

Architecture as a Way of Life: The New Brutalism 1953-1956

Irénée Scalbert

figure 1
Hunstanton
Secondary Modern
School under
construction, A. and
P. Smithson, 1949-
1954

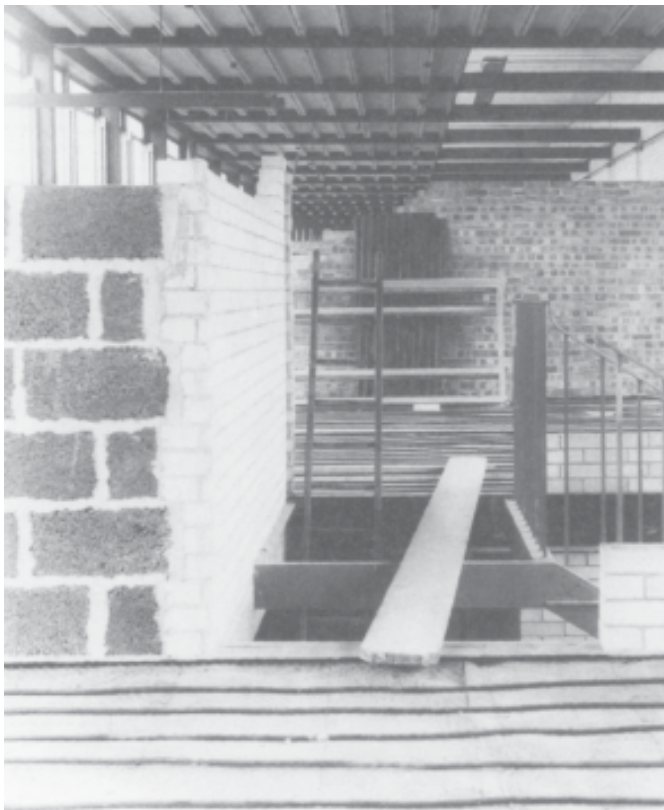


figure 2
Hunstanton
Secondary Modern
School (Completed)



The first reference to the New Brutalism was made by Alison Smithson in 1953. It appeared in her description of a project for a small house in Soho, the structure of which was to be 'exposed entirely, without interior finishes wherever practicable'.¹ In the same year, Alison and Peter Smithson, together with the artist, Eduardo Paolozzi, and the photographer, Nigel Henderson, organised the exhibition 'Parallel of Life and Art', held at the London Institute for Contemporary Arts, and at the end of the year, at the AA-school for a couple of days. At that time, the foursome was part of the Independent Group, a loosely organised discussion-group of young artists, designers and critics who gathered at the ICA during the years 1952-1955. In 1954, the two architects Alison and Peter Smithson completed the Secondary Modern School at Hunstanton which was at once accepted as the first Brutalist building. Soon afterwards, they proposed a definition of the budding movement. In a brief and enigmatic statement (one of only two in which they have attempted a clarification), they enlisted traditional Japanese architecture to illustrate the new approach. The Japanese, they argued, showed 'a reverence for the natural world and, from that, for the materials of the built world'. This reverence participated in a general conception of life, leading the Smithsons to declare, famously, that 'we see architecture as the direct result of a way of life'.² Notwithstanding the engaging simplicity of these ideas, they were somewhat lost among miscellaneous considerations on Modernism and could hardly have precipitated an architecture movement.

figure 3
Photograph by Nigel
Henderson,
Construction work at
the Hunstanton
Secondary Modern
School



It fell upon another text to acquire the status of manifesto. In an essay written in late 1955, Reyner Banham, the historiographer of the movement, ascribed three characteristics to the new architecture: memorability of image, clear exhibition of structure, and valuation of materials 'as found'. He noted that all three were present in Le Corbusier's dictum, 'L'architecture, c'est avec des Matières Brutes, établir des rapports émouvants'. The merit of Brutalists, he concluded, was to have dropped the cultural dead weight of the likes of Mansart, Palladio and Alberti.³ In his book of 1966, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, he rejected this early attempt at defining the movement, and he identified three different conceptions of Brutalism in circulation in the mid-1950's. They were a *rappel à l'ordre* to the fundamentals of architecture endorsed by Modernists with a Beaux-Arts background, an instance of British pragmatism according to which every case was to be assessed on its own merits, and a new aesthetic informed notably by *musique concrète* and abstract expressionism. However, it is clear that what Brutalism represented to him personally, during the critical years of 1953 to 1955, was the possibility of 'an utterly uninhibited functionalism' of the kind which he was to advocate throughout his life.

The best evidence in favour of the reality of a Brutalist movement was that the term did become widely used in Britain. But it seemed to have indicated nothing more precise than a sensibility towards materials inspired by Le Corbusier's *béton brut* and a case for rigorous, honest detailing. It was in fact so inclusive that it became benign and meaningless. How could the association, in the mind of Banham and others, of Le Corbusier's *Unité* with a church by Lewerentz, or of Mies van der Rohe's master plan for IIT with apartments by Stirling and Gowan serve any useful purpose? Brutalism started with a particular sensibil-

ity toward materials, but its values and its objectives remained far too vague to insure the coherence necessary to the constitution of a movement.

What Alison Smithson had called in 1953 the 'warehouse aesthetic' and the Soho house which it described could be (and were) regarded as an outbidding of Le Corbusier's *brut* sensibility as well as a radical extension of J.M. Richards's Functionalist Tradition. In 1957, when its moment was all but spent, Brutalism was still perceived as ill-defined. 'For a new idea, one observer claimed, one must come back to the emphasis on a-formalism and topology'.⁴ A-formalism undoubtedly gave a sense of direction to British avant-garde architecture in the 1950s. Banham was aware of its importance, faintly at first when it meant to him no more than a rejection of classic proportions, and emphatically in 1966 when he recognised it as a force in its own right. The exhibition 'Parallel of Life and Art' marked the beginning of this a-formalist trend in which much of British architecture was subsequently engaged.

