison & Peter Smithson, pp. 75.


67 For further description on the distinction of the Graduate School of Fine Arts of University of Pennsylvania, see Lobell, Postscript: Kahn, Penn, and the Philadelphia School, pp.63-64.
Philadelphia Urban Design Schemes

Louis Kahn's influence was not only confined to those associated to the architecture and planning department of the University of Pennsylvania, but to a wider expanse on both sides of the Atlantic. Louis Kahn's work in the mid-fifties were devoted to two overlapping experiments with new architectural ideas, both with the common aim of replacing the now-commercialized International Style with something more related to geometrical principles and tradition. The first pursuit, which began earlier, centred on the investigation of structural geometries. The other line of investigation saw Kahn's struggle for a new idiom, one that is centred around a symbolic language, loosely drawn from history. Venturi entered Kahn's architectural world just as the older architect was moving away from a technology-driven to a historically informed vocabulary.

The Philadelphia urban design schemes marked Louis Kahn's full effort to relate modern architectural and urban forms with historicism and tradition. Kahn was originally trained in the Beaux-Arts and as such, had a sympathetic rather than adversarial attitude towards the past. It was a trait that he clearly shared with Robert Venturi, who had received a similar kind of architectural training at Princeton.

This attitude towards the past led Kahn to break away from his obsession with geometric order or 'techno-organic geometries'. This early obsession with order was a result from an assimilation of ideas by Anne Griswold Tyng, Kahn's collaborator and personal companion, the French structural engineer, Robert Le Ricolais and R. Buckminster Fuller who was famous for his space frames and geodesic domes. Tyng

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68 For description on Kahn's architectural development during this period, see Chapter 5: Struggling for a New Idiom in Goldhagen, 'Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism', pp.102-135.
69 The term 'techno-organic geometries' is a borrowing from Sarah Williams Goldhagen as it is used in her book Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism. The term describes structural systems such as space frames which is obliquely related to forms based on scientific studies of geometry in nature. According to Goldhagen, Robert Le Ricolais, Anne Tyng and Buckminster Fuller saw these connections in mystical terms. Goldhagen wrote: 'Space frames, in their reliance on nature's geometries, revealed that underneath the apparent chaos and randomness of structures and forms in contemporary life was an order of almost mystical simplicity.' And as such, people should harness the logic that science of nature had uncovered, in their attempt to overcome the inadequacies of contemporary life. See Chapter 3: Techno-organic symbols of Community in Goldhagen, Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism, pp.64-74.
70 For these influences on Kahn, see, Ibid, pp.64-87.
perhaps had the greatest influence on Kahn with her strong belief in structural order as a complex system of natural laws to be applied to architecture\textsuperscript{71}. Kahn's City Tower proposal as Philadelphia's new city hall, 1952-57, drawn up in collaboration with Tyng, epitomised the generic principles of techno-geometric principles. The eighteen-storey tower is an awkward and ungainly edifice based on hexagonal plans and three-dimensionally triangulated sections.

\textbf{Figure 5. 10: City Tower, Philadelphia, 1952-57, Louis Kahn}

The city tower is just one of the many proposals Kahn had put forth for the city of Philadelphia. The city enjoyed an urban renaissance after World War II and University of Pennsylvania became the centre for research of city planning in America. Kahn, who was appointed Professor of Architecture at the university between 1955 and 1974, was at the forefront of these large-scale developments at the same time influencing the younger generation architects with his ideals. Kahn's exploration of urban designs for the city of Philadelphia focussed on two related

\textsuperscript{71} After meeting Anne Tyng, Buckminster Fuller came to respect her ideas on geometry and space frames and wrote later that, 'Anne Tyng has been Louis Kahn's geometrical strategist'. See Letter, Fuller to Entenza, April 5, 1965, Fuller, \textit{R. Buckminster Correspondence}, 1965,
themes – the ‘order of movement’ and the ‘idea of civic centre’. Common to both explorations was the distinctive use of historical precedents.

For proposals of a new Civic Centre for Philadelphia between 1956 and 1957, Kahn drew on architecture’s monumental tradition and urban symbolism as a means to consolidate communal identity. Nevertheless, Kahn’s use of historical references is consistent with modernist principles. It is abstract and geometric rather than direct appropriation of motifs, as the younger generation of American architects, led by Venturi, would employ only a decade later.

The Civic Centre Project is located on Market Street and between Philadelphia’s most symbolic structures, Independence Hall and City Hall. An aerial perspective of the proposal (Figure 5.11) depicted a visual language of ancient Roman monuments and medieval castles. Another painting of striking red, yellow and white against black background reduced the city of Philadelphia to its principal elements: walls, towers and movements in an abstract guise of modern function (Figure 5.12). Both images show Philadelphia’s main institutions being surrounded by a wall of cylindrical parking towers, forming meandering fortification walls around the forum.

This defence system of parking towers, designed to overcome the problem of overwhelming traffic threatening the civic centre, is based on the analogy of the defensive system of the ancient city of Carcassonne (Figure 5.13). First referred to in an article titled Toward a Plan for Midtown Philadelphia in 1953, Kahn had suggested cities without order or defence system as ‘Carcassonne without walls, cities without entrances’. As such, he believed that a modern city must similarly be reconfigured, based on new concept of order of movement to defend itself. He wrote:

‘Carcassonne was designed from an order of defence. A modern city will renew itself from its order-concept of movement which is a defence against its destruction by the automobile’.74

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73 Ibid., pp.11.
74 Kahn, Louis, Order in Architecture, Perspecta no.4, 1957, pp.61.
Another group of perspectives by Kahn depicted the Civic Centre's pedestrian axis along Market Street. In the spirit of Le Corbusier's urban plans, civic spaces and buildings were lined along the ten-block axis in multi-levelled spine which separated traffic from the pedestrians. There is still evidence of Kahn’s interest in 'techno-organicism' with one perspective depicting the triangulated space-framed City Hall terminating the end of the linear development. Other monuments within the forum include a cylindrical parking tower, an office tower with a flared base, the arena (an oval-roofed stadium), and a cubic building. Between these are located tent-like pavilions for cafes, exhibitions and other public functions. Kahn had referred to this forum and its various public activities as 'cathedral of the city', a phrase that invoked the increasing reverence with which Kahn spoke of the city centre.

Figure 5.11: Philadelphia Civic Centre, 1956-57, Louis Kahn

Figure 5.12: Abstract, Philadelphia Civic Centre, 1956-57, Louis Kahn

75 For example Le Corbusier’s Ville Radieuse. See Le Corbusier, The Radiant City, 1967, first English translation of La Ville Radieuse.

76 Kahn, Toward a Plan for Midtown Philadelphia, pp.11.
Figure 5.13: Gate & Bridge from Barbican, Chateau Comtal, Carcassonne, 1959, Louis Kahn

Before working on the proposals for the Civic Centre, Kahn was already applying principles of order and abstract historicism to an earlier project: Philadelphia Traffic Movement Studies, 1951-53 (Figure 5.14). It is essentially a proposal to alleviate existing traffic congestion problems in Philadelphia. Developed poetically rather than technically, it had a profound influence on the Smithsons in their own approach to urban planning and traffic management proposals.

Kahn’s traffic study project basically separated one type of movement from another so that different vehicle types with different purpose in movement will move and stop more freely, and not get in each other’s way. In antithesis to modernist planning, Kahn proposed to redefine existing city centre streets rather than replace them. As a defence mechanism against traffic congestion in the centre of the city, incoming cars are to be directed to use the expressways at the periphery of the city centre and towards ‘harbours’ or large cylindrical towers for parking.

One of the most outstanding aspects of the traffic study proposal was its use of poetic and abstract notions to describe movements. For example, Kahn’s intentions to redefine streets according to movement types were presented in his article for the magazine Perspecta as such:

‘Expressways are like RIVERS
These RIVERS frame the area to be served
RIVERS have HARBORS
HARBORS are the municipal parking towers
from the HARBOURS branch a system of CANALS that serve the interior
the CANALS are the go streets
from the CANALS branch cul-de-sac DOCKS
the DOCKS serve as entrance halls to the buildings.

Furthermore, in the attempt to explain his proposals, Kahn had developed a system of symbols on drawings. Expressways were indicated by arrows, and streets zoned for stop-and-go movement of buses and trolleys were indicated by dots. Parking was symbolized by curved arrows, while acute angles and spirals reflected wound up streets (Figure 5.14).

Similarly, both the Philadelphia urban schemes and traffic studies demonstrate a new respect to the existing which was lacking in modernist revisions of the city. They form an antithesis to CIAM’s tabula rasa approach with efforts by the designer to respond to place and to tie in with existing patterns of movements. Louis Kahn’s Philadelphia schemes demonstrated a new approach and paved a way for a new direction not only in America but also in Europe. It steered his younger colleagues away from Modernism and other prevailing movements dominant during early 20th century. In addition, Kahn at the time had also just emerged with two buildings possessing strong affinities with Brutalist ideals – the Yale Art Gallery, 1951-52

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77 Ibid
(Figure 3.7, Chapter Three) and the Trenton Bath House, 1954-55 (Figure 3.28, Chapter Three). The art gallery was first suggested as Brutalist by Ian McCallum in early 1955, who was then the executive editor of the *Architectural Review* 78. Reyner Banham was to confirm this later when he included the art gallery in his book, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic*. Banham remarked that Kahn does not only 'appear to share with their (English brutalists') preoccupations and interests but (his work)... also marked a clear break with existing US traditions in Modern Architecture' 79. Whereas the Trenton Bathhouse is perhaps the first building since modernism to challenge the ideas of dynamic motion and fluid open spaces 80. The building demonstrates that a room can be a constructed identity and thus can be read as a completed space. Vincent Scully too has noted Kahn's influence in American architecture when he wrote:

"Kahn probably both retarded the coming of the new Shingle Style and, by breaking the grip of the International Style, eventually made it possible. He liberated his students from a worn out model, and Venturi's project of 1959 is their own proper beginning." 81

It was mentioned earlier that Kahn's work impressed the Smithsons and it was highly likely that they were influenced by the older architect's work. Kahn may have, to a certain extent, led the Smithsons to re-evaluate the viability of the existing, the vernacular and the historical. Kahn was not the sole influence, of course. Elsewhere, anti-International Style influences were becoming apparent. Alvar Aalto's work for example, especially his Villa Mairea in Noormakku, 1938-41 (Figure 5. 15) and Saynatsalo Town Hall, 1949-52 82 (Figure 5. 16) represent a break with the International Style in favour of a more local, vernacular design, of which American and British architects are generally aware of by the late fifties 83. Other examples that

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79 Ibid
81 Scully, Vincent, *The Shingle Style Today or The Historian's Revenge*, George Braziller, New York, 1974, pp.17. Scully's reference to 'Venturi's project of 1959' is one to the Beach House, New Jersey designed in that particular year, but never built.
83 The Smithsons referred to Alvar Aalto's work as early as 1955 when they described the Saynatsalo Town Hall as 'evidence of a new way of thinking'. See Smithson, Alison & Peter, *The Built World: Urban Reidentification*, Architectural design, June 1955, pp.185-188.
may have influenced the Smithsons, include work by modern but non-international style architects of the twenties like Bijvoet and Duiker\(^\text{54}\) (Figure 5. 17). Nevertheless, Kahn forms a strong link between the Smithsons and the Venturis as both pairs of architects were connected and influenced in one way or the other to Kahn in their search for a new direction, away from the rigid doctrine of modernism.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 5. 15: Villa Mairea, Noormakku, 1938-41, Alvar Aalto**

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 5. 16: Saynatsalo Town Hall, Saynatsalo, 1949-52, Alvar Aalto**

Berlin and London Urban Studies

The Smithsons’ relationship with Louis Kahn began in earnest when they invited Kahn to the Team 10 meeting at Otterlo in 1959. The schemes presented at Otterlo, particularly the urban design projects, had a profound influence on Team 10 thinking and were later illustrated in Team 10 primer85 & Urban Structuring86. Both publications were edited and written by the Smithsons. In Urban Structuring, the Smithsons commended Kahn’s urban schemes for their meaningful order of spaces, developed from specific town organizing techniques and architectural forms rooted in historicism and tradition. The Smithsons were particularly drawn to Kahn’s simplification of traffic movement systems through an abstract language87 which transcended time and place. In Kahn’s work, they found a mutual appreciation of past and ordinary forms which he had successfully revalidated to suit current needs. The Smithsons wrote:

83 Smithson, Team 10 Primer
84 Smithson, Urban Structuring: Studies of Alison & Peter Smithson
85 For example, Kahn on his project for Philadelphia wrote: ‘The tower entrances and the interchanges, wound up parking terminals, suggest a new stimulus to unity in urban architecture, one which would find expression from the order of movement. The location and design of these entrances are an integral part of the design of the express-way. At night we know these towers by their illumination in colour. These yellow, red, green, blue and white
'Kahn's theoretical position on cities is a product of his historical insight into the fact that the qualities we admire in old cities are the product of the way that was found of giving form to the order of movement, the order of spaces for given functions and the ordering of the structural means available so that a unique organism was created'.

Inspired, the Smithsons, in their own projects, attempted to use past and ordinary forms they deemed valid. In the Golden Lane housing scheme, for example, they tried to recreate the 'life-in-the-streets' they witnessed in the traditional bye-law streets of East London. 'Any revival' of this sort, the Smithsons claimed, is 'historicism'.

In a similar vein of thought as Kahn who suggested that cities without order are as ludicrous as 'Carcassonne without walls, cities without entrances', the Smithsons proposed a network of urban infrastructure or 'permanent fix', as they called it. This is to be laid over the existing city fabric as an ordering framework to control movement and urban growth. According to the Smithsons, this network of urban infrastructure is a sort of 'urban motorway lifted from its ameliorative function to unifying function'. (Emphasis in original) The Smithsons proposed a system of roads, devised 'to be as simple as possible and to give equal access to all parts', as an answer to the lack of comprehensibility and identity in big cities. To them, roads have the same capacity as any big topographical feature to create geographical and structural order to an urban community.

This approach, no doubt inspired by Kahn and his quest to 'find expression from the order of movement' in mid-town Philadelphia, was applied to most of the Smithsons' urban projects such as the Berlin Haupstadt, 1957-58 (Figure 5. 18) and London Road Study, 1959, (Figure 5. 20). Hence, laid over parts of Berlin and London are a 'hierarchical net or grid' of road infrastructures to organize movement and functions in cities. In the Berlin Haupstadt project, two separate systems are proposed, one above the other. The lower of the two is a right-angular road net for cars and pedestrians. Above this is a separate irregular system (but not unsystematic, towers tell us the sector we are entering, and along the approach, light is used to see by and to give us direction. 'See Kahn, Towards a Plan for Midtown Philadelphia, pp.17
88 Smithson, Urban Structuring: Studies of Alison & Peter Smithson, pp.44.
89 Ibid pp.10.
90 Ibid. pp.51.
91 Ibid. pp. 29.
its designers claimed) for pedestrians, intended for purely pleasure functions such as shops, speciality markets, roof gardens and restaurants (Figure 5. 19). The two systems are connected at strategic points by continuously running escalators.

![Plan, Berlin Haupstadt, 1957-58. Alison & Peter Smithson](image)

Figure 5. 18: Plan, Berlin Haupstadt, 1957-58. Alison & Peter Smithson

![Perspective Sketch, Berlin Haupstadt, Alison & Peter Smithson](image)

Figure 5. 19: Perspective Sketch, Berlin Haupstadt, Alison & Peter Smithson

For London, the Smithsons proposed a triangulated net of urban motorways where *roads as they enter the built-up area, divide tangentially into two*\(^{94}\), as opposed to the rectangular net as the latter involves too many decisions to be taken at a single point. It is intended that the density and flow of traffic will be the same throughout the

\(^{93}\) For Smithsons’ write-up on these schemes see Smithson, *Urban Structuring*, pp.49-87

\(^{94}\) *Ibid*, pp.62
net system. In denser urban areas, the webbing of the net will be closer to provide maximum access.

Figure 5.20: Plan and section thru ‘route building’, London Road Study, 1959

For the London project, the Smithsons openly admitted Kahn’s influence when they wrote, ‘In the London Roads Study much of the thinking was dominated by Louis Kahn’s Philadelphia Plan’. The Smithsons used similarly abstract and poetic terms which alludes to historicism in the description of their intentions. For example, they use the term ‘Landscapes’ to describe derelict areas within the ‘net’ which needs total rebuilding and ‘Greenways’ for open space linkage system through the city for people on foot or on cycle to get about. These distinction of spaces by the urban motorway, the Smithsons asserted, creates ‘new served and servant spaces’ — an explicit borrowing of Kahn’s well known concept.

In one of the Smithsons’ sketches for the London Road Study, a pedestrian platform raised above the impending traffic surrounded by monumental cylindrical edifices was described as an ‘area of quietude’ (Figure 5.21). The overall effect is a

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93 Ibid, pp.77.
96 Ibid, pp.73
97 Ibid, pp.73
98 Le Corbusier (or rather his English translator) used the expression ‘streets of quietude’ to describe his raised platform for pedestrians: ‘Here we have a promenade for pedestrians
provocative assimilation of past forms and spirituality seen in Kahn’s Philadelphia Civic Centre scheme.

Figure 5.21: Sketch, London Road Study, 1959

At the Team 10 meeting held in Otterlo in 1959, Kahn publicly spoke for the first time on his concept of streets-as-a-building, comparing it to the aqueducts and bridges of ancient Rome: ‘In the centre of a very large city, (such as)....Paris, Rome, New York, in Philadelphia......the street in the middle of the town wants to be a building, it does not want to be just a street. If you think of it only as street, then it never can occur to you that the construction of it is anything but a left-over thing in which you use the meanest ways of making it, because you will never see it’ 99. This idea of streets-as-a-building could be seen in the Smithsons’ proposal for the London Road Study project. It takes the form of an elongated 3-storey building equipped with a travelator system or ‘moving pavement’, as they preferred to call it, connecting the main pedestrian routes in the city (Figure 5.20, top section). Alongside the building are service roads as well as strips with green spaces for parking. The combination of functions to allow movement of traffic and pedestrian within the spaces of the

99 Kahn, Louis, Talk at the Conclusion of the Otterlo Congress in Newman, CIAM ’59 in Otterlo: Group for the research of social and visual inter-relationships, pp. 206.

rising on a gentle ramp to first floor level which stretches before us as a kilometre flight of terrace It is flanked by cafes embowered in tree tops that overlook the ground beneath. Those hanging gardens of Semirramis, their triple tiers of terraces, are ‘streets of quietude’. Their delicate horizontal lines span the intervals between the huge vertical towers of glass, binding them together with an attenuated web.....’ Quote appeared in Ibid, pp.41
building meant that the building has become a route, hence, its name, ‘route building’

Historicism
An analysis of the Smithsons’ urban design schemes demonstrates Kahn’s strong influence on their work. Interestingly, the influences upon Kahn which led to the abstract allusion of historicism and tradition seen in the Philadelphia urban design schemes were wide ranging, but Kahn was strongly inspired by working with Venturi, for whom historical precedents form a strong basis in his search for an architecture that communicates. Venturi entered Kahn’s office just as the latter was considering dropping ‘techno-organic geometries’ and began exploring a different symbolic architectural language, loosely drawn from history. During the nine-month period in Kahn’s office, Venturi worked mainly on conceptual urban megastructure projects for Philadelphia. Venturi’s contribution left a lasting impression on Kahn’s architectural development, for example, of the Civic Centre plans, David De Long in *Louis Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture*, explained:

... (It) was surely Venturi’s perceptive comprehension of personal mannerisms and specificity in architecture that came to loosen Kahn’s growing inclination toward highly controlled, even compulsively ordered designs. Within the very shadow of the pure logic cast by the City Tower project, Venturi, in his sketch of the plaza, invoked the emotionally charged spirit of Michaelangelo’s Campidoglio.

Exchange between Kahn and Venturi began when Kahn was invited to serve on Venturi’s thesis jury in 1950 at Princeton University. The thesis was titled ‘Context

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100 See the Smithsons’ description of ‘route-building’ in *Ibid*, pp. 76.
103 The other person invited to serve on jury for Venturi’s thesis was George Howe. Venturi had met Kahn the summer before. Describing their first meeting, Scott Brown wrote, ‘Bob (Venturi) was 22 and working for the summer for the architect Robert Montgomery Brown when he first met Lou Kahn. Brown and Kahn had offices in the same building; Bob saw Lou in the elevator, he says Lou was the only architect in his firm to notice a quiet college grad. That was in 1947. In 1950 Bob invited Kahn to be on his thesis jury at Princeton’. Scott
in Architectural Composition' and it consisted of an explication of theoretical position
and a presentation of a design for a chapel for Venturi's alma mater, Episcopal
Academy, Merion, Pennsylvania\textsuperscript{104} (Figure 2.10, Chapter Two). The proposal stems
from Venturi's dissatisfaction with previous design assignments which lacked
indications of setting and context, resulting in a building which was designed only for
itself. The intention was to demonstrate the importance and the effect of setting on a
building:

\textit{The thesis of the problem in short is that its setting gives a building expression; its
context is what gives a building its meaning. And consequently change in context
causes change in meaning.}\textsuperscript{105}

In support of this premise, Venturi used exemplars from two sources: public
monuments of Rome and domestic American architecture\textsuperscript{106}. From Rome, Venturi
chose to explain the siting of the Trevi Fountain (compared to the Sant Michel
fountain in Paris), the Piazza S. Ignazio, the church of SS. Trinità and its relationship
to the Spanish Steps, the Campidoglio (before and after Michelangelo, and before and
after the Victor Emmanuel monument), and the Pantheon (compared to McKim,
Mead & White's Girard Bank in Philadelphia and Thomas Jefferson's library at the
University of Virginia). From American domestic architecture he selected Frank
Lloyd Wright's Wingspread house for Herbert F. Johnson in Racine, Wisconsin
(noting that his interest in context could be related to Wright's notions of the
"organic"). Included under this category are the Federal-era-Simpson-Hoffman house
on Chestnut Street in Salem, Massachusetts; the International Style Koch house
(designed by Carl Koch for his parents) in Belmont, Massachusetts; and Walter
Gropius and Marcel Breuer's Aluminium City Terrace workers housing, built during
World war II near Pittsburgh and compared to the Runtung housing estate, a Nazi-era
development in Leipzig. This tendency to use historical precedents based on face

\textsuperscript{104} An edited version of Venturi's original thesis content can be found in \textit{Context in
Architectural Composition: M.F.A. Thesis, Princeton University} in Venturi, Robert,
Iconography and Electronics upon a Generic Architecture: A View from the Drafting Room,
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Ibid}. pp.335.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ibid}. pp.333-374.
value, to prove a point of approach is seen repeated rather more elaborately in Venturi’s seminal *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* some 16 years later.

The gist of Venturi’s thesis could be seen as a reiteration of the Smithsons’ and Team 10’s rebellion against the modern masters at around the same time across the Atlantic, as for Venturi, what started as a criticism of studio problems in Princeton was also at least by implication an attack on modernism and International Style where universal architecture reigns, unfettered by time and place. At the end of the thesis presentation, Kahn was left highly impressed and soon after graduation Venturi went to work for Oscar Stonorov, Kahn’s former partner. The following year, upon recommendation by Kahn, Venturi went on to work for Eero Saarinen in Michigan and stayed at Saarinen’s office for two years. Kahn’s letters of recommendation for Venturi demonstrate close ties and deep appreciation for his younger colleague.

Venturi’s influence on Kahn is not difficult to believe. The myth surrounding Kahn as a lone genius is, apparently, inaccurate. Kahn, as Sarah Williams Goldhagen puts it, ‘*was a thoroughly social and socialized being*’, like most artists. According to Goldhagen, Kahn discussed and debated ideas with colleagues and friends. He also followed and considered the work of artists, architectural mentors, competitors but to Venturi, Scott Brown related, ‘(Kahn)…talked a great deal. Bob (Venturi) was often

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107 It must be noted that Le Corbusier himself was also a skillful visual analyst and had used ancient medieval, and Renaissance precedents in his argument for abstraction in the 1920s. See for example, Le Corbusier, *Towards A New Architecture*, Architectural Press, Oxford, 1946 (Revised edition, first publication in 1923).

108 Kahn worked in partnership with Oscar Stonorov, a German immigrant architect from 1941 to 1947. Stonorov was active in public housing developments and one of the more well known projects he worked on, in collaboration with Alfred Kastner, an architect based in Washington, D.C., was the Carl Mackley Houses in Philadelphia (1932-1935). Both Kastner and Stonorov were to have a strong influence on Louis Kahn’s early work on housing and communitarianism. At Stonorov’s office, Venturi contributed to the designs of the CherokeeApartments in Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, as well as to the design of an exhibition on the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, which was organized by Stonorov and shown in Gimbel’s department store in Philadelphia and the Strozzi Place in Florence. See Brownlee et al., *Out of Ordinary: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Associates*, pp. 245 and Goldhagen, *Louis Kahn’s Situated Modernism*, pp. 13-24.


in Lou's office to give crits. He shared his recent experience in Rome with the older architect. Scott Brown believed that it was probably from these talks that Kahn's real interest in history and mannerism began. Another to acknowledge the younger architect's influence on his mentor is David D. Brownlee who wrote:

'If Arne Tyng can be said to have strengthened Kahn's tendencies towards abstract geometric order, then surely Venturi provided the means by which that order could be made poetic.'

Despite Venturi's initial position as disciple and protégé of Kahn, the architectural exchanges could be seen as going both ways. Kahn never openly admitted, verbally or in writing, Venturi's contribution to his architectural development, but it is a fact recognised by many. Vincent Scully, for example, noted that early versions of the Mother's House demonstrate Venturi's early interest in quality of light inside a building, the layering of space and the idea of 'things wrapping around things' - concepts often attributed solely to Louis Kahn - even before they appeared in the latter's projects.

Nonetheless, Robert Venturi was not alone in helping Kahn shape ideas which later matured into a restrained monumental language with abstract allusion to history. Kahn was strongly moved by his travel experiences in Rome, Greece and Egypt. Like Venturi later on, Kahn was a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome between December 1950 and February 1951, and the experience profoundly affected the way he viewed contemporary architectural interpretation. Although Kahn claimed never

111 Scott Brown, A worm's eye view of recent architectural history, pp.73
112 Brownlee et al., Louis Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture, pp. 62.
114 Kahn was a fellow of the American Academy in Rome for a brief three months between December 1950 through February 1951. The following month, he travelled to Egypt and Greece before returning to Philadelphia via Paris.
115 Venturi won the Rome Prize Fellowship to the American Academy in Rome in February 1954.
116 Shortly after Kahn's arrival at the American Academy, Kahn wrote to his office colleagues in Philadelphia: 'I firmly realize that the architecture in Italy will remain as the inspirational source of the works of the future. Those who don't see it that way ought to look again. Our stuff looks tinny compared to it and all the pure forms have been tried in all variations. What is necessary is the interpretation of the architecture of Italy as it relates to our knowledge of building and needs. I care little for the restorations (that kind of interpretation) but I see
to have read\textsuperscript{117}, he constantly examined books and listened perceptively. He has also begun teaching at Yale University in 1947\textsuperscript{118} and teaching inspired him greatly. As Kahn said near the end of his life, ‘I come much more refreshed and challenged from classes. I learn more from the students than I probably teach.’\textsuperscript{119} Yale was an exciting place in 1947\textsuperscript{120} and Kahn was exposed to an intellectual discourse led by notable architectural figures in academia. For example, at Yale, Kahn was reported to have ‘...frequented (Vincent) Scully’s classes on the history of architecture, and at the American academy he reportedly conversed at length with Frank E. Brown, the resident historian and archaeologist whose own appreciation of Roman architecture paralleled Kahn’s’\textsuperscript{121}.

Furthermore, the architectural community in which Kahn had many friends had also begun to redefine the study of the past. Philip Johnson, notable for his Glass House in New Canaan (Figure 3.22, Chapter Three), was the first prominent American proponent of modernism to employ overt historical references\textsuperscript{122}. Following Johnson’s lead are architects such as John Johanson, Paul Schweiker, Edward Durrel

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\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, Louis Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture, pp. 74. Brownlee wrote, ‘...after recommending D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson’s On Growth and Form to his nephew Alan Kahn was the single book that would explain architecture, he later admitted that he had never read it; original fact in Kahn, Alan, Conversation about Lou Kahn, Los Angeles, California, June 20, 1981, in Louis I. Kahn: L’uomo, il maestro, ed. Alessandra Latour (Rome: Eddizioni Kappa, 1986), pp.65. Also to a former student and office colleague, he wrote in reference to an article he had been sent, ‘without reading a word I can feel its significance’, letter, Kahn to William S. Huff, November 4, 1965, ‘Huff, William, Correspondence’, Box LIK 57, Kahn Collection.

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\textsuperscript{118} Kahn began teaching at the Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania, in 1955, much later than at Yale. While at Yale he was a visiting critic, at GSFA, he took on a much more prominent post as Professor of Architecture. It is a post that he maintained for many years, between 1955 to 1974.

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\textsuperscript{119} Kahn, Louis, 1973: Brooklyn, New York, Lecture, Pratt Institute, Fall 1973, in Perspecta, no.19, 1982, pp.94.

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\textsuperscript{120} Stern, Robert A.M., Yale 1950-1965, Opposities, no. 4, October 1974, pp. 35-62.

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\textsuperscript{121} Brownlee et al., Louis Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture, pp. 50.

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\textsuperscript{122} In his article on the Glass House, published in September 1950, Johnson outlined, in detail, the historical references of his design, for example, the site planning alludes to techniques used for the Acropolis in Athens and Schinkel’s Casino in Glienicke Park in Potsdam, and massing techniques from Claude-Nicolas. Johnson, Philip, House at New Canaan, Architectural Review 108, September 1950, pp. 152-159.
Stone and Yamasaki, producing in the middle of the decade a mini-revival of classicism, or formalism, as it was often termed.\(^\text{123}\)

Kahn's Philadelphia Civic Centre project, with its use of explicit history, could also have been inspired by another environment: Princeton University. There, Kahn stumbled into a discussion about the role of historical references in modern architecture among a group of students in the faculty. In 1956, Kahn often participated in juries and he took over a studio from Jean Labatut.\(^\text{124}\) Jean Labatut, an architectural design historian who had trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, saw education of history continuous with, rather than contradictory to, the principles of the modern movement. Labatut, like Kahn, encouraged design analogies using historical forms, and they both discouraged their students from direct appropriation of historical motifs. Kahn had been a friend to Labatut since the 1940’s, but in the mid-1950’s, the two men became closer by serving together on a Committee on the Allied Arts, sponsored by the American Institute of Architects.\(^\text{125}\)

Students at Princeton whom Kahn knew were strongly influenced by Labatut’s teaching. Among these students were Robert Venturi and Charles Moore. Jean Labatut had been one of Venturi’s closest mentors at Princeton\(^\text{126}\) and his teaching inspired Venturi to take the path towards a historically informed architecture. Venturi often speaks of Labatut’s important role in his development:

'Labatut brilliantly illuminated the principles of modern design to us. But modern architecture did not represent a culmination for all time, but rather a vocabulary appropriate for our time. He saw modern architecture as a beginning, not an end—but a beginning interpreted in the context of history. And history, for Labatut, was not a way to prove points, but an objective basis for enriching our vision, and an


\(^{124}\) Charles Moore reported that Kahn took over Labatut’s studio in 1956, in Wurmfeld, Michael (editor), Princeton's Beaux-Arts and Its New Academicism from Labatut to the Program of Geddes: An Exhibition of Original Drawings over Fifty Years (Princeton, 1976), pp. 23-25.

\(^{125}\) When Labatut had to travel to Europe for several months in 1953, it was Louis Kahn whom he asked to take over his responsibilities as chair of that committee. Correspondence between Labatut and Kahn on this committee is in 'Committee on Allied Arts', box 63, Kahn Collection.

\(^{126}\) For influences during Venturi's education, see Chapter Two: The Education Years.
instrument, ultimately, for liberating our work. Modern architecture was not a revolutionary ideology to be instilled, but a stage in historical evolution, which, by implication, we artists, through education, could grow from."¹²⁷ (emphasis in original)

Venturi relied on literary sources in his approach to tradition that resembled Jean Labatut’s teaching, that is, a relationship to the past which transcended overt reference and thus in explicitly modernist terms. Venturi referred to T.S. Eliot’s *Tradition and Individual Talent*¹²⁸ in his work as explicated in *Complextiy and Contradiction in Architecture*. In his argument for a historically informed architecture, Venturi adopted Eliot’s diatribe against literary modernism, which had so disparaged tradition, that ‘seldom...does the word appear except in a phrase of censure’¹²⁹. Eliot propounded that the best writer is one who perceives ‘not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence. This historical sense, according to Eliot, ‘...is what makes a writer traditional, and it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.....’

Such assertions appealed to Venturi as he was looking for an alternative to early Modern Movement, where appropriation of historical analogies is rejected in favour of a more functionally and technologically oriented approach to design. Venturi’s enthusiasm for accepting history as part of the modern condition inspired Kahn greatly. Kahn and Venturi remained friends well into the 1960s and deep respect for each other continued throughout their lives. However, Kahn’s tendency to appropriate ideas from his associates later clouded their relationship¹³⁰. By then, their work has also diverged: while Kahn remained true to modern canon in his use of history, Venturi, together with Scott Brown, began to use explicit historical details and


¹³⁰ According to Scott Brown, Kahn’s borrowing from Venturi was never acknowledged. She wrote, ‘The fact that Lou acknowledged few of his borrowings and probably not the most important ones, finally clouded the friendship between Bob and Lou. Although Bob’s modest practice limited his opportunities to use ideas he had shared with Lou, when such opportunities came, Bob proved that he was not merely “squashed Kahn”’. Scott Brown, *A worm’s eye view of recent architectural history*, pp. 73.
references as means toward representation. When Venturi and Scott Brown took to Las Vegas to study symbolism of road side architecture, there was no way for Kahn to follow, but Kahn sent a message that 'there was "truth" in Las Vegas'.

Venturi's influence on Kahn was profound; however, Kahn's historically informed philosophy was also attributed to his early Beaux-Arts training at the University of Pennsylvania and his impressions from his stay at the American Academy in Rome in the early fifties. He was also greatly inspired by colleagues and friends such as Vincent Scully, Jean Labatut and serving on juries at Princeton. These influences opened an option to Kahn and made him realise that perhaps an architecture based on technology and mass production dominated by ideas of Buckminster Fuller and Tyng are limited in scope. From the abstraction of historical models, Kahn was able to achieve the scale, identity and monumentality appropriate for the city of Philadelphia as he had demonstrated in the urban design schemes for the city.

Conclusion

In reaction to the limitations of modern architecture, the Smithsons started searching for solutions that demonstrate a much richer language. Together with their Team 10 colleagues, they questioned the analytical/functionalist mentality that continued to dominate CIAM despite post-war tendencies for urban renewal. Through CIAM, Team 10 developed an approach based on a complex and sympathetic relationship between old urban tissue and new urban functions. Concurrent with this approach is the study of habitat at a scale of associations running hierarchically describing man's sensitive relationship to his built environment.

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131 Ibid, pp.73.
132 Kahn began his architectural training at the University of Pennsylvania in 1920, which then followed an architectural programme infused with the teachings of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts of Paris. The head of design program at the school was appropriately, French-trained architect, Paul Phillippe Cret (1876-1945). Cret's architecture was modern, despite his unshaken belief in the primacy of classicism, as according to Brownlee, ‘.....Cret's architecture was not a matter of historical styles but a problem-solving art in which the creative architect translated the demands of the client's program into substance’. See Brownlee et al., Louis Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture, pp. 50.
133 Kahn was resident architect at the American Academy in Rome for a brief 3 month period between December 1950 and February 1951 before travelling to Egypt between January 5th and February 2nd, 1951. He returned via Paris to Philadelphia to receive the Yale Art Gallery extension commission.
Across the Atlantic, a similar development can be seen at the Graduate School of Fine Arts (GSFA) at University of Pennsylvania. Led by members of the so-called 'Philadelphia School', they all had a coherent philosophical core centred on Kahn's work. Their ideas revolved mainly around the idea of historicism as continuous with rather than distinct from the modern tradition. They were also influenced by Team 10. Team 10 ideas permeated the GSFA, especially during the appointment of Dean G. Holmes Perkins, who was well versed with Team 10 polemics. Perkins was responsible for inviting the Smithsons and other Team 10 members, such as Aldo van Eyck to teach and exhibit their work at the GSFA.

These activities led to an interesting connection between the two polemical groups. For example, Peter Smithson's numerous visits to the department led to a warm relationship with Kahn. The Smithsons were clearly impressed by Kahn and invited him to the Team 10 meeting at Otterlo in 1959. It was at the GSFA too that Venturi came to know another prominent member of Team 10: Aldo van Eyck. Venturi found affinities in Van Eyck's explorations of tradition and human inter-relations and allowed his work to be influenced by the Dutchman.

This web of complex connections between Team 10 members, Kahn and Philadelphia School members, is profoundly influential in the development of the Smithsons' and the Venturis' approach to architecture. It began to unravel the fact that there had been some similar forces which influenced them to reach beyond the Modernist dogma of pure functional expression and tectonic determinism. Louis Kahn, with his desire to return architecture to some semblance of historical form, had been a consistently influential figure in the professional development of both the Smithsons and the Venturis. In an interesting turn of events, Venturi, with his Beau-Arts training background at Princeton, became a source of inspiration for Kahn. If Anne Tyng encouraged Kahn's tendencies towards abstract geometric order, then Venturi provided the means for the order to have poetic connotations that depended on historical associations.

The Smithsons' urban plans and Venturi's early works echoed Kahnian forms, but both, as in the cases of most of Kahn's students, established an independent position as they developed further. Nonetheless, throughout their career, the Smithsons (and
indeed Aldo van Eyck) share with Kahn the use of historicism that reveals a profound allegiance to modernist thought in its prohibition against decoration or ornament. The historical motifs used in their architecture remain inherently at a poetic level of interpretation. Venturi, on the other hand, diverged far from the modern canon. If the Smithsons and Kahn shunned decoration, then Venturi and his wife, Scott Brown, embraced it, relying on explicit historical details and references to meet the contingencies of location and use. This is a crucial distinction between the architects. The Smithsons and Kahn never ‘borrowed’ historical motifs. History for them was assimilated in their language.

The similarities and differences between Kahn, the Smithsons and the Venturis are discernible by briefly comparing their projects designed and built within almost the same time: Kahn’s Margaret Esherick House, 1959-61; the Smithsons’ Upper Lawn Pavilion, Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire, 1959-61 and the Mother’s House, 1959-64. There is an archaic quality to both the Esherick House and the Upper Lawn Pavilion with a profound expression of internal truth and authenticity to materiality. Predominating the designs is a quiet restrain, lack of ornamentation and unfinished rough surfaces. Indeed both display the characteristics of a building belonging to New Brutalism, a movement the Smithsons were almost wholly responsible for.

It is against this understanding of the Smithsons’ and Kahn’s work that the boldness of the Venturis’ polemics can best be appreciated. While Kahn and the Smithsons took a step forward in breaking free from the fundamental principles of Modernism, Venturi perhaps took two. Venturis’ Mother’s House illustrates the intricate mix of attachment to and rebellion against Kahn. While the Mother’s House shares with Kahn a commitment toward formality in its symmetrical Palladian facade, its use of historical motifs such as arches and split-at-the-apex pediment; it also embraces ornamentation and commercial elements which Kahn so viscerally rejected. The arch is a non-structural two-dimensional element tacked on to the facade, while windows

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134 See Banham, The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?
are fixed with cross-frames and surrounded by mouldings to make them look 'ordinary'.

