COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

DEL ORIGEN DE LA MODERNIDAD A LA ERA DIGITAL

eug

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

DEL ORIGEN DE LA MODERNIDAD A LA ERA DIGITAL

TOMO I

eug

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

del origen de la modernidad a la era digital

TOMO I

JUAN CALATRAVA
DAVID ARREDONDO GARRIDO
MARTA RODRÍGUEZ ITURRIAGA
(EDS.)

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

del origen de la modernidad a la era digital

Granada, 2024

ISBN(e) 978-84-338-7371-2

Edita:

Editorial Universidad de Granada

Campus Universitario de Cartuja

Colegio Máximo, s. n., 18071, Granada

Telf.: 958 243930-246220

Web: editorial.ugr.es

Maquetación: Noelia Iglesias Morales
Diseño de cubierta: Francisco Antonio García Pérez (imagen de fondo: detalle de *Blue on almost white*, Nikodem Szpunar, 2022)
Imprime: Printhaus

Printed in Spain *Impreso en España*

IV Congreso Internacional Cultura y Ciudad

Comunicar la arquitectura: del origen de la modernidad a la era digital

Granada 24-26 enero 2024

Comisión Organizadora

David Arredondo Garrido

Juan Manuel Barrios Rozúa

Juan Calatrava Escobar

Ana del Cid Mendoza

Francisco Antonio García Pérez

Agustín Gor Gómez

Bernardino Líndez Vílchez

Juan Carlos Reina Fernández

Marta Rodríguez Iturriaga

Manuel "Saga" Sánchez García

María Zurita Elizalde

TOMO I

FOTOGRAFÍA, CINE, PUBLICIDAD: LA COMUNICACIÓN VISUAL

CONSERVAR, ORDENAR, DIFUNDIR: ARCHIVOS, MUSEOS Y EXPOSICIONES

TOMO II

REVISTAS, LIBROS, TEXTOS: LA COMUNICACIÓN ESCRITA

LA ARQUITECTURA EN LA ERA DE LA COMUNICACIÓN DIGITAL

Architects and the Lay Public in an Age of Disillusionment: Some Notes on Activism, Satire and Self-Criticism in British Architectural Publishing

Arquitectos y público en la era del desencanto: notas sobre activismo, sátira y autocrítica en las publicaciones británicas de arquitectura

MICHELA ROSSO
Politecnico di Torino, michela.rosso@polito.it

Abstract
Los años que separan la publicación de la primera caricatura arquitectónica de Louis Hellman y el anuncio de Charles Jencks de que la arquitectura moderna había muerto el 15 de julio de 1972 en Saint Louis, son testigos del resurgimiento de una larga tradición de escritura y campañas arquitectónicas inglesas. Gran parte de los argumentos de este escrito se basaron en la discrepancia entre las suposiciones y objetivos de los arquitectos y planificadores y los de los usuarios comunes de los edificios. Este artículo se centra en algunas voces de una corriente menos estudiada de la crítica arquitectónica británica que aparecen en un momento en el que todas las teorías que previamente habían apoyado la arquitectura moderna comienzan a desmoronarse: aunque diferentes en tonos, alcances y premisas culturales, las publicaciones elegidas comparten una preocupación similar. Entre las intenciones de sus autores está la ambición de crear las condiciones para un diálogo necesario entre las profesiones arquitectónicas y el público lego de usuarios y aficionados. Se prestará especial atención a los registros y lenguajes en los que se produce este intento de diálogo, abarcando un espectro diverso de géneros, desde la condena pública, pasando por la polémica y las cruzadas, hasta la burla y el análisis autorreflexivo.

The years separating the release of the first architectural cartoon by Louis Hellman and Charles Jencks' announcement that Modern Architecture had died on July 15, 1972 in Saint Louis, witness the resurgence of a longstanding tradition of English architectural writing and campaigning. Much of the arguments of this writing was drawn on the discrepancy between the assumptions and goals of the architects and planners and those of the ordinary users of buildings.
This paper focuses on a few voices of a less studied strand of British architectural criticism appearing at a time when all theories that had previously supported Modern architecture begin to crumble: although different in tones, scopes and cultural premises, the publications chosen share a similar concern. Among the intents of their authors is the ambition to create the conditions for a necessary dialogue between the architectural professions and the lay public of users and amateurs.
A special attention will be paid to the registers and languages in which this attempted dialogue happens, encompassing a diverse spectrum of genres, from public condemnation to polemics and crusades, to mockery and self-reflective analysis.

Keywords
Crítica de arquitectura británica, sátira arquitectónica, caricaturas arquitectónicas, medios de arquitectura y opinión pública
British architectural criticism, architectural satire, architectural cartoons, architecture media and public opinion

A premise: architecture, a mediated object

> It is actually the emerging systems of communication that came to define twentieth-century culture –the mass media– that are the true site within which modern architecture is produced and with which it directly engages. In fact, one could argue [..] that modern architecture only becomes modern with its engagement with the media[1].

In her book *Privacy and Publicity* of 1996 and, beforehand, in her essay "Architecture, production and reproduction", Colomina addressed the theme of architecture in relation to the media. In it she introduced the idea that the distinctive character of architecture is its interpretation: "Architecture, as distinct from building it is an interpretative, critical act"[2].

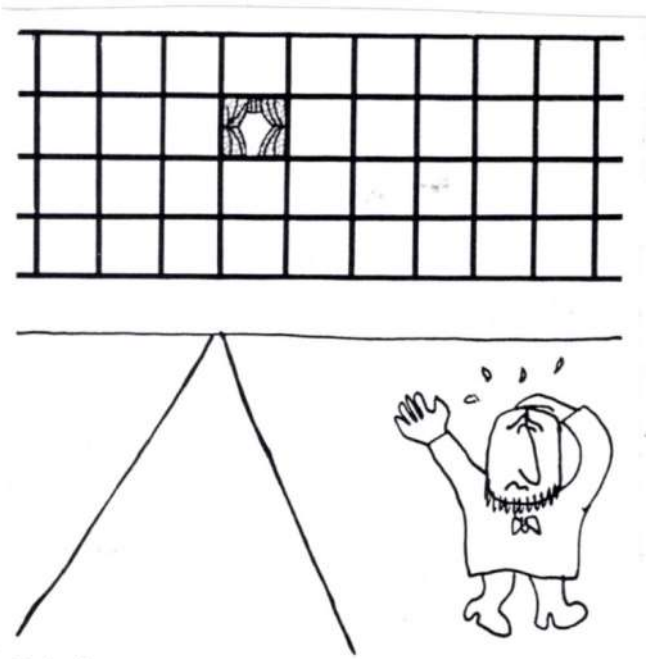


Figure 1. "Ruined!", 1966, Louis Hellman. Source: Courtesy of the Author.