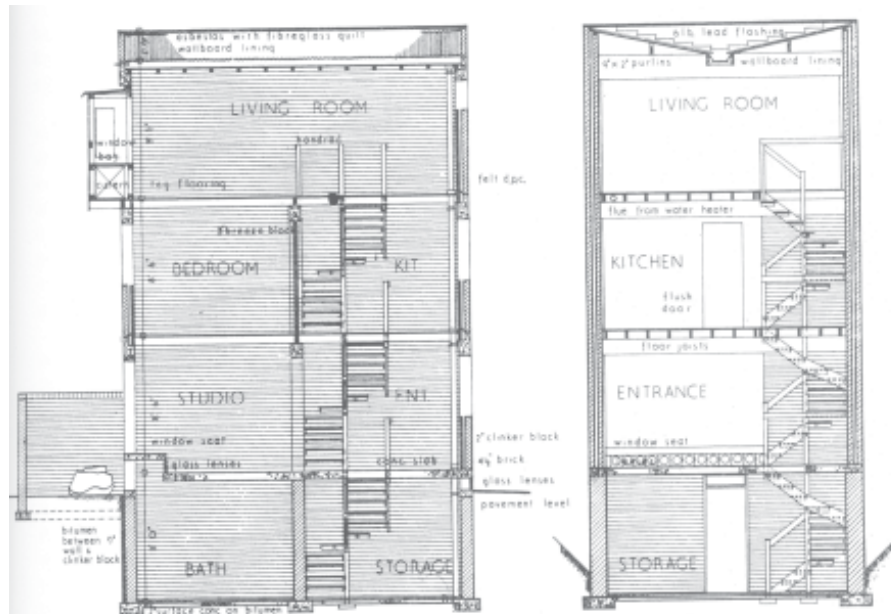
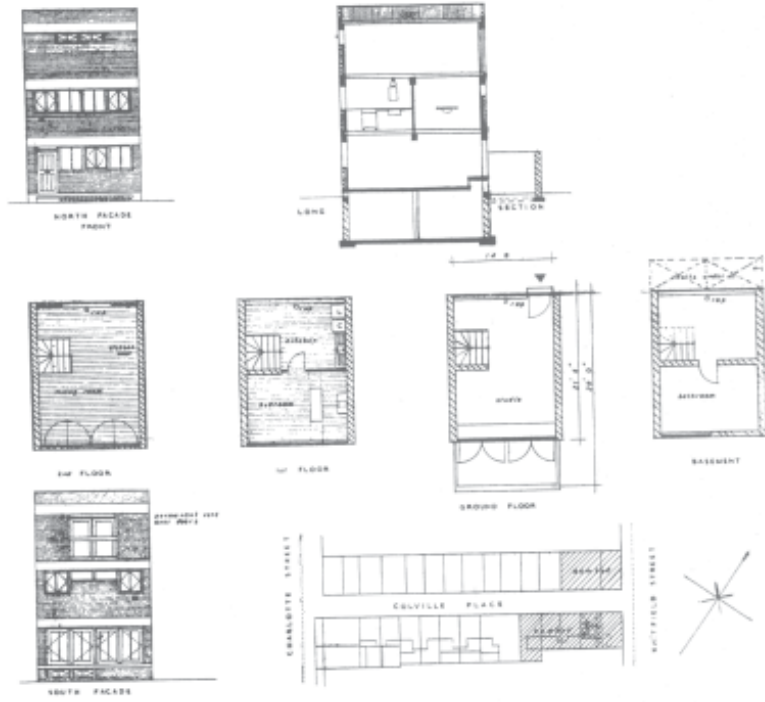


figure 4
Soho House, A. and
P. Smithson, 1953

Above: Sections (scale 16 ft. = 1 in.). Below: plans and elevations (Scale 24 ft. = 1 in.)



Parallel of Life and Art

'Parallel of Life and Art' was initiated by Paolozzi. In a year or less, after regular meetings between him, the Smithsons and Nigel Henderson during which material that seemed significant was brought forward and discussed, a substantial body of images and a certain amount of comment was generated.⁵ A proposal for a show was presented to the ICA in April 1952 under the title 'Sources'. Hence the idea of the project could have been first discussed in mid-1951, at the earliest.

The material was assembled like cuttings on a pinboard. Indeed, one of the most original and provocative aspects of 'Parallel of Life and Art' was to project at the scale of an exhibition what many did at home for pleasure.⁶ The coherence of the show was analogous in its principle to the unity assumed in a person's life. As Paolozzi put it, 'Parallel of Life and Art' was in essence autobiographical.⁷ It was a compilation of personal interests ranging from X-ray photographs of a Jeep to an image of Pollock dripping paint on the floor. Although hung at random in the show, images were grouped in the catalogue under casual headings. Photographs of architecture and art came together naturally enough. So did those from anatomy, nature, medicine and geology, all of which belonged to the natural sciences, which Henderson had studied before the war. But how was one to make sense of other categories such as calligraphy, 'date 1901', landscape, primitive, stress, stress structure, science fiction (which, surprisingly given the participation of Paolozzi, included a single item), not to mention football (also one item)? These headings were not philosophical or even generic. They were arrived at empirically and emerged from the material itself. This disregard for logical consistency, which was felt to be alien to the spontaneous order of life, baffled some observers, for example David



figure 5
Exhibition Parallel of
Life and Art, held at
the Institute of
Contemporary Arts,
1953



figure 6
Exhibition Parallel of
Life and Art

Sylvester who wrote in his review of the show of 'a consummate inconsequentiality'.⁸ The exhibition depended entirely for its effect upon the autonomy of each image and the spontaneous parallels which might be drawn from one image to another.