The Smithsons, Kahn and indeed van Eyck argued against explicit historical references that are found in Venturi's work. In fact, they still worked in a restrained, taut aesthetic of simple, abstract volumes and masses that early modernists proposed best expressed their age. Kahn may have mentored Venturi and other members of Philadelphia School, but these younger architects used historical precedents with intentions and manifestations vastly different from Kahn's. Whilst maintaining a distance from historical sources, Venturi and his cohorts tend to select qualities of appearance and shape it based on a mannerist discipline.

In Venturi's architecture, decorative elements drawn form various historical periods are allowed to adorn the external façade. The façade is seen as an independent skin, different from any part of the building and thus able to respond wholly to the public realm despite the program. This approach immediately violates one of the fundamental principles of rational architecture, that is, the consideration of building in isolation and designing the form uniquely in strict accordance of the function. Instead, Venturi reversed the process, separating the form and function, as he later explained:

'My emphasis.....was on contradiction as well as separation between form and function: allowing form and function to go their separate ways permits function to be truly functional — as it couldn’t be, ironically, when Form followed Function in the old Modern days, and had the obligation to look good as well as work well.

So independence of form and function in the interest of more effective functionalism can distinguish our architecture from that of the modern movement.'

136 Venturi wrote some twenty-five years later that he deliberately made certain elements of the house look ordinary, such as the windows. Venturi, Robert, *Mother's House: 25 Years Later*, in *Ibid*, pp.35.

137 In its primary sense, Mannerism means the acceptance of a manner rather than its meaning. The term also denotes the style current in Italy from Michaelangelo to the end of 16th century. According to the Penguin Dictionary of Architecture, the style is 'characterized by the use of motifs in deliberate opposition to their original significance or context, but it can also express itself in an equally deliberate cold and rigid classicism'. Principal examples of in Italy are Michaelangelo's Medici Chapel and Laurentian Library, Giulio Romano's works at Mantua and Vasari's Uffizi at Florence. See Fleming, John; Honour, Hugh and Pevsner, Nikolaus, *The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture*, Fourth Edition, Penguin Books, London, England, 1991, pp.281.

Unlike the Smithsons or Kahn, the Venturis also acknowledge popular culture as Herbert Gans had recorded and defined it at Levittown\textsuperscript{139}. The Margaret Esherick House and the Upper Lawn Pavilion, despite their modernist misgivings, had much of the 'pride of place' attribute. Venturi's proposal, on the other hand, embraces the 'ugly' and 'ordinary' so ferociously that when both Venturi and Scott Brown took to Las Vegas some years later, there was no way for Kahn to follow\textsuperscript{140}.


\textsuperscript{140} Kahn appears to have come round when he later admitted to Denise Scott Brown, 'There is truth in Las Vegas'. See Venturi, \textit{Thoughts About Evolving Teachers and Students} in Venturi, \textit{Iconography and Electronics upon a Generic Architecture: A View from the Drafting Room}, pp. 86.
Chapter 6
The Sugden House 1955-56 & The Mother’s House 1959-1964
Part 1 Introduction

Introduction

Underlying both the Smithsons’ and the Venturis’ work is the idea that Modern Architecture has come adrift of the society and communities it seeks to serve\(^1\). Heroic boxes designed to look like machines to replace the complex urban entities in a rigid, formalistic and diagrammatic manner proved to be disastrously unsuitable. The modern architects’ concentration on primary aesthetics to achieve universal good taste means that humanistic needs and pragmatic concerns are often precluded. Phillipe Boudon’s analysis of Le Corbusier’s first major housing estate at Pessac is a classic example. Proving highly adaptable, the houses after completion were subjected to all kinds of alterations and additions inspired by the vernacular idiom.\(^2\).

The previous chapters illustrate that the main thrust of the Smithsons’ polemics had been concerning the connection between buildings and everyday life – a reciprocal relationship communicated through an honest expression of materials, structure and services. Their theory of communication had always remained, throughout their career, within a purely architectonic discourse. From the beginning, they wished to practise a straightforward, even daring functionalism. They believed that buildings should be able to disseminate

\(^1\) Expressing their discontent with Modernism, the Smithsons, for example wrote, ‘Real social cohesion cut across geographical barriers, and the principal aid to social cohesion is looseness of grouping and ease of communication rather than the isolation of arbitrary sections of total community with impossibly difficult communications, which characterise both English neighbourhood planning and the Unité concept of Le Corbusier’ in Smithson, Alison & Peter, Ordinariness & Light: Urban Theories 1952-1960 and their application in a building project 1963-1970, Faber and Faber, London, 1970. Venturi wrote, ‘Orthodox Modern architects have tended to recognize complexity insufficiently or inconsistently in their attempt to break with tradition and start all over again, they idealised the primitive and elementary at the expense of the diverse and sophisticated’. In Venturi, Robert, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture, The Architectural Press, London, 1977 (Second Edition), pp.16.

‘signs of life’ by displaying their own necessity and instructions for use honestly and without rhetoric.

That communication of meanings in buildings should be a major concern to the Smithsons, made it interesting to make the comparison with Robert Venturi, who invented a whole theory of communication to justify his use of contradiction. His later collaborations with Denise Scott Brown, saw them asserting the importance of communication through symbolism inspired by advertising hoarding of Las Vegas\(^3\). The previous chapters discuss the similarities and differences in the Smithsons’ and Venturi’s approach to architecture. Affinities in their thinking perhaps comes closest intellectually in the juxtaposition of the Sugden House in Watford and the Mother’s House in Philadelphia. Playing on scale, symmetry and imagery derived from the typical suburban house; both buildings demonstrate each designer’s apparent interest in the architectural expression ‘ugly and ordinary’\(^4\).

Both the Sugden House and the Mother’s House proved to be bricks thrown at the window of modernism. There were none of the hovering planes, the pilotis, taut skins or flats roofs that characterise the ‘machine aesthetic’, like those found in Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye in Poissy (1828-9)\(^5\). In place of the high-tech industrial symbolism of the early modern period, is an acceptance of conventional and vernacular forms of the sort that populate suburban Britain and North America.

As such, this chapter provides an introduction to a series of detailed discussions on the similarities and differences between the Sugden House and the Mother’s House in terms of design approach. It firstly looks at how the houses were procured, for whom the

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\(^4\) The term ‘ugly and ordinary’ was first used by the Venturis in *Learning Las Vegas* to describe their architecture as ‘technologically unadvanced’, and distinctively conventional in imagery and making. See *Ibid*, pp.93-100.

\(^5\) The Villa Savoye is one of the great icons of the Modern Movement and marks the culmination of le Corbusier’s first great period. Completed in 1929, it came at the end of a line of purist villas in which Le Corbusier had been developing his ideas and honing his compositional skills. It also perhaps, better than any other work, shows the transfer of ideas from contemporary painting and sculpture into architecture.
houses were originally designed and the design processes that took place. It then goes on to compare the context, general planning and form of each. These initial investigations are supported by a series of hand-drawn drawings produced specially as part of this research and they are appended at the end of this chapter. Here, the floor plans, elevations and sections of each house are juxtaposed side by side in identical scales and orientation to ease the comparative exercise. In addition, these drawing analysis also form a basis for further discussions in the following chapters.

Procurement

Derek Sugden was an engineer at Ove Arup and Partners and was working closely with Peter Smithson on a small project\(^6\) when he first approached Smithson to build a house for his family. Sugden at the time had just recently purchased a piece of land he had bought together with a friend at Watford, north of London. Initially, Sugden wanted Smithson to recommend a ‘brilliant, gifted, young architect’ and it didn’t occur to him to ask the Smithsons as he thought they were ‘rather grand and famous’.\(^7\) By this time, the Smithsons have already had a major building built: the Hunstanton School of 1954 and they were prodigious in their writing, exhibition projects and competition entries. In the same year that the Sugden House was built, the Smithsons completed two experimental schemes exploring the essence of dwelling: the House of the Future, designed for the Daily Mail Exhibition and the Patio and Pavilion, for the This is Tomorrow exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, both in London\(^8\).

Weary of what was referred to as ‘contemporary style’ then, Derek Sugden’s brief to the Smithsons was that he wanted ‘a simple house, an ordinary house, but that this should

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\(^6\) Derek Sugden joined Ove Arup and Partners in 1953 and was immediately put under the wings of Ronald Hobbs whose group was then working on most of the Smithsons’ projects. Derek Sugden was working on a small plywood-clad steel-framed house designed by the Smithsons that was never built. Derek Sugden, in a lecture given at a symposium titled The labour of Peter and Alison Smithson, Architectural Association, London, 14\(^{th}\) & 15\(^{th}\) November 2003. Also see Sugden, Derek, The Sugden House: Dreaming and Living, in Webster, Helena (editor), Modernism Without Rhetoric: Essays on the work of Alison & Peter Smithson, Academy Editions, London, 1997, pp.129.

\(^7\) Ibid
not exclude it from being a radical house. Incidentally, Sugden's request for an ordinary house was supported with the covenant on the land that required the house to be built of brick with tiled roof. The budget for the house was £2,500, but the final cost came up to £4,600 and the Smithsons charged the Sugdens the standard Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) scale of fees.

Alison Smithson spent a week or two on a design that features a rectangular plan, narrow windows and a butterfly roof structure (Figure 6.2). Drawings were sent to the Sugdens and later, the Sugdens met up with the Smithsons at their Limerston Street office to discuss the designs. The Sugdens expressed their doubts on the internal gutter that is the result of the butterfly roof. The Sugdens were looking forward to developing a large natural garden and to enjoy the views from many parts of the house, and such, were disappointed with the narrow windows. The meeting ended up with the Sugdens concluding that they didn't like the design very much. The Smithsons returned a week or two later with the butterfly roof replaced with a double pitch roof and large windows on the facades. Apart from that the plan was hardly modified at all and was accepted by the Sugdens. Nevertheless, the local authority rejected the scheme after four months of fruitless discussion. The design was approved after appeal, ten months after first application was made and building work completed in December 1956.

While the Smithsons took little time to come up with the final design for the Sugdens, Robert Venturi, painstakingly, developed different designs for the house over a period of five years, starting from July 1959 to 1963. It took a further 8 months of construction before Venturi and his mother moved into the house in April of 1964. In the end, there were over 100 drawings of five preliminary designs plus a final design. During this

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10 Derek Sugden, conversation with author, 26th June 2003.
11 According to Derek Sugden, at this point, Alison Smithson got very cross and Peter gathered up the drawings and said, 'I'll have another go, if we can't design something for the Sugdens, we can't design anything for anybody.' Sugden, The Sugden House: Dreaming and Living., pp.130.
period, Venturi was dividing his time between his new practice\textsuperscript{12}, teaching responsibilities at University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Fine Arts\textsuperscript{13}, and writing his book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*\textsuperscript{14}.

*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* was to be one of the most influential books on theory of modernism and the Mother’s House gave Venturi the opportunity to put his words to the test. Vanna Venturi was not a typical client and trusted Venturi to design without deadline, dialogue or a detailed list of requirements\textsuperscript{15}. This was not to be a ‘dream house’ in the grandiose sense and like the Sugdens, Vanna Venturi’s budget was modest and she did not want the house to be pretentious\textsuperscript{16}. The negotiated price with contractor was $44,379 for a house of approximately eighteen hundred square feet, but the final cost came up to $54,430.

The numerous drawings produced for the Mother’s House were published by Frederic Schwartz in 1992\textsuperscript{17} and the five-year struggle that they chronicle illustrates a process of research and clarification, as concepts were tried, tested, discarded and start anew. Venturi’s Beach House project (Figure 6.1) was thought to be the direct ascendant of the

\textsuperscript{12} Venturi left Kahn’s office to begin an independent architectural practice in 1957. He was joined by a new partner, William H. Short, a classmate from Princeton and John Rauch, a 1957 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania whom Venturi met when both were working in the office of Cope and Lippincott. See *Chronology* in Brownlee, David B.; De Long, David G, & Hiesinger, Kathryn B., *Out of Ordinary: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Associates*, Philadelphia Museum of Art in Association with Yale University Press, 2001, pp. 244-251.

\textsuperscript{13} Venturi started teaching at the University of Pennsylvania in 1954 first as an instructor and assistant to Louis Kahn, then as an assistant (1961), and later as associate professor (1964). In Spring of 1963, Venturi was a visiting critic at Yale University’s School of Art and Architecture, overseeing a master’s class studio on pre-cast concrete, which he teaches with the chair of the department, Paul Rudolph. Interesting to note that years later, Venturi chose Rudolph’s Crawford Manor, New Haven as an example of ‘duck’, in presenting his case for ‘decorated shed’ (the Guild House) in *Learning from Las Vegas*.

\textsuperscript{14} Venturi submitted an early manuscript of *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* to the Graham Foundation, which had awarded Venturi a research grant. The work was published by the Museum of Modern Art in 1966, as the first in an intended series of occasional papers addressing issues of architecture and design. Subsequent studies were, however, never produced. Venturi, Robert, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture, The Architectural Press, London, 1977 (Second Edition).


Mother's House\textsuperscript{18}, but the published drawings reflect Venturi's struggle to come to terms with ideas that were his own and of his master, Louis Kahn\textsuperscript{19}. Vincent Scully, commenting on Kahn's influence, wrote:

"These leave a record of the struggle of antagonists loving and fearing each other, coming out only toward the last with something that was almost wholly new, and Venturi's own, with accreted experiences purged away or fused into his own being.\textsuperscript{20}

The earlier schemes (Figure 6.3) demonstrate deep spatial layering very much like Kahn's 'ruins wrapped around buildings'\textsuperscript{21} and cropped corners and diagonal arrangements seen in Kahn's Goldenberg House project\textsuperscript{22}. The final design, however, is the result of final redirection of course influenced by Venturi's evolving ideas concerning shelter and symbolism.

![Image]

\textit{Figure 6.1: Beach House, New Jersey, 1959, Robert Venturi}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid}
\item \textsuperscript{18} See Scully, Vincent, \textit{The Shingle Style Today or the Historian's Revenge}, George Braziller, New York, 1974.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Venturi in an interview with Frederic Schwartz in 1992 remarked on Kahn's influence in his work: 'The house started more like Kahn. After all, I was young and he was influential. The design was my way of learning and it was a wonderful experience. But I wasn't satisfied with the house and it didn't turn out the way I wanted it to be. In a way, I was lucky that the budget made the house change and it got much better. My intuition told me what to draw and took control of my hand. It told me what to do and it came out very quickly in the end.' Schwartz, Mother's House: The Evolution of Yanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill, pp.24.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Scully, Vincent, Everybody Needs Everything in Schwartz, Mother's House: The Evolution of Yanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill, pp.44.
\item \textsuperscript{21} The metaphor of wrapping buildings in 'ruins' was used by Kahn in the design of the United States consulate buildings in Luanda, Angola (1959-62), for example. See Brownlee et al., Louis Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture, pp.443.
\item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibid} pp.66-67.
\end{itemize}
Figure 6.2: Early sketch of Sugden House with butterfly roof

Figure 6.3 Mother’s House, Scheme I: July 1959 & Scheme IIB: August 1959

Context
The Sugden House and the Mother’s House are both located in a similar kind of low-density neighbourhood: suburban, affluent middle-class, leafy, expansive and quiet, alluding to an ideal place in the country (Figure 6.4 & Figure 6.5). The suburban houses
that surround both are characterised by their vernacular forms, use of local materials and well-kept gardens. Untypically of modern buildings of the early period that tend to touch lightly on the ground by means of pilotis and setback, both houses sit heavy and inert on their respective green sites. In fact, their heaviness on the ground reminds one more of the English stately home standing broad and heavy on its rusticated basement.

The Sugden House is located on the northern edge of a ‘residential estate’ in Devereaux Drive, Watford. Situated at the end of the road, it sits elevated on a sloping triangular site of approximately three-quarter acres in size (Figure 6. 7). The placement of the house on the highest point of the site and along the Northeast boundary allows most part of the house to have views across the sweeping garden, now gracefully maturing. The siting also allows the principal rooms such as the living and the main bedrooms above, to face south. The sloping ground, for some reason, did not encourage the Smithsons to create a play of levels, and instead, they opted to keep the house simple on a single level. The flat elevated area on which the house sits is extended beyond the footprint, creating a flat apron around the house, allowing the Sugdens access to all four sides of the house on a single level. This apron is skewed on plan to create tension with the rigid geometry of the house.

The Mother’s House, on the other hand, sits on a flat, almost featureless, rectangular site of approximately the same size in Philadelphia’s suburban Chestnut Hill section (Figure 6. 7). Coincidentally, it is across the street from Louis Kahn’s Esherick House, 1961, an abstract, flat-roofed edifice (Figure 6. 6). Access to the Mother’s House is through a narrow plot of land between two other pieces of land fronting the main road. A narrow straight driveway, just slightly off the axis of the house, gives a full frontal view of front facade immediately upon entering the site. Moving towards the house along the driveway, one’s view is kept strictly on this façade and the looming chimney beyond, giving very little clue as to the overall form of the house.
Figure 6.4: Neighbourhood houses around Devereaux Drive

Figure 6.5: Neighbourhood houses of Chestnut Hill

Figure 6.6: Esherick House, 1961, Chestnut Hill, Louis Kahn
Figure 6. 7 Site Plan: the Sugden House (above) and the Mother's House (below)
If the Sugden House was carefully located to gain the best views of the garden and winter sun, then the Mother's House was located near the centre of its site, facing the entrance driveway due Northeast, as if its main purpose is to address visitors arriving. This is especially so when considering how studied the front façade is, sitting squarely on the ground, in comparison to the other facades. The siting of Sugden House, in comparison, is somewhat picturesque (compare Figure 6.8 with Figure 6.9). One first catches a glimpse of the house moving past a hedge at the site boundary. While moving along the curved driveway towards the house, one is presented with an oblique view of the entrance and garden façade. This view allows an immediate full comprehension of the overall form. One finally arrives at the entrance, but the driveway, continues right to the rear of the house, allowing more parking that is hidden from the gardens. The driveway in the Mother's House — straight, narrow but slightly widened near the end for a three-point turn — is highly utilitarian. It ends right at the front of the house, celebrating the space of arrival in a very direct manner.

The dramatised path of the car seen in the Sugden House, was a common theme of the early Modern period with its general obsession with the dynamics of vehicular movement. For example, Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye had the chauffeur-driven car arriving from the rear, then to move underneath the edge of the hovering first floor, carefully avoiding the pilotis. The owners were dropped at the glazed front doors, after which the car is then parked in the garage at the far side of the dynamic diagonal.23 Gropius' Bauhaus celebrates the movement of the car by allowing them to be driven below the 'centrepiece bridge' containing the administration rooms of the institution.24 The Smithsons' obsession with the dramatic consequence of car and mobility on architecture and urban planning, is evident from the various articles and references made

to the subject, such as, *Mobility: Road Systems* written in 1958\textsuperscript{25} and *AS in DS: An Eye on the Road* written in 1983\textsuperscript{26}.

Although the main rooms in the Mother's House — the living, dining and the first-floor bedroom - are facing south as in the case of Sugden House, acquiring low winter sun and solar gain seem to be of secondary importance in Venturi's design (Compare Figure 6. 21 with Figure 6. 22 and Figure 6. 29 with Figure 6. 30). Demands of site and context, to Venturi, are just a few of the many contradictory elements that need to be accommodated within the 'difficult whole'\textsuperscript{27}. This is evident from his numerous writing and description of the house at the period. For example, Venturi described the house in 1966 as achieving, 'the difficult unity of a medium number of diverse parts rather than the easy unity of few or many motifs'\textsuperscript{28}. The Smithsons, on the other hand, had always placed particular emphasis on environmental concerns in their projects. In the same year that saw the completion of Sugden House, they explained their design attitude towards climate in *Architectural Design*:

>'The English climate is not characterized by intense rain or cold, but by changeability. The house should, therefore, be capable of grasping what fine weather it can get, grasping solar heat through south windows into all rooms and giving access to sheltered patios, roof gardens or terraces which can be arranged in a moment to catch the pleasures of our climate and then closed up in a moment so that we can ignore it.... Such an attitude towards protection and changeability could guide the form of the whole layout.'\textsuperscript{29}

From very early on, plans of their various schemes were almost always annotated by sun paths, while sections are drawn showing depth of sun penetration into interior spaces. Solar shading also makes an appearance when considered necessary in building for


\textsuperscript{26} Smithson, Alison. *AS in DS: An Eye on the Road*, Delft University Press, Delft, 1983.

\textsuperscript{27} Explaining the idea of 'difficult whole', Venturi, for example wrote, 'The difficult whole in an architecture of complexity and contradiction includes multiplicity and diversity of elements....'. Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp. 88.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, London, pp. 118.

warmer climates. Throughout their oeuvre, documented in the pages of the *Charged Void: Architecture*, such studies are often carried out in the development of ideas, demonstrating their concern of buildings’ relationship to the natural environment.

Figure 6.8: The dramatised path of the car leading to the Sugden House

Figure 6.9: The approach to the Mother’s House is along a straight and narrow driveway

For example, the diagrammatic section through Close Houses was annotated to show deep sun penetration into all rooms, while the designs for the Electricity Board, Kampala in 1953, demonstrate careful consideration of the sun’s movement in relation to the building and the use of sun screens or brise-soleil to control sun penetration. See Smithson, Alison & Peter, *The Charged Void: Architecture*, The Monacelli Press, New York 2001, pp.137 & pp. 98-101.

Ibid.
Construction and Composition
The design of both the Sugden House and the Mother’s House are based on simple rectangles on plan (Figure 6. 21 & Figure 6. 22), from which are extruded upwards, a solid form with little volumetric articulation. In the Sugden House, covering this basic volume, is a double pitched roof built very tight to the walls with minimum projection at the eaves (Figure 6. 10). From the roof are protrusions and extensions of various kinds which mark symbolically the daily running of a rather modern house: brick chimneys, upturned chimney pots, vent and soil pipes and a television antenna. Windows are uncommonly large but standard and distributed according to room functions. The use of standard windows instead of horizontal ‘absence of wall’ preferred by the Modernists, seems to allow brickwork to flow together and coalesce with the roof to form a solid mass. The Smithsons understood well the effect they were creating: the ‘appearance of all-round protection once characteristic of English popular architecture.’

In the Mother’s House, roof and walls dominate, giving it similar ‘all-round protection’ seen in vernacular exemplars (Figure 6. 11). The roof is much more articulated here, as the pitch runs in three different directions, but like the Sugden House, it is built tight at the eaves (Figure 6. 41). The sheltering quality gained as the direct result of seamless flow of walls and roof, interrupted only by ‘windows’, is particularly significant for Venturi, as it was for the Smithsons. Writing in retrospective on the Mother’s House some 25 years later, Venturi elaborated his thoughts relating to ‘shelter’:

‘The house is a shelter as well as enclosure. The flat roofs of modern architecture, and particularly of the parapeted Villa Savoye, kept the rain out but didn’t suggest shelter. In my mother’s house, the pedimented roof symbolized shelter as well as classicism.’

33 Schwartz, Mother’s House: The Evolution of Vanna Venturi’s House in Chestnut Hill, pp.37.
The Sugden House is of very straightforward construction with two internal brick cross walls, simple joist constructions for the floors and the roof, which span between the cross walls (Figure 6. 25). External walls are loadbearing and openings created in these and the cross walls are supported by simple concrete lintels. Materials used for construction are the ones typically found at the building merchant’s yard: second-hand stock bricks, Marley concrete tiles and standard Z-framed galvanised steel sashes. The construction
and materials used here, are in fact, no less different than any typical contemporary suburban homes being built in parts of Britain.

The Mother's House is equally simple, but not quite traditional in its methods of assembly. External envelope is made up of single skin loadbearing walls insulated internally, but standard I-section steel beams spanning between these walls carry the load of ground floor above the basement and first floor (Figure 6. 28). Running in the opposite direction are timber joists, which support the floor and roof finishes. Apart from the basement area, both steel beams and joists are invisible internally as they were completely covered by smooth linings of boards and plaster (Figure 6. 15). This method of assembly is a departure from the varying American vernacular wood-frame construction still being used widely in contemporary domestic buildings. The most common of these is the balloon frame construction\textsuperscript{34}. Claimed to have been invented in America\textsuperscript{35}, it is essentially a method where timber studs generally run two-storeys high from the bottom plate to the roof plate, past the floor joists which are nailed to them. Nevertheless, Venturi employed this efficient method of construction in his later, small projects, namely, the Trubeck and Wislocki Houses, on Nantucket, 1971-72\textsuperscript{36}.

Comparisons of construction drawings of both houses reveal their designers' acute attention, due diligence and obsession to 'details' (Figure 6. 12 & Figure 6. 13). Almost every typical and unique part was detailed to very large scales. This includes all interior details such as layout of floor finishes and built-in furniture\textsuperscript{37}. Production information drawings were also produced throughout the construction period as additions,

\textsuperscript{34} See, for example, Woodward, George E., \textit{Woodward's Country Homes}, Geo. E. Woodwards, New York, 1865. (AIA Archives) for early illustrations of the American balloon frame construction.


\textsuperscript{37} Sugden House' construction drawings currently kept by Derek Sugden illustrate the Smithsons' dexterity with construction detailing. Details include the glass door cabinet that separates the kitchen from the dining room drawn by Alison. For the Mother's House' construction drawings
clarifications and refinements of last minute ideas came to mind. For example, nearing completion, the Smithsons had famously proposed to paint the window frames in different colours and to varnish the timber stair purple and green with which the Sugdens disagreed38, while Venturi added the controversial ‘stair to nowhere’ during the construction period. These drawings describe the architects’ determination to be in control and desire to see their intentions clearly communicated to builders who executed the construction on site. This quality in the Smithsons’ work was described succinctly by Robert Maxwell, which could have well applied to Venturi: ‘After the Hunstanton success, the Smithsons were the forerunners of a new generation, able not only to do, but to say what should be done and how it should be done.’39

Nevertheless, at a closer look, the Smithsons’ ‘deep understanding’ of construction is different from that of Venturi. This difference lies in their contrasting attitude towards architectural production relationships between whole and parts, and the relationship between craftsmanship and draughtsmanship. The Smithsons had always been concerned with the specific appearance of the structural and ‘microtectonic’ elements, in the same way perhaps Louis Kahn and Carlos Scarpa had been40, and this is evident from the care with which the Sugden House had been detailed. Such concern is evident, for example, from the precise sizing of each opening, recesses, joints and infill elements to avoid the cutting of odd shaped bricks and the carefully detailed timber doors and wood panelling of strictly non-standard profiles. These, in their finished state, demonstrate the Smithsons’ intuition to derive poetry from the basic principles of structural articulation. Whereas, in the Mother’s House, Venturi seemed less concerned about craftsmanship, but more with the homogeneity of different parts. In Venturi’s case, detailing was crucial

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40 The term ‘microtectonic’ is borrowed from Kenneth Frampton who used it to describe the structural articulation of small or ‘micro’ elements found in the architecture of architects such as Louis Kahn and Carlos Scarpa. See Frampton, Kenneth, Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England, 1995.

see Schwartz, Mother’s House: The Evolution of Vanna Venturi’s House in Chestnut Hill, pp. 186-201.
only to the extent of achieving the right profile of elements, and not the preciseness of articulated joints or texture. Here, construction is invisible, covered by linings as if to emulate another plastic material (Compare Figure 6. 14 with Figure 6. 15). They cover what seem to be the various different methods of construction employed. Its part concrete block, part steel-frame structure came as a surprise, only revealed when studying closely the construction drawings. Plaster boarding was used extensively as an added layer to the structural elements, to make up the thickening and curving of ceilings as well as walls.

Despite such contrasting attitude to construction, the Smithsons and Robert Venturi are architects who were confidently conscious of the architecture they are creating. For both, it was as if building was necessary to the writing, as realisation and demonstration. The Sugden House gave the Smithsons the opportunity to test aspects of their often abstract and elusive reasoning, particularly the ‘as-found’ and ‘without rhetoric’ theories. In Venturi’s case, the placing of the description of the Mother’s House, along with other early works, at the end of Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, can be seen as an attempt to legitimise theory by building. Both the Smithsons and the Venturis, despite their enthusiasm for theory and teaching, saw themselves first and foremost, as practising architects. Writing of the early stages of his career, Venturi expressed his frustration, ‘I could not get big commissions nor feel at home for long in an establishment firm and so I had to write rather than do’ and in a 1993 lecture celebrating the Centennial of the American Academy in Rome, he proclaimed: ‘I am an architect first, a lecturer thirty-first’. The Smithsons, like the Venturis in the early stages of their career, had failed to build extensively, something that they very much regret:

‘There are limits to exercising the art of architecture when permission to build is withheld; drawings and models are neither as satisfying nor as communicative as the artist’s sketch or the sculptor’s maquette. The architect feels as a man without arms, and almost without identity, if he cannot build’

Figure 6. 12: The Sugden House, original working drawings, Alison & Peter Smithson

Figure 6. 13: The Mother’s House, original working drawings, Robert Venturi

Figure 6.14: The Sugden House is a display of tectonic lessons

Figure 6.15: In the Mother's House, construction is invisible
Composition

The planning of the Sugden House is handled with casualness seen in traditional vernacular dwellings. The main entrance of the house is on the south-west front and a small lobby separates it from the dining area and kitchen (Figure 6. 21). This lobby, together with a coat closet, drying closet and larder, are all aligned separating dining from the garage (Figure 6. 16). A kitchen unit designed by the Smithsons to be 'deliberately simple to avoid the clash of glossy fittings and a homely interior...'\(^{43}\) separates the dining space and the kitchen. (Figure 6. 17). Accessible from the kitchen is a playroom and a covered yard. Two wide openings in the brick crosswall connect the dining with the living space. Here the floor finish changes from black and white vinyl tiles in the dining and kitchen to Loliondo hardwood in the living. The ceiling level in the living space is also higher than the dining, suggesting formality of the former space (Figure 6. 25). An open timber staircase in the dining area leads to four bedrooms, a bathroom and separate lavatory upstairs (Figure 6. 23).

The overall result is a simple and ordinary looking house. However, its apparent ordinariness belies the fact that this is a curious little building. The more one looks, the stranger things seem. Windows are larger than normal, albeit standard, they are L-shaped not commonly used in the area, earning the house the nickname, 'window home'\(^{44}\). The Smithsons had originally painted the window frames in various different colours, which would have made the house even more peculiar\(^{45}\). Derek Sugden later had them painted over with white paint. Windows on all facades seem to have adhered to demands of function rather than 'style'. For example, what seems to be a symmetrical arrangement of large windows on the garden façade, is, in fact, not, as on closer inspection, one finds shifts occurring horizontally to accommodate the demands of the interior organisation. The roof is also strange, as the steep pitch of the roof towards the back of the house is entirely disproportionate to the front.

\(^{43}\) Smithson, House at Watford, Herts, pp.194-197.

\(^{44}\) Window Home Goes Up: Style is New Brutalism, Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, Monday, August 6, 1956.

\(^{45}\) The Smithsons specified 'Dulux' paint colours like peat, marine blue, juniper, tawny red, wedgewood blue and white for the window frames in their construction drawings.
Figure 6.16: The Sugden House, view of dining room towards the entrance lobby and coat closets

Figure 6.17: The Sugden House, Alison Smithson designed the cabinet separating the kitchen and dining area

Like the Sugden House, the Mother's House is at first glance, ordinary, even ugly. Arriving at the house, one is confronted with a large front north-eastern façade that is almost a satirical representation of a house. Like a child's drawings, it has all the
representation of vernacular and classical elements that symbolises home: a big sloping roof, a pedimented gable, a towering chimney, a large front entrance void and window with cross frames. The dado and arch are mouldings added onto the rendered wall and they are pure decorations. And above all, the whole exterior of the house is a curious pale green colour\textsuperscript{46}, painted almost three years after completion. The whole front façade is treated as pure screen, disengaged from the rest of the house, as it rises higher than roof level. The split at the apex pediment revealing the chimney wall beyond and the entrance void further enhance its detachment. The same also holds for the back façade. It is similarly disengaged as the wall stops at handrail level on the first floor terrace, to reveal a neo-palladian glazed opening that is slightly setback from the ground façade.

Upon entering the house, the disengagement of exterior and interior manifest itself even more when the ‘vernacular’ outside is contrasted with a decidedly modernist inside space (Figure 6. 22 and Figure 6. 24). The main entrance door is tucked to the side of the central rectangular void, and a curved wall directs the visitor into a surprisingly large, bright and white room accommodating Vanna Venturi’s antique dining and living room furniture. Here the floor is laid with marble, which Vanna Venturi thought was a little pretentious\textsuperscript{47} and the walls lined with picture rails - an echo of the dado mouldings outside (Figure 6. 18). Lining the blank wall of the living room area are three bays of built-in bookshelves designed by Venturi, while full height glazing on two walls of this room allows lots of natural light to filter in and views out to the patio next to dining and the back garden (Figure 6. 15). Directly above the dining, the plastered ceiling curves upwards to allow the placing of a small clerestorey. Along the central axis of the living room is located the celebrated hearth. Together with the stair, it forms the central core of the house. The stair is not a straight run, but angled near the bottom to accommodate the entrance door and constricted near the top to accommodate the flue. Venturi makes up the

\textsuperscript{46} Venturi in a lecture explained his choice of colour for the house: "there was a famous architect (Marcel Breuer) who said at the time, 'One thing I never do is use green on my houses because that's the colour of nature and you never do that.' And I thought, good idea, and so I did." Original from undated lecture notes of Robert Venturi. ' Quote taken from Schwartz, Mother's House: The Evolution of Vanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill, pp.25.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, pp.26.
narrow path up the stair with a large window along its external wall, offering views out to the driveway through the split at the apex of the pediment.

Directly accessible from the dining area along the diagonal wall is the kitchen. From here, an external door leads to a series of steps down to the basement. On the other side of the house, tucked next to the chimney and staircase is a little lobby leading to two bedrooms and a bathroom. In each bedroom, the wall indents at glazed openings (Figure 6.44), reminiscent of Kahn’s Esherick House just up the road. Moving up, one finds hovering above the head is another stair, but steeper and narrower, and apparently leading up to nowhere (Figure 6.20). Venturi justifies this by saying that it accommodates the residual core space, and on a more practical level, it is like a ‘ladder against a wall from which to wash the high window and paint the clerestorey’.

A narrow landing at the top of the main stair leads to Venturi’s bedroom, small closet and a second bathroom. The bedroom takes up much of the attic space (Figure 6.19). As with the main spaces below, the walls and ceiling are paint on plaster and it is awash with natural daylight from the lunette window and clerestorey at two sides above. A partly glazed timber door at the centre of the lunette gives access to a timber deck outdoor terrace.

The complex ordinariness displayed by both the Sugden House and the Mother’s House was gladly received by their respective owners but resulted in initial furor among the locals as well as ‘high art’ architects and critics. When the Sugden House was first published in the Architectural Review in 1957, one outraged reader condemned the magazine for lauding ‘the absurd little house in suburban Watford...’ due to lack of ‘sound theory’ on the architects’ part. Expressing similar sentiments in the Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, a local borough engineer remarked, ‘The fenestration and roof of this house, in my opinion, are unaesthetic. I thought they would be detrimental to

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48 Ibid, pp.31.
49 Smithson, House at Watford, Herts, pp.194-197.
the amenities of the area.\textsuperscript{51} The Mother’s House provoked similar unease. Students of University of Pennsylvania where Robert Venturi taught were asked by other professors not to go look at the building because of its ornamentation and violation of the principles of Modern architecture\textsuperscript{52}.

\textbf{Figure 6. 18: The Mother’s House, fireplace and wall of bookcases}

\textsuperscript{51} Window Home Goes Up: Style is New Brutalism, Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, Monday, August 6, 1956.
\textsuperscript{52} As related by Steven Izenour, then a student at the University of Pennsylvania and later co-author of Learning from Las Vegas. See Schwartz, Mother’s House: The Evolution of Vanna Venturi’s House in Chestnut Hill, pp.13.
Despite the stirring controversy, both the Sugden House and the Mother's House were very soon recognised as works of great significance among the architectural community. A year after the completion of Sugden House, the Smithsons were featured together with the house in an article by James Stirling celebrating the emergence of 'young architects'
in the *Architectural Design* magazine\textsuperscript{53}. In 1965, The Mother's House received a Gold Medal Award from the Architectural League of New York\textsuperscript{54} and the house and its architect were selected by Robert Stern and Phillip Johnson for the Architectural League of New York's important exhibition of young American Architects - 40 under 40\textsuperscript{55}. Both houses represent their designers' theoretical thinking at its most pure and in the decades following their completion, were central to the education of any forward thinking architect in search for a more enriching alternative to modern architecture.

**The Houses Today**

The Sugdens have been living in the house that the Smithsons had designed for them for almost 46 years and continue living there until today. Their children, now grown ups, have left home, but both Derek and Jean Sugden still find the house responding to their particular and changing needs. The playroom next to the kitchen later became their eldest son's bedsit, but is now Derek Sugden's study, whereas Jean Sugden now uses the smallest bedroom upstairs as her study. The house stands today very much as it was intended with very minor alterations made to it. The first alteration was carried out within a year of moving in. The Sugdens decided to fully glaze the open yard area next to the kitchen, when they woke up one winter morning to find it deep in snow\textsuperscript{56}. The second alteration came about much later when the open gallery to one of the children's bedrooms was enclosed with Columbian pine boarding to contain the increasing noise produced by growing children\textsuperscript{57}.

Vanna Venturi lived in the house that her son designed until 1973, upon which health problems forced her into a nursing home. She died in May 1975. In 1973, the house was sold to Agatha and Thomas Hughes - she a distinguished potter and he a noted professor

\textsuperscript{53} Stirling, James, *Young Architects*, Architectural Design, June 1958, pp.240.


\textsuperscript{56} Derek Sugden, conversation with author, 26\textsuperscript{th} June 2003.

\textsuperscript{57} Derek Sugden remarked that the original framing of the gallery is still intact inside, beneath the cladding, which he added would be 'useful for future restoration'. Derek Sugden, talk given at
of history and technology at the University of Pennsylvania. They continue to live there today, and like the Sugdens, the found the house suited their changing lifestyle. Vanna Venturi's bedroom is now a study, while the extra bedroom downstairs is useful for the ageing couple. The house is also just as lovingly cared for and alterations made were very minor. The only alterations included a new ventilator installed by the new owners in the attic bedroom to keep the room cool in the summer, while the metal standing seam roof was painted over with weatherproof paint to prevent rusting\(^5^8\). To preserve the house as Robert Venturi intended, Professor Hughes has applied for an easement on the house, which is currently being processed, preventing any changes to the house except for the kitchen and bathroom areas.