[1] Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), 14.

[2] Beatriz Colomina, "Introduction: On Architecture, Production and Reproduction," in *Architectureproduction* 2, *Revisions: Papers on Architectural Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), 6–23.

Since the days of Colomina's early acknowledgment of the role of media in taking over the architectural discourse rather than simply serving it, a vast literature has flourished focusing on architectural communication/mediation/dissemination and its various agents and vectors, from books and magazines, to photography and exhibitions, from videos and the social media[3].

[3] An analogous stance to Colomina's approach was taken, only a few years later by Kester Rattenbury: "'Architecture' is not just a broad, generic name we use to describe the built or inhabited world. It's a construction, a way of understanding certain parts of the built or inhabited world as being fundamentally different to other parts. It's to do with a constructed understanding of quality, class, interpretation, intention, meaning. And this seems to be not just conveyed but actually defined by this complex system of media representations, by an elaborate construct of drawings, photographs, newspaper articles, lectures, books, films, conferences and theoretical books whose subject matter is often (albeit inadvertently) the representations rather than the things themselves [...]. There's a strong argument, probably even a historical one, that architecture –as distinct from building– is always that which is represented, and particularly that which is represented in the media aimed at architects." In *This is Not Architecture: Media Constructions*, ed. by Kester Rattenbury (London: Routledge, 2002), xxii. This shift in focus from architecture as building to architecture as mediation, is the premise of a strand of studies in which architecture and modern architecture in particular are analysed as a mediated, rather than an immediate, experience, in which communication, in its various forms and languages, both verbal and figurative, are called to act a crucial function: see for instance: Architecture and its Image: *Four Centuries of Architectural Representation*, ed. by Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman (Montreal: Centre Canadien d'Architecture, 1989); among this group of studies are to be distinguished the following studies on architectural periodicals: Hélène Lipstadt, "Early Architectural Periodicals", in *The Beaux-Arts and Nineteenth Century Architecture*, ed. by Robin Middleton (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982); *Architectural Periodicals in the 1960s and 1970s*: *Towards a Factual, Intellectual and Material History / Revues d'Architecture dans les Années 1960 et 1970: fragments d'une histoire événementielle, intellectuelle et materielle,* ed. by Alexis Sornin, Hélène Jannière, and France Vanlaethem (Montreal: ABC Art Books Canada Distribution, 2008); Steve Parnell, *Architectural Design, 1954-1972, The Architectural Magazine's Contribution to the Writing of Architectural History* (PhD dissertation, University of Sheffield School of Architecture, November 2011); and most recently Jessica Kelly, *No More Giants. J.M. Richards, Modernism and The Architectural Review* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022). Another ensemble encompasses studies that have examined modern housing schemes as mediated from the perspective of the buildings' uses and the reactions of their inhabitants, such as: Philippe Boudon, *Pessac de Le Corbusier* (Paris: Dunod, 1969); and more recently: Noël Jouenne, *Dans l'ombre du Corbusier Ethnologie d'un habitat collectif ordinaire* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007); Monique Eleb and Sabri Bendimérad, *Vu de l'intérieur: habiter un immeuble en île-de-France, 1945-2010* (Paris: Archibooks, 2010); Guy Tapie, *Sociologie de l'habitat contemporain: vivre l'architecture* (Paris: Parenthèses, 2014); also in this category are to be considered works that are dedicated to the reception of modern architecture such as: Jean-Miles Glendenning, "The Politics of Utopianism: the conception and reception of Mass housing in England", in *La réception de l'architecture du Mouvement Moderne: Image, usage, heritage*, ed. by Yves Andrieux and Fabienne Chevalier (Sainte Étienne: Docomomo, Publication de l'Université de Sainte Étienne, 2005), 153-157; *L'architecture, la réception immédiate et la réception différée. L'œuvre jugée, l'édifice habité, le monument célébré,* ed. by Gérard Monnier (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006); Miles Glendenning, *Les ambiguités de la réception de tours d'habitation en Angleterre et en Ecosse,* in Monnier, *L'architecture...,* 53-79; and more recently: "Reception", *Architectural Theory Review* 18 (ed. by Naomi Stead, Cristina Garduño Freeman, 2013).

Coherently with this premise, this paper starts from the fundamental fact that architecture is inevitably entangled in the present flood of mechanically reproduced words and images[4]. Moreover, it deals with the peculiar ways in which the English post war architectural discourse has developed and evolved, that is throughout an intense confrontation, often a conflictual one, between the world of the architectural profession and its many and diverse audiences[5]. The object of this paper is the comparative analyses of a few selected media that have made this confrontation possible.

Towards a periodization... 1968 and its surroundings

The years around 1968 are proposed as a symbolic point of departure of this writing. With its worldwide escalations of social conflicts, protests and new personal freedoms, 1968 can be considered pivotal for western societies and architectural culture too: new claims of individualism and local identity, to be opposed to the cold, hermetic, impersonal rigidity of modernism, started to emerge from many parts[6]. An effective representation of this conjuncture is provided by the simultaneity of some social circumstances and few architectural facts. Almost at the same time of the Paris student uprising, and the demonstrations against the Vietnam war in front of Saarinen's American embassy in Grosvenor Square, a gas explosion in the 22-storey council block of Ronan Point causes the prefabricated external wall