These intentions were assisted by the picture hanging. While the form of the display was by then not altogether original,⁹ the spatial arrangement highlighted the autonomy of images from one another, and the casual choice of size and location for each evoked the format of a scrapbook. Henderson's contribution to presentation was determinant. For some time already, he had praised the freshness and innocence of poor quality prints which bore thumbmarks and the signs of their making. Accordingly, the material for 'Parallel of Life and Art' was reproduced commercially and a small, non-specialist firm of lithographers was chosen to print the catalogue which Henderson and Paolozzi had designed. In this way, the organisers hoped to make use of people's unconscious skills and sought to avoid falling into the hands of the designers – a profession which they held in contempt.¹⁰

'Parallel of Life and Art' meant different things to each of its organisers. For Paolozzi, its images were similar to those which Richard Hamilton had selected for *Growth and Form* held at the ICA in 1951 – 'little boy things, he recalled, about the history of the motor car, of Ford, the magic, the American ingenuity, the world of airplanes, aircraft carriers and even the way America went to war' – and were indebted to Banham for their catholicity.¹¹ What distinguished the Independent Group's concerns from that of other European centres of artistic activity was an antipuritanical taste for American popular culture. However the images themselves show no evidence of this influence. For the

Smithsons, the novelty of 'Parallel of Life and Art' was its 'as found' quality, its proposition that art could result from an act of choice rather than an act of design.¹²

For his part, Nigel Henderson claimed that the images of 'Parallel of Life and Art' were present all around them, and he identified several influences or ideas at work on the exhibition. In the first instance, there was d'Arcy Thompson's explorations of the geometry of organisms which had still a greater impact on Hamilton's show of a similar name. Further themes included visual analogies between natural and man made artefacts, new discoveries in photography such as X-rays, and 'the overwhelming beauty of the occasional throwaway image' such as news photographs.¹³ André Malraux's 'Musée Imaginaire' (or Museum without Walls) was yet another, more surprising influence, and the organisers' attempt to invite the French writer to open the exhibition suggests how significant it may have been. Like 'Parallel of Life and Art', Malraux's imaginary museum was built upon connections between disparate art works, made possible by the proliferation of photographic images.¹⁴ Malraux's parallels relied on stylistic and therefore visual qualities. But, Henderson claimed, 'for the simple pleasures of the eye, we have substituted the subtler ones of knowledge'. His idea was to extend the scope of the *Musée Imaginaire* beyond the terms of art in the sphere of significance.¹⁵

More than the images themselves, it was the *brut* aspect of the material which Banham observed in his review of the exhibition. The parallels, he claimed, arose from the levelling medium of photography, which established similarities of outline or texture where there was no connection of content. They were, he implied, of a purely arbitrary and formal kind. It was precisely this

idea of arbitrariness which another critic, Tom Hopkinson, a one-time editor of *Picture Post*, denied. In a review that was particularly appreciated by Henderson, he put forward a more sophisticated argument. 'Parallel of Life and Art' testified, in his opinion, to the fact that much of the work dismissed by conventional standards as childish doodling showed a unique penetration into the material world, equivalent to a new faculty developed by man. The images between which Banham had made chance connections became linked by a new and deeper vision which reached beyond basic distinctions such as the natural and the artificial, the animate and the inanimate: 'the basic idea of the collection', Hopkinson wrote, 'is the visual likeness between objects of a totally dissimilar nature. . . as if one had stumbled upon a set of basic patterns for the universe'.¹⁶

Many photographs illustrated this idea in their own right, none better than the image of a typewriter with its components taken apart. The parts were laid out in such an artless way that they appeared to reflect the desire to do without composition. Presented in outline as if on a light table, their texture became invisible and the sense of their material was suppressed. Every part being discreet, the image gave no clue concerning their functioning. It was no longer the signification of the whole which mattered, but that of the parts. These, now lost to the manufacturer, drifted in a semantic field of their own, open to the musings of the observer. The parts had become constituted as signs. They became pictograms of a language shorn of its syntax, of a language whose grammar was not so much forgotten as it was waiting to be spontaneously invented by the observer. Like signs, they belonged in a realm which was parallel to the world of things.