\(^{58}\) Based on conversation with Professor Thomas Hughes at the Mother's House on 29\(^{th}\) June 2004.
Figure 6. 21: The Selden House, ground floor plan, 1:125

Figure 6. 22: The Mother's House, ground floor plan, 1:125

1. Entrance Hall
2. Living Room
3. Dining Room
4. Kitchen
5. W.C.
6. Playroom/Study
7. Bedroom
8. Terrace
9. Yard
10. Garage
Figure 6.27: The Sugden House, section BB, 1:125

Figure 6.28: The Mother's House, section BB, 1:125
Figure 6.29: The Sugden House, southwest elevation, 1:125

Figure 6.30: The Mother's House, southwest elevation, 1:125
Figure 6.31: The Sugden House, northeast elevation, 1:125

Figure 6.32: The Mother’s House, northeast elevation, 1:125
Figure 6.33: The Sugden House, southeast elevation, 1:125

Figure 6.34: The Mother’s House, southeast elevation, 1:125
Figure 6.35: The Sugden House: northwest elevation, 1:125

Figure 6.36: The Mother's House, northwest elevation, 1:125
Figure 6.37: The Sugden House, south-east elevation

Figure 6.38: The Sugden House, north-west elevation
Figure 6. 39: The Sugden House, window at the end of dining room

Figure 6. 40: The Sugden House, main entrance door
Figure 6. 41: The Mother's House, north-west elevation

Figure 6. 42: The Mother's House, south-west elevation
Figure 6. 43: The Mother’s House, main entrance

Figure 6. 44: The Mother’s House, recessed window to bedroom
Chapter 7
The Sugden House 1955-56 & The Mother’s House 1959-1964
Part 2 Critical Analysis

The Functional Tradition & Inside and Outside
When the Sugden House was first published in the *Architectural Review* in 1957, the Smithsons explained their aim:

a) *To make shapes of the rooms fit the functions as closely as possible, by varying room heights and by break-out sideways.*

b) *To tailor the profile of the building as closely as possible to the room shapes.*

c) *To use the materials in a straightforward and therefore economical way.*

d) *To use standard window components repeated or grouped together.*

The first three principles suggest functionalism, with respect to economy and practicability. The phrase “Form follows Function” was first coined by Louis Sullivan in Chicago, meaning efficient expression of the specific function. This principle has, for a large part, been synonymous with modernism, although Le Corbusier never really encouraged its application. In *Vers Une Architecture*, Le Corbusier had spoken of the ‘new dwelling’ as ‘a machine to live in’. The dwelling uses mass-production processes and the functions are thoroughly examined and stripped to the essentials from the ground up. There was no longer any need to live with the clutter found in bourgeois dwelling of the time. It will also be designed based on poetic value of sculptural form, like the presence of harmony between form and function Le Corbusier sensed in ‘machine’ precedents, such as grain silos, cars, ships and aeroplanes. Describing the poetry of form, Le Corbusier wrote:

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3 *Vers une architecture* was not a defence of functionalism. Indeed, Le Corbusier indicated the role of tradition in informing a way of building in contemporary times, but the publication is permeated with ideas on the role of art and the poetic value of sculptural form seen in vernacular and anonymous examples. *Vers Une Architecture*, (translated from thirteenth French edition), Architectural Press, Oxford, 1946.
The architect, by his arrangement of forms, realizes an order which is a pure creation of his spirit; by forms and shapes he affects our senses to an acute degree and provokes plastic emotions; by the relationships which he creates he wakes in us profound echoes.  

Form follows volumetric poetry’ is perhaps a more appropriate phrase to describe Le Corbusier’s approach. The facades at Villa Savoye in Paris (Figure 7. 1) for example, were treated as pure screen, taut and weightless, giving little indication of the complex web of spaces that lies behind, except, perhaps for the curved protrusion of the solarium at the top. Apart from Hugo Haring⁵, other modern architects, despite paying lip service to the idea, never really followed functionalism through. For example, Gropius’ Weissenhof house (Figure 7. 2), utilising dry wall panel system fixed on grid, was ‘form follows assembly’⁶, while Mies was more interested in rational construction methods and potentials of high-quality American steel craftsmanship⁷.

Figure 7. 1: Villa Savoye, Poissy near Paris, 1929, Le Corbusier

⁵ Hugo Haring was interested in the relationship between function and expression which he demonstrated fully in the design of Garkau Farm, 1922-25. See Jones, Peter Blundell, Hugo Haring: the Organic versus the Geometric, Axel Menges, 1998.
⁶ Gropius’s house in Stuttgart employs a complete standardised system of construction whereby small steel sections were used to put up dry wall panels. The layout of the house and assembly of walls follow a one-metre grid laid on plan. This system is quick to put up but leads to inefficiency in Gropius’ plan, for example, the corridors and service rooms are wider than they need to be. See The Weissenhofsiedlung, Stuttgart 1927 in Jones, Peter Blundell Jones, Modern Architecture Through Case Studies, Architectural Press, Oxford, 2002, pp. 16- 17
Figure 7. 2: The Weissenhoffsiedlung, Stuttgart 1927, Walter Gropius

In July 1957, 5 months before the completion of Sugden House, the Architectural Review dedicated a whole issue to functionalism, under a title called *The Functional Tradition*.

It illustrated Eric de Mare's photographs of anonymously designed buildings in England of a regional type raising out of the industrial period, such as farmhouses, barns, warehouses and mills (Figure 7. 3). The lesson to be learnt from such paradigms is the unselfconscious idiom rising out of the instinctive rightness of form and function. James Stirling, that same year, wrote 'The Functional Tradition and Expression' and *Regionalism and Modern Architecture*, where he included in the paradigm, folk architecture of the Mediterranean and America. As with the AR issue, Stirling attested to their validity as precedents of good architecture, admiring them for 'the direct expression of the actual accommodation volumes in relation to each element determining the plastic composition of the building'. For Stirling, the significance of these buildings is their direct and undecorated volumes evolving out of building usage and functions of major elements. They also tend to be contextual, as materials used to build depend largely on locality, and economical, as structural support is sensibly derived from the organization of building.

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Figure 7.3: ‘The Functional Tradition: the Canals’: Eric de Mare’s photographic essay

The ‘functional tradition’ in this context, is thus distinct from the machine aesthetic, or ‘structural exhibition’ or indeed any ‘style’ for that matter. It is a way of building without rhetoric, whereby the architectural quality is dependent on the particular organization of the accommodation, circulation and services. Here, we find the Smithsons already ‘making building’ in this manner with their Sugden House, and indeed, they were referring to such a solution to architecture almost two years earlier in 1955, when they wrote their manifesto on Brutalism:

“...it (New Brutalism) finds its closest affinities not in a past architectural style, but in peasant dwelling forms, which have style and are stylish but were never modish: a poetry without rhetoric. We see architecture as a direct statement of a way of life and in the past ordinary, prosaic life...”

Their *Patio and Pavilion* exhibit for the *This is Tomorrow* Exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1956 (Figure 3.13, Chapter Three), was somewhat an expression of primitive fundamentals of human inhabitation: ‘a piece of ground, a view of the sky, privacy, the presence of nature and of animals when we need them, and symbols of the

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basic human urges – to extend and control, to move. In addition, examples of anonymous architecture make frequent appearances in support of the Smithsons’ writing. Nearly always, references made to them were not for the style they represent, but for their strong identity and ease of handling daily use. For example, in *Ordinariness & Light*, the dayaks’ long house in Sarawak was illustrated to demonstrate how communal daily life could occur in the wide verandah outside living units arranged linearly up to a quarter mile long (Figure 7. 4). The Smithsons expanded the idea to become continuous street deck as social space in their Golden Lane Housing competition entry. Similarly, the Souk in Cairo was admired for its identity arising out of detailing and the human activities - social and commercial – under partly covered streets (Figure 7. 5). Such developments possess a certain sense of inherent order that lends them identity or ‘feeling of place’ as they are often built with such naturalness growing out of everyday needs and locality. Careful not to re-work past style, the Smithsons found in these exemplars, practical solutions derived from logic, consistency, and contextualism useful in contemporary mass-production society:

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14 “Dayak” is a collective name for over 200 different indigenous tribes living throughout Borneo’s interior. They are the true ‘people of the jungle’. The Dayak people live in the hinterland along the banks of major river and in long houses. It is customary for them to live with a whole extended family or with one clan in the long houses which can sometimes extend to a quarter mile long. Each family has its own compartment or dwelling unit and the chief of the clan will occupy the central chamber. A long verandah adjacent to the compartments acts as a social space for the community. The Dayak house is also elevated offering protection from enemies, wild animal and flooding. The space beneath the house is used a stable for keeping their domestic animals, such as pigs and chickens. Sellato, Bernard, *Innermost Borneo: Studies in Dayak Cultures*, Singapore University Press Pte. Ltd. & Seven Orient, Singapore, 2002.
16 Ibid. pp. 39-61.
17 The ‘souk’ in Egypt is an open-air market that caters regularly to the needs of local residents. The ‘souk’ has been built up over the years through several periods of reformation. The stalls of Souk sometimes occupy narrow alleyway between buildings creating shaded areas to protect buyers and sellers from the heat of the day.
19 These practical considerations were for the Smithsons, valid and significant for contemporary times. They wrote: ‘Brutalism tries to face up to mass-production society and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work. Up to now, Brutalism has been discussed stylistically, whereas its essence is ethical.’ In a reply to a discussion in ‘The new
'We are therefore in some difficulty.....being unhappy with re-working the past, yet recognising the folk-modes in their day had just those qualities of continuity and newness that we find so difficult. It is commonly assumed that in the past anything they did come easily; that in these old places they built like birds. But there were permissions to be obtained, officials to satisfy; and there were the crafts, organised socially and as a taught discipline; and maybe there was also reflection by the community at large about where buildings were to be put, where wells were to be sunk, markets allowed and so on, that played a large part as practical considerations'.

Figure 7.4: Dayak's long house in Sarawak, Malaysia (Ordinariness & Light)

Figure 7.5: Souk in Cairo, Egypt (Signs of Occupancy)

By allowing practical daily life and community life considerations – local methods, local patterns and its association – to dictate approach to architecture, the Smithsons were practising a certain kind of functionalism not too dissimilar from the one described by

brutalism: Alison and Peter Smithson answer the criticisms', in Architectural Design, April 1957, pp.113.

James Stirling. It will, in the Smithsons’ opinion, lead to the most natural and unified of architectural formations\(^{21}\).

While the Smithsons’ earliest statements on the Sugden House suggest a functionalist approach, we find the Mother’s House appearing at the end of *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, suggesting Venturi’s practice of theory to building where the first paragraph of text describes a rather unorthodox approach at the time when Modernism was still pervasive:

‘This building (the Mother’s House) recognizes complexities and contradiction: it is both complex and simple, open and closed, big and little; some of its elements are good on one level and bad on another; its order accommodates the generic elements of the house in general, and the circumstantial elements of a house in particular. It achieves the difficult unity of a medium number of diverse parts rather than the easy unity of few or many motival parts.’\(^{22}\)

At the outset, the Mother’s House adhered to the call for ambiguity and duality described at great length in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. In support of the ideas, Venturi pointed to contemporary architectural text by architects such as Aldo van Eyck, which was already discussed in Chapter Five of this study. Venturi also justifies a call for ambiguity by looking at recent literary criticism, such as William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*\(^{23}\). Written in 1955, Empson regarded ambiguity of a scholar’s text as the result of ‘the power and complexity of his mind and art’\(^{24}\); meaning to say that complexity and intentional imprecision are both part of poetic vision, something highly regarded in literature.

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\(^{21}\) The Smithsons, for example wrote, ‘To achieve a specific town pattern ...which give(s) the evolving organism consistency and unity, the first principle of town development should be: continuous objective analysis of the human structure and change. Such an analysis would include not only “what happens”, such as living in certain places, going to school, travelling to work and visiting shops, but also “what motivates”, the reasons for going to particular schools, choosing what type of work and visiting those particular shops’. Smithsons, Alison & Peter, *An Alternative to the Garden City Idea*, Architectural Design, July 1956, pp.230.


\(^{24}\) Empson was quoted in Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp.20.
Taking his cue from these sources, Venturi, in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, shunned any idea of functionalism, refuting particularly the modern Movement idea that the functional organization of a building obeyed a unitary logic that constituted its aesthetic meaning. He also argued against flowing space and the tendency to impose continuity between inside and outside. This is due to the fact that many inferences are involved in the design of a building and that architectural design is a process of ‘accommodation’ rather than deduction. As such, the oneness of interior and exterior skin cannot be sustained and that contradiction between inside and outside, top and bottom and even left and right should exist in buildings, as each needs to respond to certain program, circumstances and milieu. For Venturi, designing in such a manner is what makes architecture:

‘Designing from the outside in, as well as the inside out, creates necessary tensions, which help make architecture. Architecture occurs at the meeting of interior and exterior forces of use and space. These interior and environmental forces are both general and particular, generic and circumstantial. Architecture as the wall between the inside and the outside becomes the spatial record of this resolution and its drama. And by recognizing the difference between the inside and outside, architecture opens the door once again to an urbanistic point of view’.  

Ironically, one of the first precedents Venturi looked at to demonstrate the idea of contrast between inside and outside is an iconic modern building – the Villa Savoye - which he considered not typical of its genre: ‘Le Corbusier’s plan of the Villa Savoye exemplifies crowded intricacies within a rigid frame.’ Its inside order responds to the multiple functions of a rather lavish domestic program and partial mystery in a sense of privacy. The simple enclosure of outside order, on the other hand, expresses the unity of the house to the green field it dominated and possibly the city it will one day be part of.

The Modern Villa, in the context of Venturi’s argument, is comparable to historical exemplars such as S. Maria Maggiore in Rome (Figure 7.6) and the Bank of England in London (Figure 7.7). In the latter examples, Venturi explained that sometimes, rigid and

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27 Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp. 86.

ordered external envelopes are needed to hide intricacies and complexities of internal programme and to contain the chaos and unify the building in relation to the scale of the city\textsuperscript{29}. The roof may also play a role in unifying complex forms and spaces. For example, the single severe roof of McKim, Mead and White’s Low House (Figure 7. 8) contains and unifies the complex spaces and floor levels which are expressed by the varying window positions on the facade\textsuperscript{30}. Equally, a simple interior may be sheathed with a heavily constructed exterior to render a building contextual. ‘Crowded intricacies’, as Venturi calls them, on the exterior are present in Piranesi’s ancient baths and the Parish Church in Lampa, Peru (Figure 7. 9)\textsuperscript{31}.

Figure 7. 6: S. Maria Maggiore, Rome (Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture)

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, pp.72.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, pp.74.
Figure 7. 7: Bank of England, London, Sir John Soane (*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*)

Figure 7. 8: Low House, Bristol, Rhode Island, McKim, Mead & White (*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*)

Figure 7. 9: Parish Church, Lampa, Peru (*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*)
Functional against Ambiguity

From an analysis of the Smithsons’ and Venturi’s polemical writing above, we can thus begin to understand how the Sugden House and the Mother’s House differ in terms of design approach. Adhering to principles of Brutalism, we find the Sugden House achieving a certain sort of ‘essential reverence’ seen in anonymous and vernacular forms by having parts consistently meeting to daily life needs and local context.

In the Sugden House, we discover that room shape, sizes and openings first and foremost correspond closely to purpose, growing almost naturally from use (Figure 6. 21). Each of these rooms has its own raison d’être. The dining room, rectangular in plan, is located next to the kitchen for convenience in bringing food across. The dining space is bright and cheerful as a large glazed opening on the southwestern wall admits daylight and allows views to the garden outside. The cabinet designed by Alison Smithson separates kitchen and dining, and is partly open and partly glazed, encouraging views and communication across the two areas. The main living room, right next to the dining, is generous in size and has a higher ceiling than the rest of the house, suggesting formality of space (Figure 7. 10). The hearth, located off centre in this room, creates a dark but warm zone for winter living on one side, while on the other, another full height glazed opening creates a bright zone, ideal for reading and sitting in the sun during the summer months (Figure 7. 11). Small elements, crucial for the daily running of a house and family, are integrated with the larger elements successfully and with a degree of inevitability. For example, along the side of the dining room is arranged the entrance lobby and next to it, the coat closet. Further along is located the drying closet and larder, conveniently close to the kitchen area. The garage, yard and small service rooms and fuel stores are arranged towards the back of the house, their room dimensions worked right up to the minimal optimum to ensure a tight fit within the overall plan dimensions (Figure 6.21).

The planning of the Mother’s House was also executed according to needs. However, ‘needs’ in Venturi’s architecture amounts to a much larger accretion, not only ‘rituals of daily life’, which was a major driving force in the design of the Sugden House. For Venturi, it also included certain formal and informal principles involving ‘symmetry’ and
Figure 7. 10: The Sugden House, the living room has a higher ceiling than the dining area beyond

Figure 7. 11: Dark zone (left) and bright zone (right) in the living room
'inflection' deemed important in the making of complex and contradictory architecture. The juxtaposition of ground floor plans of the two houses (Figures 6.21 & 6.22) illustrates the contrast in planning: the organic in the Sugden House in comparison with the near symmetrical of the Mother's House. The more formal planning of the latter house is justified by Venturi, who sees himself as 'an architect who adheres to the Classical tradition of Western architecture'.

Symmetry, a classical feature, was important to Venturi, and it was explicitly applied to the composition of plan as well as façade (Figure 6.32). Classical ornamentation was also used freely. In a lecture some years later, Venturi explained:

'My mother's house in Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, the second building of my design to be built, is an explicitly Classical building in the substance of its plan and form and in the ornament of its elevations.'

It is worth noting here that the Sugden House too possesses loose symmetry, particularly in its garden façade: the centrally placed large glazed panel on ground floor living room and two identical L-shaped windows above (Compare Figure 6.29 with Figure 6.32). The symmetry arose from simple organization of rooms: the wide living room on ground floor and the identical bedrooms above. The Smithsons' earlier proposals such as the Coventry Cathedral competition entry of 1951, (Figure 3. 14, Chapter Three) and the house in Soho of 1953 (Figure 3. 15, Chapter Three), with their formal axial plans and elevations, demonstrate Palladian formality and the influence of Wittkowerian ideas. Nevertheless, these formal tendencies were short-lived. The Smithsons publicly disassociated themselves from formalism and academicism in 1953, and in place, they advanced a direct and realistic approach to existing situations in their work. This thinking was

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32 Venturi, Robert, Diversity, Relevance and Representation in Historicism, or Plus ca Change....plus A Plea for Pattern all over Architecture, with a Postscript on My Mother's House,' The Walter Gropius Lecture, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, April 15, 1982, Architectural Record, June 1982, pp.118.

33 Ibid

heavily influenced by the likes of Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi of the Independent Group.

For Robert Venturi, the classical order of Palladian symmetry seems to have been the starting point in the composition of the Mother's House, but then, relaxation of imposed order takes place, as the demands of program began dictating the organization of spaces. The plan as built shows this (Figure 6.22). It is symmetrical only to the extent that the hearth and stair is centrally located and from this seem to radiate two diagonal walls in opposing directions to mark the more private spaces from the public spaces, that is, the living and dining. These diagonal walls indicate influence from the work of Louis Kahn, such as the Goldenberg House of 1959 (Figure 7.12).

![Goldenberg House, Rydal, Pennsylvania, 1959, Louis Kahn](image)

Apart from responding to the demands of program, Venturi had also introduced 'inflection' to the planning of the interior. In *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Venturi explained the meaning of the term:

'*Inflection in architecture is the way in which the whole is implied by exploiting the nature of the individual parts, rather than their position or number. By inflecting toward something outside themselves, the parts contain their own linkage: inflected parts are
more integral with the whole than are uninflected parts. Inflection is a means of distinguishing diverse parts while implying continuity. It involves the art of the fragment.  

(Emphasis in Original)

For Venturi, inflection is one of the ways to accomplish richness of architectural space:

'The valid fragment is economical because it implies richness and meaning beyond itself. Inflection can also be used to achieve suspense.....

This juggling resulted in what Venturi calls 'contradictions within the ideal order'37. Here we find that the hearth/chimney and stair is each 'inflected toward the other' to make a unity of the duality of the central core they constitute (Figure 6.18). The stair is wider at the bottom, but constricts towards the top to accommodate the hearth/chimney. Similarly the fireplace distorts in shape and moves over its axis, to accommodate the stair. The result is a dynamic distortion of an asymmetrical composition. Away from the central core, symmetry ceases to exist, and further inflection occur. To one side of the core, is located the main entrance and here the stair and entrance are similarly distorted and inflected to accommodate the demands of each. Further away from the central core, Venturi seemed to have tried hard to keep the planning order intact, as he juggled order, program and inflection. To both sides of the core one finds remnants of a symmetrical planning as walls are inflected to suit the kitchen and porch on one side and bedrooms on the other. Indentations of varying sizes in the bedrooms create sheltered outdoor spaces on the short facades and are reminiscence of Kahn’s Esherick House just up road from the house (Figure 6.6). The main hall is divided into dining and living area and here, the composition returns to the formal tradition as we find the hearth located almost along the central axis of the living area.

Back to the Sugden House, there appears that the coherent organizational pattern of the house has a strong influence in determining the plastic composition of the house, whereas this is not the case with the Mother’s House. In examining the sections of both houses (See Figures 6.25, 6.26, 6.27 & 6.28), we find that in the Sugden House, the most significant volumes are given expression and recognizable in the overall composition. For

37 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, pp.88-90.
34 Ibid, pp.90.
example, we find the living room and the principal bedrooms are within the tallest volume of the house, while the yard and garage in the lowest. Furthermore, the way each is designed has a knock-on effect on the other rooms and on the external expression. For example, the living room is a taller space than the adjacent dining and organization of stacked room volumes resulted in bedrooms at two different levels above. Bedrooms 3 and 4 are at a lower level and are accessible from an intermediate landing near the top. The main bedrooms at the highest level, that is, above the living, have sloping ceilings that follow the low pitch of the roof above, to maximise daylight and views out through large L-shaped windows. At the ridge, the roof slopes in the other direction sharply over the smaller bedrooms down to the single-storey yard and service rooms towards the back.

The expression of true organization lends the Sugden house its identity. By designing in a direct manner, the Smithsons avoided the clichés of style. This was their way of ‘identifying man with his environment’, something which they believed styling has failed to fulfill. As Stirling has aptly pointed out in his article, ‘Styling’ encourages ambiguity’. This phenomenon, according to Stirling, can be seen in the Victorian and Georgian terraces where its ‘styled’ uniformity of street facades has led to the disappearance of identity of the individual house. Nevertheless, the true organisation of these houses remains visible on the backs: brick walls, pitched roofs, rooms at different levels and sizes and outhouses defining property walls. Learning from the backs rather than the fronts of these houses, Stirling put knowledge to test in his own design for a country house (Figure 7.13). Here, roof complexes of various heights derived from organisation of interior volumes, furnish the building with a striking and dramatic silhouette.

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37 Venturi, *Diversity, Relevance and Representation in Historicism, or Plus ca Change....plus A Plea for Pattern all over Architecture*, with a Postscript on My Mother's House, pp. 118.
38 Stirling, 'The Functional Tradition' and Expression, pp.91.
If, in the Sugden House, we find that internal organisation has direct impact on the external volumetric expression, then in the Mother’s House, we find the opposite occurring, as there is very little clue as to the complex organisation of the interior on the facades or indeed the roof. This phenomenon is in fact found in the Villa Savoye, which Venturi had earlier identified as ‘crowded intricacies within a rigid frame’. The complex central core in the Mother’s House, in particular, is reduced to an unarticulated wall on the outside. Here, it is visible only through the main entrance void and above the pediment, as it raises up high, with its function hinted at, only right at the top, where the flue rises slightly above the parapet. Separate linings make this concealing possible. The hearth is enclosed within the stair structure, which in turn, is enclosed within the external envelope. This demonstrates Venturi’s ‘graduated series of things in things’ or ‘enclosures within enclosures’ he described in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. This phenomenon, according to Venturi, can be seen in Egyptian temples
such as the series of walls of Temple of Horus, Edfu (Figure 7. 14) and the multi-framed doors at Karnak.\textsuperscript{40}

\textbf{Figure 7. 14: Temple of Horus, Edfu, Egypt (Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture)}

Contradiction between inside and outside further manifests itself when studying the relationship between interior space and the roof. One realises that the first floor bedroom is not expressed on the outside until one reaches the back façade (Figure 6. 42). In fact, the house looks very much like a single-storey building from most angles. Venturi broke the functionalist code when he introduced an arched ceiling above the dining area. This curved ceiling is barely to be seen on any of the façades, masked by the ‘disengaged’ parapet wall. Above all, it has no relationship whatsoever, with the building’s simple pitched roof. Nevertheless, there is a hint at functionalism - as described by James

\textsuperscript{40} Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, pp.76.
Stirling - in the first floor bedroom at the rear. Here, the house differs from the other parts as the complexity of the interior resulted in a dramatic composition of roofscape.

This disengagement of the inside from the outside is perhaps the single most important difference between the Mother’s House and the Sugden House. It was already mentioned that enclosing the complex interior of the house with a rigid rectangular envelope in the Mother’s House can be seen in parallel to historical exemplars cited in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. For example, the external walls of the Bank of England and S. Maria Maggiore provide not only security, but also unify the outside in relation to the scale of the city. Similarly, Venturi introduced the external sheath to his house for privacy as well as to relate to the suburban setting in which it sits. In addition, it allowed Venturi to employ formalism quite freely on the outside now that it is free from the constraints of internal program. Dado – a classical feature - line the front and back facades and an arch, made out of the same moulding, is juxtaposed on the concrete lintel that sits flush on the rendered wall. The rear wall is similarly disengaged from the first floor bedroom wall, which itself is adorned with a truncated neo-palladian window. Now, the only sign of domesticity on the two facades is the different size window openings, and even these are contrived, with traditional trimmings around their perimeter opening and cross frames inserted.

There is no such disengagement between the inside and outside in the Sugden House, as it remains true to the principles of ‘functional tradition’. The random windows relate closely to the arrangement of rooms and external walls are also internal walls as there are neither ‘spatial layers’ nor ‘detached linings’\(^{41}\) (Compare Figure 6.25 and 6.26). Here, we find that the external architecture of the house was not only seamlessly driven from internal program, but also from the structural logic and strong expression of construction, differentiating as clearly as possible between the materials used and the contrasting ways in which they work.

\(^{41}\) ‘Spatial layers’ and ‘detached layering’ are terms used by Robert Venturi in Chapter 9: The Inside and the Outside in Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, pp.74.
As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the Sugden house seems to have been constructed the ordinary way. Nevertheless, at closer inspection, we find that the roof structure is rather unusual for houses in England, where we find pitched roofs are almost always tied at eaves level. Here, one of the internal cross wall rises up to roof level to support the ridge, which, in effect, allows for the two disproportionate monopitch roofs on either side (Figure 6.25). These are expressed internally, as Columbian pine timber panels clad the sloping soffits of the upstairs bedrooms. Where practicably possible, particularly on ground floor, the structure is expressed as part of the architecture of the house. The concrete beams that spans between the loadbearing external walls and internal cross walls are left exposed. So are the concrete lintels over openings and the timber joists. Here, we find another peculiarity. Logically, the first floor joists span between the parallel loadbearing walls, except in the dining room. One-third across this room, a transverse concrete beam provides trimming for the stairwell and at the same time allows the joists to be parallel to the stair (Figure 7.15). These demonstrate that the structural and spatial systems of the house are not precisely synchronised, just as in the Mother’s House. Nevertheless, unlike the Philadelphia house, such peculiarities are not hidden away behind plaster and boards. The first floor joists in the Sugden House are exposed and to a large extent, this subtly orientates the living space towards the garden windows and the dining space between the kitchen and the wide windows.

Figure 7.15: The Sugden House, the change of floor joists in the dining room occurs at the concrete beam
This approach of allowing program and structure to dictate the expression of building in Sugden House means that every available space is utilised and becomes part of the interior. Here, there is seamless continuity of structure, form and space that is lacking in the Mother's House. Venturi is aware that independence of the exterior from the inner layers, as seen in the Mother's House, has its own shortcomings. In Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, Venturi wrote:

'Contradiction between the inside and outside may manifest itself in an unattached lining which produces an additional space between the lining and exterior wall'\(^42\).

Nevertheless, Venturi assured us that even in significant historical examples, the 'architectural recognition of the in-between varies'\(^43\), as the residual space may be used as internal rooms, service zones, to modulate light or even left vestigial. For example, Charles V's palace at Granada (Figure 7.16) and the Villa Guilia in Rome (Figure 7.17) illustrate less important or sometimes unused leftover spaces from the making of dominant courtyards, while in the residual spaces of the dome in S. Chiara, Brà (Figure 7.18) is left open in order to elaborate space and manipulate light. Hence, when comparing the section across the Mother's House with that of the Sugden House, one will be able to identify residual spaces in the former, as the inner and outer lining is freely modelled to create Venturi's ambiguous architecture. For example, the small space directly above the living area, created by the pitched roof and the first floor bedroom, remain unused, but an identical space across the room, directly above the dining area is cleverly articulated to include a glazed clerestorey (Figure 6.28). Externally, the space above the entrance void could also be considered residual. The Smithsons, on the other hand, had been careful to ensure a tight fit of internal space with the encased volume. Usable space efficiency is extremely high in the Sugden House. Internal linings move closely with the external ones. Even the long, narrow and low roof space along bedrooms three and four - the only potential residual space in the house – was turned into an efficient storage room (See Figure 6.23).

\(^{42}\) Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, pp.74.
Figure 7. 16: Machuca, Palace of Charles V, Granada (*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*)

Figure 7. 17: Vignola, Villa Giulia, Rome (*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*)

Figure 7. 18: Vittone, S. Chiara, Brú (*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*)

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Deep-rooted Tradition

There is considerable debate after the war to humanise Modern Architecture in Britain by extending it in several new directions in which the *Architectural Review* has played a major role. The *Functional Tradition* issue was published based on the general feeling that architecture fit for the post-war period is one that would go beyond utilitarian issues to address the spiritual and cultural needs of society. Eric de Mare’s photographic essay of the English unselfconscious tradition was demonstrating the many ways in which to broaden the modernist term – functionalism - to include a building’s moral and emotional functions in addition to its material functions based on local circumstances, and not some abstract requirements of international style. While the campaign by *Architectural Review* was, in essence, a search for ‘Englishness’ in architecture, James Stirling, calling such sensibility ‘regionalism’, looked beyond the shores of England, to include almost any indigenous and usually anonymous buildings found in the Mediterranean and America.

Whichever the sources, the general thinking in Britain in the forties and fifties was that modern architecture should address more than merely utilitarian needs in a functional manner and should seek to meet local society’s cultural aspirations. One way to do so was a reevaluation of the experience embodied in traditional methods, in which form and materials would answer to local circumstances and conditions. The making of building demonstrated by the Sugden House is thus based on a sensibility deeply rooted in

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tradition, one that is medieval, even archaic. Nonetheless, it is peculiarly modern, almost proto-modern, suggestive of the early ideas of functionalism.

As with the unselfconscious exemplars, the unique quality of Sugden House came from almost natural responses to given situations. It is the ‘making of building’ the Smithsons clearly recognise and appreciate in the simplest of architecture. In an article called Beatrix Potter’s places, Alison Smithson, alluding to the fictitious and idyllic world of the children’s classic character (Figure 7.19), wrote:

‘Beatrix Potter’s interiors are tailored to meet the need of the individual and the individual room is tailored to its function... the group of rooms directly responding to their context in the environment. The dwellings of her people fit the landscape with that sort of anonymity that is only achieved through building in a personally consistent language – or an internally consistent imagination.’

Sugden House achieves what the Smithsons had always intended, that is ‘poetry without rhetoric’48: This has been the percept of whole Modern Movement, but it was only in the post-war period that the late generation of Modern architects had been sophisticated and relaxed enough to achieve. In the context of the Sugden House, however, the given situation was far from the Virgilian dream of perfect, quiet and clean countryside, but for the Smithsons, a ‘... recognition of what the postwar world actually was like’49. With the

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47 Smithson, Alison, Beatrix Potter’s Places, Architectural Design, December 1967, pp.573
building’s simple structural clarity relating to organization of spaces and daily post-war life, and its ease of handling locally available material during the period, climate and its local context, the Smithsons succeeded in raising basic necessities of life to a poetic level.

Robert Venturi too is strongly guided by a conscious sense of the past. As already mentioned in Chapter Two of this study, Venturi’s appreciation of history started early. He shared his mother’s passion for period fashion and antique furniture as a young boy. While his Beaux-arts education at Princeton and later his experiences at the American Academy in Rome have a profound influence on how he utilizes historical precedents - as a source to enrich the modernist term, of which he eloquently demonstrated in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, Venturi also saw his tendency to use precedents for comparisons as part of continuous tradition. This, he justifies by pointing to poet T.S. Eliot who wrote about the importance of tradition in contemporary literature:

‘...the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe...has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional, and it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.....No poet, no artist of any kind, has his complete meaning alone. 50

Like Eliot, Robert Venturi was not seeking revivalism of any kind, but saw history as a reservoir of information to encourage new sensibilities that are wholly the product of the present. For Venturi, contemporary architecture should be one that is ambiguous and indeterminate, creating responses to environment through layers upon layers of meaning. In Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, historical examples are often lifted abstractly from their historical context and style, only to concentrate on specific characteristics Venturi found important to justify varying approaches to forms that often contradict the principles of functionalism.

Although the Smithsons and Venturi shared a strong sense of the past in their work, there is a crucial distinction in their interpretation of ‘tradition’ in architecture. For the

Smithsons, it is more vernacular, regional and 'situationist', at the same time avoiding any stylistic concerns. They chose to look at past buildings that they considered, ‘beyond style’, concentrating more at the ways past buildings responded to daily life and context. For example, when an image of Bernini’s Colonnades at St. Peters in Rome was included in *Without Rhetoric*\(^{51}\) (Figure 7.20), the Smithsons used it to demonstrate the life-including qualities of repetitive elements, rather than its architectural style. Venturi’s interpretation, on the other hand, is more intellectual and historicist and not place-specific. In *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, he chose to ignore context and dates, concentrating more on the stylistic modes of historical precedents. The Mother’s House is no exception, where the ambiguous meaning and complexity of expression is a reference to Porta Pia in Rome\(^{52}\) (Figure 7.21).

![Figure 7.20: Bernini’s Colonnade, St. Peters, Rome, (*Without Rhetoric*)](image)


Robert Venturi, in his call for 'complex' and 'contradictory' architecture, would have found the sensibility that drove the design of the Sugden House too rudimentary. Instead, he turned to Mannerism\(^{53}\) for inspiration, earliest seen in Italian architecture of mid to sixteenth century. However, he links his preferences to a mannerist strain in many periods from Hellenistic architecture through the work of Michaelangelo, Hawksmoor, Soane, Furness, Sullivan, Le Corbusier, Aalto, and Kahn. Venturi regards himself as an architect who adheres to the Classical tradition and his interest in mannerism is clearly evident from his treatment of history as mere reservoir of examples in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. Observations of the Mother’s House show that its architecture springs from more than one principle of order: laws of formal organisation, constructional logic as well functional imperatives. To these, Venturi added the key ingredient – distortion - not just of any kind but of historical forms. Straight re-use of historical forms was rejected, as if to suggest their invalidity, but distorted; they remain

vital as conventional elements that could stir memory. It is not clear whether order provide the framework which is distorted by historical forms or do historical forms provide the framework which is distorted by order. Either way, what was important was that for Venturi principles of order alone impoverishes architecture, diversity enriches it.

Materiality

The Mother's House marked the beginning of Venturi and Scott Brown's exploration of the idea of the 'decorated shed', a term they first coined in the early seventies when they wrote *Learning from Las Vegas*. It suggests the use of decorated applique fixed directly onto a functional shed, to communicate to people its symbolic meaning without standing in any relationship to the architectonic whole. The 'decorated shed' forms an antithesis of 'duck', a term given by the Venturis to suggest that the architectural systems of space, structure and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form. According to them, most modern buildings are 'ducks'. In the Mother's House, the idea of 'decorated shed' manifests itself in the form of 'disengaged' front and back facades. Onto these were added decorations such as dado rails, cross-frames on windows, surface mounted arch and split pediment. The building, of course, could survive well without these additions. Indispensable to the idea of 'decorated shed' is suppression of materiality and in the Mother's House, all the modernist cant on 'expression of materials' was ignored. The house is like a birthday cake with icing. It had been rendered and plastered over, painted, tacked on and cut open, while complex shifts of wall and ceiling occurred as different elements in the house try to accommodate each other. The Sugden House, on the other hand, displays strong rationality with its honest use of materials and tectonic determinism. In Venturi and Scott Brown's world, the Sugden House would have been a 'duck', where associations derived from the house are implicit in the overall space, structural form, materiality and program.

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54 In addition, the argument of *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* had already included the idea of the 'decorated shed' in a weak form. It had indirectly indicated the connection between the appearance of a building and its role in communication to people.


56 Ibid

The emphasis on materiality seen in the Sugden House corresponds to a shift of Modernism in Europe when it took a turn towards a more vernacular aesthetic in mid-forties to the mid-sixties. Le Corbusier’s completion of the Unite d’Habitation, 1947-1953 (Figure 7. 23) and Chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp58, 1950-54 (Figure 7. 24) marks the beginning of the shift. Nevertheless, it was the Maisons Jaoul in Neuilly-sur-Seine, 1956 (Figure 3. 6, Chapter Three), a pair of deliberately crude brick and bare concrete dwellings that best described the new means of expression of primitivism and nostalgia59. In America, Louis Kahn, in the second phase of his career, was searching for a way back to basics, looking at works of great past in his probe for central meaning of architecture60. His Trenton Bath House, 1955 (Figure 3. 28, Chapter Three) and Yale Art Gallery, 1951-54 (Figure 3. 7, Chapter Three) are some of the early key works that demonstrate his diversion from the restrained minimalism of modernism. In both, there is a strong emphasis on materiality and the process of making over finish. Like the Maisons Jaoul, traces left by the human hand in the making of the building becomes part of the aesthetic intention. Commenting on this significant shift of process and materiality in mid-twentieth century architecture, Alan Colquhoun, in his 1962 article, *Symbolic and Literal Aspects of Technology*, wrote:

'It is as if the urge to create the world anew by means of structures which had the lightness and tenuousness of pure thought had given way to the desire to create solid

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60 Louis Kahn’s travel sketches of 1951 depicting works such as Saint Mark’s, Venice and the Pyramid’s at Giza demonstrate his interest in archaic forms. See Seully, Vincent, *Travel Sketches of Louis Kahn*, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, 1978.
hideouts of the human spirit in a world of uncertainty and change, each one in itself a microcosm of an ideal world.  

With the late modern works described above, there seem to be regression from the ideals of the early period of the Modern Movement, with less emphasis on the ‘machine aesthetic’ and ‘miracles of modern life’ and more on an expression of mass and rustication. Reyner Banham, based on his own observations, had decided to group such buildings as together in his manifesto of 1957 and proclaimed the beginning of a movement called New Brutalism. Banham’s bumper book on Brutalism poses the question ‘ethics or aesthetics?’ on the cover, but it is clear from the rest of the text that Brutalism was advanced mainly as a ‘style’. New Brutalism was essentially a private movement – a Smithson movement. For its progenitors, the movement is all about ethics. It has much to do with honesty they saw around them: objects, materials and situations ‘as found’. Things as they exist became the Smithsons’ way of purifying architecture and to return to the fundamentals of design once seen in simple structures for simple life.