[4] Andrew Higgott,'s book, *Mediating Modernism: Architectural Cultures in Britain* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), is emblematic in this respect, as well for the geographical and cultural scope of this paper. Among studies that have privileged the idea of architecture as a mediated object of study: Adrian Forty, *Words and buildings. A vocabulary for modern architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000); Richard Wittman, *Architecture, Print Culture, and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Shundana Yusaf, *Broadcasting Buildings Architecture on the Wireless, 1927-1945* (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 2014); another group of studies concerns criticism of architecture as an intellectual and operative practice of mediation and dissemination: such as the conference session "Mediating architecture and its audiences: the architectural critic", chaired by Maristella Casciato and Gary Fox, EAHN 5th International Meeting, (Tallinn: June 13-16, 2016); Hélène Jannière, *Critique et architecture, un état des lieux contemporain* (Paris: Editions de la Villette, 2019); *The Printed and the Built: Architecture, Print Culture and Public Debate in the Nineteenth Century,* ed. by Anne Hultszch and Mari Hvattum (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2019); *CLARA. Architecture Recherche. Critique architecturale et débat public,* ed. by Hélène Jannière and Paolo Scrivano, vol. 5 (2020); Antonio Pizza, Carolina Beatriz García-Estévez, Ramon Graus, and Marisa García Vergara, "From Within / From Outside: Mass Media and the International Spread of Post-War Architecture", *Histories of Postwar Architecture* 2, (2020); finally, a few scholars have started to focus on satirical criticism, a chapter of architectural criticism that still awaits to be thoroughly investigated: Gabriele Neri, *Caricature architettoniche, Critica e satira del progetto moderno* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2016); *Laughing at architecture. Architectural Histories of Humour, Satire and Wit*, ed. by Michela Rosso (London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

[5] This perspective has been tackled by Timothy Hyde, *Ugliness and Judgment. On Architecture in the Public Eye* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[6] See Michael Rustin, "Postmodernism and antimodernism in contemporary British Architecture", *Assemblage* 8 (1989): 89-104.

to collapse and kills four tenants[7]. The incident, continually cited in English texts of architectural history, has inspired dozens of satirical cartoons and has been read by many as a tangible proof of an increasing gap between architects and public opinion[8]. The optimism of the psychedelic Sixties, and their science fiction fantasies of walking/plug-in/instant cities, are soon to be replaced by widespread discontent. A new centrality granted to the user makes its way, inside and outside the institutional places of disciplinary debate.[9] Echoes of this new state of affairs can also be found in the British architectural writings of the time, both in specialist journals and more popular magazines and newspapers, with a few unexpected intersections between the two.

Architects and The Lay Public #1: Louis Hellman's satirical view *from the street*

"Ruined": a plethoric grid of orthogonal and parallel lines that could extend indefinitely in all directions condenses in a few traits the image of a modern building: tedious, monotonous, repetitive. Here, the timid insertion of an embroidered curtain, a hint of domesticity, is the reason for the architect's bewilderment. A caption explains it: it is well known that architects do not visit their buildings for fear of seeing them disfigured by their own inhabitants! This is how in February 1966 Louis Hellman portrays the presumed distance between the architectural profession and the people who inhabit buildings: the cartoon illustrates an article to be published in an issue of *Design magazine* dedicated to environmental design: "Architecture vs People"[10] (fig. 1).

Never a fanatic of concrete architecture, Hellman used the lugubrious image of a crowd of convicts standing in front a prison to depict the Park Hill residential estate in Sheffield (1958-61, and since 1998 listed Grade II). Questioned on those years, he states:

---

[7] See Elain Harwood and Alan Powers, "From Downturn to Diversity, Revisiting the 1970s", *Twentieth Century Architecture* 10 (2012): 8-35; Michela Rosso, "London 1972 (and its Surroundings): Modern Architecture Reviewed by History", in *ReHab Living. Inhabitants. Houses* ed. by Fabrizio Paone and Angelo Sampieri (Berlin: Jovis, 2022), 36-49.

[8] The origins and semantic field of the terminology are the subject of a plurality of studies; the first and most important reference is still Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Berlin: 1962), in its English edition *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991). In it, the German philosopher traces the formation of a public sphere to 18th and early 19th- century France and Germany with the shaping of a general public of readers predominantly formed formed of bourgeois and citizens, a public who is not only intensively reading and re-reading a few classic works, but for the first time evolving and directing its reading habits on current news. Moreover – in Habermas' view – the French Revolution, alongside the diffusion of the press, gave further impulse to the politicization of the public sphere. The very existence of a "public opinion" is discussed in Henri Bourdieu, "L'opinion publique n'existe pas", *Les Temps modernes*, n.º 318 (1973): 1292-1309.

[9] See Rustin, "Postmodernism...", 89-104.

[10] Conversation between the author and Louis Hellman, August 2023.

> To me it smacked of a patronising architectural view of the plebs, 'they love their old slum streets so, I know, let's give them streets in the air and preserve high-rise at the same time. It is sure to please the man in-the-street-in-the-sky and preserve his way of life.[11]

Traces of Saul Steinberg's unmistakable flair, can be detected in one of Hellman's very first humorous sketches dedicated to architecture[12] (fig. 2). Dated 1962, it is first published in the student magazine *Outlet*. The cartoon is wordless and rendered in a linear signature mark, in black and white, with an allusive and rapid language. It is a collection of 8 side-by-side rectangles. Instead of captions Hellman sketches clouds filled with images that should convey ideal architectural scenarios. Each drawing shows the architect and the client placed one in front of the other exchanging ideas about the project and how it should look like. The encounter is a sequence of expectations and answers, a succession of questions and possible solutions. The project in its definitive version is delineated toward the end of the sequence, in the seventh cartoon: a necessary compromise between the architect's vision and the projections of his client. In the eighth and last cartoon, client and architect shake their hands smiling at each other: an acceptable agreement has been finally reached.

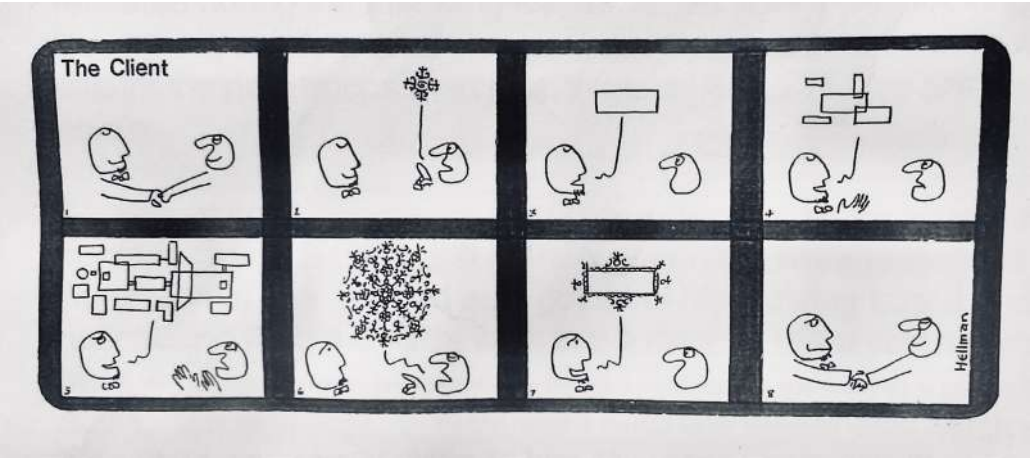


Figure 2. "The Client", 1962, Louis Hellman. Source: Courtesy of the Author.