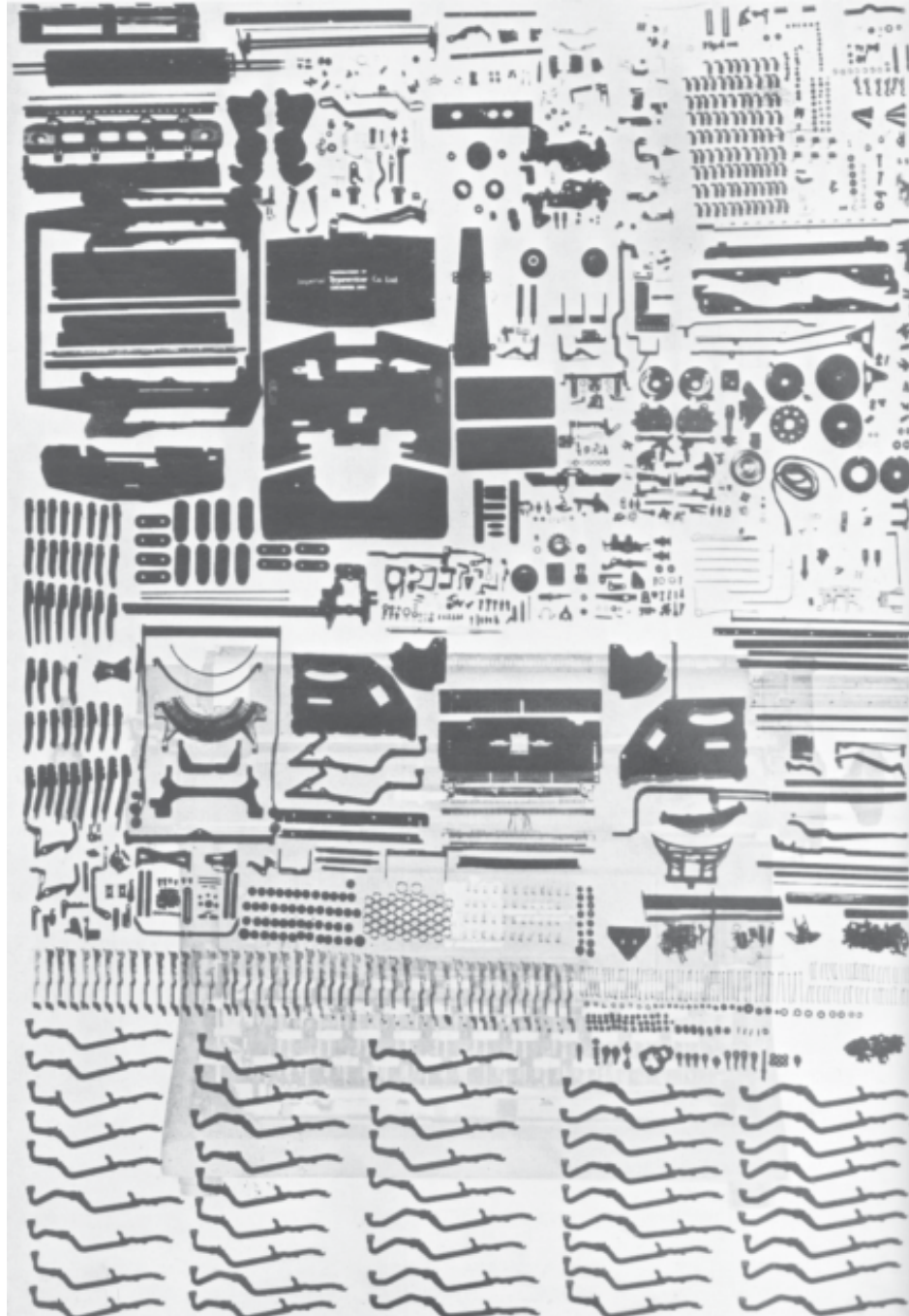


figure 7
Typewriter, as
shown at Parallel of
Life and Art

How felicitous and appropriate, therefore, that these should belong to a machine, the purpose of which was to transcribe language. To the jingling of functioning parts, to the teeming of their infinite formal complexity corresponded the proliferation of language. The typewriter image was presented as evidence that all things were also languages, and that all languages, that is, the set of basic patterns referred to by Hopkinson, were parallel and connected. This is why it was at all possible to make connections between various images of 'Parallel of Life and Art'. By virtue of this immanence of language, a secret yet more real intimacy could be established between the observer and the teeming life of the world. This, rather than any material factuality, was the essential meaning of Brutalism.

Paris

According to Peter Smithson, what he called 'the materiality thing' was at the heart of Brutalism. As he saw it, he and Alison got this 'thing' from Paolozzi, and Paolozzi got it from Jean Dubuffet.¹⁷ Hence they were, he claimed, 'the inheritors of Paris'. This view was shared by Banham who expressed it equally succinctly. But what did Paolozzi actually get from Paris, and what was this 'thing' which has mostly eluded comment?

Paolozzi stayed in Paris from 1947 to 1949.¹⁸ His journey was not atypical at a time when every aspiring British artist wanted to mix with the Surrealists.¹⁹ He wanted to meet great artists who were then far and few in Britain, and he did just this, sometimes with Nigel Henderson. Through Peggy Guggenheim, Henderson's 'fairy god-mother', they got an introduction to Arp whom they visited in his studio. Other artists included Braque, Leger (who showed them *Ballet Mechanique*), Brancusi and

Giacometti. By Paolozzi's own account, his most significant meeting was with Tristan Tzara. After the war, the Dadaist's aura had diminished, and he welcomed visitors. Though never a Surrealist, he had been a friend of Breton and was able to offer insights into the movement. He owned an important collection of primitive art which, along Max Ernst's famous tiny collage, 'Le rossignol chinois', made a lasting impression on Paolozzi. Yet Tzara's influence on Paolozzi was anything but direct. As a close friend of the sculptor during this period, Raymond Mason, put it, 'it was great to know him because he was a famous man'.²⁰ Paolozzi read Raymond Roussel's 'Impressions d'Afrique' on Tzara's recommendation, and he later wrote to Henderson that he planned to write a pastiche of the famous novel.²¹ He made Dada-inspired collages. And on the face of it, that is about all - or so it seems.

A sense of disappointment colours Paolozzi's account of his stay in Paris. His reticence toward Paris' artistic milieu was in part cultural. Pivotal French figures of the late 1940's - personalities like Jean Dubuffet, Michel Leiris, Henri Michaux and Michel Tapié - were, as he saw it, in a totally different world from his own. They were to him very French, by which he appeared to mean that they had literary pretensions: they enjoyed reading and they enjoyed writing. Although Paolozzi knew Dubuffet, there was never a great friendship between them because, he suggested, he had no inclination to enter a literary correspondence. As for Tapié, the critic who in June 1951 coined the word 'informel', Paolozzi was suspicious of his status of eminence grise: this role smacked to his mind of arrogance in a way which reminded him of British colonial or class prejudice. All the same, Paolozzi was among the few British artists invited to participate in Tapié's famous 1952 exhibition 'Signifiants de l'informel', which launched

his idea of an 'Art Autre'. The list of artists, which was formidable, included Dubuffet, Fautrier, Michaux, Mathieu, Appel, Richier and, among the Americans, Pollock, Ossorio, Tobey, de Kooning and Sam Francis.

However, it was Toni del Renzio rather than Paolozzi who drew Michel Tapié to the attention of the Independent Group. He first became aware of the latter's activities in the Italian magazine *Spazio*, in which a small article was published on the occasion of Tapié's previous 1951 show 'Véhémences Confrontées', which launched the notion of the *informel* (or, as Tapié always insisted, of the *informel signifiant*). Del Renzio, who was a frequent visitor to Paris, hoped to establish whether French painting at that time represented an original development, or whether it merely followed after the Americans. Being among the first to write about it, Tapié would inevitably have come to his attention. In addition, Del Renzio and others within the Independent Group fought against the dominance which the concept of form exercised upon the understanding of art. Tapié's idea of an *informel signifiant* seemed a perfect riposte.²²

'Opposing Forces', the show held at the ICA in February 1953, came out of this meeting of minds. It was organized by del Renzio, and paintings were selected by Tapié and Peter Watson of the ICA in Paris. For the first time, works by Pollock were shown in London. Other artists were Alfonso Ossorio, Sam Francis, Mathieu, Riopelle, Serpan and Michaux. The name of the show, 'Opposing Forces', referred to Tapié's 'Véhémences Confrontées', and the French critic contributed a forward to the catalogue, for which he borrowed ideas from his recent 'Un Art Autre'. The show marked the moment when Tapié's ideas became a focus for discussion within the Independent Group.