Figure 7.23: Unité d’Habitation, Marseilles, 1947-53, Le Corbusier


63 For example, James Stirling quite rightly claimed that he is not ‘brutalist’, although some of his buildings like Ham Common of 1958 in London has a kinship with Brutalism. See Middleton, Robin, The New Brutalism or a clean, well-lighted place. Architectural Design, January 1967,
The Smithsons had always asserted that they disliked materials contrived to simulate another.\textsuperscript{64} Even in the House of the Future, plastic was used pervasively ‘as found’. By using plastic as plastic and not simulated to look like some other material, the Smithsons compel their future inhabitants to acknowledge its origin and tangibility. The same principle was applied to the Sugden House. Nevertheless, their differences lie in the fact that the House of the Future was based on future predictions of daily life and building technology potentials, while the Sugden House was built with the currently available technology and for the social ethos of the present time.

As previously mentioned, materials used to build the Sugden House were typically found in any building merchant’s yard and they were used ‘as-found’. Assembled, they are still recognisable in their original state. Using materials in such ‘brutalist’ manner, reducing them to their essence, was the Smithsons’ way of reclaiming architecture back to its natural unselfconscious state. This particular handling of material also forces users to acknowledge process, origin and potential of use. It was, for the Smithsons a new way of

\textsuperscript{64} Their dislike of ‘dishonest materials’ was made clear when they wrote, ‘We were concerned with seeing of materials for what they were: the woodness of wood; the sandiness of sand. With this came a distaste of the simulated, such as the new plastics of the period – printed, coloured to imitate a previous product in “natural materials”. Dislike for certain mixes, particularly with technology, such as the walnut dashboard in car.’ See Smithsons, Alison & Peter, The ‘As
seeing the ordinary, a new view on how 'prosaic things could re-energise our own inventive activity'.\(^{65}\) Meaning to say that heightened awareness leads to possession, inclining occupiers to carry out their own further level of decoration and change.

In terms of tectonics, we can describe the Sugden House as having been 'assembled', while the Mother's House, 'designed'. The Smithsons had described both techniques in their writing, notably in the book, *Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-72*\(^{66}\). The 'assembled' technique is recognisable as pieces of things put together which also remain themselves. The source of items are still discernible, they are untransformed, even reusable and primitive. The 'designed' technique, on the other hand, involves the use of homogeneous special parts, each part on its own, unidentifiable, but when put together, form an efficient compact object. The Smithsons described Stephenson’s Rocket (Figure 7. 25) as being recognisably ‘assembled’ – *with pieces of things which remained themselves* - while the modern locomotive (Figure 7. 26) as being ‘designed’ – *special parts useless for anything else, coming together to make a complete object*\(^{67}\).

![Figure 7. 25: Stephenson's Rocket (Without Rhetoric)](image)


Figure 7.26: Modern Locomotive *(Without Rhetoric)*

Allowing construction logic to take over, the Sugden House is an ‘assembly’ of commonplace materials, overtly displayed. There is simple structural clarity relating to organisation of spaces and ease of handling simple materials. For example, the load bearing external walls and internal cross walls have beams running across into them. The joists running between the beams are also visible. Each of these structural elements are ‘material coded’ the customary way. Structural walls are bricks, cross beams and lintels are exposed concrete while joists are timber. No such clarity is available in the Mother’s House. In most cases, elements lose their original state, as Venturi abstracted them in his design process. The external walls are treated as pure screen while the interiors are carved white spaces that seem to have transcended time and place. Commenting on similar observations, Vincent Scully once wrote, "It (the Mother’s House) is carefully made to look like a cut-out cardboard model of a curious colour, associated with no material."\(^{68}\)

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Parallels of Building and Art

The direct assembly of ordinary materials alone did not make the Sugden House. Nor did the straightforward ‘design’ of commonplace elements in the Mother’s House. Inherent in the seemingly ordinary architecture of both the Sugden House and the Mother’s House are both subtle and striking transformations, which raised them above the ordinary materials and ordinary suburban house form that they resemble. Powerfully inelegant, there is certain wit and dexterity with the way both buildings were put together. The Sugden House, with its strange proportions and relentless coarseness of materials, and the Mother’s House, with its bizarre diagrammatic form in exotic green, both communicate at an emotional and intellectual level.

The Smithsons were pursuing a functionalist approach to architecture in the Sugden House and from this rose a strong instinctive character. The functionalist approach can be seen as the first stage of design, where the image is initially ‘discovered’, not pre-figured, within the process of making. Image is discovered not only through straightforward ‘assembly’ of ordinary elements, but also through direct response to the banalities of everyday life. The second stage involves the architects’ instinctive artistic ability to transform the discovered object into art. This is as opposed to the rather conventional method where art objects or buildings are originally pre-conceived in the mind of the architect, then drawn, sketched and modeled, then prototyped and so on. The Smithsons were careful not to transform the ordinary into something unrecognisable. Instead, by way of arrangement, they found they were able to create the real architecture in the Sugden House. The materials in their original state speak more clearly of themselves by virtue of their assembly. This, in essence, is the principle of ‘as found’ which they described succinctly as the ‘picking up, turning over and putting with’

Hence, we find in the Sugden House that direct response to program and direct use of materials were coupled with the designers’ strong instinctive artistic ability to move the building beyond straight functionalism. The standard bricks used relentlessly on the external facades and the pitched roof – disproportionately larger on one side - give the

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building a strange monolithic presence. Windows, albeit standard, are larger than normal and they are L-shaped not commonly used in traditional construction. Looking very taut in their thin frames, these windows seem to have been ‘scattered’ on the brickwork according to internal room arrangements. Nevertheless, underlying this seemingly unselfconscious exercise is an attempt by the Smithsons to transform them artistically through subtle shifts. Sketches produced by the architects (Figure 7.27) show studies carried out to stress the ‘scatter’ of windows.\(^7\)

![Figure 7.27: Studies to stress the scatter of windows, Sugden House, Alison & Peter Smithson](image)

The approach to the design of the Sugden House is very much process-based. Discovery of creative form through process rather than pre-figured thought is apparent in the paintings of Jackson Pollock, whose preferred method production is to dribble and splash paint onto canvas laid on the floor (Figure 7.28). The Smithsons regarded the strong physical movement in the painter’s work as a manifestation of a new ordering and had a strong influence in their thinking of architecture. They wrote, for example:

> 'The painting of Jackson Pollock is a different sort from any that we had ever seen before. It is more like a natural phenomenon, a manifestation rather than artefact; complex, timeless, n-dimensional and multi-vocative.'\(^7\)


\(^7\) Smithson, *Ordinariness & Light*, pp.86.
On the other hand, the use of everyday objects known as ready-mades, transformed through instinctive arrangement as seen in the Sugden House, seems to be an allusion to the work of another artist admired by the Smithsons: Marcel Duchamp (Figure 7.29). Some decades after the completion of Sugden House, the Smithsons wrote:

"Some artists, able to use collage techniques, utilizing materials of Duchampian ordinariness – material as found – did so with free inventiveness the envy of us as architects of the same generation, struggling for a new ordinariness."\textsuperscript{72}

\textbf{Figure 7.28:} Jackson Pollock at work (Ordinariness & Light)

\textbf{Figure 7.29:} Bicycle Wheel, 1964 (replica of 1913 original), Marcel Duchamp

\textsuperscript{72} Smithson, Alison & Peter, \textit{Italian Thoughts}, Stockholm, 1993, pp.90.
This approach, of course, is also very much in tune with the method used by Charles and Ray Eames in interior decorating. Calling the technique, ‘select and arrange’, the Eames used common and winsome household objects – most on them based on popular culture – in recognition of their own definite character and origin. By virtue of their arrangement the qualities of each is enhanced and speaking more clearly of themselves. The idea of using the ordinary, then enhancing their original quality through ‘arrangement’ was also explored through the Smithsons’ collaborations with pop artist Eduardo Paolozzi and photographer Nigel Henderson in exhibitions such as the Parallel of Art and Life and the Patio and Pavilion. Central to the approach of both exhibitions is the idea of ‘as found’: a process of finding something which was not already obvious, but which, once found, acquires an influence as an idea. The Parallel of Art and Life consists of images taken from unlikely sources, deliberately anti-beauty in nature, but ostensibly representing a sort of functionalism found in nature and science as well as unselfconscious drawings by children. All these are photographically blown up and arranged in various different positions, confronting the viewer to draw her own conclusions. The Patio and Pavilion, on the other hand, achieves a solemn and contemplative mood of strangeness like the Sugden House through an assemblage of artistically worked artefacts around a pavilion of second-hand wood and scobalite, all representing and giving a strong statement of the basic fundamentals of the human habitat. In retrospect, the themes explored in both exhibitions were evidently applied through tangible means in the Sugden House.

Like the Sugden House, the Mother’s House too accepts the ‘ready-mades’, which were then transformed into something rather extraordinary. We find both the Smithsons and Venturi used standard fittings throughout the houses (See Figure 7.30). However, the ready-mades for Venturi are generally less about materials and materiality, but prefigured elements that are all at once historical, vernacular and commercial. If the Smithsons assembled ordinary materials, such as brick, timber beams, roof and floor tiles in the Sugden House, then Venturi can be seen to have assembled ordinary and classical,

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73 The Smithsons were highly influenced by the work of Charles and Ray Eames, particularly of their ‘select and arrange’ technique. The Smithsons have written a number of articles on the American couple, such as Smithson, Alison & Peter, Eames Celebration, Architectural Design, (London), September 1966, pp.432-442 & Smithson, Alison & Peter, Eames: and now the Dhamas are dying out in Japan, Architectural Design, September 1966, pp.447-448.
yet recognisable visual symbols such as gable, arch, dado, pediment, chimney and sloping roof in the Mother’s House. Complex arrangement alone, as had occurred in the Sugden House, is not adequate for Venturi to achieve his ideal of complex and contradictory architecture. While the Smithsons stopped at ‘arrangement’, Venturi took the ‘ready mades’ a step further by transforming them through cosmetic arrangement but highly symbolic alterations, as these elements were often condensed and arbitrarily revised. The process of transformation follows a number of principles he had discussed in the *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, such as ‘double-functioning’ or ‘vestigial elements’, ‘circumstantial elements distortions’, ‘expedient devices’, ‘eventful exceptions’, ‘exceptional diagonals’, ‘things in things’, ‘crowded or contained intricacies’, ‘linings or layerings’, ‘residual spaces’, ‘redundant spaces’, ‘ambiguities’, ‘inflections’, ‘dualities’, ‘difficult wholes’, and the ‘phenomena both-and’.

Figure 7.30: Standard light fitting in the Sugden House (left) and the Mother’s House (right)

While *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* remained a serious study of the validity of historical references in contemporary architecture, overlaying the arguments are doses of popular culture and the importance of symbolism. In the book, Venturi hinted at the idea that symbols, like the ones used to decorate buildings of distant and recent past, when represented in contemporary architecture, promote elements and
vocabularies that are instantly familiar, ordinary, or conventional\textsuperscript{74}. Further to this idea are transformations of the ordinary through change of context, not unlike those pursued by pop artists:

\textit{The architect...through the organization of parts, creates meaningful context for them within the whole. Through unconventional organization of conventional parts he is able to create new meanings within the whole. If he uses convention conventionally, if he organizes familiar things in an unfamiliar way, he is changing their context, and he can use even the cliché to gain a fresh effect. Familiar things seen in an unfamiliar context become perceptually new as well as old.}\textsuperscript{75}

This reflects an early interest in the everyday and popular culture, an approach strongly pursued by Venturi’s partner, Denise Scott Brown, who was exposed to and fascinated by the works of Independent Group and Brutalism as a student at the AA in London in the fifties. Both Venturi and Scott Brown in later collaborations developed the idea of symbolism as essential in providing diversity of architectural vocabularies appropriate for a plurality of tastes and sensitive to qualities of heritage and place\textsuperscript{76}. The manifestation of this idea takes the form of two-dimensional external skin independent of space and structure designed to contain symbolic meanings. The ‘disengaged’ front and back facades in the Mother’s House can be seen as the beginnings of the exploration of such symbolic appliqué.

From an appreciation of popular culture came a strong appreciation of Pop Art and Pop thinking. Pop Art confirmed for Venturi the idea of accepting the banal and the recognisable and they can be made interesting, in fact extraordinary, by ‘twist of context’. The Pop Art admired by Venturi is very much within the American context. If, for the Smithsons the everyday scene was daily life picking up from surviving the war, then for the Americans, it was the fast-paced economic growth and consumerism changing the American daily lifestyle. For example, Andy Warhol’s art involves the mass production of everyday items such as the brightly coloured pictures of a tin can of Cambell’s soup (Figure 4. 8, Chapter Four) or silk-screened boxes of ‘Brillo’ (Figure 7. 31) or repetitive

\textsuperscript{74} Venturi, \textit{Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture}, pp.44.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid
images of Marilyn Monroe and Jackie Kennedy. Placed within the serenity of art galleries, these images achieved a detached quality from the everyday context from which it originated.\textsuperscript{77} While pop artist Robert Rauschenberg’s extraordinary collages are often an assemblage of a plethora of visual signs and images that surround people in the age of consumer culture and mass media\textsuperscript{78} (Figure 7. 32).

![Brillo Boxes, 1964, Andy Warhol](image1)

**Figure 7. 31: Brillo Boxes, 1964, Andy Warhol**

![Overdrive, 1963, Robert Rauschenburg](image2)

**Figure 7. 32: Overdrive, 1963, Robert Rauschenburg**

In an interview conducted in 1992, Venturi explained the importance of this particular strain of modern art movement in his early work such as the Mother’s House:

\textsuperscript{76} See, for example Venturi et al., *Learning from Las Vegas* and articles such as Brown, Denise Scott, *Learning from Pop*, Casabella 35, no.8 359-60, December 1971, pp.15-25 and joint exhibition.

'The Campbell soup can as a symbol of the ordinary, if not the banal, looks weirdly impressive; new meanings are applied to old to make for extraordinary tension – all this based on the Gestalt theory involving meaning deriving from context, and not much different in its artistic effect from Beethoven’s randos and Renoir’s picnics.....The question of Pop art is relevant now. I think the most wonderful thing we did in our architecture, in the 60’s, was to design an unheroic architecture.'

Like the American Pop Art Venturi admired, the ordinary and the recognisable classical elements go through a process of ‘editing’ which differs from that seen in the Sugden House, of which remains largely ‘as found’. Elements in the Mother’s House went through transformations that resulted in forms that are more abstract and artificial than that of the original, remaining merely representations. Explaining this phenomena in the Mother’s House, Venturi later wrote:

'The abstract linear quality of the Classical Ornament applied to smooth plaster walls, together with the disengagement of the walls and parapets, makes the facades look almost like drawings and enhances their quality as representations of Classical architecture.'

Hence, there is strangeness with the Mother’s House that is not quite as elusive as the Sugden House. Transformations of the ordinary and symbolic made the entrance façade look almost like a giant doll’s house. It has all the representation of vernacular and classical elements that symbolises home: a big sloping roof, a pedimented gable, a towering chimney, a large front entrance void and windows with cross frames. Yet, there is a sense of ersatz with the way each element looked, as most of them seem moulded to ‘represent’ the original and are almost unnecessary additions to the basic house. For example, the dado and arch are mouldings added onto the rendered wall and they are pure decorations. Trimmings and cross-frames around the window openings accentuate the traditional aesthetic of Georgian windows, yet they are transposed onto a rather modern house. And if Warhol painted Marilyn Monroe’s images with arbitrary colours, then here one finds Venturi attempting almost the same when he painted the whole exterior of the

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78 See Chapter Three: Pop Art in California, Ibid, pp.139-162.
80 Venturi, Diversity, Relevance and Representation in Historicism, or Plus ca Change....plus A Plea for Pattern all over Architecture, with a Postscript on My Mother’s House, ’ pp. 119.
house a curious pale green colour. The Pop Art exterior is a strong contrast from the bright modernist interior. Inside, peculiarities manifest themselves in the shifts and contortions of the hearth, chimney and stair to accommodate each other.

As with most architects, the Smithsons and Robert Venturi seemed torn between two conceptions of architecture. On the one hand, they saw architecture as a responsible act of creation for the public sphere and public needs. On the other, architecture is seen as unique works of art, the creation of individual sensibility. Both the Smithsons and Venturi (later joined by Scott Brown) sought the answer to this dilemma by turning to the work of contemporary artists. These artists, albeit through different mediums, seemed to have achieved a balance of allowing the ‘found’ inspire them, and to a certain extent exercise their private will to form. This is usually done through unusual juxtapositions of everyday objects in tense and vivid plays between the old and new associations to flout the everyday interdependence of context and meaning resulting in the most dramatic final image and form.

Nevertheless, what each pair of architects drew from contemporary art resulted in very different transformations of the ordinary. Seeking to assign an almost functionalist approach to architecture, the Smithsons saw in the work of Duchamp, Pollock, Henderson and Paolozzi, a new kind of order, almost one beyond style derived from the social and physical realities of daily life. Like these artists, the Smithsons’ approach in the Sugden House, is contemplative and calm, the aesthetics derived from the concentration on process, partly unselfconscious, partly intuitive, - described aptly by the architects as the 'picking up, turning over and putting with'\(^{81}\). Venturi, on the other hand concentrated more on the finish product and it is quite clear that the Mother’s House is very much about imagery. Just as Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture was principally visually based, where the reader is presented with largely comment on photographic illustrations of external facades of buildings, the Mother’s House is an exercise on dynamic visual manipulations. Like Warhol’s sculptures and paintings, Venturi’s building ‘shout’, as the original recognisable forms were abstracted by almost

\(^{81}\) Smithson, The As Found and the Found, in Lichtenstein & Schregenberger, As Found: The Discovery of the Ordinary, pp. 40.
any process necessary - enlarged, coloured, extended, juxtaposing layered and added to - to arrive at the desired final image.

Signs of Occupancy
The direct handling of materials and the ‘gentle’\(^2\), yet subtly ambiguous and complex internal spaces in the Sugden House is, for the Smithsons, a deliberate attempt to set up a dialogue between object and user. Calling such phenomena ‘signs of occupancy’\(^3\), it is a secondary process of how a thing develops after it is built: personal possession takes over, daily activities occupying space, garden maturing. As described fully in Chapter Three, the Smithsons’ acceptance of the secondary process of inhabitation – a process sometimes beyond the control of the architect - was partly influenced by Nigel Henderson and Charles and Ray Eames, who both saw inspiring values in everyday scenes and objects\(^4\).

Here in the Mother’s House, we find Venturi pursuing this idea of assemblage of ‘found’ objects, in this case, his mother’s antique furniture, and that of building as ‘shell’ waiting and inviting occupation:

\(^2\) Gentle spaces’ in the Smithsons’ vocabulary means spaces that do not demandingly dictate use. Consider the quote: ‘What we would seem to be looking for is the gentlest of styles, which whilst still giving an amalgamation of the measures of internal events and structures (rooms, activities, servicing arrangements, supports,) leaves itself open to – even suggests – interpretation, without itself being changed. Smithson, Alison & Peter, Signs of Occupancy, Architectural Design, February 1972, pp.91.

\(^3\) The Smithsons first used the phrase ‘signs of occupancy’ in 1972 when they published an article using the phrase as a title. It was in St. Hilda’s Garden Building, 1967-70, that the Smithsons saw full realisation of the concept, internally and externally. Nevertheless, it is an approach that they recognised and used from very start of their career in projects such as the Hunstanton School. See Ibid, and recorded lecture by Alison & Peter Smithson, Signs of Occupancy, Pidgeon Audio Visual, PAV 793, London.

\(^4\) Consider this quote: ‘It is possible Nigel Henderson could have led us to the ephemera of life – the penny whistle, the Woolworths plastic toy or Christmas decoration, the German pressed metal toy or Christmas decoration, the German pressed metal toy and the walking robots – via photographs of old boots, doors, bits of sacking, but I think it is to Ray and Charles Eames we owe the debt of the extravagance of the new folk purchase: fresh, pretty, colourful ephemera...The Eames gave us courage to make sense of anything attracted....They are our Los Angelos – who providently provided us with the furniture to put in perspectives of buildings’; which appeared in Smithson, Alison & Peter, Changing Art of Inhabitation: Mies’ pieces, Eames’ dreams, The Smithsons, Artemis, London, 1994, pp.77. The text was originally published in an article called Eames: and now Dhamas are dying out in Japan, Architectural Design, September 1996, pp.447-448.
'I've designed the house so my mother's old furniture (circa 1925, plus some antiques) would look good in it. In those days interiors were expected to be purely modern. Although you could scatter some very old antiques about...eclecticism was essentially out'.

As with the Smithsons, Venturi found justification for the above by referring to the work of Charles and Ray Eames. The Californian designers demonstrated to both pairs of architects that decorative and eclectic objects belonging to high or popular culture were acceptable, when current practice expects interiors to be purely modern. It is by virtue of selecting what exactly was right and the attention to the last detail of arrangement that an art form developed. The Eames' approach suggests that some form of high art expertise be involved, which the occupant may or may not possess. Hence, from the Californian designers' point of view, occupants' clutter and eclectic mix of accumulated possession is acceptable, as long as there is an expert to help turn it into high art.

In the Sugden House, we find the Smithsons advocating much more occupant freedom than that permitted by the Eames. To the Smithsons, occupants should be able to see potentials within a space and use or decorate it as they see appropriate. They believed that their architecture could communicate to occupants the potentials of use by varying the materiality and feel throughout the house by subtle manipulations of light, room proportions and views. These manipulations charge the spaces with strong moods to be felt, compelling occupants to make spaces their own. Explaining this condition, the Smithsons wrote:

'We have to know-instinctively to be at peace, to sense rather than see: and this means that we have to raise the individual items or elements above themselves, shifting sideways the emphasis of their bare selves, to the level that they recess together and subtly serve as signs to help us know how to behave in our buildings, guide how we want to live as a society in our cities'.

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85 Schwartz, Mother's House: Evolution of Vanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill, Rizzoli, pp.37
86 For example, in 1973, Venturi applauded the Eames for '.......reinvent(ing) good Victorian clutter. Modern architects wanted everything neat and clean and they came along and spread eclectic assemblages over an interior'. See McCoy, Esther, An Affection for Objects, Progressive Architecture, vol.8, August 1973, pp.67.
Hence, the communication the Smithsons had been interested in is one which is ‘felt’ by the occupant, yet unaware of having been ‘told’. They believed that it is the simple and familiar things of everyday life - tactile, honest and banal construction materials and forms, weather and views - that stir the senses. Communication will only occur through heightened awareness of these elements that would need to be transformed or ‘raised above themselves’ just enough for the occupier to be conscious of their origin, their identity and their tangibility. Only then do occupants start seeing things afresh, seeing new connections and see the potential for change. For example, there is change in ceiling heights between the dining and the living. In the living room, there are dark and light zones, which allows the Sugdens different furniture configurations in the summer and winter months, while various window configurations have allowed them to display special objects, family pictures and potted plants.

If the Smithsons’ interiors are quietly indicating use, then Robert Venturi, in comparison, seem less concerned with how he sees his spaces are occupied. Nevertheless, like the Smithsons, Venturi believes that one should try to make an exception to accommodate varying occupancy patterns. For Venturi, there is no need for seamless continuity between the interior and exterior. Interior demands that contradict exterior forms could exist side by side. Hence, we find in the Mother’s House a contrived front façade with its strong symbolic elements contrasting sharply with the rather abstract modernist interior - open plan, white and bright - capable of accepting any occupancy style. This modern interior is a contrast from that in the Sugden House, which is made up of zones of varying brightness and texture. There is also a sense that there exists a closer relationship between the inside and what is outside in the Watford house than the Philadelphia house. Take, for example, the first floor rooms in both houses. The large L-shaped windows in the Sugden house, particularly, seem to have been carefully orientated towards the garden, almost inviting it to be part of the interior of the house, whereas in the Mother’s House, views of the garden are obstructed by parapet wall and half-solid doors (See Figure 7.33 and

89 Explaining their concept of communication, the Smithsons further wrote, ‘…..occupiers are left in no doubt, yet be unaware of having been “told”, which is intended to be the quiet part and which the noisy, where one is expected to walk and where to drive, where to play, where to
Figure 7.34). In a recorded lecture of 1978, the Smithsons described their intentions for a similar effect in the Garden Building at St. Hilda, Oxford, 1970: (The internal space) 'invites occupancy, invites the garden inside, to become the decoration of internal space'⁹⁰. This deliberate connection with the outside is a very crucial part of the Smithsons' attempt to raise awareness of space potential, while for Venturi, it is one of the many complex requirements and circumstances to be included in the design.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 7.33: The Sugden House, views out from first floor bedroom window**

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 7.34: The Mother's House, the arch opening in the attic room**

The idea that interiors could be completely separate, responding to very specific programmes is extolled in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. In it, Venturi referred to Frank Lloyd Wright's Morris Store (Figure 7. 35), where a dramatic interior

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fit out is a contrast to the simple enclosing rectangular plan. Aldo van Eyck was quoted in support of such contradictory architecture:

‘Planning at whatever scale level should provide a framework – to set the stage as it were – for the twin phenomena of the individual and the collective without resorting to arbitrary accentuation of either one at the expense of the other.’

Hence, for Venturi, his architecture is one that accommodates the particular, private as well as the general. In order to be accommodating, Venturi tries to be non-judgemental of peoples’ tastes and foibles, as the Smithsons have been with their acceptance of ‘daily life ephemera’. In the Mother’s House, Venturi claimed to have provided spaces to house his mother’s old antique furniture, while in other early interior designs, including the renovation of James B. Duke House for New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts (Figure 4. 13, Chapter Four), Venturi used ordinary and standard metal shelving and Thonet bentwood chairs. The pages of Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, are full of images of an eclectic mix historical and contemporary exemplars and Venturi’s attitude to occupancy and interior design is, perhaps, no different. Like the Smithsons who sees personal possessions of occupants as that might have been acquired over time and treasured, Venturi accepts the eclectic combination of the ordinary and the historical. Apart from Charles and Ray Eames, Venturi found justification for this method by turning to other twentieth-century architects, such as Le Corbusier, whom Venturi praised in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture for juxtaposing ‘commonplace elements such as the Thonet chair, the officer’s chair, cast iron radiators, and other industrial objects’ and Edwin Lutyens, whose tendency of mixing stylistic ornamentation Venturi found ‘valid again in our own pluralist, mobile, pop, mass culture...period’.

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93 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture
94 Ibid, pp.43.
Despite an acceptance of the ordinary, one senses that both the Smithsons and Venturi had instinctively wanted some control of inhabitation. Firstly, writing eloquently of the inhabitation process, the Smithsons managed to raise it to a poetic level. Then they tried to gain some control of the process through subtle play of materiality, light and space. Venturi is seen to have attempted some 'control' of the final occupancy result, by providing open gallery-like spaces. For example, in comparison with the Sugden House, the interior spaces in the Mother's House are more clean and modernist, in their impression of openness and light which allow objects to be distinctively displayed. Sugden House, on the other hand, is more 'cottage' like, in its planning of spaces and materiality. For example, walls, piers and built-in cabinets separate spaces clearly in comparison to the plan of the main living space in the Mother's House. Within each space, the Smithsons have tried to create even more distinctive zones. While, large full height windows as well as the clerestorey in the Mother's House' living space seem to wash the space with almost uniform daylight, we find, in the Sugden House, distinct dark and light zones.
Language

Within an apparently static and ordinary format, the Smithsons had succeeded in raising the Sugden house into something special that the Sugdens could make their own. This is partly driven by the Smithsons’ belief that the act of occupying space should be above all pleasurable and pleasure is to be derived from the simplest things. For example, the Sugdens discovered pleasure in the garden that they tend to lovingly. The view of the maturing garden can also be enjoyed from most parts of the house, ‘inviting the garden to become part of the decoration of the internal space’96.

The Smithsons often stated that pleasure is also to be found in materials ‘well-made’. It was a taste developed from their admiration for the Japanese tradition, described by them as possessing a certain reverence for honest and anonymous surface, certain perfection and proportion97. This idea developed into what they called ‘form-language’, which they described as both ‘indicator and enhancer of everyday use’98. It is all about what the guided hand or the trodden feet, or the moving body feel when moving in space. The banal would be raised from necessity to an art form, to pure architecture, to increase pleasures of use. Describing how this might be achieved, the Smithsons wrote:

‘That we should accept that the things we are likely to touch should be pre-smoothed by the human hand as it were, that things near to us should be flawless and undisturbing, even pretty, that all materials and their handling should indicate and enhance use seems reasonable’.99

That said, we find in the Sugden House, after a closer look, some ‘luxuries’ against the brutal handling of the materials. Door handles, for example, are smooth stainless steel on rich timber panelled doors, designed by the Smithsons. The handrails and treads on the staircase are all wood – smoothly rounded at the edges and warm on the moving hand and feet. The bedrooms upstairs are even less brutal: carpeted floors, plastered walls and tongued and grooved Columbian pine ceilings.

96 Smithson, Signs of Occupancy, (recorded lecture).
98 Smithson, Signs of Occupancy, pp. 94.
99 Ibid
All these variants of feel, materiality and the odd luxuries are so subtly handled that they allowed changing pleasures of use in the house. This idea of ‘signifying’ rather than ‘dictating’ possible use of space meant that different patterns of occupancy could occur quite easily according to whims, change of season and household and life patterns. For example, the furniture in the living room is often reconfigured by the Sugdens according to season\textsuperscript{100}. The playroom, next to the kitchen, later became the eldest son’s bedsit, and now Derek Sugden’s study, well accommodated. Upstairs, the small fourth bedroom is now Jean Sugden’s study.

The Smithsons called the secondary process of inhabitation, ‘signs of occupancy’\textsuperscript{101}. From the description above, it is clearly a process that works at two levels: firstly how the language of architecture can indicate use, and, beyond that, how it can invite the affection and pleasure of use of its occupiers. Hence, the meaning of the word ‘sign’ in the context of the Smithsons’ architecture, is not so much symbol or representation but the creation of ‘moods’ to be felt by the occupier, inspiring him to take action. While ‘decoration’ for the Smithsons had little to do with objects but more to do with the process of inhabitation. They once said ‘daily life activities and things decorates space’\textsuperscript{102}. Here, we find the Smithsons raising the basics and the banal of life to a poetic level. It is an aspect of design already explored symbolically in the \textit{Patio and Pavilion}, first conceived in March 1956, a few months before the completion of Sugden House\textsuperscript{103}.

That said, we thus find the Smithsons’ usage of the term ‘sign’ and ‘decoration’ being vastly different from that of Venturi’s. While both regard realism as relevant in the formation of form and space, Venturi tends to focus on visuals of buildings and the

\textsuperscript{100} Their long sofa is placed opposite the fireplace in winter, but turned around to face the garden in summer. Derek Sugden, conversation with author, 26\textsuperscript{th} June 2003.

\textsuperscript{101} See Smithson, \textit{Signs of occupancy}, pp. 91-97.

\textsuperscript{102} Smithson, \textit{Signs of Occupancy}, recorded lecture.

\textsuperscript{103} Although first conceived in March 1956, the \textit{This is Tomorrow} exhibition only opened on 9\textsuperscript{th} August 1956, where the Smithson, Paolozzi and Henderson team were one of the twelve teams to produce exhibits almost separately and independantly from each other. See \textit{This is Tomorrow} in Robbins, David (editor), \textit{The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty}, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1990, pp.135-136.
reading of building as text. The Mother’s House, in fact, displays Venturi’s early signs of
his move towards what the seventies would call a ‘semiotic’ architecture.\(^{104}\)

The front of the Mother’s House is a diagram of Neoplatonic order, deliberately detailed
and constructed to look like a line drawing on paper. It is clearly an assemblage of pure
geometric shapes - square, rectangle, triangle and circle - to form a curious ‘disengaged’
front façade, making it look like a little cardboard model. Apart from the different size
windows and the pot of geraniums by the entrance opening, it reflects little of any signs
of occupancy; any signs of daily life taking place. Yet the diagram that the shapes make
is familiar, as it is representational of the typical house form that pervades suburban
America.

This front façade of the Mother’s House is laden with rhetoric intended to stir empathy.
As already mentioned earlier, this rhetorical front façade is orientated straight towards the
driveway and it is the first view of the house for the approaching visitor. Using cultural
coding familiar to all, this particular facade and its orientation reflect Venturi’s intention
for architecture as text, carrying messages that can be read in some sense. Moving around
the house, we find that he seemed to have dropped the intensity of cultural coding on the
other facades, especially on the side elevations (Figure 6.34 and 6.36). Mouldings stop
short before turning the corner to the side facades, where windows are wall recesses or
‘absence of walls’ rather than ‘a hole in the wall’. On the rear southwest façade (Figure
6.30), however, conventional elements are reintroduced in the form of mouldings, arched
and cross-framed windows, although these are not as contrived as the front. The emphasis
given to the front façade in the Philadelphia house is a contrast from that of the Sugden
House, where its picturesque setting and approach meant that it is to be viewed and
appreciated from different angles. Here, the Watford house ‘speaks’ of familiarity

\(^{104}\) It was Charles Morris who defined ‘semiotics’ as ‘the theory of signs’ and distinguished
among ‘syntactics’, which investigates the relationships between signs without regard to how these
signs relate to reality, ‘semantics’ which examines just that relation, and pragmatics, which is
concerned with the way these signs are actually used. See Morris, Charles, Foundations of the
Theory of Signs, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1938. For implications of the theory for
architecture, see Norberg-Schulz, Christian, Intentions in Architecture, The MIT Press,
Cambridge, 1965, pp.56-66. Also see, Eco, Umberto, Function and Sign: Semiotics of
through its overall form and materiality without the help of decorations or non-standard additions. Although the southwest façade facing the garden may have been the most photographed, the architectural language remain consistent on all four sides of the house (See figure 6.29, 6.31, 6.33 and 6.35) The facades are equally treated and each reflects the various programs accommodated within the shell of the house.

Much has been said on the influences on the design of the front façade of the Mother’s House. The gabled facade with split pediment could have been linked to Michaelangelo’s Porta Pia in Rome (Figure 7. 21) and the Nymphaeum by Alessandro Vittoria at Maser (Figure 7. 36). It could also have come from the more contemporary Casa Girasole on Via Parioli by Luigi Moretti (Figure 7. 37). Closer to home, the Low House at Bristol, Rhode Island of 1887 by McKim, Mead and White was another strong precedent. The Rhode Island house was illustrated in Vincent Scully’s The Shingle Style and the Stick Style, ironically, first read by Venturi during his fellowship in Rome. The looming chimney could have been derived from Sir Edwin Lutyens’ Middlefield of 1908 (Figure 7. 38). While from Frank Lloyd Wright’s own house in Oak Park, Illinois, of 1889, could have come the half circle, appended on the façade just above the squarish entrance opening.

Figure 7. 36: Nymphaeum by Alessandro Vittoria, located in the rear garden of Palladio’s Villa Barbaro at Maser (Mother’s House: The Evolution of Vanna Venturi’s House in Chestnut Hill)

105 For a comprehensive account, see Schwartz, Mother's House: The Evolution of Vanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill.
108 Frank Lloyd Wright’s house was also featured in one of Scully’s book on the Shingle style. See Scully, Vincent, The Shingle Style Today or the Historian’s Revenge, George Brazillier, New York, 1974, figure 32.
These borrowed formal elements go through a process of abstraction, which is then condensed with what Venturi calls 'circumstantial elements' of domestic program to
achieve 'difficult unity'\textsuperscript{109}. The result is a highly symbolic representation of a house. This contrivance serves a highly judicious purpose: to intensify and enrich human being's reaction to architecture. On this, Vincent Scully remarked, 'He is wholly an artist, and his primary concern is to increase the aesthetic intensity of everybody's reaction to his building'\textsuperscript{110}. Venturi believes that for an enriching experience to transpire there must be a 'twist of context'. In the case of the Mother's House, the 'twist' occurred when familiar elements went through changes, producing ambiguity and unfamiliarity. For example, the arch, a classical feature, has been stripped of its structural function and became pure decoration as it was reduced to 'moulding'. The dado was fixed at a higher level than usual, distorting the overall scale of the house.

In comparison, the idea of intensifying reaction to architecture also holds for the Smithsons, but they do it by varying the feel of spaces through materiality. Their architecture communicates through heightened awareness of the 'natural' elements that surrounds the occupants. Hence, the reaction to be prompted by Venturi's architecture is distinct from that of the Smithsons. For Venturi, an enriching life is to be amongst buildings and environments that are not too serious, almost satiric but highly contextual. Through his later collaboration with Denise Scott Brown, they developed signs and decorations on façades of buildings as social commentary of the pre-existing pluralistic conditions: a primary process controlled by the architect, ironically inspired by secondary processes of people adjusting their own environment. This gentle comedy of citizenship would have been too unnatural and forced for the Smithsons as they strove for 'calm' and 'natural' architecture, free from rhetoric. In \textit{Signs of Occupancy} they wrote about producing the 'gentlest of style'\textsuperscript{111} and the Sugden House achieves the objective. It sits quietly and comfortably in the leafy suburb that it is situated. There is undoubtedly oddness in the house - the relentless use of bricks, the large L-shaped windows and the pitch roof, tight at the eaves - but there is also honesty. Elements are introduced only because they are necessary to the making of a house: a brick, a brick, a door, a door and a


\textsuperscript{111} Smithson, \textit{Signs of Occupancy}, pp.91-97.
lintel, a lintel. This honesty, combined with complex little shifts, was enough to communicate – no other symbolic shapes or decorations were necessary.

**Conclusion**

The Smithsons considered modernism as inadequate in providing man with an identity that would relate him to *'his house, his community and his city'*\(^{112}\). This propelled them to pursue a search for the essence of ‘natural’ architecture that would make *‘a direct statement of a way of life’*\(^{113}\). As such, the Smithsons can be seen to have practised a kind of functionalism and contextualism that they found inherent in simple vernacular and anonymous buildings. Despite being synonymous with modernism, functionalism never was the strongest design criteria in a modern building. If anything, such buildings emulate a machinistic and technological ideal, often, at the expense of function and context. Hence, the Smithsons saw in Modernism an impoverishment of ‘identity’ rising out of place and use, an ‘identity’ that man can once again relate to. Turning to anonymous exemplars – buildings without rhetoric – as the Smithsons called them, they were careful not to re-work the past and its style, but drew from them a number of principles of early functionalism: 1. space shapes and proportion fitting closely as possible to room functions 2. profiling the external form as closely as possible to internal spaces and 3. usage of materials in the most direct and economical way. These principles were highly regarded by the Smithsons as ethics rather than aesthetics, and came to define a new sort of architecture called the New Brutalism. There is strong logic to the approach, creating a development with certain sense of inherent order that lends it identity and feeling of space, as direct and undecorated volumes evolve out of building usage and functions of major elements.

As with the Smithsons, Robert Venturi found the principles of Modern Architecture too limiting to reflect the plurality of taste and complexity of situations of contemporary cities:


'And today the wants of program, structure, mechanical equipment, and expression, even in single buildings in simple context, are diverse and conflicting in ways unimaginable. The increasing dimension and scale of architecture in urban and regional planning add to the difficulties.'

The limitations of modernism, for Venturi, was that it idolised the primitive and elementary. Sharing similar sentiments with the Smithsons, modernism is seen to solve only selected problems, recognizing complexity insufficiently or consistently often at the expense of isolating man from the environment in which he resides. Venturi went on to refute the whole idea of functionalism, particularly the idea of flowing space and continuity between inside and outside. In *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Venturi proclaimed that 'less is a bore', an appropriation of Mies van der Rohe's 'less is more'. Using visuals of historical precedents to guide him through his rather lengthy arguments, Venturi concluded that contradiction between inside and outside, top and bottom and even left and right should exists in buildings as there are various necessary tensions - both general and particular, generic and circumstantial - that help make architecture.

