Learning to Love Brutalism

The following keynote lecture was presented at the 12th International docomomo Conference that took place in Espoo, Finland, this past August 2012. The author began his lecture thanking the Chair of docomomo International, Ana Tostões, and all docomomo members and friends who have done so much to ensure that the now historical heritage of Modernism might be saved for the future. Following the stimulating talks of John Allan and Mark Pasnik, he entered what for many in this field was a territory that was at least ambiguous if not impossible to accept: that the so-called Brutalist buildings of the period 1960 to the late 70s would one day be the urgent object of attention for those interested in preservation and conservation.

By Anthony Vidler

Even today, while a portion of the architectural community might be supportive, the general public remains convinced that these, often mega-structural and urban planning related structures, are both unredeemably ugly (to use one of John Allan's terms) and worthy only of being torn down. John Allan made the point that we cannot any more use our own aesthetic and professional criteria to argue for their preservation—energy, economic, and political considerations demand to be fore-fronted—and Mark Pasnik's coalition in Boston has tried to re-frame the debate by re-naming the style—not "Brutalism" but "Heroic Modernism". I don't want to rehearse these arguments again, but rather to speak about this undeniably unfortunate word "Brutalism". John Allan, in his response to the session on the Tugendhat restoration, made the point that Modernism for many was received in photographs and that it was essential to unravel the "mythic" status of photographic Modernism. I will briefly try to unravel the equally mythic status of a word—"Brutalism". I turn first to the dictionary definitions as quoted in that repository of the common wisdom Wikipedia: "Brutalism" is, according to the dictionary, a commonly accepted term for a particular style of architecture dominant in the 60s: "a style of Modern architecture, primarily in the 60s, emphasizing heavy, monumental, stark concrete forms and raw surfaces" (*McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Architecture and Construction*, 2003, McGraw-Hill); "term applied to the architectural style of exposed rough concrete and large Modernist block forms, which flourished in the 60s and 70s and which derived from the architecture of Le Corbusier". (*The Concise Grove Dictionary of Art*, 2002, Oxford University Press); "term coined (1953) to describe Le Corbusier's use of monumental, sculptural shapes and raw, unfinished molded concrete, an approach that represented a departure from International Style" (*Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*, 1994-2010, Encyclopædia Britannica). Readers are referred to Louis Kahn, Denys Lasdun, and James Stirling. In these senses the term is generally applied to a wide range of buildings, and not necessarily just to British buildings, that include to give just a few examples which without expanding upon this evening I would just note have all been the object of public dislike if not animosity more or less from the outset, and that all are nearing, according to their owners, public or private, the end of their useful life.

Boston City Hall [figure 1]

Vilified on completion as "a giant concrete harmonica" a "pigeon cage" or better, an "Aztec gas station". At the very least it was, and still is, with most so-called Brutalist buildings characterized as unwelcoming, cold, ugly, with poor lighting, ineffective heating, and having a labyrinthine layout.

By contrast, the architectural community was more or less ecstatic, at least for a few years: Ada Louise Huxtable, wrote, "what has been gained is a notable achievement in the creation and control of urban space, and in the uses of monumentality and humanity in the best pattern of great city building. Old and New Boston are joined through an act of urban design that relates directly to the quality of the city and its life". Donlyn Lyndon wrote in the *Boston Globe* that "Boston City Hall carries an authority that results from the clarity, articulation, and intensity of imagination with which it has been formed". Architectural historian Douglass Shand-Tucci, author of *Built in Boston: City and Suburb, 1800–2000*, called City Hall "one of America's foremost landmarks" and "arguably the great building of twentieth century Boston". Ada Louise Huxtable noted "the architectural gap, or abyss, as it exists between those who design and those who use the 20th century's buildings".

Birmingham Central Library [figure 2]

This building was built by John Madin (1924-2012), one of Birmingham's often unappreciated master architects of the second half of the 20th century, between the mid-60s and 1974, as part of a large civic centre scheme on the newly created Paradise Circus site. Originally planned to be built alongside the library was a School of Music, Drama Centre, Athletic Institute, Offices, Shops, Public House, a Car Park with 500 spaces and a bus interchange. The collection of civic buildings was all to be connected by high level walkways and the network of galleries which bridge the roads. According to Madin, it was designed with the inspiration of Leslie Martin's Law Library at Oxford, and of course, Boston City Hall. Prince Charles famously described the library as "looking more like a place for burning books, than keeping them". It will, as you know, soon be torn down in favor of a new library building by Mecanoo architects—an undeniably good contemporary structure, that in the place of its "austere" forebear

Figure 1. Boston City Hall, vilified on completion as "a giant concrete harmonica" a "pigeon cage," or an "Aztec gas station."