In the early 1950s, the idea of form was irremediably linked to the avatar of formalism and stylistic distinctions. It became increasingly difficult to think of art in terms of new movements or 'isms'. Hence Tapié could imagine an *ailleurs*, another place which could encompass every interesting tendency in the art of his time: Tachism, art brut, action painting. In his influential pamphlet of 1952, 'Un Art Autre', close to the apex he placed two precursors, Duchamp and Picabia, while at the apex itself there was Dada. More precisely, there was Tristan Tzara and his 'Essai sur la situation de la poésie' of 1931, which was to the 'Informel' what Apollinaire's *Esprit Nouveau* Conference of 1917 had been for the Surrealists: a testament, a foundation and a prophecy. Lower down, he placed two events, both of 1945, which founded the Informel. The first was the exhibition of Fautrier's Hostages paintings, for which Malraux (later called upon to open 'Parallel of Life and Art') wrote a forward to the catalogue. The second event was the exhibition of Dubuffet's 'Hautes Pâtes'.

figure 7

Dubuffet's name was bandied around, for example by Banham, who like the Smithsons, envisaged *art brut* as one of the sources, perhaps the main source of the Brutalist sensibility. 'Parallel of Life and Art' included a reproduction of one of his paintings from the 'Corps de Dames' series and people within the Independent Group were doubtlessly aware of the painter's work well before Dubuffet's show at the ICA in March 1955. Nevertheless, a lack of focus surrounds his impact on the British scene. Even though the Smithsons willingly acknowledged a connection with Dubuffet, they were but dimly aware of the painter's ideas. They never met him.²³

The painter's impact on Paolozzi was little more direct. While in Paris in the late 1940's, Brancusi, Arp and Giacometti (all sculp-

figure 8
Portrait of Michel
Tapié, by Jean
Dubuffet, 1946



figure 9
sculpture, St.
Sebastian I, by
Eduardo Paolozzi.
1957

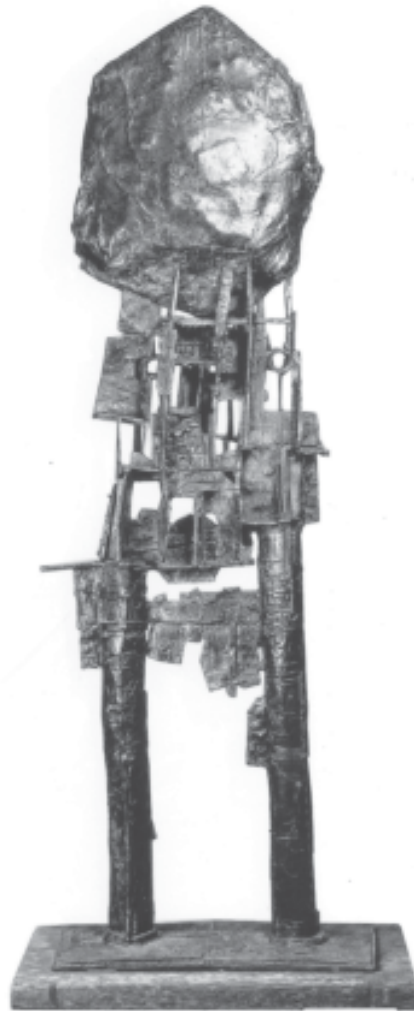




figure 10
Bethnal Green,
Photograph by Nigel
Henderson, c. 1956

tors) made a greater impression on the young artist. Notwithstanding widely observed similarities concerning the representation of the human figure, there were significant differences. Paolozzi's creatures were not the misfits sponsored by the *art brut* but people who were intimately connected with modern life and its artefacts, however obsolete these might be.²⁴

Nigel Henderson was more open to Dubuffet's talent, and this was reciprocated. The painter praised Henderson's show, 'Photo-images', shown at the ICA in 1953, which he visited in the company of Roland Penrose. Having bought six photographs which he found 'admirable', he then encouraged Henderson to do many more, 'in the manner of the bathers and in the manner of the turnip'.²⁵ There were undoubted affinities between Dubuffet's notion of the common man ('Plus c'est banal, mieux cela fait mon affaire' (26)), and the pottering man to which the 'Patio and Pavilion' 1956 display for 'This Is Tomorrow', by the same team who made 'Parallel of Life and Art', was a tribute.

The little contact between the French painter and the team of 'Parallel of Life and Art' appears hardly significant. Nevertheless, Dubuffet's work was looked upon by the members of the Independent Group as a development of Surrealism, and it would inevitably have come within its orbit. Moreover, one of the Group's concerns was to bypass the old conflict between abstraction and figuration, both of which involved the notion of form. Dubuffet came in marvellously in this context because his work could not be confidently ascribed to either.²⁷

What Peter Smithson described as the 'inheritance' from Paris was therefore manifold, In the first instance, there was Paolozzi's

attachment to the personality of Tristan Tzara, as well as a widely shared interest in Dada within the Independent Group.²⁹ There was, too, the contribution of Michel Tapié which confirmed and helped sustain the antiformalist cause within the Group. Lastly there was the impact of Jean Dubuffet's work and of his 'art brut' polemic. Even though the channels through which this last influence was exercised were barely explicit, all the persons concerned – Henderson, the Smithsons, Del Renzio, Banham and, in a grudging way, Paolozzi – agreed on its significance. The impact of these three figures can be felt in 'Parallel of Life and Art'. In retrospect, their association in the background of the exhibition, however artificial it may have been, clarifies the ethos of Brutalism in a way that is more exacting than what the Brutalists themselves attempted.