There is strong ethical axiom involved in the way the Smithsons and Robert Venturi tend to see their role in shaping egalitarian architecture. Driven by ethics of providing man with relevant architecture, they tried avoiding the clichés of style or abstract theories such as the ones that once characterised modern architecture. Instead, both turned of abstract socio-anthropological understanding in their response to rethink modern principles. The Sugden House represents the Smithsons' quest for honest, non-rhetorical architecture based on everyday human needs and activities, while the Mother's House, Venturi's almost unprejudiced response to almost all the contradictory situations - program, context, symbolic and spiritual needs - present in the design of the particular environment. The Smithsons, more so than the Venturis, were weary of the subjective act of 'design', as they believed that they would inescapably produce work that is bound up with rhetoric. However admirable the Smithsons' and Venturi's search for relevant architecture, it is clear that beyond their objectivity is subjectivity and their architecture transcends those found in the anonymous, commercial or the historical for the sole reason

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114 Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp.16
that architecture is for large part intuitive and evocative. Giancarlo De Carlo thoughtfully pointed this out when he said,

‘Architecture deals with the organisation of space and therefore involves rationality, method, coherence. But then, it is also a question of form, which requires intuition, invention, evocation, prophecy. Great architects are those who have managed to strike a perfect balance between organisation and form – a balance dense with meaning and in its nature, unstable.’\textsuperscript{115}

In both the Sugden House and the Mother’s House, the Smithsons and Robert Venturi drew from their re-evaluation of the past, sensibilities and methods that could be applied to contemporary architecture. The Smithsons believed that by using ordinary materials, put together in the ordinary way to create spaces that respond to closely to human daily rituals, they would be able to emulate the unsconscious traditions of the buildings of the past. The Sugden House, in essence, is an expression of the primitive fundamentals of human inhabitation, what the Smithsons like to call ‘architecture without rhetoric’. Robert Venturi, on the other hand, suggested that architecture should respond to complexities of urbanism and program and hence, will include multiplicity and diversity of elements. Realising that such richness of ideas in one building may prove problematic, Venturi suggests that the architect ‘inflect’ the elements, meaning making adjustments often at the sake of purity so that they are directed towards making a unified whole\textsuperscript{116}. This is no easy task for an architect, and suggests the use of remarkable talent and intuition in order to achieve what Venturi calls, ‘difficult unity of whole’. Hence, if the Sugden House is intended as a natural outcome of responding to certain selected parameters, then the Mother’s House can be seen as highly contrived in comparison, as the final architecture depended very much on Venturi’s skills in manipulating or ‘inflecting’ the diverse elements introduced.

Although the Smithsons never admitted to it, there is considerable subjective skill involved in the making of the Sugden House. Moving in the house, there is a strong sense


of drama resulting from the way the raw materials were assembled to make spaces of
different proportions and daylight quality. In this sense, the Sugden House is truly not as
straightforward as the Smithsons claimed it to be. Using their strong instinctive artistic
ability, they have been able to move the house beyond literal functionalism. The
complexity seen here is in fact unrivalled by that of the Mother’s House.

This sensibility of raising the banal to something poetic and extraordinary can be traced
back to both the Smithsons’ and Venturi’s reference to parallels of building and art. Both
admired twentieth century artists of their preference: the Smithsons were obsessed with
the strange world of Duchampian objects and Pollock’s process paintings, while Venturi
with Warhol’s transformations of the everyday iconoclastic images and commercial
products. These artists may produce varying works, but both the Smithsons and Venturi
learnt that there is poetry to be found in the ordinary ephemera of life. Nevertheless, their
selection of pop artists to learn from had a strong impact on how the transformations of
the ordinary occur in each house. Perhaps just as Duchamp’s composition of bicycle
wheel on a stool consisting of recognisable everyday objects, the Sugden House is clearly
‘assembled’ with the building materials remaining recognisable in the whole complex
juxtapositions. This idea of discovery of creative form through process rather than
prefigured conceptions is also related to ideas behind Pollock’s painting. The Mother’s
House on the other hand, was clearly ‘designed’, as ordinary and symbolic elements, like
that of Warhol’s, goes through a process of highly dynamic visual and physical
transformations, resulting in forms more abstract and at times more bizarre than the
original. Here, we find exterior walls are disengaged from interior ones, separate linings
occur to cover residual spaces, stairs were contorted, while the plan and elevations
possess indecisive symmetry as formalist ideas were compromised to make way for
domestic practicality.

There is a strong reason why such transformations, albeit contrasting, occur in the
Sugden House and the Mother’s House: they allow communication at an emotional and
intellectual level. It was John Ruskin who once claimed that ‘architecture’ contributes to
our 'mental health, power and pleasure'\textsuperscript{117} and hence needs to be distinguished from pure 'building', a functional edifice for 'work' rather than pleasure, by impressing on its form 'certain characters venerable and beautiful, but otherwise necessary'\textsuperscript{118}.

A critical analysis of both buildings demonstrated that they have been raised above and beyond 'building' in the Ruskinian sense. Signs and decorations are extremely important to the Smithsons and Robert Venturi. They are part of the communicative quality inherent in the architecture of both houses. It explains why both houses are instantly recognisable as a dwelling. Nevertheless, there is strong contrast in the means which the Smithsons and Venturi employ to communicate to occupants. To the Smithsons, the architecture of Sugden House could communicate to occupants the potentials of use by varying the materiality and feel through the house, by subtle manipulations of light, room proportions and views. It is communication to all senses rather just the eye, as it has very much to do with what the trodden feet, guiding hand or moving body feel when moving around in the house. The Smithsons believed that these subtle manipulations were adequate to communicate without resorting to any deliberate designed elements or decorations. Striving for an 'architecture without rhetoric', they hope to strip architecture down to its essentials and achieve an architecture without pomp or ceremony. When they came to design the Sugden House, they had hoped that the house would be so transparent that the only visible ornamentation is the pattern of the family needs and on-goings of daily life.

Hence, signs in the Sugden House really mean signs of life, but for Venturi, it took on a whole kind of different meaning as he turned to visual symbolism for inspiration. The assemblage of pure geometric shapes resembling a child's drawing of a house makes the Mother's House a highly symbolic representation of a house. It was a deliberate contrivance to communicate and intensify and enrich human being's reaction to architecture. Communication is further intensified by the addition of ornamentation, formal and ordinary, such as the tacked-on arch, window mouldings and cross-frames.

\textsuperscript{117} Ruskin, John, \textit{The Seven Lamps of Architecture, Noonday}, New York, 1974, pp. 15
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 16
The inclusion of cultural coding in the design of the Mother’s House is a response to the muteness of Modern architecture. It reflects the architect’s intention of reading the building as text, for buildings to carry commentary of the contemporary situation that can be read in some sense. The cultural coding comes often in the form of ornamentation as have been assigned to buildings by traditional architecture. The Smithsons, on the other hand, are said to have avoided ornament, and they claimed that the only ornamentation visible in the Sugden House are the Sugdens going about the normal life and their possessions. Nevertheless, close observations of the house teach us that ornament can still be a concentrated expression or re-presentation of the idea that governs the structure it serves. The deliberate exposure of the timber joists, rough brickwork in selected areas and concrete, altogether becomes an abbreviated signature of the building’s idea: the architecture system is that of space, structure and program. While, at the same time, the exposed boiler between the kitchen and the playroom, symbolises the home as a machine, constantly working. We find that Venturi, later with Denise Scott Brown, have rejected this approach of ‘constructing decoration’ outright, calling such examples ‘ducks’.

All symbolism and ornamentation seem strongest on the external facades of the Mother’s House. Internally, modernist gallery-like spaces are favoured, acting as containers to take Vanna Venturi’s eclectic mix of antique furniture and small decorative pieces obviously accumulated over time. In such modern spaces, the antiques seem richly enhanced, acquiring the quality of a museum piece. Here we find the Smithsons too, in their encouragement of occupancy, seeking to raise the objects and furniture that comes with occupancy to a greater poetic level or higher art status. Their mutual admiration for the works of Charles and Ray Eames had a lot to do with their acceptance of popular taste and foibles in serious works of architecture. From the Eames, both the Smithsons and Venturi learnt that it was by virtue of arrangement in space that the status of objects can be gained. The Smithsons in the Sugden House, decided to control arrangement by subtly communicating possibilities through a complex play of space and materials, while Venturi in the Mother’s House, does so by providing a modern and simple, yet highly polished container for the act of occupancy. The importance of occupancy for these
architects is reflected in the publications of both houses maturing: they are almost always photographed with the furniture and furnishings in place.\(^{119}\)

In conclusion, we find that both the Sugden House and the Mother’s House look and are supposed to look ordinary, yet the more time one spends with them, the less ordinary it becomes. The complex ordinariness inherent in both houses stems from the fact that it was important to both the Smithsons and Robert Venturi that buildings communicate. To do so, these buildings must have identity and this identity is acquired by making references to socio-anthropological roots and popular culture. For the Smithsons, human activities become central to the idea, while human reaction to familiar elements and ‘signs’ were equally important to the Smithsons and Robert Venturi. Nevertheless, the means by which identity was achieved is strikingly different in the Sugden House and the Mother’s House. Signs that speak, for the Smithsons, are the heightened awareness of structure, materiality and space, while for Venturi, they are the heightened awareness of symbolic representations. In retrospect, we find the Smithsons’ approach being more akin to the late-modernist practitioners\(^{120}\) in their belief that meanings should be communicated through an honest expression of structure and services. Venturi’s approach, on the other hand, shows the beginnings of post-modernism in his manipulations of symbolism and ornamentation based on historical and popular motifs, at the expense of honesty in construction and materiality, to achieve an architecture that speaks.

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\(^{119}\) Although the earliest published photographs in 1957 featured the house devoid of furniture, later publications including the one in The Charged Void: Architecture, included the Sugdens’ furniture and possessions.

\(^{120}\) For example, Le Corbusier with late-modern works such as the Unité d’Habitation, 1947-1953, Chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp 1050-54, and Maisons Jaoul in Neuilly-sur-Seine, 1956 and Louis Kahn with works such as the Trenton Bath House, 1955 and Yale Art Gallery, 1951-53.
Chapter 8
The Sugden House 1955-56 & The Mother’s House 1959-64
Part 3 Communities and the City

Introduction

The study of the Sugden House and the Mother’s House will be incomplete without looking at them in relation to the public realm and the community that they belong. Both houses are essentially dwellings in the most traditional sense. Each provides a home to a family: the Sugdens with their three children, whilst Venturi lived with his mother for a few years before moving out with Denise Scott Brown soon after they got married. The ‘dwelling’, in comparison to any other building types, is perhaps the most private and profane. A typical human being spends more time in a dwelling than any other building type. It is also the most important building type known to man, as inquiries into the origin and essence of building have tended to focus on the house. Private as it is, the dwelling is the first point where an individual gain her sense of place in the community, in the city and in history.

Hence, there is a strong relationship between dwelling and the larger context, between the private and public realm, that simply cannot be ignored. The Smithsons realise the significance of this relationship when they wrote the following:

‘The task of our generation is plain – we must identify man with his house, his community, his city.’

In the fifties and the sixties, the Smithsons were seeking for a more complex and sympathetic relation to existing urban tissue and new urban functions. The Golden Lane Housing scheme (Figure 2. 2) is one of their proposals which examine the potentials of such relationship. Essentially, it explores the human and his association to his environment in successive levels of relationships: the dwelling, the street, the district and the ‘ruined’ city in the form of housing blocks with multi-level continuous streets-in-the-air. These streets form ‘horizontal mesh’ would be sufficiently flexible to slot into the
vertical circulation of other buildings in the attempt to fuse the new with the existing, revalidating and reorganising them to suit new requirements of the city (Figure 8.1).

Figure 8.1: Streets-in-the-air of the Golden Lane Housing can be linked together in a multi-level continuous complex. Alison & Peter Smithson

Schemes like the Golden Lane housing, able to absorb the complexities of urban structure, were proposed based on the dissatisfaction with the analytical/fuctionalist mentality inherited from the modern movement as a whole. The Smithsons share such sentiments with a group of like-minded young European architects, collectively known as Team 10. Led by the Smithsons, the group was directed towards philosophies where

2 The Smithsons for example wrote, ‘Young architects today feel a monumental dissatisfaction with the buildings they see going up around them. For them, the housing estates, the social centres and the block of flats are meaningless and irrelevant.....They are dissatisfied with the ideas these buildings represent, the ideas of the Garden City Movement and the Rational Architecture Movement.’ Smithson, Alison (editor), *Team 10 Primer*, Studio Vista London, pp.82.
3 *Ibid*, pp.75
architectural and planning concepts are never autonomous, but always working in relation to the existing state.

Underlying the work of Team 10 is a particular emphasis on the relationship between man, his dwelling and the urban context as a whole. Team 10’s Doorn Manifesto⁴, for example, stresses the need to consider the house as part of a community owing to the interaction of these on each other⁵. This is based on the fact that identity is easily lost in a mobile society and as such, community should be built up from a hierarchy of associational elements and tries to express the various level of association: the house, the village, the towns and the cities. One of the points of the manifesto sternly states that, ‘we should not waste our time codifying the elements of the house until the other relationship has been crystallized.’⁶ Both the structure and ecology of a community are deemed important in establishing the particular design and grouping of dwellings and this includes not only the study of the patterns of life and ‘patterns of reality’ of just an individual or a family, but of the whole community.

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⁴ The Doorn Manifesto was drafted when the nucleus of angry young men (and women) met together outside the sphere of the CIAM establishment in Doorn in late January 1954. In fact it was here that Team 10 first convene, anticipating its official formation. The Doorn manifesto is an initial attempt to formulate its members’ shared attitude and it advanced the concept of ‘human association’ as a first principle and which is to be studied in a hierarchy of successive levels of association: house, street, district and city, inspired by the ‘valley section’ of Patrick Geddes. For Geddes’ valley section, see Geddes, Patrick, Architect’s Year Book 12, London, 1968, pp.65-71.

⁵ The Doorn Manifesto was the common basis on which the incipient Team 10 was able to agree, and which was to remain fundamental to Team 10 thinking. The declaration formed the basis specifically for the discussion of CIAM 10 held at Dubrovnik in 1956 and contains the following:

1) It is useless to consider the house except as a part of a community owing to the inter-action of these on each other.
2) We should not waste our time codifying the elements of the house until the other relationship has been crystallized.
3) Habitat is concerned with the particular house in the particular type of community.
4) Communities are the same everywhere. Detached house-farm, Village, Towns of various sorts and Cities.
5) They can be shown in relationship to their environment (habitat) in the Geddes valley section.
6) Any community must be internally convenient – have ease of circulation; in consequence, whatever type of transport is available, density must increase as population increases.
7) We must therefore study the dwelling and the groupings that are necessary to produce convenient communities at various points on the valley section.
8) The appropriateness of any solution may lie in the field of architectural invention rather than social anthropology.

See Smithson, Team 10 Primer, pp.75
That considerations of specificity, references to the particular setting, and more importantly, that the inclusion of experiential factors are essential to the design of a dwelling or dwellings is echoed in Robert Venturi’s work and the circle of intellectuals and architects to which he is linked at the time when the Mother’s House was built. In Chapter Five of this study, we found that G. Holmes Perkins, dean of the Graduate School of Fine Arts (GSFA), Pennsylvania University, where both Venturi and Denise Scott Brown taught, was instrumental in introducing the idea that buildings in relation to the collective structure to which they belong encompass not only complex urban processes but also complexities of social hierarchies. This thinking is not far from Team 10’s approach to architecture and urban planning. There is evidence of a more direct exchange of ideas between the members of Team 10 and GSFA faculty members when Aldo van Eyck, a prominent member of Team 10 was appointed visiting professor at the faculty in 1960. The Dutch architect’s interest was primarily on the essence of architecture that reflects the complexities of human existence. Van Eyck’s influence on Robert Venturi is obvious from the examination of Venturi’s polemical writing advancing the theory of the complex and pluralist city in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. More influential than Van Eyck perhaps, had been Louis Kahn, with

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6 *Ibid*

7 As already mentioned in Chapter Five, Robert Venturi belonged to a group of architects running small firms and part-time teachers who were associated with Louis Kahn. Known collectively as the ‘the greys’ or ‘Philadelphia School’, it includes Venturi, Ronaldo Giurgola and Charles Moore. They were strongly influenced by Louis Kahn who was looking to return architecture to semblance of historical form. See Lobell, Mimi, *Postscript: Kahn, Penn and the Philadelphia School*, Opposition 4, October 1974, pp.63-64.


9 A summary of Aldo Van Eyck’s activities at the GSFA and at CIAM is made in Chapter Five of this study. For more comprehensive information on Aldo van Eyck’s interests and architecture, see Strauven, Francis, *Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of Relativity*, Architectura & Natura, Amsterdam, 1998.

10 For example, Venturi, in the introduction to *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* referred to Aldo van Eyck’s plea for the ‘constant rediscovery of constant human qualities’ by quoting the Dutchman: ‘Modern Architects have been harping continually on what if different in our time to such an extent that even they have lost touch with what is not different, with what is always the same.’ See Venturi, Robert, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture, The Architectural Press, London, pp.22. Van
whom Venturi was working and teaching at the GSFA. Through schemes such as the Yale Art Gallery, Trenton Bathhouse and Philadelphia urban design proposals - all centred around a symbolic language, loosely drawn from history - Kahn was steering his younger colleagues away from the rigid and rational idiom of the Modern Movement. Kahn’s influence was not limited to his American students only, but also to those across the Atlantic. Through the examination of the Smithsons’ writing, we find that the English couple too were highly influenced by Kahn, particularly by his Philadelphia schemes

Nevertheless, even before Venturi knew Aldo van Eyck and Kahn, we find that Venturi was already embarking on an in-depth exploration of the relationship between the new and the existing in his final year thesis. The thesis, titled Context in Architectural Composition, was written in 1950 at Princeton University. The gist of the thesis was that existing conditions around the site should become a part of any design problem: the setting giving the building expression, the context giving building meaning. The value of context was examined by looking at the buildings within the context of organic planning of the city of Rome, while the second part emphasises the importance of setting in American domestic architecture. The latter looks at the design of a house and housing, particularly their composition and formal relationships in different dwelling types. It firstly examines the house in the country i.e. Wright’s Johnson House in Racine, then the suburban house, i.e. the Simpson-Hoffman house in Salem, Massachusetts 19th century and Koch House, Snake Hill, Belmont, 20th century, followed by the very urban apartment units i.e. Aluminium Terrace Apartment, Pittsburgh, c.1940 and Runtung Apartment, Leipzig, Germany, c.1935.

Eyck made the plea at CIAM 1959 at Otterlo. See Newman, Oscar, CIAM '59 in Otterlo: Group for research of social and visual inter-relationships, Alec Tiranti Ltd. London, 1961.pp 27
This study of dwellings and their context in a hierarchy of contextual association by Venturi is an echo of the Smithsons' presentation of dwelling types at CIAM 10 at Dubrovnik in 1956. As already mentioned in Chapter Five of this study, the English couple presented five housing projects in correspondence to five successive levels of urbanisation: Burrows Lea Farm, an isolated country house in Surrey; Galleon Cottages, an extension to a small village; Fold Houses, an 'infill' type dwelling in a large village; Close Housing, a group of dwellings part of rural new town and terraced houses, a 6-storey housing complex in an industrial suburb of a large city (See Figure 5. 4).

In contrast to the usual CIAM approach to town planning in terms of functions, the Smithsons and Venturi highlighted the significance of a hierarchy of successive levels of association, thus giving form to the idea that dwellings in the city are not isotropic, barely differentiated 'urban structures' as characterised by the Modern Movement, but rather, a part of distinct clearly delineated settlements which would have specific structures and specific characters according to their natural situation and size, analogously to traditional villages and towns. When they came to design the Sugden House and the Mother's House, we will find such deviation from modernist planning approach is apparent as context, in terms of meaning, ordering, human logistics and aspirations became strong driving forces in design.

Complex Patterns of A City

The Smithsons had always been interested in designing dwelling prototypes. To name but a few, there is the Appliance House, 1956-58 (Figure 8. 2), the Snowball House, 1956 (Figure 8. 3), the Bread House, 1956 (Figure 8. 4), and the Portico Row and the 'Wareite' or White Formica House, 1957 (Figure 8. 5). These prototypes illustrate the Smithsons concern with building in a city and its communities, as each of these is repeatable in serried ranks and extendible to form neighbourhoods. For example, their House of the Future for the Ideal Home Exhibition, 1956, another prototype, with no apparent

\[15\] Ibid
openings on the external façade, apart from the entrance shutter gate, allows proximate grouping into a dense mass. The prototype is to be arranged in what the Smithsons called the ‘Fougasse layout’, designed to be built up to a density of seventy or eighty houses per acre (Figure 8.6).

Figure 8.2: The Appliance House, 1956-58, Alison & Peter Smithson

Figure 8.3: Snowball House, 1956, Alison & Peter Smithson


17 On this layout, the Smithsons wrote, ‘Fougasse Layout, designed to be built up into a ‘mat’ of a density of seventy and eighty houses to the acre. This aspect was perhaps overstated to counteract the accepted idea that the prefabricated house must mean a detached cottage centred in a garden plot’. *Ibid*, pp. 162.
Figure 8.4: Bread House, 1956, Alison & Peter Smithson

Figure 8.5: The Portico Row and the 'Warcite' or White 'Formica' House, 1957, Alison & Peter Smithson

Figure 8.6: The Fougasse Layout for the House of the Future, 1955-56, Alison & Peter Smithson
The same holds for the Sugden House. At the tenth CIAM meeting at Dubrovnik in 1956, the house was presented as a prototype\textsuperscript{18} for ‘true suburban developments’ where houses are built from standard elements, ‘to form an economic and continuous building operation’\textsuperscript{19}. These will be strung along a covered pedestrian street or ‘close’ which twisted and branches irregularly to fill specific sites, riding the landscape without destroying much of it (Figure 8. 8, Figure 8. 9 & Figure 8. 10). Each ‘close house’ can be different, but they all back onto the ‘close’ on both sides to create the covered walkway which open alternately on left and right through a portico into the garden of each house (Figure 8. 7). Designed for ‘rural new towns’, each house will have large gardens towards the back – very much like the Sugden House - to suit individual requirements, ‘as were the early industrial, speculative houses for the middle classes’\textsuperscript{20}. With car parking grouped off the ‘close’, the covered pedestrian street becomes a safe social interaction space, enhancing strong communal ties. The ‘closes’ can develop their own identity, as each can be potentially different.

\textsuperscript{18} The Sugden House will have to go through some alteration before it can fit into the ‘close house’ concept. For example, the first floor will have to be made cantilever over the pedestrian street and the roof configurated to catch the sun as suggested by the Smithsons. See Ibid, pp. 136-137.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, pp. 136.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, pp. 136.
Figure 8. 8: Close House System

Figure 8. 9: Cluster of Close Houses. Motor traffic enters this vertebrae system at the interruptions in the runs of buildings, and it parks there without penetrating further.

Figure 8. 10: Close Houses ride the landscape. Urban, yet without destroying the feel of the landscape.
The Close Houses is just one of the 'orders' in the Smithsons' version of a city: the 'Cluster City'\textsuperscript{21} (Figure 8. 11). It essentially consists of different dwelling types in 'clusters' reminiscent of the existing farms, villages, towns and city centres. The Smithsons suggested 'fold-houses' for rural areas and village infill and extension, the close houses for suburban areas and terraced crescent housing for infill developments in an 'industrial quarter of a Metropolis'\textsuperscript{22} (Figure 5. 4, Chapter Five). These clusters of different dwelling types are arranged around a framework of 'urban motorways' based on concentric rings of decreasing densities away from the centre. The city will hence develop as a population of clusters (Figure 8. 11), each working and living in different building types that have appropriate relationships to motor traffic and the city centre itself.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{cluster-city.png}
\caption{Cluster City with population of clusters.}
\end{figure}


The Cluster City, with its efficient system of service and communication allows for freedom of growth and change around a clear and indestructible basic structure. A lot less geometric than the Ville Radieuse and more complex than the New Towns, Cluster City makes room for complexities of urban growth experienced by ‘natural cities’, described by Christopher Alexander as those cities which have arisen more or less spontaneously over many, many years.

The concept of ‘Sugden houses’ potentially being strung along ‘closes’ that may be short or long, straight or curved, flexible enough to respond to individual and community needs, topography and different town organisation patterns reflects the Smithsons’ strong criticism of housing. While the Golden Lane offers a critique of post-war high-density housing in Britain, Close Housing was conceived in particular reference to the shortcomings of contemporary suburbia: New Towns. In the late fifties, New Towns such as Harlow and Stevenage in England were being conceived based loosely on CIAM’s approach, Ebenezer Howards’ vision of the Garden City and the campaigns of the Town and Country Planning Association from the 1930’s and 1940’s. Harlow’s masterplanner, Frederick Gibberd reiterated CIAM’s ideals when he wrote of making ‘a

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23 ‘Natural cities’ as oppose to ‘artificial cities’ which have been deliberately created by designers and planners. According to Alexander, Siena, Liverpool, Kyoto, Manhattan are examples of ‘natural cities’ while Levittown, Chandigarh, and the British New Towns are artificial cities. See Alexander, Christopher, A City is Not a Tree, Architectural Forum, April 1965, vol.58-62.

24 The Dudley Report 1944 and the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act gave official blessing to the planning of ‘New Towns consisting of ‘integrated neighbourhood’. Many hundreds of neighbourhood units have been created by new buildings or by refurbishing and extending the existing areas of towns. Because both the Dudley Report and Town and Country Planning Act consist more of a set of guidelines rather than prescribed rigid formula, they have been adopted invariably and sometimes occasionally. In all cases, the aims of neighbourhood units are aesthetic and economic, but most importantly social – to create a feeling of identity and sense of community. The New Town Act received Royal Assent in the summer of 1946, giving mandate to the following recommendations: new towns should be in the size range 20,000-60,000; they should generally be built by public corporations, one for each town, financed directly by the Exchequer. Between then and 1950, the governing party – the Labour Government – designated thirteen New Towns in Britain: eight for the London area, two for Scotland, two in north-east England, one in Wales and one in the English midlands. See Sutcliffe, Anthony, British Town Planning: the formative years, Leicester University Press, St. Martin’s Press, 1981.

distinct separation between areas for work, homes and play' in his designs\(^{26}\). Implicit in the design ideas of Harlow is also the concern for the shaping of space through picturesque siting of buildings\(^{27}\), an echo of an approach first advanced by Camillo Sitte in *Town Planning According to Artistic Principles*\(^{28}\) and later interpreted by Raymond Unwin in *Town Planning in Practice*\(^{29}\). Despite such good intentions, the neighbourhoods in Harlow failed to create any feeling of urbanity at all, mainly due to the low densities imposed at 30-50 people per acre\(^{30}\) (Figure 8.12). The apparent failure of New Towns - vast expanse of rain-swept asphalt and grass, the absence of any vertical scale, either from trees or buildings - was quickly picked up by critics such as J.M. Richards and Gordon Cullen, who both wrote *The Failure of the New Towns* and *Prairie Planning in the New Towns*, respectively.\(^{31}\)


\(^{27}\) For example, in the discussion of civic areas in *Landscaping the New Town*, Gibberd illustrates the arrangement of buildings and spaces in towns and cities with examples as varied as Aylesbury and the Rockefeller Centre, New York, in the same terms used by Raymond Unwin in his presentation of the special qualities of the little German town at Buttstedt. See *Ibid*.


Figure 8.12: Harlow New Town: Views of the first housing areas

The exasperation at missed opportunities was trenchantly expressed by the Smithsons. In their article, *An Alternative to the Garden City Idea*, they condemned New Towns and 'developed' cities and villages for being designed based on 'Art' but not 'pattern of life'32. In another article, *The Built World: Urban Reidentificaton*, they condemned both the Garden City movement and the founders of CIAM, for failing to meet contemporary needs:

*Each generation feels a new dissatisfaction, and conceives of a new idea of order. This is architecture. Young architects to-day feel a monumental dissatisfaction with the buildings they see going up around them. For them, the housing estates, the social centres and the blocks of flats are meaningless and irrelevant. They feel that the majority of architects have lost contact with reality and are building yesterday's dreams when the rest of us have woken up in today. They are dissatisfied with the ideas these buildings*

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represent, the ideas of the Garden City Movement and the Rational Architecture Movement.\textsuperscript{33}

For the Smithsons, an alternative to New Towns is a development that is derived from 'continuous objective analysis of human structure and its change'\textsuperscript{34}. Based on this principle, the Smithsons advocated the idea of 'open city' where a system or framework is to be laid, offering tangible possibilities by connecting spaces and which would suggest, rather than prescribe use. It is an idea that is applied to a number of Team 10 projects such as the Smithsons' proposal for the Cluster City (Figure 8. 11), Berlin Haupstadt (Figure 5.18 & Figure 5.19, Chapter Five) and Candilis, Josic and Woods' Free University of Berlin\textsuperscript{35} (Figure 8. 13).

Figure 8. 13: Free University of Berlin, 1963, Candilis, Josic and Woods


\textsuperscript{34} Elaborating on the content of such an analysis, the Smithsons explained, 'Such an analysis would not only include "what happens": "the organism's habits, modes of life and relations to their surroundings", such things as living in certain places, going to school, travelling to work and visiting shops, but also "what motivates", the reasons for going to the particular schools, choosing that type of work and visiting those particular shops. In other words, trying to uncover a pattern of reality which includes human aspirations. See Smithson, An Alternative to the Garden City Idea, pp.230.

\textsuperscript{35} The Smithsons’ proposal for Berlin Haupstadt, 1957, consists of pedestrian platform net of ‘variable mesh’, capable of relating to the pattern of any pre-existing fabric onto which it is laid. The trio, Candilis, Josic and Woods, proposed open-ended pedestrian streets extendable in one or two directions – called the ‘stem’ or ‘web’ - that are separated from high-speed traffic below in schemes such as urban proposals for Toulouse-le-Mirail, France, 1961 and Free University of Berlin, 1963. See Smithson, Urban Structuring: Studies of Alison & Peter Smithson.pp. 49-58. Also see Smithson, Team 10 Primer, pp.61-66.
Louis Kahn had been a strong influence in leading the Smithsons towards the 'open thesis' concept. Kahn’s Plan for Midtown Philadelphia demonstrated that the key to the design of a city is ‘finding expression from the order of movement’36 (See Figure 5.14, Chapter Five). From this order, only then, can one set up a framework as basis for the organic growth of a city. It is also through Kahn’s historical insight that the Smithsons learned to appreciate what makes a city a unique organism: the order of movement and order of spaces of given functions and the ordering of structures. This idea was directly applied to Cluster City where the ordering structures for growth of a city took the form of triangulated urban motorways (Figure 8.14).

![Triangulated Urban Motorway as basis for growth in Cluster City](image)

For Robert Venturi, on the other hand, Kahn demonstrated that by drawing on architecture’s monumental tradition and urban symbolism, one could provide the means to reinforce communal identity. The Philadelphia Center Study which appeared in Perspecta in 1956, is perhaps the most potent image for Venturi (See Figure 5.11, Chapter Five). Reminiscent of the medieval city of Carcassonne, the proposal consists of a new centre with giant cylindrical bodies of parking towers resembling the Coliseum of

Rome and truncated pyramids of Egypt. There is strong social agenda with the proposal of such structures, as aptly pointed out by Sarah Williams Goldhagen, ‘In this plan, he (Kahn) revived his explorations into monumentality and urban symbolism as a means to consolidate communal identity’\(^{37}\). Kahn’s historicising tendencies gave Venturi the impetus to go forward with his own ideas of using symbolic forms – historical and vernacular – to anchor the individual to her community by encouraging recollection of the familiar past and present.

Hence, in the Mother’s House, Venturi responded to the city and its community at large by charging it with visual references. The external form of the house is laden with references that in combination read ‘particular community’. The pitched roof, the prominent entrance and cross framing and perimeter moulding of the windows are references to suburban area and suburban architecture to which it belongs. While Kahn and indeed the Smithsons remained restrained and abstract in their references to historicism, we find Venturi unabashedly employing explicit decorative elements, shaping it based on a mannerist discipline. Ironically, as if to demonstrate Venturi’s divergence from his mentor’s work, Kahn’s Esherick House located just up the road from the Mother’s house, is as alien to its community as the Venturi’s little edifice tries to be a part of it. In addition to this, the Mother’s House also tries to fit into its suburban setting in terms of siting and context. One finds that there is strong conformity to the existing arrangement and pattern of Chestnut Hill in the placement of the Mother’s House at the end of a long driveway so that the façade that greets one is the strong gable with a main entrance and a towering chimney beyond. This arrangement is also ubiquitous throughout suburban America, where typically, the front door faces the street, and at the same time, separated from it by a green lawn but connected by a narrow driveway (Figure 8. 15).

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In comparison to the Sugden House, however, the physical relationship of building to larger groupings or ‘pattern of building arrangement’ is less important for Venturi in the design of the Mother’s House. The latter was designed as a unique detached dwelling, and not as prototype for mass housing as in the Sugden House’s case. Nevertheless, if the Sugden House, in a ‘close’ arrangement is seen to be offering an alternative to what is being built in contemporary suburbia, then the Mother’s House can be seen to be offering support of the phenomenon. The Smithsons found the suburbs surrounded by green belt irrelevant as they were built based on ‘yesterday’s dreams’ of garden cities and Cartesian formality, whereas Venturi, together with Scott Brown saw the large tracts of commercial suburbia in America as something to learn from positively. ‘Learning from the existing landscape, the latter began, ‘is a way of being revolutionary for an architect. Not the obvious way, which is to tear down Paris and begin again, as Corbusier suggested in the 1920s, but another, more tolerant way: that is to question how we look at things’.}

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In fact, the Mother's House will not look out of place in Radburn\(^9\) (Figure 8. 16), an American version of garden city planning in the borough of Fairlawn in New Jersey, 15 miles from Manhattan, built in the thirties. Here, modest vernacular houses cluster cosily alongside the short cul-de-sacs from the distributor road - a motif borrowed directly from Unwin and Parker at Hampstead\(^{40}\). Nevertheless, the Mother's House really belongs to another related American phenomenon: the 'automobile suburb'. The automobile revolution and the opening of freeways in America led developers to conceive highly idealized versions of the automobile city in large scales. The most complete formulation of it, however, came not from a developer but native architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, whose Broadacre City envisaged a rejection of big city living\(^{41}\) (Figure 8. 17). With Broadacre, Wright claimed to recreate the notion of free independent farmers and proprietors, for them to live as individuals who work and lived in the land. Nevertheless, while the Mother's House promotes ordinariness of architecture and construction, Wright was advocating the possibility of a new kind of building with the availability of new building materials and machinery\(^{42}\).

Broadacre was never built, but after World War Two, a suburban building boom created a kind of Broadacre City all over America, without the economic basis and the social order Wright had so steadfastly affirmed\(^{43}\). Some of the most efficiently built have been the

\(^9\) Garden city planning in America is also more commonly known as the 'Radburn layout', which have been implemented in Chatham Village (1932) in Pittsburgh and Baldwin Hills Village (1941) in Los Angeles. The campaigner for new towns in America was Clarence Stein, who also built three brilliant designs that gave the Radburn layout to the planner's vocabulary. See Chapter Four: The City in the Garden in Hall, Peter, Cities of Tomorrow (Updated Version), Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, U.K. & Massachusetts, U.S. A., 1996, pp.122-135.

\(^{40}\) As Stein freely acknowledged in Stein, Clarence, Toward New Towns in America, Liverpool UP, Liverpool, 1958, pp.44.


\(^{42}\) Wright, for example, wrote of new building materials being used. High pressure concrete, glass and 'innumerable broad, thin, cheap sheets of wood, metal or plastics', made a new kind of building possible: 'buildings may be made by machinery going to the building instead of the building going to the machinery. And at the same time, 'machine-shop fabrication' made water and gas and electricity cheaply 'available in quantity for all instead of still more questionable luxuries for the few.' Ibid, pp.37.

\(^{43}\) According to Peter Hall, there were four main foundations for the suburban boom. 'They were new roads, to open up land outside the reach of the old trolley and commuter rail routes; zoning of land uses, to produce uniform residential tracts with stable property values; government guaranteed mortgages, to make possible long-repayment low-interest mortgages that were
'Levittowns' in Pennsylvania and New Jersey (Figure 8.15), which utilises techniques such as flow of production, division of labour, standardized designs and parts, new materials and tools, maximum use of pre-fabricated components, easy credit and good marketing. In most cases, Levittown lacks the charm of the best-planned early suburbs such as Letchworth in England or Radburn in America. The residential streets are slightly too long, too wide and too straight for any kind of visual delight, while the design of the houses were based on a standard Cape Cod vernacular design of pitched roof, shingle board cladding and cross frame windows, all repeated in a limited number of variants. Nevertheless, it is exactly just such banality and ordinariness of suburban commercialism that Venturi urged us to look at closer and learn from. He wrote, for example In Learning from Las Vegas:

'Many people like suburbia. This is the compelling reason for learning from Levittown. In dismissing Levittown, Modern architects, who have characteristically promoted the role of the social sciences in architecture, reject whole sets of dominant social patterns because they do not like the architectural consequences of these patterns. Conversely, by defining Levittown as "silent white majority" architecture, they reject it again because they do not like what they believe to be the silent majority's political views. These architects reject the very heterogeneity of our society that makes the social sciences relevant to architecture in the first place........Developers build for markets rather than for Man and probably do less harm than authoritarian architects would do if they had the developers' power.'

Thus, here, we find significant difference between the Sugden House and the Mother's House, that is, what each is saying about the contemporary mass housing development. The Mother's House' vernacular form and symbolic ornamentation can be seen as a reference to what was regarded as a democratic approach for contemporary times that are more relevant to people's diverse needs and more tolerant of the untidiness of urban life. At the same time, its site arrangement speaks of an acceptance of the roadside civilisation that pervades America. Whereas, the Sugden House, in a linear 'close' arrangement

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44 Levittowns were built by the archetypal firm, which became a legend in its own time for its large scale, economy- and efficiency-conscious operations, capable of building houses like refrigerators or cars. The firm was founded by Abraham Levitt and his sons William and Alfred in 1929, and when they finished their major developments, they had completed more than 17,000 homes housing some 82,000 people: the largest single housing development in history. Ibid, pp.294-295.
marks a rejection of suburban New Towns and the rational planning of the ‘point-block’,
while its straightforward ordinariness and brutal handling of materials demonstrate a
rejection of the pastiche and the kitsch that usually came together with such
developments.

The Natural: Climatic Considerations

It is also worth nothing that establishing a positive relationship with climate and site is an
important criterion in both the Sugden House and the Mother's House. It has, to a certain
extent significant impact on the form, arrangements of rooms, designs of facades and
more importantly, how each sits on site. The most striking is the large sloping roof in
each and their strong sheltering quality. It is a practical solution in both parts of the world
– north London and Philadelphia - where wet and wintry weather conditions pervade for
a large part of the year. It also makes a very reassuring image: it looks as if it would
protect you from the outside and feels as if it fits you on the inside. This quality is found
in most traditional style dwellings found in both houses’ neighbourhood.