The collapse of Ronan Point, and other fiascos of modern English housing estates seem to have been the excuse for Hellman's early decision to focus on architectural satire, "the beginning of the end of the modernist/technical/industrial dream"[13] as he defines it. Now in his eighties, he has not only been a shrewd witness of contemporary architectural events which, since 1967, he has promptly and uninterruptedly satirized in a series of sketches for *The Architects' Journal*, he has also been directly involved in the profession: educated at

[11] Conversation between the author and Louis Hellman, August 2023.

[12] Conversation between the author and Louis Hellman, August 2023.

[13] Conversation between the author and Louis Hellman, August 2023.

the Bartlett School of Architecture (then renominated School of Environmental Studies) under the deanship of Richard Llewlyin Davies (1912-1981), studying history of architecture with the guidance of Reyner Banham (1922-1988), worked at the modernist firm of Yorke, Rosenberg and Mardall (YRM), and later at the Greater London Council (GLC), in the Schools Division and for the Spastics Society[14].
The mismatch between the demands of the client and the solutions offered by the architect has been one of the preferred themes of his satirical sketches. In recent interviews he clarified the motivations behind his career as an architectural cartoonist:

> All started from a disillusion with the precepts of the modern movement and a desire to see buildings as a lay person does, and not with the blinkered eyes of the professional and the myth of the average user, [...] I also aimed to satirise the professional jargon and art-speak that was designed to obfuscate the public's understanding[15].

Architects and The Lay Public #2: on AR's "Manplan": architecture from without 1969-1970

> Why bother when we are told continually we've never had it so good? Because, though modern man is in some ways wealthy beyond dreams, in others he's never had it so bad. The reader is invited to leaf through the pages that follow and ask himself whether the consumer society is not paying too high a price for affluence in the pressures and frustrations which seem to dog the footsteps of every technological advance. The question is are they the inevitable fringe benefits? [...] Is technology for us or against us?[16].

The climate of disillusionment and self-criticism characterizing the end of the 1960's strengthens the spirit of public engagement that had always characterized the major English architectural magazine, *The Architectural Review (AR)*, from its early days[17]. In September 1969, under the chief-editorship of long-time owner of Architectural Press, the 67-year-old Hubert de Cronin Hastings then nearing retirement, is published the first issue of "Manplan", intitled "Frustration". Through the incisive montage of photo-journalism, social surveys, and critique, the editorial endeavour appeared at the time as a ground-breaking and ultimately unpopular investigation into the conditions of urban environments across the country at the threshold of the new decade and from the less considered vantage point of the everyday people inhabiting spaces[18]. The introduction, printed on a red background is followed

---

[14] Conversation between the author and Louis Hellman, August 2020.

[15] Conversation between the author and Louis Hellman, August 2020.

[16] "Manplan 1. Frustration", *The Architectural Review* (September 1969): 174.

[17] See Steven Parnell, "Richards's Alternative", *OASE, What is Good Architecture?* 90 (2013): 38–42, https://oasejournal.nl/en/Issues/90/RichardssAlternative; Jessica Kelly, "Vulgar modernism: J.M. Richards, Modernism and the Vernacular in British Architecture", *Architectural History*, n.º 58 (2015): 230-235.

[18] About the presumed unpopularity of "Manplan" when seen from the point of view of the *AR*'s sales in the period September 1969-September 1970, see Erdem Erten, "I, The World, The Devil and the Flesh: Manplan, Civilia and H. De Cronin Hastings", *The Journal of Architecture* 17, n.º 5, (2012): 703-718.

by photographer Patrick Ward's full-page black and white pictures accompanied by brief captions, quotations taken from daily and political news, reporting the facts and figures of a condition of crisis. A concise editorial commentary sews them together. At the centre of the issue are the contradictions and dysfunctionalities of a metropolis where the increased individual mobility provided by modern technological advances threatens people's very ability to move: endless queues at bus stops, interminable traffic jams, immense crowds of commuters on the escalators of the London Underground, translate into pictures the paradox of the contemporary urban condition (fig. 3).

Figure 3. (izda) "Each Morning, Cars, Taxis and Buses Pour into the City from the Suburbs, from the Airport, from the Midlands, from the West, from the Wast", "Manplan 1. -Frustration". Source: *The Architectural Review*, September 1969.
Figure 4. (dcha) "Each Journey, However Fast, However Confortable, Begin and Ends ... in Wating [...]", "Manplan 1. Frustration". Source: *The Architectural Review*, September 1969.

> Each morning, cars, taxis and buses pour into the city from the suburbs, from the airport, from the Midlands, from the west, from the east, from the south where they must fight for meters that may not work but will surely expire. At the airport the taxies wait in serried ranks... at the air terminal none in sight.[19]

The graphic language is crude, realistic, at times macabre: it vehiculates a dingy, hopeless, dystopian atmosphere. Whereas the cover is a phrenological head covered in words, including, prominently, "Frustration", several pages of the issue encompass a small black and white photograph in the centre of a sea of black and are commented by sharp statements.

[19] "Manplan 1. Frustration...", 177-178.