Tapié helped to make sense of the post-war Parisian art scene and facilitated its import within the Independent Group. New art, he claimed in 'Un Art Autre', existed outside the notions of beauty, form, space and aesthetics – this was precisely what the Smithsons's competition entry for the University of Sheffield meant to Banham. These notions, and more particularly form, were to be transcended onto a quasi-mystical plane. In this *ailleurs*, the real was anything but realist. In this magic realm where mystery, eroticism, ecstasy and violence prevailed, art was to be *autre, informel*, formless. It was to be an authentic and fiercely individualist adventure, at last liberated from the shackles of humanism and functionalism, Bringing to mind the image of the typewriter components, signs were to replace forms, and art was to become a 'transcendental calligraphy', the measure of which was not beauty, but 'hyper-significance'.

Tapié's debt to Tzara was considerable. In his 'Essai sur la situation de la poésie', Tzara, too, attacked the notion of beauty.

He attacked the subordination of poetry to language which had been its traditional form. Art works mattered to Tzara only insofar as they were signs within a continuous transformation. Crucially, Tzara opposed the conception of poetry as a means of expression with another, envisaged as an activity of the mind. Poetry could exist outside the poem, and its production was equivalent to a natural waste. There could be no theory to defend, be it Futurism, Expressionism or even Modernism. Instead, poetry arose from an aspiration towards 'an unarguable truth, that of a man expressing himself outside formulas that were learnt or imposed by the community, by logic, language, art and science'.

This last statement could hardly be closer to the anticultural views of Dubuffet. Like Tzara, who said that 'thought happens in the mouth', Dubuffet wanted to capture thought at source, before it became spoiled by the structures of language, the sophistication of intellect and the rigidities of academies. He claimed that they were translations of internal pulsations or gestures, which were responsible not only for thought and painting, but also 'for the form adopted by our flesh, our bones and our teeth'. In this real but formless world in which he intended to remain, Dubuffet strived to give a material substance to concepts, and at the same time sought to avoid that these objects assumed too definitive a shape. The resulting 'inconsistent beings', the poorly constituted objects of his art appear to proceed from a feeling that it is in their nature to struggle forever towards opacity and firmness.

Dubuffet's disagreement with Tapié and the latter's conception of an 'informel' stemmed from his opposition to any form of tran-

scendence. Painting communicated better than words or signs, because it was neither abstract nor incorporeal. Because it used real substances, it was able to be closer to real things. Far from a transcendence, painting involved something like a descent into a great primordial soup, into an informal matter in which the mental and the biological, sense and matter, were as yet undifferentiated. Straining in this original magma, the artist needed to confront the velleities and the aspirations of a recalcitrant material which represented not his unconscious (as it might for the Surrealists), but what Dubuffet called a pre-conscience. Once created, a work lost its connection with the fields of pre-conscience from which it was issued. It acquired an efficiency upon which the artist no longer had any control, and entered other fields 'still more mysterious and far more important' which Dubuffet described, enigmatically, as 'post-conscience'.

Conclusion

From the vantage point of a Brutalist, Tapié, Tzara and Dubuffet had the following in common: all three wanted to dispose with the notions of beauty, of language and of form which, they felt, were prejudicial to the integrity of thought. Instead they sought an unarguable truth which resided beneath the trappings of form. Works of art, they contended, were cast-offs from the ceaseless flux of life, comparable to the parts of a typewriter laid bare, or to the images of a pinboard torn from the leaves of a biography in the making. They were signs or impressions lifted from the formlessness of matter. Once wrenched from the velleities of matter, these impressions obtained an autonomy of their own, even a kind of life. Every disposition of the artist appeared to provide for the material to order itself with little or no intervention on the part of the author. Only certain kinds of operations were admitted, among which the most notable were finding, choosing and juxtaposing. All three were quite obviously central to the making of 'Parallel of Life and Art'. Eventually – and in contradiction with their earlier opposition to the idea of beauty – they formed the basis for an aesthetic, whether the 'as found' aesthetic which the Smithsons claimed to inherit from Henderson, or Paolozzi's elevation of choice to an art form and his use of juxtaposition rather than collage as a means to circumvent the use of composition.

This, it appears, was the basis of the Brutalist sensibility. It was therefore far more specific than an instance of honest or direct detailing, which its popularity and subsequent banalisation led it to become. Behind Banham's interpretation of Brutalism as the short change of functionalism, a whole world was concealed: that of the formless and of the 'informel', of which a-formalism and the intrusion of topology represented but one facet. Once

Architecture as a Way of Life: The New Brutalism 1953-1956



figure 11
 Catalogue of *This is Tomorrow*, with from left to right: P. Smithson, E. Paolozzi, A. Smithson and N. Henderson