In addition, both houses were placed and oriented in a way that takes advantage of the
sun path and views (See Figure 6. 7, 6. 21 and 6. 22). In the Sugden House, large
windows to the living areas and the main bedrooms above face southwest allowing low
sun to penetrate deep into interior spaces in the winter, at the same time allowing views
out to the sweeping garden. In the context of the Close housing layout, the Sugden House
would have undergone some modification to form a 'walk-in-the-dry' covered pedestrian
path and roof reconfigured to allow for split section that would admit southern 'sunlight
and permits new forms of internal planning and new sorts of spaces....together with a
new sense of possession – even access to – the private air above one's head'\(^46\).

The same goes for the Mother's House. Although not explicitly stated by the architect,
some careful thought has been given to the way rooms are arranged to take advantage of
the climate. The open plan living and dining area are towards the back of the house and is

\(^{45}\) Venturi et al., *Learning from Las Vegas*, pp.154-155.

also facing southwest, as in the Sugden House (Figure 8. 18). Windows on this façade are generally full height, encouraging solar gain in winter, and views out to the back garden. Along the front elevation, facing north, are arranged ‘rooms’ and small cubicles – the kitchen, storage, entrance void, toilets and a small bedroom. Above, on the first floor, the stair occupies almost the whole space and the only opening here is small and partly hidden by the parapet wall. All these spaces either need small window opening or no windows at all. On the north façade, this would discourage heat loss through the fabric of the building. Hence, while the rhetorical front façade of the Mother’s House announces in a big way ‘house’ and ‘entrance’, it is also a very private façade, giving little clue as to the goings on in the house. We find the Smithsons employing a similar approach to the north wall of the Sugden House, where lined along it are the garage, fuel stores and yard. Here, due to the dramatic sloping roof, the wall is at its lowest and with only two small windows, heat loss is almost minimal.

![Image](image-url)

**Figure 8. 18: Large windows in both the Sugden House (left) and in the Mother’s House (right) faces southwest**

**Human Aspirations and Patterns of life**

Another principle common to both the Sugden House and the Mother’s House is their carefully considered relationship of form to human life in a community. The Smithsons,
in particular, were pursuing an ecological and anthropological approach to the human environment. As already mentioned in Chapter Five, they were strongly inspired by Nigel Henderson’s photographs recording the elementary patterns of life he perceived in children playing in the street of Bethnal green\(^{47}\). The uninhibited patterns of children playing provided the Smithsons two possible design indications: one, is ‘*an indication of freer sort of organisation*\(^{48}\), such as the action painting of Jackson Pollock (Figure 8. 19) and the *art brut* of Eduardo Paolozzi (Figure 8. 20). In this art, they recognise an order within a structure and a certain tension, where every piece was correspondingly new in a new system of relationship\(^{49}\). Two, is the suggestion that important in the design of habitats in communities is ‘identity’ arising out of clear understanding of a way of life, and with that come the *‘feeling of safety and social bond’*\(^{50}\). The Smithsons also found that identity can develop from obviousness and simple orders found in the existing urban structures: house, street, district and the city.

![Figure 8. 19: Full Fathom Five, 1956, Jackson Pollock](image)

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\(^{47}\) Smithson, *Urban Structuring: Studies of Alison & Peter Smithson*, pp.9-15

\(^{48}\) *Ibid*, pp.10

\(^{49}\) *Ibid*, pp. 34

\(^{50}\) *Ibid*, pp.15
The Smithsons tried to find expression from human’s pattern of life, through their observations of human associations in its particular environment. Here, we find Venturi too focussing on the human experience. ‘He (the architect) can only exclude important considerations only at the risk of separating architecture from the experience of life and the needs of the society.’ For Venturi, human life is complex; there is no reason why architecture shouldn’t be complex too. The making of valid architecture is one that responds to the various chaotic juxtapositions of contradictory elements found in an existing city. This idea was extended further in collaboration with Denise Scott Brown, who suggested architects respond to pluralism of needs. People have diverse taste and how people shape their environment gives us a clue as to what to build. The clue is to be found in the existing pop landscapes created by freeway suburbanization such as Las Vegas and Levittown. Both Venturi and Scott Brown explained that since pop landscape is the place in which we build, it is our context.

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52 Claiming, ‘Main Street is almost alright’, Venturi’s starting point had been an acceptance of all the chaotic juxtapositions of contradictory elements in a city. From this acceptance, rose the belief that there are many valid forces in a city that could legitimately determine the character of his architecture. Architecture could again be potentially rich and exciting by responding to these forces. See Venturi, Robert, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture, The Architectural Press, London, pp.104.
53 See Venturi et al., Learning from Las Vegas.
In comparison, we find both the Smithsons and the Venturis were similarly trying to ‘humanize’ the city, currently under threat by rational planning. ‘Identity’ is to come from consideration of specificity, references to particular setting and the inclusion of humanistic experiential factors, as opposed to the spatial and visual ambiguity found in the generic ideals of Modernism. Nevertheless, for the Smithsons, this is achieved through direct expression of structure and materials. In contrast, we find that Venturi’s commitment to humanity, community and urban landscape at large is carried out mainly through visual references. The Mother’s House, albeit a little strange, looks very much a part of Chestnut Hill, so is Guild House a recognisable Philadelphia city building (Figure 3.16, Chapter Three). Physical elements of suburbia – in this case of Chestnut Hill – such as sheltering roofs, manicured lawns, colonial front doors and windows and decorative elements serve as means of self-expression for suburban residents. Venturi realises that such symbolic overtones are important to the owner of a dwelling as they establish his place in history and on the social scale in a community. Humanising the dwelling in its context for Venturi means having to respond to the surrounding in visual and symbolic terms, no matter how tasteless and colloquial the language may be. This notion, in fact, indicates Venturi and Scott Brown’s later preoccupation with the suburban sprawl and 20th century commercial strip. For their exhibition of 1976, the Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City, they put up images of urban landscapes minimally intervened by architects or planners as representing people’s wants and needs. The Venturis believed that this paradigm possesses a kind of validity that could be introduced back to architecture.

54 The Venturis’ Levittown studio project of 1970, promptly christened Learning from Levittown, examined the ways and the success in which residents and users of Levittown navigated and shaped their own environment to suit their particular needs and aspirations. A book on the study never materialised, but some of the findings did appear in Learning from Las Vegas as well as in the Signs of Life exhibition of 1976 at the Renwick Gallery. See Signs of Life: Venturi/Rauch, Architectural Design, August, 1976, pp. 496-499.
55 Scott Brown, Learning from Pop, Casabella 359-360, 1971, pp. 17
56 The exhibition Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City, held at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC in 1976 sums up these preoccupations. See Signs of Life: Venturi/Rauch, pp. 496-498.
57 Ibid
The Mother’s House, in a sense, represents Venturi’s idea of building in a complex city. The two disengaged facades at the front and back of the house with the internal spaces squeezed in between for the ‘normal running of daily life’ are all about the importance of responding to the dialectic of program and urban context. The two screens – both complex and contradictory - are hence laden with symbols derived, not only from history, but also from suburban America - communicating an individual’s and a community’s aspirations, identity, individual freedom and even nostalgia.

The idea that a building should ‘look’ like its neighbourhood buildings is agreeable to the Smithsons, who wrote:

‘To make the community comprehensible to itself, to give it identity,...is to create building types which by themselves read ‘house’ or ‘church’ or ‘shop’, and which in combination read ‘particular community’.

Like Venturi, the Smithsons sees conformity to recognisable forms as part of a community’s aspirations, but unlike Venturi, Smithsons sense that each individual is constantly striving towards better standard of living and aspiring for values which may be different from what he is used to.

‘There must be inherent in the organization of every building the renewal of the whole community structure...new houses should not just live off...old idea(s), but should give an indication, a sign, of a new sort of community structure’.

The Smithsons explained that the architect cannot ignore the dynamic change of modern times such as advances in technology and aesthetics of European architecture and increasing mobility made possible by more efficient cars and road systems. The architect’s responsibility is thus, to create a genuine image and pattern that is at once progressive yet culturally relevant.

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In order to do so, we find the Smithsons deriving identity not only from existing ‘ttypal-images’, but also from a deep understanding of how to group houses together so that the group has identity and meaning within the community, and discover what form of community buildings can define the political and social objectives best. Hence, rather than emulating existing patterns of urban complexes, the Smithsons suggested that pattern of grouping is to be derived from the simple act of the individual and community going through their daily lives. An analysis of pattern of life and aspirations of a community is essential:

'Such an analysis would not only include "what happens", "the organisms' habits, modes of life and relations to their surroundings", such things as living in certain places, going to school, travelling to work and visiting shops, but also, "what motivates", the reasons for going to particular schools, choosing what type of work and visiting those particular shops. In other words, trying to uncover a pattern of reality which includes human aspirations.  

Hence, while we find the Sugden House taking on a familiar form, yet in a cluster or appreciated unit of Close housing, the house would be arranged in a manner that is almost wholly new but not inflexible. The traffic free internal 'close', which opens alternately on left and right through a portico into the garden of each house, can be seen as an improvement of the Bethnal Green streets the children were playing in. This is consistent with their ever growing conviction that 'family living, except in exceptional circumstances, is best served by relatively low density development, wherever its location'. The houses too offer something new to inhabitants. Each house will be different with a large garden, increasing one's sense of individuality, but their proximate grouping would generate a sense of community and encourage communal activities along

60 Smithson, An Alternative to the Garden City Idea, pp.230
61 By 'appreciated unit', the Smithsons meant 'group concepts', which in effect, replaces typical words such as village, town or the city. This is because they found such words too specific in their historical overtones and for every form of cluster there is an inherent pattern of order that can be appreciated. The Smithsons, for example wrote, 'An appreciated unit is not a 'visual group' or a 'neighbourhood', but a part of a human agglomeration which can be felt. The appreciated units must be different for each type of community.' Smithson, Urban Structuring: Studies of Alison & Peter Smithson, pp.20.
62 Smithson, Alison & Peter, Scatter, Architectural Design, April 1959, pp.149-150.
the ‘close’. Internally, the split section admits sunlight into the centre of the house, giving more possibilities of space use.

At this point, it is completely inaccurate to say that the Mother’s House is not a progressive building, which offers nothing new to modern life. While, the house may look and sit on its site like one of its neighbours, and it offers possibilities of modern living new to traditional style dwellings. Through complex play of plan and sections, the internal planning offers efficiency of space and openness coupled with clever manipulation of daylighting. As already mentioned in Chapter Seven of this study, the sections of the house show high coved spaces and clerestoreys, and clever use of ‘residual spaces’, all made possible by deep spatial layering.

Conclusion

Like the utopian ideas advanced by Le Corbusier such as Radiant City, the Sugden House and the Mother’s House represent a promise of a future for humanity in an environment that would be better than the present. Nevertheless, it was precisely the Modern Utopia that the Smithsons and the Venturis found difficult to relate to. They found the isotropic and barely differentiated urban structures of such cities dehumanising to the human spirit, deeming all individuals indistinguishable and indistinctive. Hence, in the improved alternative advanced by the Smithsons and Venturi, the individual is promised an ‘identity’, one strong enough she could associate with, in the context of community and city that she lives in.

‘Identity’ is uniquely achieved in a number of ways in both the Sugden House and the Mother’s House. At the first two levels of association of the Doorn Manifesto – the house & village, or suburbia in this case – we find both houses’ external form is derived from their suburban context. The Mother’s House makes visual references, symbolically through the addition of ornamentation, while the Sugden House does so tectonically. Despite the different means, the external forms of both houses read in combination ‘particular community’. For Venturi, visual references to the existing were important as it represents the aspirations of the individual within a community, while for the Smithsons,
it was the result of their pursuit of directness and ‘simple obviousness’ developed from looking around the existing. Venturi wanted to make people aware of their taste and propensity, while the Smithsons, of the potentials of what had been nearly discarded by the modern times.

We also find the Smithsons and Venturi deriving identity from responding to the climate, even before the word ‘sustainability’ became a ‘buzzword’ for contemporary architecture. It is a holistic approach that is not apparent at first, but one finds that simple principles of ‘green’ architecture being strictly adhered to in the design of both houses, such as solid facades to the north and transparent ones to the south.

In addition to visual references and climatic considerations, identity was also derived from the physical arrangement of the house in a neighbourhood unit or ‘appreciated unit’. The Smithsons proposed that an analysis of the pattern of life of a community, including their fears and aspirations, is crucial, to gain full understanding before pattern of the neighbourhood unit can be established. That understanding gave form to Close Housing, where a series of houses, not unlike like Sugden House, are arranged across a linear internal street or ‘close’. The traffic-free street, just outside the house, becomes a social place for communal activities, but a sense of belonging is retained by giving each dwelling a garden, which the Smithsons described as ‘a piece of inviolate territory’ or ‘vertical tube of unbreathed private air’\(^{63}\). The Mother’s House, on the other hand, represents Venturi’s response to building on a typical suburban plot: the front door faces the main road and is reached via a vehicular path across the manicured lawn. The house owner would feel a strong sense of belonging, as the house would be surrounded by garden, while the main street could potentially be a social space, but this role may be threatened by vehicular traffic. This arrangement is ordinary and typical of suburbia, but highly contextual. Here, Venturi could almost be saying of suburbia what he had said

earlier about main street America in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*\(^6^4\), that is, 'suburbia' is almost alright.

Hence, while the Mother's House represents a typical dwelling in suburbia in terms of grouping, the Close Housing is, for the Smithsons, an improvement of rural suburbia that they had witnessed and analysed. Close Housing would exist in a complex of old ones, extending and renewing them. A new order is introduced and will be organised plastically to give the existing new meaning, revalidating, modifying and generating new responses from the old communities.\(^6^5\) This seeking of order is partly inspired by the social and physical realities of the existing urban environment, captured photographs of Nigel Henderson and the inherent order seen in the seemingly chaotic works of Jackson Pollock and Eduardo Paolozzi.

The Sugden House and Close Housing show that the Smithsons' consideration of the existing revolved around a sense of calm and order. But in the Mother's House, we find Venturi celebrating its noisy tendencies resulting from the complex juxtapositions of contrasting elements. The Mother's House demonstrate Venturi's recommendation that architects should design individual buildings to accommodate forces of the inside (program) and outside (the city)\(^6^6\). Life is complex; there is no reason why architecture should not be the same. The contrasting of inside and outside may lead to residual spaces and for Venturi, these spaces hold great fascination, as it represents, in a city, the bending of the individual and the community to accommodate each other.

Despite the differences, we find that both the Sugden House and the Mother's House represent the architects' mutual tendency of piecemeal approach in designing in suburbia or city. Both understood that the existing urban structure are in constant dynamic flux,


\(^6^5\) The Smithsons in their explanation of one of their principles for town planning, wrote, 'Any new development exists in a complex of old ones. It must revalidate, by modifying them, the forms of the old communities. The concept of a balanced self-contained community is both theoretically untenable and practically wasteful'. See Smithson, *An Alternative to the Garden City Idea*, pp. 231.

\(^6^6\) Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp. 86.
and the zealous communities that live in them live a complex life, made even more complex by the onset of technology and increasing mobility. Both the Smithsons and Venturi fully understood that the urban structures are temporally ordered, and they are in constant state of renewal. The metamorphosis of site is not simply change, there is always an element of recollection, a dialogue between what already exists and the most recent interventions. The responsibility of proposing new structures in a complex system that is constantly evolving is immense and should thus be carefully considered.

The Sugden House and the Mother’s House, may have differences between them in their approach to the city, but in essence, both demonstrate the fact that an architect would need to embed herself in the culture and socio-economics of an existing community to see what is possible. She hopes that the structure she proposes will generate a reciprocal activity and renewal of the city within an established culture and community, than to condone them stalemate, as had been suggested by the modern forebears in the early twenties and thirties.

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67 The idea that urban structures are temporally ordered is based on the observations and study carried out by Peter Carl of Cambridge University. According to Carl, from the point of view of urban structure, it is evident that all these cycles presented above are hierarchically related, whilst nonetheless allowing for change at particular level of autonomy. The temporally ordered urban structure is in a ‘permanent receptacle of metamorphosis: permanent with respect to its setting and general layout, variously metamorphic in most other respects.’ However, according to Carl, this metamorphosis is not simply change; there is always an element of recollection, a dialogue between what a city has always been and the most recent transformations. This implies that the key to grasping the topography of transformation is the relation between permanence and adaptability. See Carl, Peter, *Urban Density & Block Metabolism*, ARCHITECTURE, CITY, ENVIRONMENT, Proceedings of PLEA 2000, Cambridge, UK, July 2000, pp.343-347.
Chapter 9
The Influence of the Sugden House and the Mother’s House

Introduction
The few years following the completion of the Sugden House, the Smithsons had very little opportunity to build. Nevertheless, they were prolific in developing their ideas, and through paper projects, writing, teaching and debate, Brutalism continued to be discussed. Important publications on the theory such as Scatter\(^1\), Fix: Permanence and Transience\(^2\) and Team Ten Primer\(^3\) strongly defined the movement’s thinking and through Peter Smithson’s outpost as a tutor at the Architectural Association in London between 1955 and 1960, students and architects alike soon became influenced\(^4\). It was already mentioned earlier in Chapter Two that one of the AA students who had been fascinated by the Smithsons and Brutalism was Denise Scott Brown.

Significant shifts in architectural thinking continued throughout the Smithsons’ career, as they persistently and patiently continued their exploration of contemporary modernity. They built sparingly, something that they regretted\(^5\), but each commission for them presented an opportunity to discover the potential of a new form and new language of Brutalism. Robert Maxwell, remarked on their obstinacy that borders on being a special kind of patience: ‘For them, above all, the project of modernity remains an unfinished

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1. Smithson, Alison & Peter, Scatter, Architectural Design, April, 1959, pp.149-50
4. Peter Smithson claimed to have re-organised the syllabus during his tenure at the AA towards the notion of context thinking, by which he meant: ‘...a new thing has to be thought through in the context of existing patterns...patterns of human association, use, movement, form, noise, stillness, etc....and that a design for a building on ground could not be evolved outside its context.’ Smithson, Peter, The Slow Growth of Another Sensibility: Architecture as Townbuilding, in Gowan, James (editor), A Continuing Experiment: Learning and Teaching at the Architectural Association, The Architectural Press, (London), 1975,pp.60.
project. They have never submitted to the easy solution, are always in search of something fresh and uncontaminated.\(^6\)

Robert Venturi's architectural thinking, on the other hand, took a significant but unsurprising shift very soon after the completion of the Mother's House. It is a shift largely influenced by what Venturi witnessed in Las Vegas. Two years after *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* was published, Denise Scott Brown, whom at the time was teaching at UCLA and was about to take up a new teaching position at Yale, invited Robert Venturi to visit the gambling city with her for a four-day trip.\(^7\) That trip had a profound influence on Venturi. From there on, the small doses of popular culture overlaying the historical and formalist argument in his first book were to take on greater significance in the later work. Venturi and Scott Brown also got married in 1967 and co-authored a number of articles on their forays in Las Vegas,\(^8\) which later culminated in a book titled *Learning from Las Vegas* published in 1971.\(^9\) The shift of emphasis in the second book is clear: whereas in the former Venturi emphasised the importance of formal manipulation of mass and space in architecture in response to the pluralism found in a complex city; now the latter publication pronounced the significance of the commercial and popular vernacular by asserting that communication and symbolism are the two most important social functions of architecture. Although the comparative method of visual images in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* was adopted in *Learning from

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\(^7\) The trip was made in November 1968, where the two were said to have been alternately 'appalled and fascinated' by what they saw. Following the trip to Las Vegas was a research project conducted at the Yale School of Art and Architecture in the fall of 1968. Denise Scott Brown had served as a visiting professor of urban design at Yale between 1967 and 1970 with Robert Venturi. The Las Vegas study resulted in *Learning from Las Vegas*, which they had co-authored with a student of theirs at University of Pennsylvania, Steven Izenour, who was at the time completing his master's degree in environmental design at Yale. See Brownlee, David, B., De Long, David G., Hiesinger, Kathryn B., *Out of the Ordinary: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown Associates*, Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, Philadelphia 2001, 248 and Venturi, Robert, Scott Brown, Denise and Izenour, Steven, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Revised Edition), The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1977 (first published 1972).


\(^9\) Venturi et al., *Learning from Las Vegas*
Las Vegas, the Venturis concentrated more on signs and symbols of the commercial vernacular rather than the historical physiognomy that had held Venturi's fascination earlier.

![Figure 9.1: Caesar's Palace signs and statuary, (Learning from Las Vegas)](image)

Despite the shifts in architectural thinking and formulation of new ideas in both the Smithsons' and the Venturis' later work, each pair of architects' early project - the Sugden House and the Mother's House, respectively, - remained significant in influencing their architectural development in subsequent work throughout their career. This Chapter explores the influence of the design of both houses in a selection of their most important projects, in the attempt to further understand the architecture of the dwellings. It will examine the endurance of some of the early theoretical ideas that directed the design of the houses, as well as their obsolescence.

This Chapter will then proceed to examine the significance of the architecture of the Sugden House and the Mother's House on contemporary architecture. A current
resurgence of interest in the work of the Smithsons in Britain, means that their architecture is once again re-examined and evaluated. We will take a closer look at the work of a particular group of young, contemporary and successful British architects, who are particularly drawn to the Smithsons and to the Sugden House in particular. Whereas, in the case of the Mother’s House, we will examine how ideas found in the house, such as ‘inside-out’, ‘things in things’, ‘individual circumstance’, have liberated many younger generation architects from the Cartesian model, and how these have remained significant in influencing contemporary architecture.

Enduring and Shifting Theories
If, in the Sugden House, the Smithsons’ exploration of theories and ideas was somewhat restricted in respect of their clients’ wishes; in the building of their own little summer home – the Upper Lawn Pavilion at Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire, completed in 1961 – they had free reign (Figure 9. 2). Here, we see the ‘as found’ theory being integrated not only in terms of materiality and form, but also in terms of site and context. The design of the pavilion rose from a strong awareness of objects found in its ruined site, which consists of parts of wall and chimney of an old farm building, enclosing garden wall, and a courtyard\textsuperscript{10} (Figure 9. 3). The new addition is a rectangular volume precisely placed adjacent to the existing outer wall. This new volume makes the existing chimney its centre, inevitably, taking over only part of the footprint of the existing farm building. This intervention means that the found objects on site take on different meaning and significance within their new context.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} The Smithsons bought the property in 1958, part of a group of farm buildings including a stone cottage that had been served with demolition order. The farmstead is located within the estate of Fonthill, owned by William Beckford (1760-1844) who instigated the building of one of the largest and most expensive private buildings at the time (1796). He also made changes to the extensive wooded countryside as well as paths and walls. The Smithsons had visited the site as early as 1950, and Peter Smithson later mentioned that Alison knew the place as a child. See Krucker, Bruno, Complex Ordinariness: The Upper Lawn Pavilion by Alison and Peter Smithson, gta Verlag, ETH Zurich, 2002.

\textsuperscript{11} For example, the external area where the former building once stood has a new close relationship to the interior space. Similarly modified is the relationship of two window openings in the existing wall to the new building. One window assumes its original role of opening to the interior space, while the other provides a view out from the small courtyard, essentially forming a metaphorical outdoor room.
Figure 9.2: The Upper Lawn Pavilion, near Fonthill, Wiltshire, England, 1961, view from the southeast with folding doors open for summer use

Figure 9.3: The Upper Lawn Pavilion, diagram of assembly
In terms of form, the Upper Lawn could not have been more different than the Sugden House. While the latter is derived from the suburban typology, the flat-roofed cubic form of the former makes strong references to the Modern Movement. Nevertheless, we find that both were designed based on a similar intention towards maximum neutrality of appearance through Brutalist techniques, such as pronounced directness of structural and material handling. For example, the use of standard frame size in the Upper Lawn is repeated on most facades to achieve what the Smithsons called ‘autonomous’, ‘pure’ and ‘neutralizing skin’ that is ‘without rhetoric’. Whereas the interior is perhaps ‘Brutalist’ at its purest: rough concrete floor, exposed stone and plywood walls while services are very basic and generally exposed (Figure 4.15). Like the Sugden House, daily life was celebrated to the full, but here life was also celebrated outdoors by a basic building which opens out to an almost 360 degree panorama.

A similar concern for ‘daily life needs’, construction and materiality was also found in another project of a much bigger scale: Robin Hood Gardens Housing in Tower Hamlets, London, 1970. This project was rather a literal transposition of a design first proposed for the Golden Lane Housing competition of 1952, and hence, its ideas are very much within the spirit and ethos of the post-war period. Like its predecessor, the Robin Hood flats are angled to suit site conditions and have elevated decks named ‘streets-in-the-air’ with many front doors immediately off them to generate activities like the ones witnessed occurring along the bye-law streets of London. While repetitive exposed concrete

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12 This quality, according to the Smithsons, can be seen in Mies van der Rohe’s work such as the on the street façade of apartments at the Weissenhofseidlung Stuttgart, 1927, Silk Factory at Krefeld, 1932-33 and the Lafayette Park in Detroit, 1955. Commenting on the neutral quality of these buildings, the Smithsons wrote the following: ‘In these works, two separate but reciprocal ideas are emerging….an almost autonomous, extremely well made, repetitive, neutralizing skin….and an open-space-structured building recessive, calm, green, urban pattern.’ See Smithsons, Alison & Peter, Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-1972, Latimer New Dimensions, London, 1973, pp.37

13 The Smithsons lived simply in the summer home – they cooked on a stove outside and the whole family slept on rolled-out mattresses on the first floor. Peter had likened days in the pavilion to ‘camping out’. See Withers, Jane, Down to Earth, The Observer, Sunday, 30th November 2003 & Krucker, Complex Ordinariness: The Upper Lawn Pavilion by Alison and Peter Smithson, pp.40.

14 Refer to Chapter Five for description of Golden Lane Housing.

15 As seen observed by Nigel Henderson in his photographs of everyday ‘life-in-the-streets’ of East London. See Nigel Henderson’s photographs reproduced for the presentation of Golden
elements were used almost relentlessly on the facades of dwelling units, with only the structural fins articulated in a lyrical play providing some sort of 'constructed adornment'\textsuperscript{16} (Figure 9. 4). Indeed, the scheme adopted the technologically advanced Swedish SUNDH precasting systems\textsuperscript{17}, which gave high standards of tolerances and finish, and allowed 'brutalist indulgences' such as exposed concrete ceilings and cross walls.

![Image of Robin Hood Gardens, Tower Hamlets, London, 1970](image)

*Figure 9. 4: Robin Hood Gardens, Tower Hamlets, London, 1970*

As the Smithsons were exploring the essence of Brutalism in a number of varied projects, Robert Venturi's architecture in the late sixties and seventies can be seen to be leaning more towards the 'decorated shed' phenomenon explicated in *Learning from Las Vegas*. This demonstrates Denise Scott Brown's greater interest in taxonomy for roadside

\textsuperscript{16}This term is borrowed from A.W.N. Pugin who detested ornamentation applied to buildings that had little to do with construction of buildings. He expounded, for example, 'Architectural features are continually tack'd on buildings with which they have no connexion, merely for the sake of what is termed effect; and ornaments are actually constructed, instead of forming the decoration of construction, to which in good taste they should always be subservient.' Davey, Peter, *Arts and Crafts Architecture*, Phaidon Press Limited, London, 1995 edition, pp.15-16.

\textsuperscript{17}Smithson, Alison & Peter, *Robin Hood Gardens London E14* Architectural Design, September 1972, pp. 560.
communication\textsuperscript{18}. Two fire stations – Fire Station No.4, Columbus, 1966-68 (Figure 9. 5) and Dixwell Fire Station, 1967-74 (Figure 9. 6) are quintessential ‘decorated sheds’ exemplary of the kind of work produced after the Mother’s House. Both fire stations adopted a false front that disguised the rather complicated program of garage and sleeping quarters behind. In the first building, a hose-drying tower rose symbolically bearing the ever-important text and graphics that signifies its function, while in the other, the front facade is made up of red-bricks and bearing across it is the name of the station in large bold letters. Perhaps, the best example of ‘decorated shed’ to come out of the Venturis’ office during this period would have to be their competition entry for the National Collegiate Football Hall of Fame, New Jersey, 1967\textsuperscript{19} (Figure 9. 7). Here the symbolic language of ‘heraldry’ in the form of text or written sign is used on a large signboard with 2000 programmable lights facing the parking lot, picnic ground and nearby Stadium, while behind this stupendous sign is a simple ‘shed’ containing the grandstand facing a real practice field.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{fire_station_no_4}
\caption{Fire Station No.4, Columbus, Indiana, 1966-68}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{18} Even before the publication of \textit{Learning from Las Vegas} in 1972, Scott Brown had already written on the subject. For example her essay of 1965, titled ‘The Meaningful City’, maintained the potency of relevant architecture being governed by messages conveyed through both ‘physiognomy’, that is sizes and shapes of buildings and the spaces around them, and by ‘heraldry’, that is written and graphic signs. See Scott Brown, Denise, \textit{The Meaningful City}, AIA Journal, vol.43, January 1965, pp.30.
In all these later schemes, the architectural ideas used are still very much related to the Mother's House, in terms of disengaged facades, the use of basic and ordinary forms, as well as the use of symbols to communicate. However, they communicate not only through 'physiognomic' symbols based the ordinary and commercial, but also the 'heraldic', that is, in the form of large bold graphics or 'supergraphics', which the Venturis have seen and admired in main street Las Vegas. Another strong contrast

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between the work of this period and the Mother’s House would be the lack of historical content, and missing too are some of the formalist planning such as implicit symmetry and diagonal walls.

Nevertheless, the design for two holiday cottages on a moor by the sea in Nantucket, New England in 1970 for David Trubek and George Wislocki (Figure 9. 8), can be seen as a return to first principles found in the Mother’s House. Here, we find that both concepts of ‘superadjacency’\(^{20}\) and ‘inflection’\(^{21}\) are immediately apparent in the picturesque siting of the pair of houses. While each house has the one of its long facades facing the sea, the studied misalignment of the siting is, according to their designers, ‘like that of the Greek temples at Selinunte, in Sicily’\(^{22}\). At the same time, distortions of the ordinary gave the holiday cottages a similar sort of strangeness as that of the Mother’s House. The tight eaves and the use of shingles on the roof and facades allow walls and roof to flow together, forming a solid mass, giving the appearance of a rather strange all-round protection that is the vital characteristic of a dwelling. The larger of the two houses – the Trubeck House- is big enough to contain some of the spatial layering and vertical distortion of linings that had earlier characterised the Chestnut Hill House. For example, the main entrance of the Trubeck house is pulled back into a niche through means of detached lining behind the skin of the building. Internally, the diagonal planning favoured by Khan\(^{23}\) makes its appearance, but Venturi had mischievously avoided the crucial formal 45-degree angle, and instead placed both the stair and kitchen wall at an arbitrary angle. The stair at this angle does not quite align itself to the diagonal cut of external wall

\(^{20}\) Superadjacency, according to Venturi, ‘is inclusive rather than exclusive. It can relate contrasting and otherwise irreconcilable elements; it can contain opposites within a whole; it can accommodate the valid non sequitur; and it can allow a multiplicity of levels of meaning’. Venturi, Robert, Venturi, Robert, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, (Second Edition), The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture, The Architectural Press, London, 1977 (first published in the U.S. in 1966), pp.61

\(^{21}\) According to Venturi, by inflecting toward something outside themselves, parts contain their own linkage; ‘inflected parts are more integral with the whole than are uninflected parts. Inflection is a means of distinguishing diverse parts while implying continuity’. Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, pp.88-90.

\(^{22}\) Quote appeared in Brownlee et al., Out of the Ordinary: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Associates, pp.55.

and on plan the juxtaposition looks uncomfortable. Nonetheless, as Venturi has justified in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, such inconsistencies in architecture are valid and appropriate, as they will lead to richness and vitality. 24

![Figure 9. 8: Trubek and Wislocki Houses, Nantucket, Massachusetts, 1970-72](image)

**Planning for Cities**

The Smithsons’ exploration of Brutalism continued in perhaps their most significant project of this period: the Economist Building, St, James’ Street, London, 1965 (Figure 9. 9). Here, we find the Smithsons had developed a gentler, yet, more complex language of Brutalism than that seen in previous projects. With the new found optimism of post-war Britain, the plan itself employs a central service core, then considered new and ‘state of the art’, while the skin is assembled using the serial production techniques of machined stone and aluminium extrusions. Roach Bed Portland stone cladding was used as column cappings and spandrel panels on the façade. Anticipating weathering and deep staining from pollutants, the façade was detailed to channel rainwater from the window sills down the stove-enamelled aluminium channel gutters. There is studied restraint and refinement

24 Venturi wrote, for example, ‘.... “contradiction juxtaposed” involves the shock treatment. (Its) contradictory relationships become manifest in discordant rhythms, directions, adjacencies, and especially in what I shall call superadjacencies – the superimpositions of various elements. Superadjacency can result in a real richness as opposed to the surface richness of the screen which is typical of “serene” architecture.’ See Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp.56 & 61
with the detailing of the facades that is much inspired by Mies van der Rohe. From Mies, the Smithsons learned that perfection of detailing and handling of materials as luxury, be it marble, travertine, steel, glass, bricks or even cement rendering, can bring out the essence of the materials, such that 'ordinariness of the programme and the site is raised to a kind of dignity'. For the Smithsons, this approach produced a neutral aesthetic close to a calm ideal, which they saw synonymous with architecture without rhetoric.

The Smithsons also seemed to have been testing ideas of planning in the Economist, which they have first proposed for Berlin Haupstadt 1957 (Figure 5.18). Nevertheless, here the ideas take on a new theoretical term: 'pavilion and route'. This was described as a principle to be applied to the organisation of buildings in proximity, whereby, 'each of these buildings or building groups has the same simple organisational base of clearly separate, near symmetrical elements hooked onto, or bedded into, a much freer circulation system'. This principle led to the decision of separating the building complex into three separate blocks with a raised plaza above the circulation of traffic to create a 'calm space' within the city. This sequence of open space in the Economist opened up the interior of the block integrating it with the street system. In such an arrangement, the Economist proposes a distinct alternative to the conventional type of 'slab on a podium' development of the time, which is a significant achievement. This idea has its roots in the Smithsons' earlier proposal for Berlin. Like the Berlin proposal, the 'pavilion and the route' theory of the Economist, in essence, is an attempt to limit the

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25 The Smithsons for example wrote, '...for even the earliest Mies work is made with materials of the finest quality detailed with great care – the marble, travertine, plate glass, and nickle-plated steel of the Barcelona Pavilion; the vast veneered-wood doors and careful brickwork of the Krefeld Houses'. See Smithson, Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-72, pp. 19-20.
28 The plaza with its ground pattern pulls together the seemingly ad-hoc positioning of buildings, creating at the same time strong sense of energy ordered and controlled, where one is able again to feel decent calm and its patrician sense of place. 'It is a place' the Smithsons wrote, 'where you can breathe and feel like a man.' In such an arrangement, the Economist also looks very much a small piece of Berlin Haupstadt of 1957, of which consists of pedestrian platform net of 'variable mesh', capable of relating to the pattern of any pre-existing fabric onto which it is laid. See Smithson, Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-72, pp. 14. For Berlin Haupstadt, see Smithson, Urban Structuring: Studies of Alison & Peter Smithson, pp. 49-58.
open-ended approach to planning within a limited framework, which would inevitably lead to 'calmness' in a city. When looked at closely, this idea is also not extremely remote from that of Close Housing, where a series of 'Sugden Houses' are stringed along a pedestrian path or 'covered close'. The planning of both the Economist and Close Housing are related to the 'open thesis' theory described in Chapter Eight of this study. Both represent an attempt to create 'a freer sort of organisation', in the attempt to replace the 'diagrammatic, formalistic and legalistic' formal planning of CIAM.

Figure 9.9: The Economist Building, St. James's, London, 1960-64

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30 The Smithsons were referring particularly to the *Athens Charter* of 1933 published by CIAM, in their criticism of Modern planning. See Smithsons, Alison & Peter, *Cluster City: A New Shape for the Community*, The Architectural Review, November 1957, pp.333-336.
In the previous Chapter Eight, we find that while the Smithsons had a tendency to introduce a new order to the existing with flexible frameworks that allow organic growth, the Venturis approach planning with a higher degree of acceptance of the existing conditions. This is apparent in their urban projects. Denise Scott Brown, armed with a strong background in planning was heading projects in the office that were based on preservation and revitalization. The Franklin Court in Philadelphia, 1972-76, (Figure 9.10) for example, captures the typical essence of the urban renewal work carried out by the office in the seventies. On a small urban site where Benjamin Franklin’s long demolished family house once stood, the Venturis’ erected a steel skeleton in replica of the house, while excerpts of the Franklin’s letters and household records were inscribed on the ground paving. In another project called the Western Plaza, later renamed Freedom Plaza in Washington D.C., 1977-79 (Figure 9.11), the Venturis paved an urban square near the White House with a portion of a plan of the city. They placed on it, in the appropriate places, miniature three-dimensional models of the White House and Capitol, and inscribed thirty-nine quotations about the city on the black granite and white marble paving.

Figure 9.10: Franklin Court, Philadelphia, 1972-76
These urban projects by the Venturis achieved the ironic marriage of high and low culture, as each is characterised by representations of history and context in highly contrived schematic forms and large text inscribed on unlikely surfaces. This approach upholds the gist of both *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture and Learning from Las Vegas*, that is, the change of context of the ordinary and familiar leads to heightened sensorial urban experience, but in these projects they remain nostalgically romantic within the American context. They also remain small in scale and piecemeal, in comparison to the Smithsons’ grand visions, to improve not only the future developments of the city but also the overall connectivity and freedom of movement within large parts of it.

**Dynamics of Decoration**

For the Venturis, their tendency to employ surface decoration gained momentum with the commissioning of a number of high-profile art projects in the seventies and eighties. The extension to Allen Art Memorial Art Museum in Oberlin, Ohio, 1973-77, for example, is a classic demonstration of a ‘decorated shed’ phenomenon (Figure 9. 12). It rather unceremoniously adjoins the existing elegant Tuscan Renaissance building, which was
built between 1915 and 1917, rising up above it, terminating the existing cornice and façade details midway across the façade. The Venturis proposed a stone checkerboard pattern that picks up the colour and material of the existing building, although not its decorative scheme. This ornamentation is only surface deep and is independent of the functional organisation of the two blocks. Here, we also find that the detached façade resulting from the complex layering of walls found in the Mother’s House is missing in the Oberlin extension. Decoration is simply part of the cladding, fixed straight onto the external walls. There is also no attempt by their architects at functional expression. Indeed, the functional volumes are considered ‘mute’ as the spatial disposition is sheathed by the skin that provides symbolic, cultural or aesthetic dimensions. While the Oberlin gallery can be regarded as the quintessential decorated shed – Las Vegas Style - for its simple volumetric articulation and surface decoration, in another arts building - the Sainsbury Wing, 1980, an addition to the National Gallery in London\(^\text{31}\) - the Venturis designed a complex building of overlapping and juxtaposed elements that refers almost simultaneously to context, history, function and social concerns (Figure 9.13).