Figure 2. Birmingham Central Library, which has been torn down in favor of a new library building by Mecanoo architects.

will provide a "world-class new Library [...] a 'people's palace' for people of all ages, offering the diverse communities across the city and beyond a library to truly be proud of".

London South Bank Arts Centre [figure 3]

Even Charles Jencks tried to defend this structure in his review for *Architectural Review* in 1978, against the charge leveled by nearly half of 550 engineers surveyed as 'Britain's Ugliest Building' (*Daily Mail*, October 1967); qualified by the press variously as 'quasi-fortified', 'neo-Antheap', 'mini-Ziggats', bunker', or what I think of as the very best that British journalism can have ever come up with 'an army of centipedes carrying off the dried carcass of a broken turtle.' The fate of the South Bank is yet undecided—perhaps, like that of Boston City Hall only in limbo by reason of the recession.

Charles Jencks in his argument for the South Bank development, admitted that to the eyes of a rationalist these attacks were partially justified: no apparent structural logic, no underlying coherence, no visual logic to explain the functional logic", a "confusion of shapes and ambiguity of forms—all in exposed concrete—with dark apparently useless space beneath circulation deck; changes of level stairs turn inward; no provision for daytime activity—in short as far as the always anti-elitist public is concerned, just one more post-war cultural ghetto". Yet there was, he insisted, a sensible answer to each of these objections: "the architects were not trying to create a building in any conventional sense but rather a sequence of extended places and events along a route. And where they were trying for a building, it was probably *intended* to be conventionally ugly".

In other words, the architects of the South Bank were deliberately trying for something other than either the traditional classical monument or the already traditional anonymous International Style Modernism of corporate usage. The true ancestor of the South Bank, Jencks argued, is the Brutalist work of the Smithsons. Sheffield University scheme of 1953 was "the first really blunt expression of a non-building, organized around non-formal principles by means of a circulation deck". The Berlin Haupstadt competition scheme was "open aesthetic for the open society", "a loose, polycentered arrangement which is organized as a series of fixed places on a route for movement, as well as an ad hoc arrangement of elements."

How did this movement come into being? (I will call it a movement for the moment, although as we shall see, as a movement with an ethic rather than an aesthetic sense since it was severely restricted in its adherents).

'The New Brutalism' was a term invented by Reyner Banham in concert with Alison and Peter Smithson in 1953-55. Later, following irate letters from Hans Asplund, Banham admitted that 'Brutalism' as a term had originated in Sweden in the form 'Neo-Brutalism' but defended 'New Brutalism' as entirely different, as composed of a mash-up of two Gallicisms: *Art Brut and Béton Brut*. The first one referred to Jean Dubuffet and later Edouardo Paolozzi, and the second one to the concrete work of Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseilles. There were, inevitably, other memories of this semantic history. Peter Smithson thought the term came from his colleague and friend Eduardo Paolozzi, who had taken it from Dubuffet's *Art brut*. Georges Candilis, probably paraphrasing Sigfried Giedion, thought it came from the conjunction of Peter Smithson's nickname, "Brutus" and Alison's own name: "Brutalism, yes of course. It was our slogan. The term has to be taken in the sense of directness, truthfulness, no concessions. I remember writing: 'You have to be direct and brute' [...] We used to say: Smithson=Brutus (Peter's nickname) plus Alison". Banham, not to be outdone, added another twist, noting in his entry on "Brutalism" for the *Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture* that it was a friend of the Smithsons, Guy Oddie, who was "the first person to utter the phrase in the early summer of 1954"—despite the fact that this directly contradicted Peter Smithson's own use of the term in print the year before.