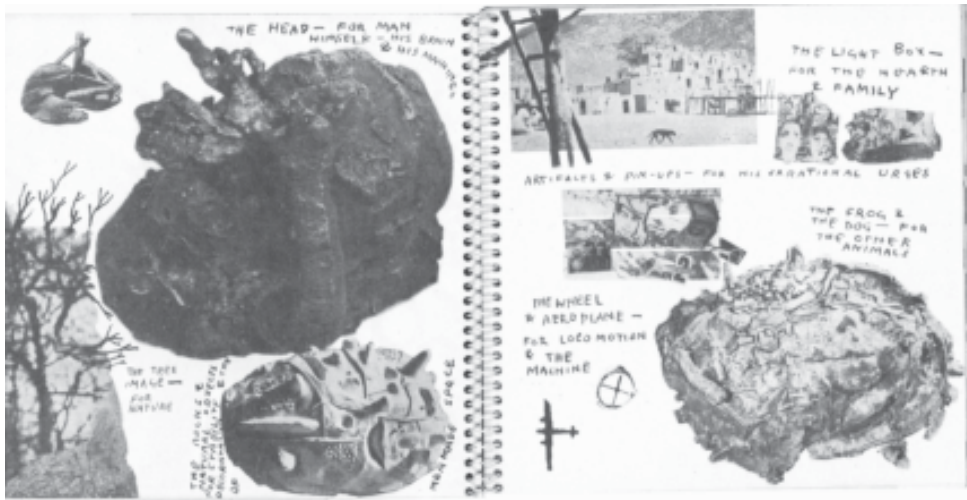
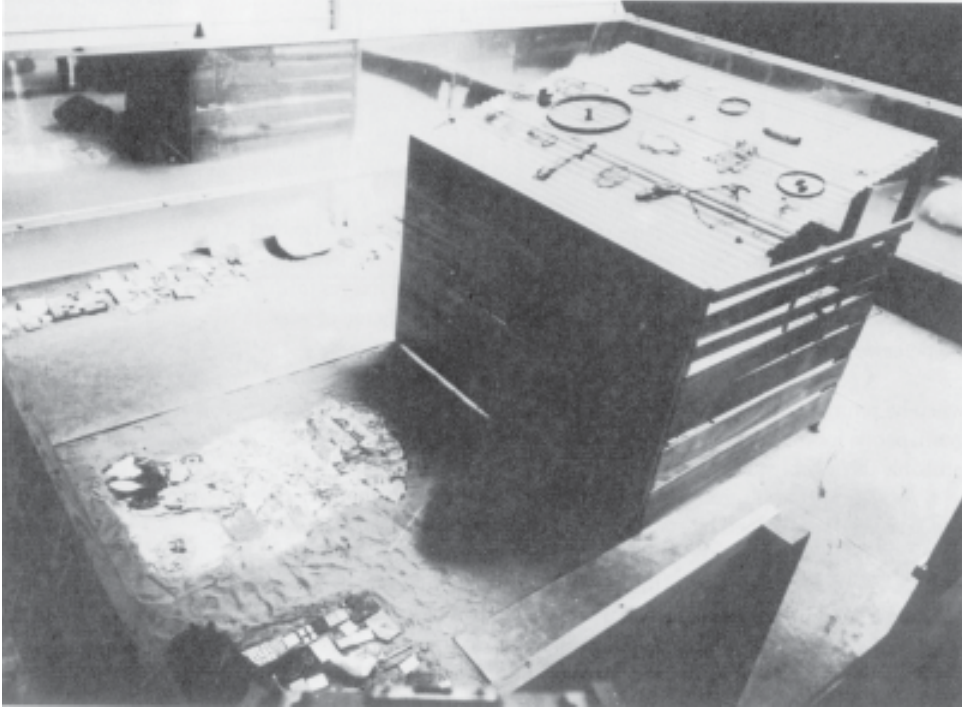


figure 12
This is tomorrow catalogue

figure 13
Patio and Pavilion at the Exhibition This is Tomorrow, composed by A. and P. Smithson, N. Henderson and E. Paolozzi. The Exhibition was held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1956