The contrast between the Sainsbury Wing and the Oberlin extension is immediately clear. Instead of ramming up against the old gallery as demonstrated by the Oberlin extension, the Sainsbury Wing refrains from touching its predecessor. The only physical connection it makes is in the form of a circular bridge that connects the main gallery spaces in the Wilkins building and the Sainsbury Wing. Despite the ‘light’ connection, the whole Sainsbury wing is designed as a fragment of a greater whole in its ‘inflection’ towards the Wilkins building and Trafalgar square. The rather strange articulation of the entrance façade, the conformity to existing building height, the processional steps inside the museum parallel to the external steps of Jubilee Walk and the framed views out from the internal spaces to Trafalgar Square are essentially inflections of ‘multiplicity and diversity’ of elements contrived to achieve what Venturi calls a ‘difficult whole’\(^\text{32}\).

\(^{31}\) The National Gallery is a neo-classical building by William Wilkins and was completed within years 1823 and 1838.

\(^{32}\) Venturi explained the idea of ‘difficult whole’ as such: “An architecture of complexity and accommodation does not forsake the whole...... It is the difficult unity through inclusion rather than easy unity through exclusion.....The difficult whole in an architecture of complexity and contradiction includes multiplicity and diversity of elements in relationships that are inconsistent
Figure 9. 12: Allen Art Memorial Art Museum in Oberlin, Ohio, 1973-77

Figure 9. 13: The Sainsbury Wing, National Gallery, London, 1980

or among the weaker kinds perceptually'. See Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, pp.88.
The gallery design marks a return to the ideas of ‘inside and outside’, ‘detached linings’, ‘residual spaces’ and ‘contradiction juxtaposed’ as elucidated in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*\(^{33}\). The internal spaces are held back from the outer wall, forming ‘detached linings’ between inside and outside, allowing the wall to be shaped in response to surrounding streets, buildings and urban squares. Each façade is different, transforming itself according to its immediate context. The main entrance façade – the public face - is highly contrived and dramatic in its articulation in comparison to the other more utilitarian façade. It recalls that of the Mother’s House, with the gable facing the driveway. These front facades have a function to play, that is, to communicate to the approaching visitor its symbolic meaning. The front façade of the Sainsbury Wing began as a reprise of the original gallery building at the corner of Jubilee Walk, but towards the end of the elevation towards Pall Mall south; the hard external shell began to disintegrate in a syncopated decay of its pilasters, cornice and string course. This syncopated rhythm of columns looks like pleats in a fabric that has been partially gathered to one side\(^{34}\).

Blind windows, echoing those on the existing building, vary too, from full articulation to a ghostly frame beyond the mooring of the string course. At ground level, the façade was bluntly incised to reveal rather high-tech glass revolving doors and full height glazing of the entrance lobby and gallery café on the first floor. This articulation of contradictory elements echoes Venturi’s earlier reference in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* to the idea of ‘contradiction juxtaposed’ found in Palazzo del Popolo in Ascoli Piceno:

‘The rectangular face of Palazzo del Popolo teems with the violent adjacencies and superadjacencies of open and closed arcades, continuous and interrupted string courses, big and little windows, “porte” and “portone,” and clocks, cartouches, balconies, and store fronts. All of these produce broken rhythms and reflect the contradictory dualities of public and private, ordered and circumstantial scales.\(^{35}\)

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\(^{33}\) See Chapter 8 Contradiction Juxtaposed and Chapter 9 The Inside and the Outside in Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp.56-69 & 70-87 respectively.
\(^{34}\) This ordering, is meant, according to Venturi, to evoke in perpendicular elevation the clustering of columns perceived when the Wilkins building is viewed obliquely, such as from the steps of St. Martin-in-the-Fields – ‘one of London’s great neo-Classical images’. Quoted from Abrams, Janet Y., *Contemplation and Congregation in the Popular Urban Art Museum: Two projects by Venturi, Rauch & Scott Brown*, Lotus International, no.55, *New Museums*, pp.91.
\(^{35}\) Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp.57.
Ironically, the idea of ‘surface decoration’ came to occupy the Smithsons’ architectural thinking towards the late sixties. In the fifties, the Smithsons wrote that, ‘people and objects in motion and change are both the stuff and the decoration of the urban scene.’ Back then, the word ‘decoration’ takes on a different meaning from that used by the Venturis. Decorations for the Smithsons are people going about their daily lives and their possessions against the backdrop of veritable, anonymous, yet ordered structures, such as the Sugden House or the Hunstanton School. By the end of the sixties, the Smithsons expanded their interpretation of ‘decoration’ to include not only man and his activities and belongings but also the additional layer of material adornment that man adds to his environment.

This shift of attitude is evident in their exhibition installation titled ‘Wedding in the City’ for the Fourteenth Triennale in Milan held between May to July 1968 (Figure 9. 14). Here, the Smithsons explored the relationship between the built fabric of the city of Florence and the transient activities such as a wedding and the urban decorations that go with it. The theme for the Smithsons’ fit-out was ‘Transformation of the City’, and it celebrated the fact that cities had come a long way from the ‘undressed’ makeshift of the wartime. According to the Smithsons, cities like Florence are constantly being decorated and layers upon layers are added: lamp posts, cars and trams, people’s ways of walking and dressing, shop-fronts, sky signs and posters, tourists, weddings, funerals and ceremonies. The vision of a city as a complex aggregation of things and activities superimposed onto each other is, in fact, very close to that of Venturi, as illustrated by Main Street U.S.A., than their earlier sombre and almost desolate interpretation of man’s environment in *Patio and Pavilion* in 1956. For the Smithsons, the trepidation brought about by the war was long over, and the requirements of man’s habitat have thus

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changed. Aspirations of the immediate future are much more positive and the discovery of life ahead lies in its pleasures.

Figure 9.14: Wedding in the City, Fourteenth Triennale, Milan, 1968

In the spirit of such positive approach to life in general, the Smithsons’ design for the Garden Building at St. Hilda, Oxford, 1970, demonstrates their new-found desire to incorporate decoration and ornamentation (Figure 9.15). The Smithsons added a layer of untreated oak screen or ‘trellis’ on the main facades, enveloping but barely touching them. The trellis on the Oxford building was meant to encourage an active response from occupants, drawing ‘occupiers into the game of architecture’\(^{40}\) and into ‘the arts of inhabitation’\(^{41}\) through one particular language of invitation, ‘that of layers’\(^{42}\). So far, it provides support for the growth of ivy, rooting the building with the landscape on which it sits. The trellis, as such, can be seen as a more ‘active’ mode of inviting user to occupy


\(^{41}\) Ibid, pp.66.

\(^{42}\) Ibid, pp.73.
a building in comparison to the more passive approach demonstrated in the Sugden House, where occupants 'feel', yet are unaware of having been told. In addition to this, the trellis also has other functional and practical role to play. It forms a secondary visual protection to the girls' rooms, which the Smithsons had hope would, 'cut down the glare, obviate any sense of insecurity, and prevent the casual eye from breaking too easily the 'skin' of the building.'

Figure 9.15: Garden Building, St. Hilda's College, Oxford, 1967-70

Here, we find the definition of 'decoration' and 'function' significantly stretched and overlapped to take on a richer and multivalent meaning, unlike that defined by the Venturis, who prefer the two to remain separate and irreconcilable. In championing the theory of decorated shed, for example, the Venturis wrote that the, '...systems of space

and structure are directly at the service of program, and ornament is applied
independently of them. Here, we find that the Smithsons’ thinking of decoration is still
very much within the Brutalist idiom. The idea of decoration within the Smithsons’
arquitecture revolves around the secondary process of occupancy: ‘what others do their
spaces’ and ‘how others invent the things that announce the shift in their arts’. This
approach is not too different from that found in the Sugden House, where the idea of
‘signifying’ rather than ‘dictating’ is more dominant, allowing possibilities for different
patterns of occupancy that could change according to whims, change of season and
household and life patterns.

In the Garden Building, as in the Economist, we find a gentler language of Brutalism.
The oak screens of the Garden Building are held up by what seems to be the vertical
concrete framing structure of the building clearly expressed on the outside. A closer
look at the plans and sections reveals that the building is, in fact, mainly supported by
nine-inch thick brick cross-walls that separates the student rooms, except at the corners of
the building, where it is truly framed. Yet, the Smithsons had largely presented the
building as a framed structure – facades with concrete mullions and spandrels.

Despite the slight compromise in structural honesty, the façade of the Garden Building
dispenses an air of calm neutrality that one recognises from the Sugden House and the
Upper Lawn, with its regular vertical mullions and lattice-work throughout the main
facades, skilfully detailed. Furthermore, the exposed concrete mullions, spandrel panels
and windows demonstrate the Smithsons’ return to the raw and ‘brutalist’ handling
materials and details, which they had temporarily abandoned in the Economist. In
addition, the vocabulary of the Garden Building, like the Sugden House, remains
ordinary in an odd sort of way. The form of the building is familiar, at least within the
Smithsons’ ouvre. The way the corners are chamfered is similar to the blocks of the

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44 Venturi et al., Learning from Las Vegas, pp.87
45 Dunster, A+P Smithson: The Shift, pp.9.
46 Peter Smithson, in his description of the ‘trellis’ in 1972, wrote the following: 'The oak trellis
sits on small oak levelling pieces on the ears on the mullions, with ¼” tolerance at both ends of
the top and bottom rails for differential movement. The trellis is just 'dropped on' the ears on the
mullions with stainless steel dowel bars.' See Middleton, The Pursuit of Ordinariness: Garden
Building, Oxford, pp.82.
Economist, 1959–64 and that of Berlin Haupstadt, 1957. But then the building is strangely sunk into the ground, creating a narrow dry moat all around, making truly profound the connection between the rooms on the ground floor and the landscape outside. It also gives the building an indeterminate quality, as it appears to be sinking into the ground.

Scenography and Electronic Iconography

So far, we find that the Smithsons and the Venturis were continuing their exploration of early ideas in various ways. While the Smithsons were seen to be developing a gentler language of Brutalism; the Venturis, it seems, became more interested in the different mediums of decoration. In 1994, the Venturis' decided to revisit Las Vegas some twenty-five years later and the evolution that took place in the city astounded them. There, they found that elaborate scenes and high-tech electronic images have replaced the billboards and neon signs that had once overwhelmed and fascinated the Venturis in 1968. Nevertheless, the Venturis felt positive about the 'scenography' and 'electrography' they witnessed (Figure 9.16), both terms used by the Venturis to describe the technologically advanced three-dimensional images and representations and large moving pixels on LED boards, all of which demonstrate new ways of representing

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47 The Venturis revisited Las Vegas in 1994 by invitation of the BBC. They were later interviewed by BBC who later produced a program on Las Vegas aired on in January 1995 on the BBC's The Late Show.


49 The Venturis observed that, 'The strip has seen a considerable reduction in the number and size of its signs and a parallel evolution from signography to scenography, or from the decorated shed to the duck. Vivid examples of the trend toward scenography include the MGM architectural lion's head, the Luxor Hotel pyramid, the Excalibur castle, and, most vividly, the Mirage Lake cum volcano and the Treasure Island Carribean town. In their front yards, where parking lots once predominated, the Mirage and Treasure Island offer dramatic performances – the latter with real actors and special effects – to be experienced essentially by pedestrians on the Boulevard. These hotels promote a vivid, duck-oriented scenography and demote signage and neon lighting. The flamboyant neon of the Golden Nugget Hotel on Fremont Street has been removed, and on the Strip neon is being replaced by LED or its incandescent equivalents. The moving pixels permit changing imagery and graphics for a multicultural ethos in an information age.' See Las Vegas after its Classic Age in Venturi, Iconography and Electronics upon a Generic Architecture: A View from the Drafting Room,pp.126.
symbolism. According to the Venturis, these are more effective, as they offer ‘changing imagery and graphics for a multicultural ethos in an information age.’

Figure 9. 16: Scenography and Electrography of Las Vegas


51 See Las Vegas after its Classic Age in Venturi, Iconography and Electronics upon a Generic Architecture: A View from the Drafting Room, pp.126.
As if ‘Learning from Las Vegas’ the second time round, some of the Venturis’ projects during the nineties are characterized by the use of advanced technology to promote sophisticated forms of communication and civic monumentality. For Loker Commons, Memorial Hall, Harvard University, 1992-96 (Figure 9. 17), for example, they proposed an LED board above the food counter promoting flexible imagery that ‘appeal to our hyper sensibility of our time and as sources of information, dynamically complex and multicultural.’\(^{52}\) In the Whitehall Ferry Terminal proposal, 1992-96 (Figure 9. 18), the Venturis used a much larger LED screen that faces the water to achieve monumentality and civic presence for Manhattan, much like the Eiffel Tower is for Paris. Here, they had proposed a representation of a clock via the medium of LED pixels that sparkle day and night. The working clock, Venturi argued, is purely decorative and symbolic and hardly functional ‘because virtually everyone wears a watch.’\(^{53}\)

Figure 9. 17: Loker Commons, Memorial Hall, Harvard University, 1992-96


In 1990, a few years before their second visit to Las Vegas, they travelled to Japan for the first time in their lives. What they saw in Japan was significant in confirming for them the relevance of their pursuit of architecture and urbanism based on accommodating plural taste. In Kyoto, the Venturis were fascinated by the city's complex juxtaposition of *shrines in gardens and market streets with figures in kimonos all over*54, while in Tokyo, by the rather outrageous amalgamations of cultures and technologies, ranging from the local to global and from rural craft to high-tech (Figure 9. 19). In Tokyo, the Venturis wrote, is *where village shrine and global headquarters meet and electronic commercial graphics create an iconography comparable in splendour to that of religious mosaics of Ravenna*55. Here, we find that the Venturis' positive attitude towards the messy vitality of the contemporary global city is a contrast from that of the Smithsons. The Smithsons' admiration for Japanese architecture was focussed on the minimalist,

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structuralist and modular purity of palaces and shrines of Kyoto and Nara\(^{56}\). In fact, it was the purity of these buildings that inspired them in their conception of New Brutalism\(^{57}\). The influence of Japanese architecture can be seen in the uncompromising purity of Hunstanton School, Norfolk, 1949-54; the Sugden House, 1954-55 and the Upper lawn Pavilion, Fonthill, 1959-61. The Venturis, on the other hand, applied an ‘americanised’ interpretation of the Japanese everyday in a number of late projects. Their proposal for Hotel Mielparque Resort Complex in Nikko, Kirifuri, Japan, 1992-1997, for example (Figure 9. 20 and Figure 9. 21), was a rather successful attempt to accommodate the wide-ranging, contrasting, rich and ultimately symbolic dualities that they have witnessed in contemporary Kyoto and Tokyo\(^{58}\).

![Commercial district in Tokyo, Japan](image)

**Figure 9. 19: Commercial district in Tokyo, Japan**


\(^{57}\) Explaining Japanese influence on New Brutalism, the Smithsons wrote the following: ‘Our understanding – and so it might have been for Mies – was that for the Japanese their Form was only part of a general conception of life, a sort of reverence for the natural world and, from that, for the materials of the built world. It is this respect for materials – a realisation of the affinity which can be established between building and man – which was at the root of our way of seeing and thinking about things that we called New Brutalism. (emphasis in original). Smithson, *Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-1972*, pp.6.

\(^{58}\) The symbolic dualities according to Venturi varies to include, for example, individual and/or communal, laissez-faire and/or routine, serene and/or show-off, indoors and/or outdoors, present and/or future, symbolic and/or formal etc. For full list of dualities see Venturi, Robert & Scott Brown, Denise, *Toward a Scenographic Architecture for Today: Generic Form with Ordinary-extraordinary Signs: A Description of the Design of the Kirifuri Resort Project in Nikko*.
The hotel was competently designed and sensitive to the rituals or privacy and publicity of life in a big hotel and spa. The ‘shell’ buildings take on a generic geometrical form with large glazed surfaces and geometric cladding patterns, a style not far from the anonymous International Style that has, for a long time, come to characterise hotel design throughout the world. The decorations added to the functional edifices, on the other hand, summarise the Venturis’ position on functionalism and obsession with multicultural symbolism. It consists of an American, post-Las Vegas appliqué of Japanese motifs that the Venturis had observed from their travels around Japan. For example, a decorative plane was added onto the reinforced concrete bridge that represents the traditional garden bridges of Japan, while flattened, decorative rafters were fixed to the ends and sides of the hotel buildings, recalling the anonymous Japanese village houses around the area. The spa, a building with large glazed surfaces and geometric cladding patterns, were overlaid at its base, decorative two-dimensional representations of trees made up of concrete lattice and coloured aluminium ‘Japanese blossoms’. Here, ‘shed decorations’ are no longer confined to the exterior. Attached to the lattice frame of the basilica-like internal space, above the swimming pool, are decorative planar forms, suggestive of leaves that convey the sense of a forest clearing (Figure 9.20).

The most bizarre decorations can be found in the internal ‘village street’ immediately beyond the entrance lobby of the main hotel complex (Figure 9.21). Here, the Venturis applied the concept of ‘scenography’ for their wild projection of the honky-tonk elements found in a traditional Japanese shopping street. This projection is somewhat a reminiscent of Main Street USA like the one photographed by Peter Blake, which Venturi had earlier promoted in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture as being ‘almost all right’.


To re-create the complex order of main streets in the hotel’s internal street, the Venturis put up decorative and symbolic two-dimensional representations that reflect the traditions and celebrate the spirit of Japanese urban and village life, such as flattened utility poles, telephones, utility wires, hanging bouquets, vending machines, lanterns and banners. Along one side, photographic murals depicting actual images found in Japanese streets were put up. In an environment where the real and the imagery are combined, the architecture of the hotel dissolves into a wild and parodistic ‘stage set’.

See Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, pp.104.
order that is recognised as similar. The former is derived from a 'complex and illusive order of the difficult whole', while the latter consists of a collection of 'villages' with 'a hidden complex' order like that of 'a patterned kimono'.

Figure 9.20: Spa, Hotel Mielmonte Nikko Kirifuri, Nikko, Japan, 1992-97

Figure 9.21: Village Street, Hotel Mielmonte Nikko Kirifuri, Nikko, Japan, 1992-97

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Ibid

The University Buildings

Despite the various commissions that the Smithsons’ and the Venturis’ received, their most recent and largest commissions had been from educational institutions – opportunities, which most likely have stemmed from their close relationships with academia and their active teaching activities. Peter Smithson was Visiting Professor at Bath University in the years 1978-90 and received commissions to design a series of buildings on its campus between 1978 and 1984. Whereas the Venturis, throughout the eighties and nineties, received commissions from the University of Pennsylvania where they both taught and Princeton University, where Venturi had received his formal architectural education.63

At Bath, the Smithsons worked on four buildings: the Staff Amenity Building, 1978-80 and 1984-85; the Second Arts Building, 1979-81; the Arts Barn, which started in 1981 and yet to complete and Building 6 East, 1984-88. In these projects, the idea of contextualism underlying the design of the Sugden House takes on a distinct significance. This shift of emphasis stems largely from the Smithsons’ active involvement with Team 10, which continued right up until 198164. In the late sixties and seventies, prominent Team 10 members such as Giancarlo de Carlo65, Ralph Erskine and Aldo van Eyck were producing definitive schemes that emphasise a new respect to place. De Carlo’s plan for Urbino66, 1968-76 (Figure 9.22) and Van Eyck’s Urban Redevelopment project for

63 The Venturis received a large number of university commissions – both of large-scale planning projects and individual buildings - from other American universities, such as, UCLA, Harvard, Dartmouth, the University of Michigan and Yale. See Brownlee et al., Out of the Ordinary: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Associates.

64 The last Team 10 meeting was held at Lisbon, November 1981. It was decided that there shall be no more meetings as a tribute to Jaap Bakema, who died on February 20th, 1981. See Smithson, Alison (editor), Team 10 meetings: 1953-84, Publiekatieburo Bouwkunde, Delft, 1991, pp.34.

65 Giancarlo De Carlo also founded an urban design workshop called The International Laborotary for Architecture and Urban Design (ILAUD) where the Smithsons, as well as Van Eyck and Erskine were regular attenders. An annual event, it was essentially a six-week project-based summer school attended by representatives of associated ten European and American schools of architecture. It was first held in Urbino between 1976 and 1981, and subsequently in Siena. The central theme to the summer school was the evolution of ways of reading historic contexts and of unveiling the intrinsic nature of place. See Peter Smithson’s essays published in ILAUD Yearbooks from 1978 to 1990.

66 Giancarlo de Carlo sensitive intervention at Urbino is the Il Magistero, the Scool of Education, which he built for Urbino University between 1968 and 1976. In this scheme, conversions of old
Nieumarkt, Amsterdam\textsuperscript{67}, 1970 (Figure 9.23), are essentially piecemeal and incremental additions that relate strongly to the topological and morphological character of place. Such an approach is a contrast to the Smithsons’ earlier urban schemes\textsuperscript{68}, which often include the layering of new ordering infrastructures onto large parts of the existing city, no doubt driven by their designers’ rather modernist obsession to change the morphology of the city.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure922.png}
\caption{Il Magistero, Urbino, Italy}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure923.png}
\caption{Nieumarkt Project, Amsterdam, 1970, (sections of reconstruction design of the urban fabric)}
\end{figure}

buildings exist alongside the additions of new ones creating an urban microcosm that is very much part of the city. For description of the scheme see, for example, Mckean, John, Space and Society, the Architect’s Journal. 13 February 2003, pp.20-35.


\textsuperscript{68} Urban projects such as Cluster City, Haupstadt and Mehringplatz in Berlin. See Smithson, \textit{Urban Structuring: Studies of Alison & Peter Smithson}
During the late sixties and seventies, the Smithsons could be seen applying new contextualist concepts such as ‘mat-building’ and ‘conglomerate ordering’ to the design of the Bath University buildings. In an article titled *How to Recognise and Read Mat-building*, Alison Smithson maintained the importance of order in a city, and the order she identified was one that was already inherent within the existing fabric of the city. In a proposal for Kuwait Ministries (Figure 9. 24) – one identified as a typical mat-building - the Smithsons began ‘with a search for the underlying will to urban-form in the instincts that underpin the true Arab cities built in contrast to the desert’. While in an essay titled *Conglomerate Ordering* published in *Italian Thoughts*, the Smithsons sought to define a set of ordering systems, which is found to formally bind cities and places with seeming naturalness. ‘Conglomerate Ordering’ embodies a number of concerns that have preoccupied the Smithsons throughout their career but only now, have began to form definite methodology. In *The Charged Void*, the Smithsons summed up the theory as:

‘...ordering of the building so that those means of finding one’s way, of sensing what lies where, are taken from the old indicators...the density of both built fabric and its occupation...the position of the sun...the way the land falls outside...the position of the principal ways inside.’

*Figure 9. 24: Government Offices, Kuwait, 1970*

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70 Ibid


For the Smithsons, a building of ‘Conglomerate Order’ is compatible to the formal language of a place, and the challenge for them, is to find ways in which the order could be applied in a new building. The resultant buildings of conglomerate order will share a common ‘formal language’ that ties them back to the existing fabric of which they form part. Essentially, it is an attempt to turn the unselfconscious practices of a craft tradition into a conscious design methodology. In reiteration of the early statement of Brutalism some three decades later, Peter Smithson referred to the old farm building or cottage as a paradigm of ‘conglomerate ordering’, where the architecture is natural and without rhetoric. These examples, according to Smithson, have not been worked out formally; they just evolved to meet the practical demands of everyday life. The Smithsons also believed that the application of non-geometric ‘order’ is not new and is found in most ‘designed’ historical cities. In Peter Smithson’s study of Bath, published in 1971, he marvelled at the city’s remarkable cohesion of architecture and urbanism. He found that there is the feeling of ‘control’ and ‘order’, of conscious design, owing to the traditional use of a few materials. The sense of control is also the result of a conscious application of formal rules, of ‘formal language being understood and contributed to by all’.

To achieve the remarkable cohesion they saw in the historic city of Bath, the Smithsons starting point had been to regard the Bath University complex as an existing village (Figure 9. 25). Masterplanned by Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall and Partners (RMJM) in the mid-sixties, it was also recognised by the Smithsons as a complex of ‘mat-buildings’, for its low lying, connective, overlaying pattern of use and indeterminate

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73 The Smithsons wrote in 1995: ‘What is new about the New Brutalism among Movements is that it finds its closest affinities, not in a past architectural style, but in peasant dwelling forms.’ (Emphasis in original) Quoted in The New Brutalism, Architectural Design, January 1955, pp.1.


75 The notion of ‘Conglomerate Ordering’ emerged during the Siena period of ILAUD following a period of reflection on the buildings of Santa Maria della Scala and La Grancia di Cuna. The Smithsons described the latter as: ‘...a place of extraordinary presence, where to the farmyard’s directness is brought an order of the rarest and yet the most ordinary kind.’ Smithson, Italian Thoughts, pp.58.

76 Smithson, Peter, Bath: Walks within the walls – a study of Bath as a built-form taken over by other uses. Adams & Dart, Bath, Somerset, 1971, pp.1.

77 Ibid
ordering of routes and spaces. In keeping with the mat analogy, any additional buildings added to the fringe of the ‘mat’ were regarded as terminating fringe or ‘tassels’, ‘so it can lie there, on its gently sloping green hillside, seemingly complete’. Hence, the new Bath buildings were seen as entities that complete the existing complex and landscape – accurately placed and of a maximum intensity to effect change.

Although, the Smithsons were not explicit about how to achieve ‘conglomerate ordering’ consciously, some sort of design methodology derived from the ethos of place was applied to the Bath buildings. The Smithsons believed that by following a set of

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79 It is worth noting that the Berlin Free University, 1963-73, by Candilic, Josic and Woods, is also a mat-building. This development has raised pedestrian deck as a main social space above a services level. To the raised deck are series of pedestrian connections to different levels inside buildings and out to the landscape. See Smithson, *How to Recognise and Read Mat Building*, pp.573-90.


81 On the idea of tassels completing mat of buildings, Peter Smithsons explained that, ‘...new interventions needed therefore to be accurately placed and of the maximum intensity so as to be
functional requirements of a programme, both quantitative and qualitative, then a true and natural architecture, will result, mimicking, in effect, the unselfconscious process of the vernacular. The Bath buildings, in their opinion, achieved the ideal as ‘it is a building that is developed from the inside outwards, so that when it is materialised, our recognition of it is: “so that’s what it looks like”.....the conglomerate building.  

The desire to achieve ‘Conglomerate Ordering’ at Bath resulted in carefully considered buildings, each possessing a coherent formal language (Figure 9. 26, Figure 9. 27, Figure 9. 28, and Figure 9. 29). For example, each building is heavy, robust and rooted to the ground and employs a system of structural frame and infill panels of concrete and stone string-courses. This combination of stone and concrete and simple framed glazing echoes the austerity of the buildings found in the Georgian city below:

'Down the hill in Bath there are buildings reduced to just openings in smooth ashlar walls.....the second arts building has, I believe, some similar quality....plain, robust, but with the discipline of a classical past entrapped in its bones.  

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Figure 9. 26: Building 6 East, Architecture & Engineering Building, University of Bath, 1984-88

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82 Smithson, The Canon of Conglomerate Ordering in Italian Thoughts, pp.69.
Figure 9. 27: Staff Amenities Building, University of Bath, 1978-85

Figure 9. 28: Second Arts Building, University of Bath, 1979-81

Figure 9. 29: The Arts Barn, University of Bath, 1981-

The buildings in Bath were also meant to be pedagogic and instructive of the tectonic lessons for students of the School of Architecture and Civil Engineering, and hence, display a direct, practical and honest approach to building as seen in earlier projects such as the Hunstanton and the Sugden House. For example, at the bottom of Building 6 East (Figure 9. 26) were placed heavy uses of the engineering laboratory, while light uses such as studios and seminar rooms were grouped on the upper floors. This logical separation of use by loading needs is correspondingly expressed on the structure: the bottom of the building is heavy and inert, isolating the noise from machinery as much as possible, while the top most has a lightweight truss roof system - exposed internally - spanning between reinforced concrete ring beams. Tectonic honesty is extended to the structural columns as they reduce in size towards the top floors in correspondence to the loading. The studios at the top floor also enjoy high ceiling and natural light that the split roof section provides. At the top floors too the roof structures dominates the room space. In the Arts Barn and the Staff Amenities Building particularly (Figure 9. 30), the triangulated framing and bracing serve as gantries to hang lights, decorations, or banners from. Inevitably, the service pipings, tubes and wires are inexorably exposed, in explanation of the anatomy of the building.

Figure 9. 30: Interior, Staff Amenity Building, University of Bath, 1978-85

84 In an interview with Fouad Somara, Peter Smithson, explained, ‘Obviously, if you build in a place where there is a school of architecture, the buildings themselves have to be lessons. What is depressing about the student housing in Bath is that it contains no information that would help an architecture or engineering student’. See An Interview with Peter Smithson in Webster, Modernism without Rhetoric: Essays on the work of Alison & Peter Smithson, pp. 173.
At this point, it is worth comparing the Smithsons' contextualist approach to that of the Venturis at Princeton University, from which they had received numerous design commissions. Venturi regarded most American campuses, particularly those long established, such as Princeton, as having buildings that are consistently unified and a landscape that is artfully pedestrian in their quality and scale. This is comparable to the Smithsons' rationale of a place having a certain formal language. Venturi, like the Smithsons, asserted the importance of understanding the coherent nature and essence of a campus:

'During the planning study questions about the ethos and nature of the place and institution must be subtly posed and carefully analyzed among the planners and the users to understand where Princeton is coming from, in order to continue, via the campus plan, to accommodate change and growth for a dynamic and complex future.'

In addition, the Venturis wrote of two different ways by which campus planning might take place. The first is characterised by buildings with formal compositions of 'unifying axes and balancing symmetry' that are complete in themselves, while the other, where 'picturesque and continuous form directs and encloses space and is perceived as evolving over time'. At the same time, the Venturis recognised that there has been growth in the form of expansion at the edges of campus (vis à vis the Smithsons' tassels) and growth in the form of infill within the fabric of the campus. Based on such understanding, the Venturis saw the need to extend and enhance the setting through the concept of 'generic form'. According to this concept, internal spaces are to be as simple as 'lofts', offering flexibility in terms of use, space requirements and mechanical systems. Venturi wrote, for example, that 'such loftlike buildings want their architectural quality to be recessive, not intrusive – to be an ideal background for work and concentration'. At the same time, there is a need for a place for communication and concentration. Communication, incidental or arranged, and quiet places for contemplation, can occur as 'the principal exception within the order' in the form of nooks or eddies off the main circulation spaces,

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85 Note on the Beloved Princeton Campus as a Basis for a Proposed Planning Study in Venturi, Iconography and Electronics upon a Generic Architecture: A View from the Drafting Room, pp.239.
86 Ibid, pp.240
87 Ibid, pp.239
as well as classrooms and lecture halls. Lastly, there is a need for 'contextual analogy' over 'contextual contrast', meaning buildings which relates itself to its surroundings via ironic resemblance rather than physical three-dimensional articulation of form\textsuperscript{89}.

Here, we find that, while the Venturis share with the Smithsons a strong regard for 'ethos and nature of place', their similarities end when we start to consider the architecture of the Princeton buildings in parallel with that of Bath. The Venturis worked on a number of buildings in Princeton, namely, Gordon Wu Hall, 1980-83 (Figure 9. 31); Lewis Thomas Laboratory, 1983-86 (Figure 9. 33); Fisher and Bendheim Halls, 1986-91 (Figure 9. 34) and George La Vie Schultz Laboratory, 1988-93 (Figure 9. 36)\textsuperscript{90}. Externally, the Princeton University buildings are predominantly calm and understated, particularly the laboratories, which are unarticulated volumes extruded from a simple rectangular plan. In all cases, their facades have decorated patterns created by changes of cladding material within a two-dimensional plane, similar to that of the extension to the Allen Memorial Gallery, Oberlin, 1973-77. Here, we find that the constructional systems of curtain wall cladding used by the Venturis are contemporary, yet standard and commonplace. This is in contrast to the Bath University buildings, where the Smithsons had developed a unique

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, pp.247-248
\textsuperscript{90} All but Lewis Thomas Laboratory are major additions to enhance the facilities of existing buildings and as such, are often physically connected as linear extensions forming new courtyard spaces and new relationships to the interstitial green spaces of the campus. The Lewis Thomas Laboratory, a new facility for molecular biology, on the other hand, is a free standing building located opposite George La Vie Schultz Laboratory of the department of biology. Both, in combination, create a strong sense of vertical enclosure along a crucial pedestrian axis in Princeton University called College Walk. These are not the only University buildings that the Venturis worked on. There have been numerous others, sporadically located throughout the American continent. For example, the Clinical Research Building, 1985-89, Roy and Diana Vagelos Laborotaries, 1990-97 and Fisher Fine Arts Library, 1985-91 of University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Gordon and Virginia MacDonald Medical Research Laboratories, 1986-91 and Gonda (Goldschmied) Neuroscience and Genetics Research Centre, 1993-98, both of University of California at Los Angeles; Charles P. Stevenson Jr. library, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, 1989-93; Memorial Hall, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992-96 and Trabant Student Centre, University of Delaware, Newark, 1992-96. See Brownlee et al., \textit{Out of the Ordinary: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Associates}, pp.90-117. Also see Von Moos, Stanislaus, \textit{Venturi, Rauch & Scott Brown}, Rizzolli International Publications, 1987 and Von Moos, Stanislaus, \textit{Venturi Scott Brown & Associates}, The Monacelli Press, New York, 1999.
and technologically progressive system of concrete framing and infill panels\textsuperscript{91}, which was thoughtfully detailed and perfected since it was first used in the Economist.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image1.png}
\caption{Figure 9. 31: Gordon Wu Hall, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1980-83}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image2.png}
\caption{Figure 9. 32: Dining Room, Gordon Wu Hall, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1980-83}
\end{figure}

Figure 9.33: Lewis Thomas Laboratory, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1983-86

Figure 9.34: Fisher and Bendheim Halls, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1986-91
Figure 9.35: Podium level entrance, Fisher and Bendheim Halls, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1986-91

Figure 9.36: George LaVie Schultz Laboratory, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1988-93
As with the Sugden House and the Mother’s House, the major difference between the two campus’ buildings lies in their tectonic honesty. Whilst the Smithsons’ buildings are meant to instruct about their making, those of the Venturis remain quiet and ambiguous. The Princeton buildings are ‘tectonically neutral’ and ‘architecturally recessive’, where the structure and services are invisible to the occupants, much like the modernist interiors of the Mother’s House. This is the case with the dining hall at Gordon Wu Hall (Figure 9.32), as well as the library in the Fisher Building. Both spaces are neutral in the sense that they speak little of the anatomy and the making of building. This is the case too on the external facades. Often, conventional elements were incorporated, disregarding their strong association to certain traditional methods of construction. The keystone, in Gordon Wu Hall, for example, (Figure 9.31) used typically over an opening in a load-bearing wall, is reduced to a mere decorative cladding pattern.

Numerous elevational pattern studies carried out by Venturi showed his concern with relating building to its immediate context\(^2\). However, unlike the Smithsons who used techniques of ‘conglomerate order’, which they claimed to be natural and unconscious, we find mannerism being employed in Princeton, in somewhat gentler form, demonstrating a close correspondence to theories presented some fifteen years earlier in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 1961. As already mentioned, on the facades of Gordon Wu Hall are incorporated embellishments of conventional elements in the attempt to relate to its context. This takes the form of five large incomplete representations or vestiges of keystones on the west brick curtain-wall facade. Further along this wall is the main entrance to building and here, above the ground floor entrance recess, is a large panel consisting of flattened and abstract geometric shapes which evoke imagery of the Collegiate Gothic architecture of Princeton, as well as English scholastic architecture\(^3\). The entrance façade to Bendheim Hall takes on a similar evocation of the

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\(^3\) For example, the entry portal that exists on the Princeton Campus at the north entrance to Holder Court, the main gate to St. John’s College, Cambridge University, England, 1510-1516 by John Fisher and the entrance portal to St. Anthony’s College, Oxford University, Oxford, England, 1780 by Charles Bucrindle. According to Stephen Kieran, who wrote an article on Gordon Wu Hall, the breadth of references that Venturi evokes here is not isolated only to Gothic traditions, but classical too. For example, the decorative rectangular panel with an inset circle is a motif common to many Renaissance decorative elements such as that found repeatedly in
past (Figure 9.35). Here, above the ground floor entrance recess, the entry portal above stands out from its adjacent brick facades with a change of material to stone. The rectangular geometric patterns and simplified pediment overlapping a rectangular form makes a combination of eclectic references to various historical exemplars such as Easton Neston, Northamptonshire by Hawksmoor and Il Redentore, Venice, by Palladio. In the laboratories, reference to Princeton’s historical brick and limestone buildings is made with a diaper and checkerboard patterns of the contemporary curtain wall cladding, whilst entrances as in the other building are announced by means of associations. In the Lewis Thomas Laboratory, for example, simplified Tudor arches with columns missing, seem to be suspended surreptitiously over the entrance recess (Figure 9.33).

These elements are consistent with Robert Venturi’s reasoning in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, where conventional elements are to be used not only for their associations to articles of the everyday, but also to the past meaning of history:

> ’Conventional elements in architecture represent one stage in an evolutionary development, and they contain in their changed use and expression some of the past as well as their new meaning. What can be called the vestigial element parallels the double-functioning element. It is distinct from a superfluous element because it contains a double meaning. This is the result of a more or less ambiguous combination of the old meaning, called up by associations, with a new meaning created by the modified or new function, structural or programmatic, and the new context’.  

The Influence on Contemporary Architecture

The Smithsons wrote little on the Sugden House, unlike that of the Upper Lawn Pavilion, which they have claimed to be one of the icons of Modern architecture of the late period alongside Mies’s Farnsworth House and Charles and Ray Eames’ Santa Monica House95. The little house in Watford, in the meantime, continued to stand the test of time, devotedly cared for by the Sugdens, who have found it accommodating to their specific

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Sabastino Serlio’s drawings of chimney pieces, while the triangular and circular forms at the top are more explicitly Tudor than Gothic in origin. The forms are reminiscent of, for example, the gable end decorative panel at Kirby Hall, Northamptonshire, England, 1570-73 by Robert Smythson. See Kieran, Stephen, *The Image in the Empty Frame: Wu Hall and the Art of Representation*, 94 Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp.38.

demands throughout the years. Up to the early nineties, the house was still sparsely documented. However, a recent resurgence of interests in mid-nineties in the works of Alison & Peter Smithson propelled the house back into the limelight. For example, Bath University hosted the A+ PS Symposium in 1994 in commemoration of Alison Smithson’s death fourteen months earlier, where Derek Sugden spoke for the first time at the symposium of his experience with the Smithsons and the Sugden House. In 1997, Dean Hawkes wrote an article on the house to celebrate its fortieth anniversary⁹⁶ and in the same year the first book on the Smithsons – not written by themselves - was published⁹⁷.