As late as 1956, the origins of the term were still giving rise to what the photographer of the vernacular tradition, Eric de Maré, called "a subject for academic research". In 1950 the Swedish journal *Bygg-Mastaren* (Build the next few years) had published a special issue on the work of the architect Gunnar Asplund, with an English summary that used the term "Neo-Brutalist".[1] De Maré wrote to *The Architectural Review* summarizing a letter he had received from Gunnar Asplund's son Hans, explaining how the term had arisen in Sweden. Hans, it seems, had coined the term in jest to characterize a house design by Ed-

Figure 3. London South Bank Arts Centre, qualified by the press as 'quasi-fortified', 'neo-Antheap', 'mini-Ziggats', bunker', or 'an army of centipedes carrying off the dried carcass of a broken turtle.'

man and Holm, and had shared his comment with two English architects, Shankland and Cox, who brought the words back to England where "it had spread like wildfire" and had "somewhat surprisingly" been adopted by "a certain faction of young English architects". Hans Asplund took "no pride" in this invention as a self-described "paleo-sentimentalist". Thus, a term that was apparently invented to repudiate Swedish Modern, and its importation to Britain, has in fact been invented by the Swedes.

Banham's riposte to this idea was belated and followed the orthodoxy of art-historical terminology. "'Neo-Brutalist'" he stated in his summing up of the movement, "is not the same as 'The New Brutalism' [...] 'Neo-Brutalist' is a stylistic label, like Neo-Classic or Neo-Gothic, whereas 'The New Brutalism'", the privileged users of which were, he concluded predictably, Alison and Peter Smithson, was "an ethic not an aesthetic". In this context it is worth remarking that the word 'brutalist' as used by the friends of Hans Asplund was from the start "negative" while for Banham and the Smithsons, with their attempt to translate a "New" brutalism into an "ethic", it was positive.

But as a British movement, the *New* Brutalism was born out of a particular context—that of postwar "austerity Britain"—it was a society of scarcity, subjected to what historian Tony Judt describes as the "unprecedented conditions of restraint and voluntary penury", with "almost everything either rationed or simply unavailable". But as far as building was concerned, and despite fuel shortages, bricks were in plentiful supply. Brick production reached prewar levels by 1954 and continued to grow until the early 70s.

Of course, the British, from Georgian times, were very proud of their bricks. In a 1940 advertisement for the most popular of bricks, the Accrington Brick and Tile Company showed a bomb landing harmlessly on their 'Nori' (Iron) brick that resisted with a crushing load of 1028.8 tons per square foot (*AR* vol. *LXXXVII*, nº 518, January 1940). Part of Churchill's charisma as a wartime leader, and afterwards his folksy image in retirement, was his passion for bricklaying: "each afternoon, we'd spend a couple of hours together, laying bricks. If anyone had asked me what my grandfather did, I'd have said: 'he's a bricklayer'".

But the British were also slightly embarrassed by their bricks; they were a little too much of a reminder of the working-class streets of Midland industrial towns, not part of the establishment—as in the sobriquet "Red-brick Universities" to distinguish local and regional foundations from Oxbridge and London. As Jim Stirling was to note regarding his and James Gowan's re-housing at Preston "I suppose some would think them too Victorian". But it was this very ambiguity that allowed for the fighting words of the "Angry Young Men", their novels, films, and plays celebrating the resilience, comraderie, and sometime upward mobility of working-class culture. It was in some sympathy with this sentiment, though not as politically charged, that New Brutalism was able to adopt its rough materialism and attitude toward brick-and-steel culture. It was not accidental either, as Banham reminded his readers much later, that the rubric 'New Brutalism' was "claimed particularly by an English team of Redbrick extraction".

The Brutalism word itself first appeared in print in a short text by Peter Smithson for *Architectural Design* in 1953, introducing the drawings for a house in "Soho" (which was not for Soho at all but a project for their own house in Colville Place) and claiming that, if it had been built, it would have been "the first exponent of the 'new brutalism' in England". Modest in the extreme, with its load-bearing brick party walls and exposed concrete floor beams on front and rear façades, the project inherited the already five-year preoccupation with neo-Palladian geometry: the façades were controlled by regulating lines, the plan was nearly square, and the internal divisions were equally geometricized. But the interest of the design did not lie in this survival (Peter Smithson was later to declare the Palladian movement over by 1948) but rather in the use of materials specified for the builder:

> *Bare concrete, brickwork and wood...Brickwork may suggest a blue or double burnt or colored pointing; but the arbitrary use of color and texture was not conformed with, and common bricks with struck joints were intended. The bars and color variation have some sort of natural tension when laid by a good bricklayer.*
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> Alison and Peter Smithson, "House in Soho, London" *Architectural Design*, December 1953, 342.