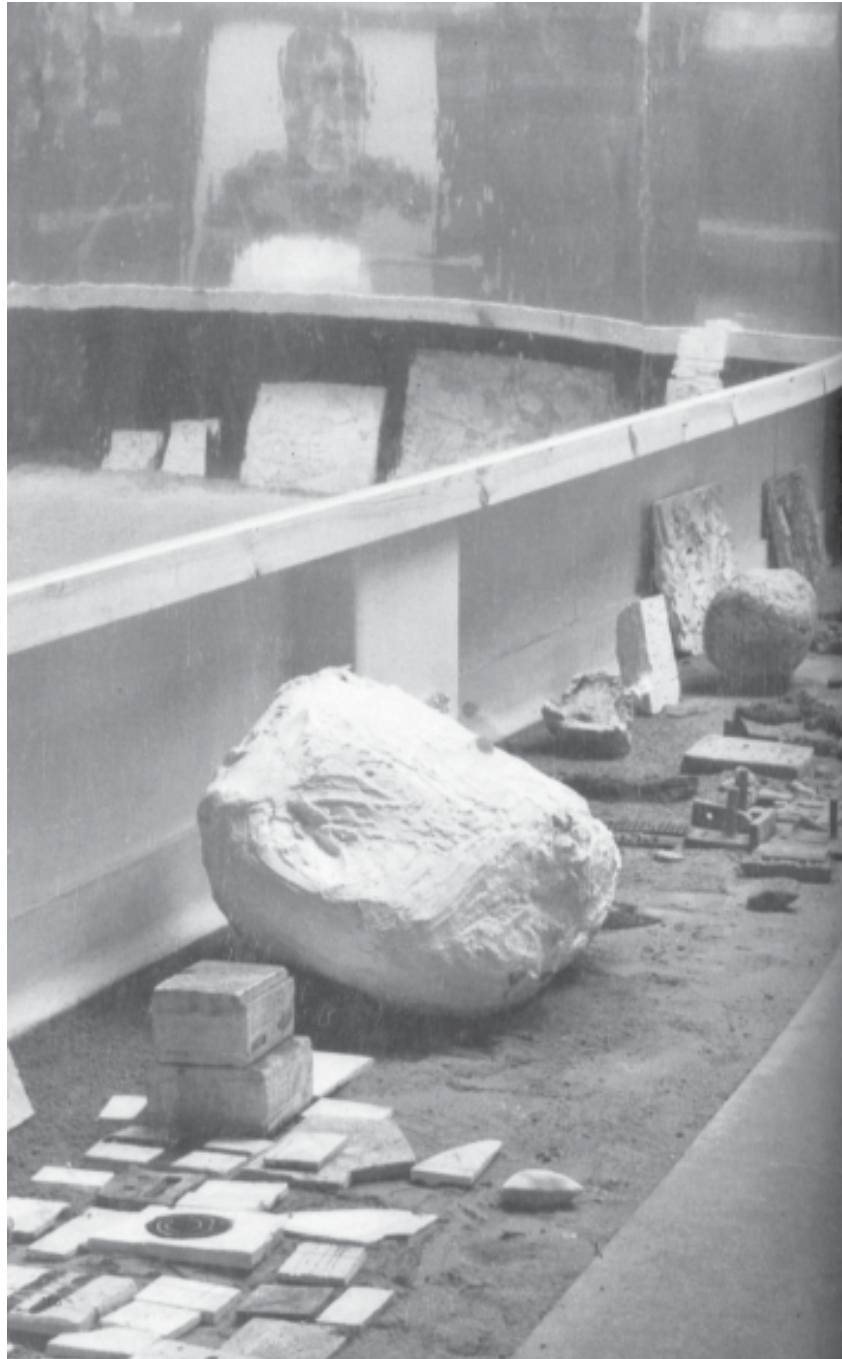


figure 14
Exhibition *This is Tomorrow*

the essential affiliation with late 1940s Paris is recognized, it becomes clear that Brutalism was both more restricted and more interesting than it has been made out to be. While Le Corbusier's Maisons Jaoul might conceivably fall within its compass, buildings once thought seminal to the movement, for example the Yale Art Gallery by Louis Kahn, the Ham Common flats by Stirling and Gowan and the Halen Siedlung by Atelier 5, should be excluded: these all testify to a keen interest in form, order and symmetry which were fundamentally at odds with the Brutalist sensibility.

Brutalism was for the most part a British concern. It lasted as long as the collaboration between Paolozzi, Henderson and the Smithsons did, While Banham rightly considered 'Parallel of Life and Art' as its *locus classicus*, the year 1955 could be regarded as its *annus mirabilis*, including notably Dubuffet's exhibition at the ICA, Banham's formulation of an 'architecture autre', and above all the design for the House of the Future which, in its embrace of an overt materiality as well as formlessness, can be regarded as a Brutalist project 'par excellence'. If for Tzara thought could happen in the mouth, the House of the Future suggested that architecture could be conceived in the hand. By 1956, following the quiet divorce between the Smithsons and Paolozzi, Brutalism had been spent, and the ideology of the modern movement, so alien to the likes of Tzara and Dubuffet, became once again determinant in the work of the architects.

The demise of Brutalism may have been inevitable, As Paolozzi pointed out, the responsibilities of building demand faculties that are unavailable to the psychotics, prisoners and children who made *art brut*.³⁰ Brutalist architecture was an impossible aspiration – like Surrealist architecture (how could the design of

Architecture as a Way of Life: The New Brutalism 1953-1956

buildings be automatic and unconscious?) or Dadaist architecture (how could design be the residue of the spontaneous combustion of life?). To think of architecture as a debris from life, or as the Smithsons intended with Brutalism, as the direct result of a way of life, was an irresistible conceit and a fascinating paradox. But a paradox, it shall remain.

Notes:

- ^{1.} *Architectural Design*, December 1963.
- ^{2.} *Architectural Design*, January 1955, reprinted in Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, London, 1966, p. 45.
- ^{3.} Reyner Banham, *A critic writes*, London, 1997, p. 15.
- ^{4.} *Architectural Design*, April 1957.
- ^{5.} Interview of Nigel Henderson by Dorothy Morland, 17 August 1976, ICA Archives, Tate Gallery.
- ^{6.} Conversation with Toni del Renzio, 4 June 1997.
- ^{7.} Conversation with Eduardo Paolozzi, 23 April 1997.
- ^{8.} David Sylvester, *The Listener*, 24 September 1953, preserved in the ICA Archives, Tate Gallery.
- ^{9.} Judith Barry, 'Designed Aesthetic: Exhibition Design and the Independent Group', in: *Modern Dreams, The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*, Cambridge, Mass., 1988, p. 43.
- ^{10.} 'Notes towards a chronology based on conversations between Ann Seymour and the artist', in *Nigel Henderson*, exhibition catalogue gallery Anthony d'Offay, 1977.
- ^{11.} op. cit. note 7.
- ^{12.} David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, Cambridge, Mass., 1990, p. 201.
- ^{13.} Nigel Henderson, retrospective notes on 'Parallel of Life and Art', undated, ICA Archives, Tate Gallery.
- ^{14.} André Malraux, *Le Musée Imaginaire*, Paris, 1947.
- ^{15.} op. cit. note 10.
- ^{16.} Tom Hopkinson, in: *Manchester Guardian*, 22 September 1953, preserved in the ICA Archives, Tate Gallery.
- ^{17.} Conversation with Peter Smithson, 7 November 1996.
- ^{18.} See op. cit. note 12, p. 192, for an account of Paolozzi's stay in Paris.
- ^{19.} Thomas Lawson-Bunk, 'Eduardo Paolozzi and the Legacy of the Independent Group', in: *Modern Dreams*, op. cit. note 9, p. 20.
- ^{20.} Conversation with Raymond Mason, 26 June

1997.

^{21.} Letter from Paolozzi to Henderson, Henderson Archive, Tate Gallery.

^{22.} When they eventually read a text by Dubuffet in translation, Peter Smithson found it too belligose and negative, and disliked it.

^{23.} op. cit. note 6.

^{24.} Lawrence Alloway, 'Paolozzi and the Comedy of Waste', in: *Cimaise* nr. 5, October-December 1960, pp. 1-14.

^{25.} Letter from Dubuffet to Henderson, 12 June 1954, Henderson Archive, Tate Gallery.

^{26.} Jean Dubuffet, *L'homme do Common a l'ouvrage*, Paris, p. 224.

^{27.} op. cit. note 10.

^{28.} op. cit. note 6.

^{29.} Anne Massey, 'The Independent Group: towards a redefinition', in: *The Burlington Magazine*, April 1997, pp. 232-242.

^{30.} op. cit. note 7.

This text is an abridged version of the article 'Parallel of Life and Art', published in *Daidalos*, nr. 75, 'The Everyday', 2000.