As has been noted, with its predominance of black, both figurative and literal, the first issue must have appeared as a shock to the eyes of the *AR*'s ordinary reader[20] (fig. 4).
Issued six months after publication of the anarchic "Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom" in the magazine *New Society* –signed by Reyner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall and Cedric Price, "Manplan" consisted of 8 numbers, each dedicated to a particular theme: transport, industry, education, religion, health, public government, and housing. If Non-Plan had provocatively advanced a bottom-up approach, thus to exclude the State from the planning process, "Manplan"'s proposed goal was to re-examine the state of the British Welfare State society at the turn of the new decade by scrutinizing its architecture, planning methods and policies. The ambition of the editorial board was now to put people and society and their real needs back in the centre of attention and use them as a parameter of investigation.
In the last issue, n.8, published in September 1970, the investigation opened with a first full-page photograph of the Pepys Estate, inaugurated in 1966 on the outskirts of Deptford, and a second, printed across four pages, illustrating Becontree housing built three decades earlier. The two shots in black and white are accompanied by a line of text which runs along the upper edge of the page providing a cutting commentary. The same short-sighted indifference towards the expression of individuality and the personalization of living spaces that characterized the council interventions of the 1930s, the authors stated, was being reproposed unchanged. The inherent anonymity of the interminable ranks of the more than 25,000 identical homes built by the London County Council in Becontree, had been replaced by the intimidating, oppressive atmosphere of the 24-storey apartment blocks of the Pepys estate. The common denominator of these two initiatives was the ill-considered paternalism which, as a heritage of the 19th century, continued to blind the authorities by arrogating their right to know and above all to decide what was good for their neighbours.
"Manplan"'s novel approach to researching society also included the involvement of the best-known photojournalists and street photographers of the day –such as Tony Ray-Jones, Ian Berry, Tim StreetPorter and Patrick Ward– whose shots were asked not only to illustrate the text but to comment on each theme addressed: as Valeria Carullo has noted: "Imbued with the spirit of photo-reportage and shot on 35mm cameras, the black and white images were reproduced, often at full page, using a special matt-black ink, which made them even more dramatic. Another novelty was the frequent presence in the compositions of people inhabiting and using the spaces studied by the survey, thereby shifting the focus from the architecture itself to the human element within the built environment. The overall message was a powerful, uncompromising and highly critical comment on contemporary living conditions"[21].
By promoting an alternative perspective to architectural journalism, one that emphasized the criticality of participated design rather than high architecture, "Manplan" can be valued

---

[20] Steve Parnell, "Manplan. The bravest moment in architectural planning", *The Architectural Review* (3 March 2014): 100-101.

[21] Valeria Carullo, "Tony Ray-Jones and the Manplan Housing Survey", *The Journal of Architecture* 23, n.º 1 (2018): 168.

as an attempt to look at the contemporary environmental scene dispassionately. By proposing a vision from without the profession and advancing an empathic relation with the receivers of the housing schemes that it criticized, "Manplan" reminded the readers that architecture and planning have relevant public functions and bear a social responsibility of their own[22].

Architects and the lay public #3: "Nooks and Corners of the New Barbarism"

> I'm unable to find the names of the designers of the brilliant complex which our photograph shows which faces anyone emerging from Russell Square Tube station. At the time of writing, 54 of the shop units are to be let. The stepped fenestration above is awaiting not tomatoes, but human fecundity. As will be seen, the bold structural concrete bones from which the, as it were, conservatories are slung convey at once a sense of compactness and regimented irregularity. The promoters are to be complimented for inventing a new type of urban renewal. German and Continental papers please copy[23] (fig. 5).

Nooks and Corners

of the New Barbarism: 6, Brunswick Square WC1

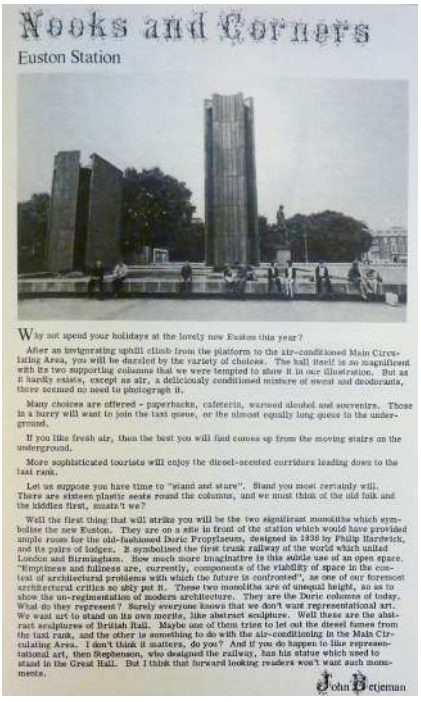
LETTERS

Raja and Out

Mr Joe Haines

Beastly

John Betjeman



Nooks and Corners

Euston Station

Why not spend your holidays at the lovely new Euston this year?

John Betjeman

Figure 5. (izda) "Nooks and Corners of the New Barbarism. Brunswisk Square", John Betjeman. Source: *Private Eye*, 13 August 1971.
Figure 6. (dcha) "Nooks and Corners of the New Barbarism. Euston Station", John Betjeman. Source: *Private Eye,* 10 September 1971.

---

[22] Erten, "I, The World...", 703-718.

[23] John Betjeman, "Nooks and Corners of the New Barbarism, 6, Brunswick square WC1", *Private Eye* (13 August 1971): 7.

A fragment of a sarcastic short reportage of the widely disliked Brunswick Centre then just finished, a mixed residential and commercial complex designed by Patrick Hodgkinson in the mid-1960s, located in the heart of Bloomsbury and in 2000 listed Grade II in the National Heritage List for England, introduces the experiment of "Nooks and Corners". Signed by John Betjeman, author, poet, journalist, broadcaster and conservationist, it is one of his eight articles for the series issued for the satirical and current affairs fortnightly magazine *Private Eye*[24]. The column is inaugurated on 21st May 1971, with a piece dedicated to Hillgate House - Ludgate Hill by the Manchester architect Theobald Birks[25]. The same building, recently completely, and dramatically redeveloped, had happened to have been favourably reviewed by professor Nikolaus Pevsner in one of his celebrated volumes of the *Buildings of England* published in 1962 and dedicated to the City of London and Westminster.

Betjeman's short article, preceded by an excerpt of Pevsner's entry, is intentionally polemical: the reference to his historic "enemy", the German art and architectural historian immigrated in Britain in 1935, declares with no ambiguity the column's antimodernist stance. Due to the creativity of his prolific inventor, "Nooks and Corners of the New Barbarism", as it was first to be called, also unequivocally alluded to that New Brutalism first historicised and supported by Reyner Banham, himself a pupil of Pevsner![26].