In their preamble to the builder's specification, the Smithsons exhorted the "Constructor" to "refrain from any internal finishes wherever practicable". The conclusion was that he should "aim at a high standard of basic construction as in a small warehouse".

A house like a small warehouse: this suggests the stringent conditions of material supply and construction at the time, but also an emerging sense that

the formulas of the Modern Movement were outworn and unsuitable for the postwar British condition. This was a sense shared by many, and not only Le Corbusier himself whose wartime designs for emergency housing, the *béton brut* of the Unité, and the soon-to-be-completed Jaoul Houses, had demonstrated a turn towards the expression of materials. Indeed, while it might seem that the Soho house had been drawn up without knowledge of the Jaoul Houses (as published in the 1953 edition of Le Corbusier's *Oeuvre Complète 1938–1946*), there is every reason to believe, given the strong similarity of the Smithsons' elevations to those of the first Joaul project, that Peter Smithson had either seen them in a presentation at a CIAM meeting or, more likely, at Le Corbusier's talk at the Independent Group in 1951 or in his subsequent visits to the RIBA and AA in May 1953.

Theo Crosby elaborated on the term Brutalism a year later, as an "attitude taken by certain younger English architects and artists, and known, half satirically, as the New Brutalism", as a reaction against the tendency to over-refinement and dry academic-abstract geometries which lurk in the International Style".

With this new traction, 'New Brutalism' was now retroactively associated with a built example—the Smithsons' Hunstanton Secondary School, designed in 1949 and completed in 1954, and reviewed favorably by Philip Johnson, presumably as the reigning Miesian. Johnson was less favorable towards the general turn represented by the Smithsons, calling it "an Adolf Loos type of Anti-Design which they call the 'New Brutalism' (a phrase which is already being picked up by the Smithsons' contemporaries to defend atrocities)". In their explanatory article, the Smithsons took issue with this American diatribe against the new British architecture, affirming that "the architects themselves would certainly disagree with Mr. Johnson's separation of Hunstanton from the New Brutalist canon, even though the term had not been coined when the school was designed", and stirringly claiming that the whole issue devolved around the truthful display of materials: "It is this valuation of materials which has led to the appellation 'New Brutalist', but it should now be clear that this is not merely a surface aesthetic of untrimmed edges and exposed services, but a radical philosophy reaching back to the first conception of the building". The Smithsons traced its philosophy back to English precedents—Hardwick Hall (by another Smithson in the late 16th century for its long gallery heating system) and Butterfield's All Saints Margaret Street, a building already praised by Ruskin and John Betjeman as "fearless" in pushing the gothic language to an extreme. Standing on these safe shoulders Hunstanton could claim further radicalism. It was, the Smithsons claimed, "ruthless" in its avoidance of the "gentlemanly" Modernism that characterized what they saw as the English version of Scandinavian Modern, and was "free from the sentimentalism of Frank Lloyd Wright or the formalism of Mies van der Rohe". It was also designed according to new structural principles—the calculation of the steel structure by means of the Plastic theory developed by Baker and Heyman during the war, and the insertion of brick panels that "were conceived from the very first [...] as performing structurally, functionally and decoratively as parts of an integrated structure". Banham wrote:

> *It is this valuation of materials which has led to the appellation 'New Brutalist', but it should now be clear that this is not merely a surface aesthetic of untrimmed edges and exposed services, but a radical philosophy reaching back to the first conception of the building. In this sense this is probably the most truly Modern building in England, fully accepting the moral load which the Modern Movement lays upon the architect's shoulders. It does not ingratiate itself with cosmetic detailing, but, like it or dislike it, demands that we should make up our minds about it, and examine our consciences in the light of that decision.*

This school, proclaimed Banham a year later in his seminal article "The New Brutalism" of 1955, was the real originator of the New Brutalist manner, despite its pre-dating the term. Thus Banham, having referred to what he called "the New Brutalist canon" as if one already existed, opened his review and description of Hunstanton polemically enough, with a section entitled "Design principles..