In comparison, the Mother’s House’s influence has been more widespread than that of the Sugden House. Its potent image of an architecture that is inclusive, complex and more importantly, one that communicates the aspirations of a pluralist society, has had an extraordinary impact on the Venturis’ contemporaries. One of them had been Charles Moore, who since the late sixties had developed many of Venturi’s ideas concerning the exaggeration of cultural codes and displacement of context⁹⁸. The Moore House, Orinda, 1962 (Figure 9. 37) and Sea Ranch Condominium, 1965-66 (Figure 9. 38), both in California, were based on a contemporary take on the suburban typology of pitched roof and shingled cladding. Meanwhile, the interior of his Faculty Club for the University of California of 1968 (Figure 9. 39), picked up on symbolic ornamentation and separation of inside and outside. It was designed as a stage set of thin planes and screens evoking simultaneously modern architectural icons and the image of a baronial hall. Robert Stern, another American architect who is also an academic, historian and critic, borrowed the

⁹⁷ Webster, Modernism Without Rhetoric: Essays on the work of Alison and Peter Smithson
⁹⁸ Charles Moore had been a graduate student at Princeton University, where he was a master’s and doctoral student and then postdoctoral fellow between 1954-58. Like Robert Venturi, he was influenced by the director of design Jean Labatut and professors Donald Drew Egbert and later Louis Kahn. Under these influences, Moore shares with Venturi a strong sense of historicism and symbolism for contemporary architecture. Kevin Keim, in his introduction to Charles Moore's collection of essays titled You Have to Pay for the Public Life, for example wrote, '...the group of students who emerged from Princeton at the time – Moore, Robert Venturi, Donlyn Lyndon, William Turnbull, Jr., Hugh Hardy, and others – were among the first to substantively question the rhetoric of modernism and formulate not specific solutions or rules of their own but a set of detailed observations about experience, hierarchy, ornament, scale, symbol, precedent, and past and present'. See Keim, Kevin (editor), You Have to Pay for Public Life: Selected Essays of Charles W. Moore, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England, 2001, pp.xii.
idea of 'contradiction juxtaposed' seen in the Mother's House and the layering of
detached skins in his own design of Ehrman House in Armonk, New York, 1975 (Figure
9. 40). Stern could also be seen to be developing the Mother's House's ornamental
expression based on historical quotations. In the 'House for an Academical Couple' in
Connecticut, 1974-76 (Figure 9. 41), for example, Stern employed the use of thin
appliques representing arches and mouldings on the facades.

Vincent Scully, who initially rallied to Venturi's cause with his laudatory introduction to
Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, has continued to give his continuing
support through his own personal polemic The Shingle Style Today or the Historian's
Revenge99. In it, Scully has also pronounced the Mother's House, along with other
schemes such as the Beach House and Trubek and Wislocki Houses as versions of
smaller, 'less expansive' and 'impoverished' modern version of the Shingle Style
house100. Their relation to the American colonial style is evident from the house's
vernacular references and inflection of interior planning. In addition, the works of both
Charles Moore and Robert Stern have also been distinguished by Scully as belonging to
the Shingle Style for their manipulation of form and exploitation of the American balloon
frame tradition.

![Image of the Moore House](image)

Figure 9. 37: The Moore House, Orinda, California, 1962

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99 Scully, Vincent, The Shingle Style Today or the Historian's Revenge, George Braziller, New
York, 1974.
100 Ibid, pp.31-32.
Figure 9.38: Sea Ranch Condominium, California, 1965-66

Figure 9.39: Faculty Club, University of California, 1968

Figure 9.40: Erhman House, Armonk, New York, 1975
Despite the varying attention the Sugden House and the Mother's House received when they were first completed, both remain relevant today as their architecture still speaks to us the importance of the basic human needs and human aspirations. Both dwellings have been sought by many, particularly by those who contemplate architecture as a socially transformative practice. The recent publicity for the Smithsons' architecture has caught the attention of a younger generation of architects. Present-day exponents of the ordinary such as Sergison & Bates and Caruso St. John picked up on the complex ordinariness of the Sugden House. The house's acknowledgement of 'as found' conditions in a situation was important to Sergison & Bates' formulation of their theory 'tolerance'.

For example, in their design for both the Public House in Walsall, West Midlands (Figure 9.42) and the prototype of a semi-detached house in Southern England (Figure 9.43), they concentrated on the reduction of form and derived uniqueness through distortions of familiar images of buildings. Whereas Caruso St. John's Walsall Art Gallery (Figure 9.44) contains elements that are closely associated to the Sugden House. For example, the exposed concrete beams running parallel on the ceiling of the gallery are reminiscent of the timber beams in the house, while the use of timber and exposed concrete wall with

\[\text{Figure 9.41: 'House for an Academical Couple', Connecticut, 1974-76}\]

101 According to Sergison and Bates the concept of 'tolerance' may be explained as such:

'\text{a. Tolerance indicates an acknowledgement of the found conditions of a situation, in both emotive and physical terms, and an ability to work with them and make interpretations of these conditions.}
\text{b. Tolerance informs an approach to construction where structural solutions accommodate spatial ideas rather than dictate them. The enveloping material then becomes the important element in the expression of space.}'}
shuttering marks left intact relates to the Smithsons’ idea of direct handling of materials. The Smithsons’ influence on the imagery of the gallery is also clear in the minds of its designers. In Peter St. John’s recent essay on the Sugden House, we find the following conclusion:

‘When we were considering the mood that the elevations of our project for the New Art Gallery in Walsall should have, we were looking for something that could resonate with the melancholy of the broken industrial buildings round about. This unsteady image (that of the Sugden House), somewhere between the grand and the awkward, is what we had in mind.’

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Figure 9. 42: Public House, Walsall, West Midlands

Figure 9. 43: Prototype for semi-detached house, Stevenage, England, 1999


The Swiss practice Herzog de Meuron is another firm of contemporary architects for whom existing conditions form important criteria in providing orientation for their architecture. They stated, for example, in an interview, that:

"...we are interested in ...(using)....well known forms and materials in a new way so that they become alive again. We would love to do a building that would cause people to say, "well, this looks like an old traditional house, but at the same time there is something totally new in it"."

Although they have never made direct acknowledgement to the influence of the Smithsons or of the Sugden House, there are strong parallels between a number of their projects with that of the Smithsons. In a number of single family dwellings designed by Herzog de Meuron early in its career, we find a strong reference to the vernacular typology, honest use of materiality and tectonic determinism. The 'House for a Veterinary Surgeon', 1983-84 (Figure 9.45), Plywood House, 1984-85 (Figure 9.46) and

103 Kipnis, Jeffrey, *A Conversation with Jacques Herzog* in 1981-2000 Herzog & de Meuron, El croquis, 60+84, 2000, pp.31
‘House for an Art Collector’, 1985-86 (Figure 9.47) are all based on the suburban house motif of pitched roof and simple volume and are built almost entirely out of ordinary and standard materials in a direct manner. The closest the architects came to the Sugden House will have to be the ‘House in Leymen’ completed between 1996 and 1997 (Figure 9.48). Like a child’s drawing, the ordinary form of sloping roof, tall chimney and large windows are reduced to a minimum expression, where the tar-board roof and exposed concrete facades flow almost seamlessly into one another without an overhang. It also sits flat on a sloping site like the Sugden House, but here, it is elevated off the ground by a platform on stilts to absorb ground level inconsistencies.

Figure 9.45: ‘House for a Veterinary Surgeon’, Dagmersellen, Suiza, 1983-84

Figure 9.46: Plywood House, Bottmingen, Suiza, 1984-85
Figure 9. 47: 'House for an Art Collector', Therwil, Switzerland, 1985-86

Figure 9. 48: House in Leymen, Ht. Rhin, France, 1996-97
Compared to the Sugden House, the Mother’s House’s influence on contemporary architecture is a little bit more difficult to discern. A sympathetic following of Venturis’ early writing and work in both academic and professional circles, such as Moore and Stern, had a net effect of stimulating a rather profound reaction against all forms of modernist expression in architecture, a situation which the architectural critic Charles Jencks was quick to identify as ‘Post Modern’ in his book *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*. However, Post-Modernism remains elusive and little practiced today.

Nevertheless, the Mother’s House has played a significant part in creating a path for one of the many directions contemporary architecture might go, particularly in term of spatial configuration. In essence, the house is a serious piece of work that has liberated architecture from the Cartesian or formal order, then and now. Its legacy has allowed the freedom to respond to the complexity of contemporary life and embrace the circumstantial. In the architecture of Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, for example, we find similarity of approach in its response to complexity of program, site and city. In the Kunsthall II in Rotterdam 1992 and the recent Dutch Embassy in Berlin, Germany, completed 2003, for example, we find a deliberate spatial complexity with little ‘Cartesian’ coordination between interior and exterior. Just as Venturi believed that ‘inflection can...be used to achieve suspense’, Koolhaas’ architecture indulges in the ‘trajectory’ of elements to create the spectacular. Within the general envelope of a square of the Rotterdam Museum (Figure 9. 49), we find a large incision for a public pedestrian ramp to run through, and running at right angle to this and below it, a narrow service road. Internally, ramps of differing gradients seemingly going in arbitrary directions are introduced, while the remaining available spaces fold, squeeze and contort to fit the space program. Just as the chimney and stair of the Mother’s House distort in shape and ‘move

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104 Jencks has defined Post-Modernism as follows: *Post-Modern Architecture is doubly coded, half-Modern and half-conventional, in its attempt to communicate with both the public and a concerned minority, usually architects.* According to Charles Jencks, Post-Modern architecture is so pervasive that it is found in the work of numerous architects such as Charles Moore, Robert Stern, Han Hollein, Arata Isozaki, James Stirling, Aldo Rossi as well Mario Botta. See Jencks, Charles, *The Language of Post Modern Architecture* (Fifth Edition), Academy Editions, London, 1987, pp.6.

over a little to compete for central space; in the Kunsthalle, we find the restaurant space is a distorted sloping volume, inflected to accommodate the sloping floor of the auditorium above. Similarly, in the Koolhaas' embassy building (Figure 9.50), each floorplate rotates and cantilevers over the one below, while ramps and stairs zigzag and shift in between, changing direction of ascent and gradient to accommodate the various distorted volumes.

Figure 9.49: Kunsthalle II, Rotterdam, 1992

106 A phrase borrowed from Robert Venturi in his own description of the chimney and stair of Mother's House. See Ibid, pp.118.
In Bernard Tschumi’s work too, we find complexities stemming from a deliberate and contradictory juxtaposition of different parts to achieve what Venturi calls ‘difficult whole’\textsuperscript{107}. In Tschumi’s Le Fresnoy, the National Studio for Contemporary Arts in Tourcoing, France, 1998, for example, a vast over-sailing new roof covers much of the original buildings, which was retained and adapted (Figure 9. 51). Here, Tschumi identifies the great roof as a kind of ‘transprogramming’ or ‘crossprogramming’ by which the most diverse and disparate elements – the existing buildings - could coexist\textsuperscript{108}. He wrote, for example:

\textsuperscript{107} According to Venturi, ‘...an architecture of complexity and contradiction....embraces the “difficult” numbers of parts – the duality, and the medium degrees of multiplicity.’ See Chapter: The Obligation Toward the Difficult Whole in Ibid pp.88-105.

\textsuperscript{108} Tschumi Le Fresnoy: Architecture In/Between; essays by John Abram... (et al), The Monacelli Press, New York, 1999, pp.39.
'Modes of construction from different epochs, styles without the least affinity, uses and functions lacking any common point could together become generators of a wholly other modernity – a modernity of absolute heterogeneity'\textsuperscript{109}

![Figure 9.51: Le Fresnoy, National Studio for Contemporary Arts, Tourcoing, France, 1998](image)

The juxtaposition of the new roof creates layers of 'inside and outside', which Venturi has claimed to be a major manifestation of contradiction in architecture.\textsuperscript{110} The Le Fresnoy roof (outside) covers the 'crowded intricacies' of the multiple functions and multiple forms below it (inside), just as Venturi have described how Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye exemplifies intricacies within a rigid frame or McKim, Mead and White’s Low House contains intricacies within a large elemental roof. More importantly, there is similarity between Le Fresnoy and the Mother’s House, in that both have an external configuration that is simple, but packed within its interior is an organisation of amazing complexity. In the Mother’s House, the differences between the inside and outside have created 'spaces in-between', which Venturi has exploited to a certain extent to create a tall dining space with curved ceiling and to accommodate the service rooms and storage.

\textsuperscript{109} ibid

\textsuperscript{110} Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, pp.70.
In the case of Le Fresnoy, the space between the rooftops of retained buildings and the underside of the oversailing roof became extraordinary space reminiscent of a film set as service ducts and conduits, maintenance stairs and catwalks are slung below.

Conclusion
After the completion of the Sugden House, the Smithsons continued with their exploration of the language of Brutalism through a smaller, yet more personal project – the Upper Lawn Pavilion. If theory was somewhat restricted by their clients’ wishes and a land covenant in the previous house, here, we find a building that captures the essence of Brutalism to the full. The neutrality of appearance, responsiveness to the ‘as found’, honest materiality and tectonic determinism of Upper Lawn demonstrates the clarity of the Smithsons’ intellectual understanding of Brutalism. Robin Hood Gardens, built some fifteen years later, was again a demonstration of how directness of approach can accommodate the daily life needs of human habitation.

In both of these later projects, the Smithsons maintained a rather modernist sensibility of grounding their work in the ‘concrete’ – inhabitation, tectonics and neutrality of appearance. The Venturis, on the other hand, soon after the Mother’s House, became increasingly interested in matters of ‘style’. The impact of the visit to Las Vegas was profound, and the book that came out of it – Learning from Las Vegas - took an exclusively populist stance. No longer was architecture to be thoroughly complex and contradictory inside out; the inside can now be a simple shed, while the outside a detached billboard with symbolic decorations that allude to the commercial and popular. The fire stations at Columbus and Dixwell as well as the extension to the Allen Memorial Art Museum were less about inflections of interior elements or juxtaposition of contradictory elements than exterior styling.

The Venturis are generally more successful than the Smithsons with their practice and the projects that came flooding in gave them the opportunity to explore all spheres interests. The Mother’s House was a complex little building, but it was also ‘decorated’. The Venturis’ later projects seem to oscillate either between the ideas of the first book and the second or the combination of the two. For example, the simplicity of the fire stations is
closely associated to the decorated sheds of Las Vegas’s gambling halls, whereas the complex layering of skin, inflection of interior spaces and the interpretation of the vernacular found in the Trubek and Wislocki Houses are more related to Venturi’s earlier Mother’s House. The Sainsbury Wing, on the other hand, demonstrates the formal influence of Venturi’s early Princetonian education, combined with a desire to achieve communicative and symbolic complexity.

If the Smithsons and the Venturis are said to have met intellectually at Sugden House and the Mother’s House, then their architecture since the completion of both houses seems to be diverging further and further apart, in terms of spatial complexity, form and appearance. Even when the Smithsons moved from a raw language of Brutalism to a gentler one in the Economist, or ‘experimented’ with ‘decorations’ on the facades of St. Hilda’s, the essence of Brutalism was still present. In fact, there is little that can relate the two buildings to any of Venturi’s ‘decorative sheds’. A comparison of buildings of a similar type by both pairs of architects confirms this. The Smithsons’ ‘conglomerate ordering’ in the Bath University buildings in the eighties was an attempt to turn the unselfconscious practices of a craft tradition into a conscious design methodology, which relates very closely to the idea of Brutalism as they have suggested in 1955: ‘...it (New Brutalism) finds its closest affinities not in a past architectural style, but in peasant dwelling forms....’\(^{111}\) The Bath buildings, for the Smithsons, have a ‘natural’ quality. They share a common ‘formal language’ that ties them back to the existing fabric of which they form part of. Meaning to instruct, these buildings are also a display of the process of their making, guided by honest systems of rules. In a collection of similar building types for Princeton University, the Venturis’ handling of architecture is a complete contrast with that of the Smithsons. If the latter looked at the natural order of place to render their buildings contextual, the former can be seen resorting to mannerism to allude to the historical roots of the rather traditional ‘ivy-league’ university. Calling such building typologies ‘generic form’, the Venturis claimed to have created adaptable and flexible buildings that are expressive of place through ‘ironic resemblance’. Here, we find the idea of ‘generic form’ is both rooted in the earliest architectural ideas,

‘complexity and contradiction’ and ‘decorated shed’ phenomena, just as the ‘conglomerate ordering’ is very much rooted in the Brutalist idiom.

The differences between the Venturis and the Smithsons became even more pronounced, when in the nineties, the Venturis decided, to ‘learn from’ Las Vegas, for the second time, and Japan. They fell in love with the ‘schlock’ of neon lights, LED boards, and scenes against the high urban densities. From this developed terms such as ‘scenography’ and ‘electrography’ within their architectural vocabulary to describe technologically advanced ways of representing symbolism. The Smithsons, on the other hand, right up till the end of their career, were obsessed with the search of the essence of place from the tangible and palpable, such as the basic needs and poetry of habitation, truthful systems of building and material honesty.

The architectural disparities between the Smithsons and the Venturis are also noticeable in the influences they exerted in the development of architectural thinking in the last five decades of the twentieth century since their completion. The recent resurgence of interest in the Smithsons’ architecture has led a number of young contemporary architects to reassess the ideas of the ordinariness and honesty. It was the concept of ‘as found’ that both Sergison & Bates and Caruso St. John found most inspiring from the house, which led them to explore their own architectural acceptance of the everyday. Their reassessment of the ‘as found’ led them to produce architecture that that is close to the Brutalist idiom: familiar, direct, complex and structurally expressive. For the Mother’s House, what started as a ‘gentle manifesto’ to re-assess the importance of urban complexities in the making of contextual architecture, very soon became an icon for Post-Modernism and all things now regarded to be ‘kitsch’. However, the Mother’s House is about much more than just symbolism and ornamentation. The ‘disengaged facades’ allow the outside to be different from the inside, while the inflection of contradictory elements in space planning led to ‘eventful exceptions’, ambiguities and dualities. These complex design processes were to have an enduring effect on the development of contemporary architecture. The Venturis’ ingenuity and originality are acknowledged and respected by many and some of his early ideas can be identified in the contemporary works of Koolhaas and Tschumi.
The architectural differences between the Smithsons and the Venturis are, perhaps, condensed in two contrasted articles written by Alison Smithson and Denise Scott Brown on Sir Edwin Lutyens published in the RIBA Journal in 1969\(^{112}\). In her article, Alison Smithson expressed her admiration for Lutyens' earlier work as the 'best of English country life'. However, his early talent later gave way to disappointing productions when 'he came imaginatively to assemble pieces derivative of past style'\(^{113}\). At the same time, Alison Smithson also proclaimed that the 'assemblage of styles' was a dead end and that Lutyens must be seen as being responsible for all the domestic kitsch that came to characterise the interiors of suburban housing from 1934-56. Outraged by Alison Smithson's article, Denise Scott Brown condemned it as 'condescending and irrelevant', asserting that "commercial strip architecture and Lutyens' houses are relevant to an architecture of meaning"\(^{114}\) (emphasis in original). For Scott Brown, Alison Smithson's 1920's heroic-modern stance for the production 'original' architecture is outdated. Scott Brown supported Lutyens' importance in her article, asserting that the complexities and inconsistencies of Lutyens's forms appear valid and poignant when matched against hers and Robert Venturi's attempt to accommodate to the richness of their own environment and culture. Earlier, Robert Venturi, had, in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, discussed the architecturally simulating qualities of paradox, ambiguity and accommodation in a number of Lutyens's buildings such as Middleton Park, Oxfordshire and Grey Walls, Scotland.\(^{115}\)

This battle of words in 1969 between the two women sums up quite potently the huge differences between the architecture of the Smithsons and the Venturis that was already evident from the comparisons made between the Sugden House and the Mother's House. What is immediately apparent is that each pair of architects belong to a very different architectural culture. The Smithsons, in their acceptance of the existing and the vernacular, remain true to the thinking of the 'heroic and the original' championed by the likes of Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn. Whereas the Venturis' architecture is closer to


\(^{113}\) Smithson, Alison, *Ibid*, pp. 146

\(^{114}\) Scott Brown, Denise, *Ibid*, pp. 353
what Charles Jencks has defined as ‘post-modernists’ tendencies, an approach that involves ‘double-coding’ and ‘hybridity’ of recognisable forms\textsuperscript{116}.


\textsuperscript{116} Charles Jencks defined Post-Modernism as evolutionary, one-half Modern and one-half something else – usually traditional or regional in building language. It is also defined as ‘double-coding, that is, as a series of important dualities. This primary dualism, according to Jencks, is related to elitism and populism, in its attempt to communicate with both the public and a concerned minority, usually architects. Jencks, Charles, \textit{The Language of Post-Modern Architecture}, The Fifth Edition, Academy Editions, London, pp.6
Chapter 10
Conclusion

Introduction
The Sugden House and the Mother’s House were both built in the decade following Second World War: a period that was crucial to the architectural formation of a new sensibility based on realistic rather than ideal human values. They were shocking pieces of work from serious and respected architects at a time when mainstream architecture on both sides of the Atlantic after the Second World War were very much based on the constants of Le Corbusier’s 1920s work (as examined in Chapter Three). The excavation, analysis and comparisons carried out in the previous Chapters Three, Four and Five suggest strongly a trail of connections between the lives and architectural activities of the Smithsons and the Venturis in the early part of their career. There are also a number of parallels in the development of their architectural thinking. A close comparative examination of the two houses carried out in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight suggests that while there is a close correspondence between the syntax of both houses, there are also differences, particularly in the manner in which tectonics, volumetric expression, and communication were manipulated in the two cases to entirely different architectural ends.

The question that begs to be answered in this study remains whether the parallel events, thinking and influence that revolves around the Smithsons and the Venturis have led them to meet intellectually at the Sugden House and the Mother’s House. Are the houses related to the theories of anti-establishment architecture they forwarded in the post-war period? What were the architects’ contributions to post-war architecture with those little houses? How did their contributions fit into the trajectory of architecture in the century, so dominated as it was by the modern movement and attempts to break away from it? Did the similarities in the two houses persist in subsequent projects or was it their differences that dominate? Why do the houses still speak to us? What do they say?
Trail of Connections

Firstly, it is worth considering the some of the significant facts revealed in the earlier Chapters, which suggest a trail of connections between the lives and architectural activities of the Smithsons and the Venturis. Chapter Two reveals that the Smithsons and the Venturis were almost exact contemporaries: Alison Smithson was born in 1928, Peter Smithson 1923, while Robert Venturi was born in 1925 and Denise Scott Brown, 1931. However, the Smithsons achieved recognition for their architectural work at a much earlier age. Alison was twenty-one and Peter, twenty-six when they won the Hunstanton School competition¹, while Venturi was thirty-nine when the Mother’s House was completed and forty-one years of age when Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture was published in 1966. While the Smithsons started collaborating almost during college years, Denise Scott Brown did not meet Robert Venturi until 1960, after having travelled and studied in Europe. Although both started collaborating in teaching as early as 1962, design collaboration began only in the late sixties when Scott Brown joined the firm officially in 1969. Hence, they did not collaborate on the design of the Mother’s House although they exchanged ideas a lot, and some of Scott Brown’s ideas appeared in the last part of Venturi’s Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture.²

The Smithsons’ and the Venturis’ success as theorists and as practicing architects relatively early in their careers owed much to the support of prominent ‘critics’ who share their passion for anti-establishment architecture, who in turn used them to forward their own position and predilection. The Smithsons had the back-up of Reyner Banham, who helped them theorise New Brutalism in 1955³, while Robert Venturi had Vincent Scully, who promoted Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture as being the most important writing on the making of architecture since Le Corbusier’s Vers une Architecture of

¹ Peter Smithson, commenting on their early success when they won Hunstanton, wrote: ‘We were just children, as it were, straight out of school. People forget that when they attack the design.’ Smithson, Peter, Reflections on Hunstanton, arq, vol.2, summer 1997.
² This is confirmed by Robert Venturi in an e-mail to author dated 7th July 2003.
1923. Each pair of architects also had the support of their contemporaries. They were seen as leaders of the young who were dissatisfied with the dominant strain of the ‘avant garde’ and the ‘modern’ style. The Smithsons took leadership of Team 10 and were active in their contribution within the Independent Group. The Venturis’ were influential among the elite academics who were also architects, such as Charles Moore, Robert Stern and G. Holmes Perkins.

The unwavering respect from their mentors and peers is easy to understand. Both the Smithsons and the Venturis were academics and architects of a high calibre who taught and practised concurrently and saw teaching as inspiration to continuing creative thinking. Peter Smithson was highly respected and influential as a teacher at the Architectural Association between 1955-1960 and at Bartlett, University College, London between 1976-77. He was later invited to teach and become an associate professor at Bath University in 1978. Venturi, on the other hand, has been teaching at GSFA of University of Pennsylvania since 1954 and at Princeton, Yale between 1966 and 1970. Denise Scott Brown too had a teaching career at Penns’ GSFA, and was later appointed as co-chair of the Urban Design Program at UCLA, Berkeley, California.

Their fortuitous careers in academia and practice meant that they are those rare breeds of architects who are able not only to design, but to express what should be done and how it should be done. Throughout the Smithsons’ and Venturis’ career, writing and building had been mutually necessary; the writing necessary to the building, as inspiration and justification; the building necessary to the writing, as realisation and demonstration.

When the Sugden House and the Mother’s House were built, their architects were at a juncture of their career when there was not much work⁴, and with time in their hands, the natural thing to do was to theorise and publish. Hence, they have been able to concentrate with one eye on the drawing board, the other on the mighty pen. The design of the houses

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⁵ With the Smithsons, this remained so throughout their career.
must thus be seen in the light of their writing during this period. The Smithsons’ most important contribution to the architectural debate would be their polemics on ‘direct and natural’ architecture called *New Brutalism*. Whilst Robert Venturi, wrote a piece of what he calls ‘gentle’ manifesto, titled *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* which asks us to take mannerist lessons from historical and contemporary sources for the creation of ‘inclusive’ architecture. The in-depth comparison of the two houses in Chapters Seven and Eight illustrates that the design of the houses are closely related to their respective theories. It also illustrates that there are strong similarities and differences between the design of the houses.

One of the important questions to answer at this juncture is whether the important events, influences and interest in the architectural development in the Smithsons and the Venturis outlined in Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five have led to similarities in the Sugden House and the Mother’s House. It is known that the Smithsons and the Venturis were moving in overlapping circles and were exposed to similar influences. They were also examining similar concerns. These can be summarised as the following:

- Denise Scott Brown claimed to have been highly influenced by the Smithsons and the Independent Group as a student of the AA School in London in the mid-fifties. She also mentioned that this sensibility was brought into her collaboration with Robert Venturi since 1960.
- Through G. Holmes Perkins – dean of the Graduate School of Fine Arts at University of Pennsylvania – ideas of CIAM as well as Team 10 permeated the school. He was reported to have always stressed that the importance of planning for communities at all levels of social organisation, which recalls Team 10’s own hierarchy of human association diagram.
- Team 10’s work further permeated discussions at the GSFA in 1957 when the department hosted projects presented at the tenth CIAM Conference at Dubrovnik and when Peter Smithson himself was invited to lecture at the school. Another
member of Team 10, Aldo van Eyck, was also invited to the school in 1960 and in his case, as a visiting professor.

- The Smithsons and the Venturis were exposed to and influenced by significant parallel sociological studies that concentrated on the everyday (described in Chapter Four). Through Nigel Henderson and wife Judith Stephenson, a sociologist, the Smithsons came across Wilmott & Young's *Family and Kinship in East London*. Whereas the Venturis, particularly Denise Scott Brown, through her connection with Herbert Gans, were well versed with another important documentation of everyday life: *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community*.

- The Smithsons and the Venturis began to examine contemporary art and popular culture in their respective work. Together with Independent Group members, the Smithsons were examining the *art brut* aesthetics of Pollock and Dubuffet, the wit of arranging household objects inspired by the Eames, as well as the aesthetics of commercialism and consumer goods through the House of the Future in 1956. Whereas, the Venturis were influenced by American versions of Pop Art, particularly that of Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenburg, and they have also started examining the existing American commercial and suburban landscape as valid lessons to learn from.

- Louis Kahn, as demonstrated in Chapter Five, becomes an important link between the Smithsons and the Venturis. Both Robert Venturi and Kahn were associated with Princeton and were highly influenced by French Beaux-Arts style of teaching there. From early on they both shared a mutual interest in an effort to relate modern architectural and urban forms to historicism and tradition. Whereas, the Smithsons had been most impressed by Kahn’s Plan for Mid-town Philadelphia project of 1951-53. The Smithsons’ urban projects for Haupstadt, 1957-58 and London Road Study, 1959, were highly influenced by Kahn’s original intention of finding ‘*expression from the order of movement*’ and the proposition of poetic and monumental civic form for the city of Philadelphia. This project represents Kahn’s move away from his earlier obsession with geometric order or ‘techno-organic geometries’, towards

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architecture’s monumental tradition and urban symbolism. This shift in thinking can be partly attributed to Venturi’s growing influence over Kahn during this significant period of the older architect’s career.\(^7\)

A number of conclusion may be derived from the above. Firstly, we can safely conclude that while the New Brutalism and *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* may have respectively described two very different approaches to architecture, they also advanced a number of similar concerns. These theories were based on their authors’ dissatisfaction with the limited and rigid vocabulary of modernism. The exposure to the wider interests of sociologists and artists suggests to the Smithsons and the Venturis the possibilities of alternatives that include human values and human experience. As such, these theories can be seen as attempts to humanise an architecture that has failed to include the experience of life and needs of society, while the Sugden House and the Mother’s House represent part of how it could be achieved. The Smithsons and the Venturis were, of course, not alone in the struggle to humanise modern architecture in the fifties and sixties. There were others, but their work played significant roles. Their ideas have also crossed the Atlantic many times. The parallels of concern between Team 10 in the fifties and the greys in the sixties are proof of the phenomenon. Robert Venturi and the Smithsons never met each other, but exchange of ideas did occur through individuals like Denise Scott Brown, G, Holmes Perkins, Aldo van Eyck and Louis Kahn.

\(^7\) As mentioned in Chapter Four, Venturi entered Kahn’s office just as the latter was considering dropping ‘techno-organic geometries’ and began exploring a different symbolic architectural language, loosely drawn from history. During the nine-month period of 1956-57 in Kahn’s office, Venturi worked mainly on conceptual urban megastructure projects for Philadelphia. Venturi’s contribution left a lasting impression on Kahn’s architectural development, as affirmed by Vincent Scully who wrote, ‘.....(*It*) was surely Venturi’s perceptive comprehension of personal mannerisms and specificity in architecture that came to loosen Kahn’s growing inclination toward highly controlled, even compulsively ordered designs. Within the very shadow of the pure logic cast by the City Tower project, Venturi, in his sketch of the plaza, invoked the emotionally charged spirit of Michaelangelo’s Campidoglio’. Quotes in Brownlee, David B. & De Long, David G., *Louis Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture*, The Museum of Comtemporary Art, Los Angeles, Rizzolli, New York, 1991, pp.62-63.
As such, another important conclusion to make here is that the apparent similarities between the Sugden House and the Mother’s House, are not accidental. Playing on scale, symmetry and imagery derived from a typical suburban dwelling, each house displays their designers’ parallel interest in the everyday and the popular. Here, we find the populist concern underlying the historical arguments in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* became highly conspicuous in the Mother’s House, especially the symbolic additions, which can partly be attributed to Denise Scott Brown’s growing contribution in their collaboration. We cannot, however, conclude that there is a direct Brutalist or Independent Group influence on the design of the Mother’s House through Denise Scott Brown, because Robert Venturi was already exploring similar elemental form even before he met Scott Brown in his Beach House project of 1959. It is more likely that, as Vincent Scully suggests, Venturi was inspired by McKim, Mead and White’s Low House of 1887, Luigi Moretti’s Casa Girasole or even Palladio’s Villa Barbaro of Maser, all of which appeared in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*.

Thirdly, the Smithsons’ and the Venturis’ parallel examination of popular culture and pop art thinking, have had a profound influence on the manner in which the most banal and ordinary were transformed into something quite extraordinary and poetic. The Sugden House and the Mother’s House are at first glance ordinary, even ugly, but closer examinations uncover definitive strangeness and complexity in each house. In the Sugden House, the external brickwork is overwhelming, while the windows are larger than normal and the roof slopes disproportionately. Whereas, in the Mother’s House, the scale is baffling, so is the curious green colour on the walls, while the elemental front façade makes it look very much like a giant dollhouse. These transformations of the ordinary in both houses are carried out by shifts and twists of context, and it is an approach that is very much rooted in contemporary art thinking.

Lastly, we can conclude that Louis Kahn, with his desire to return architecture to some semblance of historical form, exerted a profound influence on both the Smithsons and the Venturis. Kahn’s work suggests possibilities of a modern idiom that is rooted in tradition.
However, the Smithsons, like Kahn, were against explicit historical referencing and direct appropriation of its forms, while the Venturis were all for it. The Smithsons share this sentiment not only with Kahn and Team 10, but also the Modernists, where historical sources are only to be repeated when used in a restrained, taut aesthetic of simple, abstract volumes and masses. The Venturis, by contrast, prefer to select qualities of appearance and shape it based on a mannerist discipline.

The Disparities

The Smithsons’ and the Venturis’ differing approach to appropriation of sources – albeit historical, popular or commercial – significantly sets their architecture apart. It is a virtue that is immediately apparent when the two houses are examined in detail in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. In fact, what was found at closer examination of the houses in comparison is that there are more differences than there are similarities. Their differences can be summarised as the following:

- The design of the Sugden House is closely related to the idea of functionalism, not the kind practised by Le Corbusier or Gropius, but one found in the unselfconscious idiom found in anonymous buildings rising out of instinctive rightness of form and function. This attribute correlates strongly with the direct, natural and honest approach of New Brutalism. Venturi shunned the idea of functionalism in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, and argued against flowing space and the tendency to imposes continuity between the inside and the outside. Hence, the Mother’s House is far from any kind of functionalism. It is ambiguous, inclusive and contain residual spaces, as a result of manipulation of form and space through detached skins.
- The Sugden House was clearly ‘assembled’ where the source of item in its making is still discernible, untransformed, even re-usable and primitive. Whereas, the Mother’s House was ‘designed’, a method that involves the use of homogeneous special parts, each part of its own, unidentifiable, but when put together, forms an efficient compact object.
- It was concluded earlier that the complex ordinariness in the Sugden House and the Mother’s House are rooted in contemporary art thinking. Further examinations, however, reveal that what each pair of architects’ was referring to, belong to very different strains, in terms of ideology and methodology. The rising of the ordinary in the Sugden House is very much ‘process-based’, much like the production methods used by Jackson Pollock in the making of his paintings, where discovery of creative form is through a process rather than pre-figured thought. The processes that took place in the house can be described as the ‘creative assembly’ of ‘as found’ materials, a method typically employed by Charles and Ray Eames and Marcel Duchamp, who were well known for their production of highly artistic arrangements through creative assembly of ‘ready mades’. The complex ordinariness seen in the Mother’s House, on the other hand, is parallel to the phenomenon of American pop art, which involves the sophisticated connections between perception and meaning via scale, symbol and context. Like the transformations of the ordinary seen in the Mother’s House, this particular approach to art involves a process of highly dynamic visual and physical transformations, resulting in forms more abstract and at times more bizarre than the original. In the design of the house, these processes lead to the inflection of the original, so that it becomes explicitly complex not only in the substance of its plan and form, but also in its symbolic representations.

- Within the sphere of the Venturi’s argument, the Mother’s House could be loosely characterised as a ‘decorated shed’ for the additions of symbolic meanings that doesn’t stand in any relationship to the architectonic whole. The Sugden House, by contrast, would be labelled a ‘duck’ for its modernist tendency, where associations derived are implicit in the overall space, structure, materiality and program.

- The Smithsons were avoiding the clichés of style with the Sugden House by designing in a direct and honest manner, whilst the Venturis were imbuing the house with style by their inclusion of various stylistic and cultural coding.

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• Both houses communicate but in different ways. In the Sugden House, the variation of materials assembled in their as found state, the subtle changes in room proportions, light quality and views are all meant to raise the individual items and elements above themselves, to serve as ‘quiet’ signs to communicate to the individuals the potentials of use. The Mother’s House, on the other hand, includes a number of highly recognisable codes – in the substance of its plan, elevation and ornamentation - that are meant to be read like a text that gives commentary of the contemporary situations and aspirations.

• The interior spaces in the Sugden House flow with a degree of inevitability, as each is in close correspondence to purpose, growing almost naturally from use. Each room is allowed to speak its social function by starting a dialogue with each adjoining function. Whereas the interior spaces in the Mother’s House reflects the complexity of what Venturi calls ‘individual circumstance’. A regular and symmetrical planning of the house is modified and distorted to accommodate the demands of various conflicting elements, resulting in awkward configurations, residual spaces and change of scale.

• In urban planning terms, the Sugden House represents a new housing typology for suburban development called Close Housing. The new typology will be organised plastically to give the existing new meaning, revalidating, modifying and generating new responses from its communities. This approach is consistent with their tendency for proposing a new but flexible order to replace the complex of existing ones. The Mother’s House, in contrast, represents the Venturis’ non-judgemental acceptance of the existing and of ‘what people want’. It sits on its site in accordance to the typical suburban arrangement: the house is set back from public domain, to be reached on a driveway across a sweeping lawn, which inevitably leads to a conspicuous entrance door set onto an almost symmetrical façade.

At the juncture, we can conclude that while the Smithsons and the Venturis have shared similarities in their continuing engagement with the search for an architecture that reflects the enormous variety of cultural determinants, nevertheless, it is the differences that were
almost certainly of a greater significance. The design of the Sugden House illustrates that the Smithsons' sensibilities remain heroic and original, whilst Venturi and Scott Brown, by contrast, is committed to the idea of fragmentation in architecture, and this seems to follow from their feeling about the Zeitgeist. In Chapter Nine, the examination of the Smithsons' and the Venturis' architectural vocabulary in subsequent projects and the influence they exert on contemporary architecture confirms further their disparities of approaches.

Would the Smithsons have approved of the Venturis' architecture? Most probably not. The dynamic separation between the inside and outside, between program and its extrinsic accessories, would have been impossible and unacceptable to the Smithsons, who throughout their career were searching for the truth. Their differences became public in a direct exchange of opinions when Alison Smithson and Denise Scott Brown each wrote articles with contrasting views on Sir Edwin Lutyens in the RIBA Journal 1969. One was lamenting over the disappointing productions of assembled 'pieces derivative of past style' in Lutyens' late buildings, while the other found them relevant to an 'architecture of meaning'.

Despite the differences, the Smithsons and the Venturis made major contributions to post-war architecture with those little houses. Each house represents contrasting ways of how to humanise and enrich modern architecture, which they believe has come adrift of the society and the communities it seeks to serve. The Sugden House represents a method of using ordinary materials, put together in the ordinary way to create spaces that responds closely to human daily rituals. Whereas, the Mother's House represents one that uses inflection and contradictory juxtaposition as well as ornamentation to respond to the complexities of program, pluralism of taste and urbanism. When they were just built, both houses were shocking and controversial, mainly for their ordinariness and references to social realism. Nevertheless, they also proved to be enduring, and almost five decades later, they still speak to us their aesthetic power and social force. Their endurance
indicates the substance and durability of their analysis and approach. Both houses force us to confront the age-old dilemma of balancing an architect's fulfillment of personal disposition with communal responsibility, by encouraging us to think of architecture as having cultural and emotive relevance. However, in many ways, the Sugden House's influence is perhaps more enduring than the Mother's House because it is grounded on the concrete – inhabitation, tectonics, and functionalism - rather than matters of style and meaning. Nevertheless, the Mother's House is about much more than just style and symbolism. The complex design processes that the house went through were to have an enduring effect on the development of contemporary architecture. In essence, the house is a serious piece of work that has liberated architecture from the Cartesian or formal order, then and now. Its legacy has allowed the freedom to respond to the complexity of contemporary life and embrace the circumstantial.

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Appendix

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