However, beyond any personalistic polemics or rivalry, "Nooks and Corners"'s aim had been to lambast the inadequacies and destructiveness of contemporary developments, private and public, often carried out at the detriment of historic architecture, Georgian and

---

[24] In the Spring 2016, during my in-residence fellowship at the Yale Center of British Art in New Haven, Conn., I was able to consult the issues of *Private Eye* at the Beinecke Library of Yale University which holds the British magazine's entire collection. For a profile of John Betjeman see Gavin Stamp, "A lightweight wax fruit merchant? Or Jon Betjeman on Conservation", in *First and Last Loves* (London: Sir John Soane's Museum, 2006), 11-20.

[25] A passage of this article reads: [...] the Board of Trade which took over the building when we couldn't let to anyone else choose this. To compensate we have emphasized to the outside public the essentially upward line of staircase to the first floor. A plank of wood in the form of an ungrippable bannister rail continued upward line and is itself a forward-looking feature of its time. To show that this is a modern building we have deliberately off-centred the prominent features on an otherwise restrained facade. This has been skillfully done by the introduction of a concrete projection which though affording no shelter, performs the function of drawing the eye down to the door and window which are themselves off centre with the projection [...]. In John Betjeman, "Nooks and Corners of the New Barbarism, Hillgate House, Ludgate Hill", *Private Eye* (21 May 1971): 7.

[26] Perhaps the most exemplary "brutalist" group of buildings built in London around the years dealt with in this paper that were also widely criticized at the time of their completion, is the complex of South Bank Arts Centre, including its three main buildings Royal Festival Hall (1951), Queen Elizabeth Concert Hall (1967) and Hayward Art Gallery (1968). While in 1967 the *Daily Mail* ranked it "the ugliest building in Great Britain," for others, the simple passage of time would have made acceptable this set of architectures located on the southern bank of the Thames that many still detest today. "Sturly", "bunker-like", "barbaric", "dank", "bleak", "shabby", "sleazy", "dreary", are just some of the not at all laudatory adjectives used to describe it. In 1968 it was the critic and historian of architecture Charles Jencks, in reviewing it, who recalled the question of the relationship between the work and the observer, emphasizing how its presumed ugliness is attributable to the absence of an overall coherence. See Hyde, *Ugliness...*, 66-87.

Victorian. On some occasions, such as in the much-debated case of the demolition and subsequent reconstruction of 19th-century Euston Station, humour, in the form of light-hearted joke or more corrosive witticism, proved to be Betjeman's preferred weapon[27]:

> Why not spend you holidays at the lovely new Euston station this year? –writes on 10 September 1971–. [...] Well the first thing that will strike you will be the two significant monoliths which symbolize the new Euston. They are on site in front of the station which would have provided ample room for the old-fashioned Doric Propylaeum, designed in 1836 by Philip Hardwick and its pairs of lodges[28] (fig. 6).

The most frequent targets of Betjeman and his collaborators were the "brutalist" architecture in which concrete is frankly exposed providing both the structure and the building's envelope. Week after week, deploying a visual reading of façades and volumes, accompanied by black and white photographs devoid of any authorial pretensions, Betjeman, his daughter Candida Lycett Greene, and photographer Angelo Hornak, comment, lament and condemn the increasing ugliness of the environment[29], the aesthetic incongruity and technical misfits of new modern constructions[30] in the capital and, and in the rest of England. At the centre of these polemics is the outward appearance of what has been built: the criticism is capillary, it is aimed at interventions of different scales and consistencies, the attention is brought to the ordinary rather than the exceptional. In continuity with the work of Betjeman, in subsequent years the series is carried out by the architectural historian Gavin Stamp, who since 1980 would sign his stinging statements with the moniker "Piloti"[31].

---

[27] For the story of the debate about the preservation of the Euston Arch in which John Betjeman himself played a pivotal role see Gavin Stamp, *Lost Victorian Britain: How the Twentieth Century Destroyed the Nineteenth Century's Architectural Masterpieces* (London: Aurum Press, 2010).

[28] John Betjeman, "Nooks and Corners of the New Barbarism. Euston Station", *Private Eye* (10 September 1971): 7.

[29] Candida Lycett Greene, "Outworn Oxford", *Private Eye* (February 11, 1972): 8.

[30] A passage from this writing reads: "And that sweet city with her dreaming spires..." Matthew Arnold. St Catherine's College, Oxford, designed by Arne Jacobsen in 1964, has been much criticised. Some have likened its clean Scandinavian lines to an extermination camp. The under-graduated who first lived there had a few trivial complaints. The moat got stagnant and bred mosquitoes. The windows were so large that the ground floor rooms were completely open to view –some area of the College had to be cordoned off to allow the students to undress–. In spite of their size, these windows could only be opened a few inches. Replacements for cutlery and electrical fittings were only available from Sweden, as they were exclusively designed of the College by the architect. But against these complaints we must set the aesthetic beauty of the tower: a worthy companion to the "dreaming spires" of Merton, Magdalen and Nuffield. Jacobsen spent a fortnight in Oxford to "get the feel of the University life'. He has caught the very essence of the medieval college tower: the secular paraphrase of the church steeple. Jacobsen, carried the paraphrase a stage further – he re interpreted the motif in iron and concrete. In design it is part giant bean-slicer, part guillotine, with a stark beauty usually only found in petrol stations along the M1. St Cat College was awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Inst of British Architects in 1964". In Angelo Hornak, "Nooks and Corners. St. Catherine's College, Oxford", *Private Eye* (22 October 1971): 7.

[31] For a succint portrait of the figure of Gavin Stamp see Joshua Mardell, "An Activist Scholar: The Gavin Stamp Archive", pamphlet of the exhibition 16 January – 5 May 2023 (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2023).

The three episodes of criticism introduced above interpret the diversity of the architectural discourse in post war Britain. In which do they differ? What cultures do they reflect or belong to? What is common amongst them?

Fuelled by his experience at GLC, youth counterculture and underground alternative journals, Hellman's work would broaden and change across the years, often using different techniques, collage assemblages, typed commentaries, to caricature topical events including politicians alongside architects, with the omnipresent bearded bow tied little character commenting the events in question, always trying to avoid a leftist stance, and "direct barbs at all sides" beyond any prejudice[32].