Confusingly then, New Brutalism originated in a work that, for all intents and purposes, was inspired by Le Corbusier's Jaoul Houses, yet its most significant exemplar was a building designed three years before that, and four years before the term itself was adopted, a building that was inspired in turn by the IIT Campus buildings of Mies.

With the fervor of an art historian who had discovered a new movement that matched his favorite Modern one—Futurism—Banham now took up the cudgels for the term: "as Britain's first native art movement since the systematic study of art history reached these islands, the New Brutalism needs to be seen in a double historical context—that of post-war architectural thought, and that of post-war historical writings on architecture". It is a mark of the historicization of architectural styles that New Brutalism was introduced as an effect of art-historical writing, and as an art historian in-training Banham did not disappoint, taking care to define the origins of the term before characterizing its reach.

For Banham the term 'New Brutalism' was a natural response [natural?] to "New Empiricism" if not "New Humanism" and was a direct attack on what he called the Marxist/Communist cell in the LCC. Against the "soft" Modernism of this cell, something—a "New X-ism"—was bound to emerge. And with the help of a few continental words—Le Corbusier's *béton brut*, Dubuffet's *art brut*—the Smithsons managed to capture the term "as their own, by their own desire and public consent".

It was indeed literally and figuratively a "brick-bat thrown in the public's face", a program, a banner". But this banner was on closer inspection decidedly vague. For in the end Banham is reduced to defining New Brutalism in extremely general terms as "1, Formal legibility of plan; 2, clear exhibition of structure; and 3, valuation of materials for their inherent qualities 'as found'". Indeed, these are general enough that they "can be used to answer the question: Are there other New Brutalist buildings besides Hunstanton?" in the affirmative. Banham lists Le Corbusier's Marseilles block, Mies' Promontory and Lakeshore apartments, Eero Saarinen's General Motors Technical Center, the Dutch work of Aldo van Eyck and the architects associated with Team X, only to admit immediately that New Brutalists (i.e. the Smithsons) would reject most of these from the canon. Only Louis Kahn's Yale Art Gallery of 1951-53 might survive the test, but even this not quite, since with its inconsistent detailing it could be construed as too "arty". This leaves us alone once more with Hunstanton.

But the application of the idea to architecture, and to Hunstanton in particular, demanded more than a general sense of the word. According to Banham, it required not simply "that the building should be an immediately apprehensible entity" but that "the form grasped by the eye should be confirmed by the experience of the building in use". New Brutalism's "form" is actually "aformal", (and this despite the apparent "formality" of Hunstanton which he admitted with a certain condescension, was not the Smithsons' fault). Rather, it was the Golden Lane and Sheffield University competition entries, with their full deployment of *collage* to present a "coherent visual image" by "non-formal means" that evoked "aformalism as a positive force". Here Banham brings in a surprisingly contemporary terms to characterize his new aformalism—"topology"—that allows for a new bridging of the gap between what he called "ideal beauty" and the Brutalist "image", for in topological terms as he argued "a brick is the same 'shape' as a billiard ball". It was this term of course that allowed for the relinquishing of bricks and mortar for the smooth abstract surfaces of reinforced concrete.

Looking back on the "movement" he had theorized in 1955, in his *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* ten years later, Banham decided not to reprint the article 'The New Brutalism', deeming it not "truly representative of the state of the Brutalist movement at that important time in its evolution", revealing "only too clearly" his "attempt to father" some of his own "pet notions". This self-critique reinforces the impression, fostered by his earlier editorial comment on Hunstanton, that if there was indeed a movement with the title 'New Brutalism', it was almost entirely of Banham's own invention, supported by only one completed building. The book itself was brief enough, with no more than fifty text pages, but these were supplemented by nearly two hundred illustrations of buildings and projects that, in Banham's eyes, demonstrated that New Brutalism, beginning in England, had by 1966 become an almost worldwide phenomenon.

One of the major problems of the book however, and that had been faced by Banham since the beginning, was that apart from the Smithsons, very few of the architects claimed as New Brutalists by Banham wanted to be called Brutalist. Among the first to react were Stirling and Gowan. When Banham had reviewed Ham Common in 1958 in an article that associated Stirling and Gowan both with the "Angry Young Men", in his title—"Plucky Jims"—and with New Brutalism, by reference to their obvious debt to Corbusier's Jaoul, the architects replied immediately: "we do not consider ourselves 'new brutalist'", stating bluntly (and with hardly concealed animosity towards Banham's art-historical appropriation), "'New brutalist' is a journalistic tag applied to some designers of architectural credit, in a morale-boosting attempt to sanctify a movement as 'Britain's contribution' and to cover up for the poor showing of our postwar architecture". In a later article, Stirling and Gowan, responding to the suggestion that the flats were 'brutalist in design", summed up their position:

> *The 'New Brutalism', a term which we used to regard on the one hand as a narrow interpretation of one aspect of architecture, specifically the use of materials and components 'as found'—an already established attitude; and on the other hand, as a well-intentioned but over-patriotic attempt to elevate English architecture to an international status. But whatever the term might initially have meant it is clear from recent and repeated derisive journalistic asides, that it must now have created in the public eye an image of pretentiousness, artiness, and irresponsibility, and as such the continuation of its use can only be detrimental to Modern architecture in this country.*

As for the flats, they were, the architects stated, simply built in accordance with the client's low-cost specifications, with "simple and everyday materials"—load-bearing brick walls "calculated structurally to get the maximum of window openings", with recessed pointing to cast an "oblique shadow" and the concrete floor beams "patterned by the formwork". "We do not know" they concluded ironically, "if this specification is in accord with the 'new brutalism'".

The lone partisan left was Coin St John Wilson, former architect at the LCC, partner of Leslie Martin, and lecturer in architectural theory at the new Cambridge School of Architecture. His extension at 1 Scroope Terrace in Cambridge, completed a year before I entered the school in 1960, was perhaps the most canonically New Brutalist of all buildings of that period. Reyner Banham opined that "into this relatively small building were poured most of the intellectual aspirations of the Wilson, Smithson generation". A two-storey cube, with thirteen-inch thick brick walls, exposed concrete floor slabs, wood and tubular steel details, and a *béton brut* projection "pulpit" sculpted like a van Doesburg axonometric, it seemed to realize everything that the Smithsons' unbuilt Soho house of 1952 aspired to. Carefully proportioned according to Le Corbusier's Modulor, it was also a living memory of the neo-Palladian, pre-Brutalist moment that was influenced briefly by Rudolph Wittkower's publication of *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* in 1949. Wilson, the most academic of all the Independent group had in microcosm perfected a model New Brutalist exemplar—indeed realized what the Smithsons had failed to build in their little house project at Colville Road.

Even the Smithsons wanted out from under the art historical trap. The last—or penultimate to last words—were appropriately enough spoken by Peter and Alison Smithson in a conversation with E. Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew. In response to Fry's observation that Burtalism signals "a very fierce morality which will only deal with London stock brick and bush hammered concrete", Peter retorts: "we were stuck, and are still stuck in many ways, with the problem of the brick. I am obsessionally against the brick, you know, we think brick the antithesis of machine building and yet for practical reasons we never have built in anything else. It is a tragedy. When I was 19 I said I would never design or build anything in brick in all my life, and yet one has to face in England and in this Northern climate and in the middle belt of Europe with the fact that brick does the job. You cannot argue with it, and therefore you know there is a certain sort of common sense in it. If common sense tells you that you have to make some poetic thing with brick, you make it with brick". Alison agreed:

> *But a time is coming now for a further stand against being pushed towards building in bricks, even if it means refusing a job that needs bricks. Now everything is being done in brick, rough concrete, vast sections of this and that, and varnished planks. I still cannot face brickwork. On Tyneside I was surrounded with brickwork still being dirtied by industry Even Banham, in the conclusion to his 1966 book admitted that the movement was, to all intents and purposes, "over".*

And yet, as we now know, the word 'brutalism' refused to go away.

Despite all the arguments for 'ethics' rather than 'aesthetics', by as early as the late 60s, Brutalism was to be attacked, not only by the public but also from within, by both the unrelenting supporters of a Gropius style Modernism and the initiators of what, already in 1960 was termed "post-Modernism" by none other than Nikolaus Pevsner. Pevsner indeed had always hated "Brutalism". He didn't mind the Smithson's Hunstanton ("symmetrical, clean, precise, in short Mies van der Rohe and not Le Corbusier in origin") nor did he mind the Economist Building ("again entirely unbrutal [...] and a Townscape sensitive job") but he hated Denys Lasdun's Royal College of Physicians ("next to Nash's Regent's Park [...] with two square concrete posts in front of one bigger square concrete post to mark the entrance-take it or leave it, Mr Nash"). "Sculptural" and "personal" like Le Corbusier's Ronchamp or Chandigarh, Brutalism represented for him "self-expression of the artist-architect", "a fervent avoidance of lightness, of anything that could be called elegant, and also of anything that could be accounted for purely rationally" and, "forms of overpowering—what shall I say?—yes: brutality".