Always understated about his job and sceptical about the true effectiveness of satire, as well as about the real impact of 1960s technological fantasies probably without even realizing it, Hellman has actually provided an illustrated satirical chronicle of architecture of the last 50 years as precious and relevant as the one provided by the more canonical forms of architectural publishing (fig. 7).

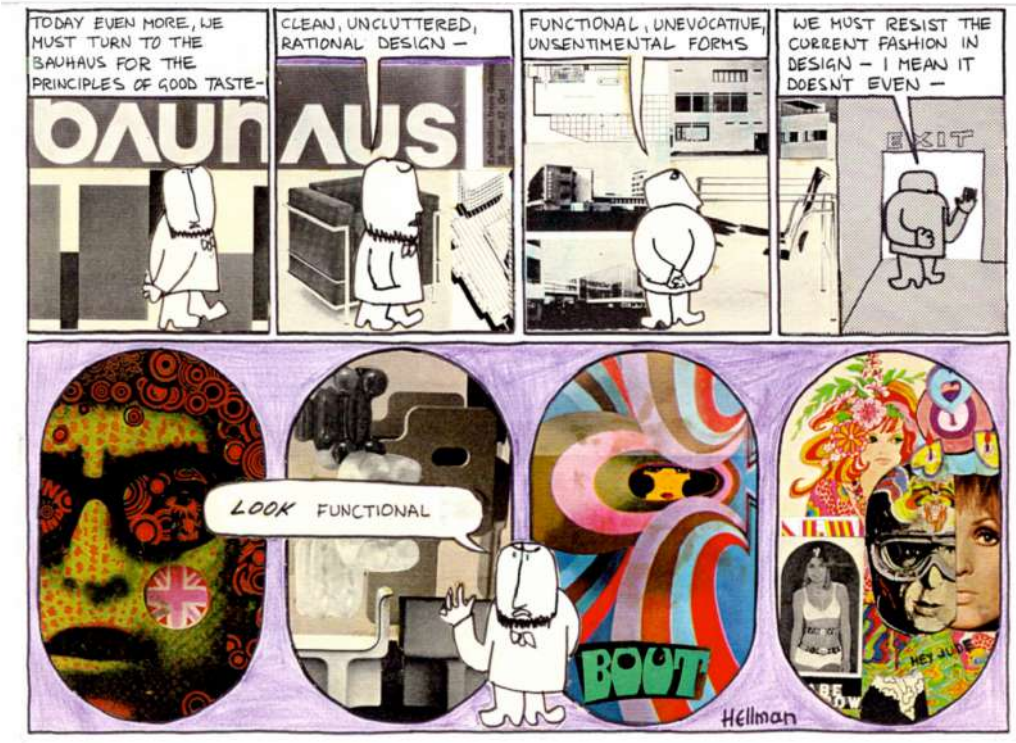


Figure 7. Cartoon, *The Architects' Journal,* 25 September 1968, Louis Hellman. Source: Courtesy of the author.

[32] Conversation between the author and Louis Hellman, August 2023.

The "Manplan" campaign has to be viewed in continuity with the post war *AR*'s constant activism. Since the years after 1945, the AR had evolved into a more explicit vehicle of public engagement with the ambition to address an audience situated outside the milieu of the architectural and urban professions, an ambition that had been cultivated already in the interwar years[33]. As thoroughly discussed by Jessica Kelly, with the series "Criticism" inaugurated in the 1930s, the board had aimed to "Fan the ardor of the Layman," raising cultural awareness in its public to gain legitimacy and cultural relevance for both the journal and Modern Architecture"[34]. In the late Forties, with Gordon Cullen's "Townscape" series, under the editorship of J.M. Richards and with the presence of de Cronin Hastings, the magazine had envisaged a possible way out the demise of Modern architecture through an alternative approach to the design of cities and urban spaces. Visual planning, and the English tradition of the Picturesque had provided the methodology, the historic pedigree and legitimization to this new *modus operandi*[35]. In 1955, "Townscape" had been followed by "Outrage": in the June issue of that year, the AR had published a number edited by Ian Nairn and called "Subtopia". Pitiless pictures of arterial roads, concrete lamp-posts, carparks and road signs filled the pages of the AR. "What must we do to be saved?" sounded as a desperate warning against the reckless dissipation of rural England, an attack on the dispersal and low-density residential development; no alternative plan was in view though. The predominant mood was one of pessimism and impotence. In addition to bringing attention to the aesthetic evaluation of architecture, the "Anti Ugly" Action, as it was called, formed by a group of students of the Royal College of Arts led by Nairn, raised the question of a shared standard of architectural and urban quality, but above all it identified an average citizen, a hypothetical man in the street, whose opinions, thoughts and feelings constituted a fictional norm, possibly useful to architects and planners, though not perfectly coinciding with the feelings of a really-existing person.[36]

The initiative of "Nooks and corners" falls within the tradition of the cultivated and erudite architectural amateurism that had distinguished a whole generation of English writers born in the first years of the twentieth century[37]. Betjeman himself had never been trained as an

---

[33] See Kelly, "Vulgar modernism...", 248; Kelly, *No More Giants*..., 54-82.

[34] See Jessica Kelly, "'To Fan the Ardour of the Layman': The Architectural Review, The MARS Group and the Cultivation of Middle Class Audiences for Modernism in Britain, 1933-1940," *Journal of Design History* 29, n.º 4 (2016): 350–365.

[35] See Michela Rosso, "Rediscovering the Picturesque. Nikolaus Pevsner and the Work of Architects and Planners During and After the Second World War", in *Reassessing Nikolaus Pevsner,* ed. by Peter Draper (Burlington VT – Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 195-212; *Pevsner's Townscape: Visual Planning and the Picturesque*, ed. by Matthew Aitchinson (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010).

[36] Hyde, *Ugliness*..., 62-66.