Visiting Rudolph's Yale Art and Architecture Building, he admired the spatial intricacies but thought the building failed absolutely in terms of its program. The problem there, as with any other 'brutalist' buildings was the return of what he called expressionism. And not of the proper line of descent from Gropius and Mies. It was not by accident that Pevsner launched this diatribe in 1966-67. This was the year in which Banham had published his summation of the Brutalist movement, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic*, and it was Pevsner's purpose to demonstrate that the New Brutalism was only an aesthetic, "expressionist" and narcissistic in form, that directly negated the principles of his favored "pioneers" of the Modern movement, Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, and their "ethic" of "simplicity, honesty, and service". If in that year Banham had celebrated the movement he had started, Pevsner was determined to kill the residues of the movement that his wayward student, Banham, had started.

But Banham himself was disabused. In his conclusion to the book, Banham

closed this "period" that he had himself initiated, with the statement that, for the British contribution at least "it was all over". "For all the brave talk of 'an ethic not an aesthetic', (which was, one has to say his own brave talk of an ethic as applied to a few buildings of the Smithsons) Brutalism never quite broke out of the aesthetic frame of reference", it would never produce what he had wanted in 1955, "an other architecture" (*une autre architecture*) with an "uninhibited functionalism", and free of a "machine aesthetic". For Banham, the Johnsons, the Johansens, and the Rudolphs were more the followers of a Brutalist 'style' than of his ethical program; they were, "their allies, not mine" as he caustically remarked.

End of story—or at least for Banham, seemingly now agreeing with his teacher that an ethic had become a style at last.

It is the objects of the style that we are now obliged to contemplate as works of architecture, representative of a period of reaction to international Modernism, attempting, as Mark said this morning to supply what Sifried Giedion called a 'new monumentality' for a continuing Modernism, caught in a period of intense urban renewal that emphasized circulation, infrastructure and connectivity, all of which has reached an age limit of usability, if not economic renewal and investment feasibility. It is a period that **docomomo** is, I know, beginning to confront in every respect.

I conclude with an example of what may happen if **docomomo** does not become active for even the smaller iconic buildings of the period. Stirling and Gowan's House in the Isle of White: before and after [figure 4].

Notes

1. In an apparently innocent footnote to his seminal article of 1955, Banham wrote: "there is a persistent belief that the word Brutalism (or something like it) had appeared in the English Summaries in an issue of Bygg-Mastaren published late in 1950. The reference cannot be traced, and the story must be relegated to that limbo of Modern Movement demonology where Swedes, Communists and the Town and Country Planning Association are bracketed together as different isotopes of the common 'Adversary'".

Anthony Vidler

Dean of The Cooper Union, Architect and Doctor in History and Theory, critic of Modern and contemporary architecture, specializing in French architecture from the Enlightenment to the present, he has consistently taught courses in design and history and theory and continues to teach a wide variety of courses at The Cooper Union.

As designer and curator he installed the permanent exhibition of the work of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux in the Royal Salt Works of Arc-et-Senans in Franche-Comté, France, as well as curating the exhibition, "Ledoux et les Lumières" at Arc-et-Senans. In 2004 he was curated the portion of the exhibition "Out of the Box" dedicated to James Stirling for the Canadian Center of Architecture and in 2010 he installed the exhibition "Notes from the Archive: James Frazer Stirling", in the Yale Centre for British Art.

His publications include *The Writing of the Walls: Architectural Theory in the Late Enlightenment* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1987), *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux: Architecture and Social Reform at the End of the Ancien Regime* (MIT Press, 1990), *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (MIT Press, 1992), *Warped Space: Architecture and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (MIT Press, 2000), *Histories of the Immediate Present: The Invention of Architectural Modernism* (MIT Press, 2008).

Figure 4. **Stirling** and **Gowan**'s House, Isle of White: before and after. Photo © Russell Light, 2011.