[37] For an account of this circle of people including, besides Betjeman, Peter Fleetwood-Hesketh, John N. Summerson, Clough Williams-Ellis, J. M Richards, P. Morton Shand, and Osbert Lancaster see Michela Rosso, "Between History, Criticism, and Wit: Texts and Images of English Modern Architecture (1933-36)", *Journal of Art Historiography* 14 (ed. by Branko Mitrović) (June 2016): 1-22. For a short autobiographical account of Betjeman's education and background see his memoir published as a foreword to the second edition (1970) of his *Ghastly Good Taste. Or The Depressing Story of the Rise and Fall of English Architecture*, John Betjeman, "An Aesthete's Apologia", in John Betjeman, *Ghastly Good Taste*, or a *Depressing Story of the Rise and Fall of English Architecture* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), ix-xxiv.

architect and his writings appealed to an audience composed by casual readers as well as the literary establishment[38]. To pin down this eccentric and whimsical figure, we could use the words of Alan Powers, and state that "before Betjeman architecture appealed chiefly to clergyman, antiquarians and other architects. Growing up in a new communication media he was probably the greatest communicator that architecture has ever had"[39]. The emphasis on the visual aspects of architecture –an architecture to be appreciated and perceived by the senses– is the major ingredient of "Nooks and Corners of New the Barbarism": sarcastic yet outspoken and matter of fact, common-sensical and practical at the same time. The aesthetic theme was the decisive argument used to delegitimize design choices, providing the most immediate degree of the polemics. In particular cases, the recourse to the category of taste –"the ugly building"–, became the vehicle of a deeper understanding of architecture regarding the bureaucratic, political, social factors preparing the soil to the architectural projects and their making. Linguistic jokes and paradoxes were used to filter a reality difficult to accept or cope with. Crusading for the salvage of buildings threatened by demolition, fighting the aesthetic decay of the urban environment, preserving the local character of centres, highlighting the neglect of the Georgian and Victorian heritage of the nation: these ones were the most frequent issues at stake. A sarcasm nourished by oxymorons and hyperboles, the analogies between the ugly construction and objects of everyday life, trivial and ordinary, altogether, should hopefully open a crevice through which the common reader, the one who finds a natural and disinterested pleasure in architecture, can peep and try to seize an otherwise arcane or inaccessible subject[40].

Judging architecture: a plea to withstand "the strange death of criticism"

Though originating from different cultural milieu and inheriting different legacies as well as directing their commentaries, assessments and lampooning to different targets, the voices that I have introduced all fall into the category of criticism, following the Concise Oxford Dictionary where the term is defined as "the work of the critic", and the critic is "1) a person who expresses an unfavourable opinion of something" or "2) a person who judges the merits of literary or artistic works, especially one who does so professionally"[41].

Hellman's work, *AR*'s "Manplan" and "Nooks and Corners", all three, pertain to the field of criticism, and therefore, of knowledge, evaluation and judgment, and all translate feelings of a widespread disaffection into words and images and associations of the two. Moreover, they employ a mode of judging and disseminating architecture, based on a constant intertwining of research, and commitment in the field, a mode which is substantiated in a

---

[38] Herbert Mitgang, "Sir John Betjeman, poet laureate dies at age 77", *The New York Times* (May 20, 1984).

[39] *First and Last Loves*..., 4.

[40] The main reference for this terminology is Virginia Woolf's definition of the common reader in her essay *Hours in a library* (1925): "... a man of intense curiosity; of ideas; open minded and communicative, to whom reading is more of the nature of brisk exercise in the open air than of sheltered study; he trudges the high road, he climbs higher and higher upon the hills until the atmosphere is almost too fine to breathe in; to him it is not a sedentary pursuit at all [...]".

[41] *Concise English Oxford Dictionary,* 11th edition, (2011), s. v. "critic", 339.

language that aims at reaching a diverse audience, formed by professionals as well as amateurs. In all of them, in order to facilitate the transmission, the tools of photography, and drawing in the form of illustrations and cartoons, come to the rescue of the verbal language. As we have seen, the main vehicles of this criticism are not only the specialist literature but the daily newspapers and magazines. An evidence of the anti-intellectualism with which architectural criticism has been dealt with in this country throughout the 20th century, is that, here, one relevant part of the specialist architectural literature, alongside the two major magazines *The Architectural Review and Architectural Design*, has been made up of weekly magazines such as *Building, Building Design and The Architects' Journal* , types of publications that are more similar to news bulletins, being focused, as they are, not so much on theory, criticism or celebrity architecture, but on information and news, at the sheer service of the professional. One could argue that when seen form the perspectives of their reading publics, the three case studies briefly illustrated here differed substantially one from the other. And they certainly did. But still, what they shared was an idea of their job as a public service aimed at bringing the profession closer to the public, whichever this was, interpreting the demands of the latter and placing these ones at the centre of attention.

Despite their different backgrounds and objectives, political sympathies and orientations, all these three forms of criticism implied a judgment on architecture, forthright and unambiguous. An ideal symposium about the history of post war architectural criticism, and its present state, structured into three different ages of criticism: the 1950s to 1980s, 1990s to 2000 and the last twenty years, could pivot around Martin Pawley's prophetic and well-known stance on the "strange death of architectural criticism" (1998)[42]: the belief that there wouldn't exist any real, honest, and disinterested criticism of architecture in the press, neither in the architectural magazines, nor in the more generalist papers and media, the latter being indissolubly allied with the contemporary society's centres of power[43]. We could argue that, ahead of Tom Wolfe's pamphlet (1981) and Prince Charles' invectives against the architectural establishment (1984-87), the voices of the AR, Louis Hellman and "Nooks and Corners of the New Barbarism", identify modes of resistance to the transformation of architectural criticism into the mere adulation of what instead should be carefully scrutinized and criticized –an attitude–, that not at all so strangely, seems to have become more and more absent from the agendas of the last three decades of architectural news and magazines.

---

[42] Martin Pawley, "The strange death of architectural criticism," in *The strange death of architectural criticism*, ed. by David Jenkins and Norman Foster (London: Black Dog Publications, 2007), 330-31; the article was previously published in *The Architects' Journal*, 2 July 1998.

[43] A view of this kind is shared a few years later by Rattenbury: Kester Rattenbury, "*Naturally biased: architecture in the UK national press"*, in Kester Rattenbury (ed.), *This Is Not Architecture: Media Constructions* (London: Routledge, 2002), 154-155.

ISBN 978-84-338-7329-3

GRUPO DE INVESTIGACIÓN
ARQUITECTURA Y CULTURA CONTEMPORÁNEA

AhAU

SOBRELAB

etsa

UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA