

Ordinary and Luminous

1. Memorability as an Image; 2. Clear exhibition of Structure; and 3. Valuation of Materials 'as found'. Remembering that an Image is what affects the emotions, that structure, in its fullest sense, is the relationship of parts, and that materials 'as found' are raw materials, we have worked our way back to the quotation which headed this article "L' Architecture, c'est, avec des Matieres Bruts, etablir des rapports emouvants".

To produce stirring relations with found, disassembled or manipulated materials, *bricolaging* fragments (books, films, sounds, ruins, objects, memories) until they once again become raw materials, building blocks for new affective assemblages of images and things. To engender a vortex of reverberations, echoes of echoes of echoes... paradoxically capable of appearing to the eyes as something singular and recognizable, and made of what they appear to be made of; yet recognizable enough to remain what they appear to be, but already something else in the relations they establish.

In a different formulation - because images can really be the matter of things - and paraphrasing the title of one of the works in the exhibition, *images are acts*, or promulgations, or decrees, or scenarios, or re-enactments, or constructions and reconstructions, or even the reversal of vectors through which the consequences change the causes, in order to get closer to the distorted reverberation produced by feedback. Things made up of their own process of making, and of the relations they establish when rushed together in the ephemeral moment of an exhibition. A whole laboratory of stirring relations bringing things back to a state of becoming, raw materials for further transformations.

Making sense of a narrative with so many voices requires a fictional archaeology, a delirious excavation of its many veils and sedimentation planes; a reconstruction of its images through their ever-changing ways of fading and disappearing. The last sentence of the epigraph is the first layer of this archaeology, Le Corbusier's famous (among architects at least) and almost centenary Lesson of Rome: "architecture is the use of raw

materials to establish stirring relationships". This statement was pronounced as a slogan two pages after the chapter's title page, illustrated with Emperor Hadrian's villa built in Tivoli. The seductive idea of reading one thing within the other, of imagining the stirring relations between the fragments or architectural figures of Hadrian's villa as a definition of architecture, overshadows the anti-academicism of this chapter of *Towards a New Architecture* (1923).

Reading through the pages is already a way of disrupting the matter of which books are made. Layers inside layers... this one inside Reyner Banham's text titled "The New Brutalism", published in the *Architectural Review* in 1955. This was, like Le Corbusier's, an antiacademic text, but it is the closeness between words and images that engenders the fictive plan of this excavation. The opening images of Le Corbusier's Ronchamp chapel on the left page displace the meaning of Le Corbusier's epigraph on the right page, welcoming the chapel and exposed concrete into the sphere of New Brutalism. The following pages relate New Brutalism to Art Brut and to *The Parallel of Art and Life*, eventually handing the banner to a new generation, which actually builds with industrial, raw materials, and with a nonchalant attitude, or rather, as Banham writes, a *je-m'en-foutisme* or *bloody-mindedness* that justifies the Brutalist slogan.

According to Banham, Alison and Peter Smithson were the protagonists of that attitude. At this point the echoes cross paths: the Smithsons' work as a fragment of this matrix of relations, and literally as the material of *Ordinariness and Light, after Alison and Peter Smithson* (2018), an earlier installation by Fernanda Fragateiro, part of an exhibition titled after a sentence by Alison Smithson: *For us a book is a small building* (2018). A work made of echoes, this installation assembled much of the ideas, rhythms and materials of which Robin Hood Gardens, the Smithsons' 1970s council estate, was made. The recent past has added another layer to this pile of ruins, with the recent demolition of this complex, another fold in the stirring relations, materials as *found* and raw materials of this multiple work.

This fictional archaeology requires a complex excavation of media's immateriality, particularly television. And how to excavate matter that appears to vanish in plain sight? How to excavate the ephemerality, the here-and-now of analogical media, constantly obliterated every time we rescue those memories on-line anyplace anytime? Or how to excavate the media when the divide between viewers and producers is blurred? Perhaps by tracing parallel maps that show the differences and misalignments between contours, or just by highlighting the moving relations the artwork establishes between things. Once again, the Smithsons are of valuable help in this media archaeology, even though sometimes that help is involuntary and somehow tragic. They keep us aware that New Brutalism was judged, condemned and punished in the arena of public opinion; an immaterial demolition that paved the way for its actual demolition.

The authors and the building process of this estate were featured in *The Smithsons on Housing*, a BBC documentary aired in 1970, as a clear attempt to make an approach between public housing and public opinion as generated by television. Soon after, moving images would immortalize the implosion of Pruitt-Igoe, a vast housing estate deemed inadequate in St. Louis, Missouri. For some critics, this implosion was also the implosion of the entire project of modern architecture. But this neo-liberal form of symbolic violence (the destruction of modern houses that assumedly failed to heal the social evils of the slums they had replaced) was not limited to Pruitt-Igoe, as the monumental estate of Quarry Hill, in Leeds, was also knocked down. And here again television was the stage on which public housing was demonised and deprived of social meaning. It was the media narrative of council housing as a source of social unrest that led to the social consensus which ultimately legitimised its material erasure.

Some years before its demolition, Quarry Hill was portrayed as a den of thieves in the sitcom *Queenie's Castle*, taking for granted its 'complicity' with local gangs, and thus enabling the bizarre syllogism of blaming architecture for the evils staged on it. In Leeds, television was simultaneously executioner and memorial of public housing. And history repeated itself, both as farce and tragedy, in Robin Hood Gardens. In much the

same way as the so-called Post-Modernity and the neo-liberal trend coming hand-in-hand with it were committed to erasing modern public housing, today's populism is committed to obliterating 1970s Brutalism, often built on land suddenly too valuable for social use. Memorable as an image, clear in its structure and evident in its materiality, Robin Hood Gardens was the flagship of an armada that still dreamt that architecture should turn the right to housing and the right to the city compatible. But the media fire was able to sink it. It was demolished and some of its fragments salvaged by the kind of architecture culture accumulating in museums and biennales.

Once again, television showed Brutalist architecture as the absurd scenario on which violence between neighbours was enacted, at the very heart of the community to which architecture was supposed to provide structure. Robin Hood Gardens was featured in minute 16 of the first episode of the third season of *Luther* (BBC 2013):

Violent crime engendered by forced cohabitation and the degradation of the built environment.

A perfectly blurry view of the industrial background seen from the streets in the air leading to the flats.

Police brutality, and the moat surrounding the 'Castle' of Robin Hood's Garden.

The tilt windows in the living room of apartment 97, which supposedly muffled the noise from the nearby highway.

The radiant heat glowing on a post-war electric fireplace.

The camera moving around the duplex flat, showing the entrance door leading to the kitchen, and the living-room below, as well as the "modern" trash chute as the best place to search for the smoking gun or the bloodied knife.

It is on top of this pile of debris, simultaneously matter, form and noise, that the absurd violence of the demolitions in Bairro 6 de Maio becomes more evident, an overlapping of planes allowing for other continuities and correlations to come to the surface. Again, Fernanda Fragateiro's work compels viewers to re-examine the accepted meanings of raw materials, or matter, or ruins,

or fragments, and the relations these materials establish among themselves and with us. And it also raises questions about singularity and multiplicity, about the precise locus of things, found in many places and planes. Again, we have worked our way back to the beginning, to the moving relations produced with raw materials: ruined walls, closed books, or library shutters, all of them raw materials upon which to figure out the images and ideas pressed against each other inside books; to imagine a chain of materials and meanings always oscillating between beauty and violence: walls without doors, books kept away from their readers, or the coloured fragments of a devastated humble intimacy. The artwork is just another plane in this continuous intermediation, always operating in multiple vectors.

The images and sounds of protest travel in one direction, the images bearing witness to evictions and demolitions - rescued from TV archives - travel in another direction, towards the community, as proof of the violence to which it was subjected. Travelling simultaneously in several directions, between the viewers and the victims, images are again executioner, remonstrance and memorial. Instead of appropriating it, the work materializes the full range of this conflict, and of the absurd violence of destroying that which is already fragile. It exposes the absurdity of using powerful machines in order to erase the frailty of the informal and precarious; a disproportion of means rendered even more absurd by the way in which the law and the police secure the demolition. The images and the fragments still preserve the vibrant colours of those humble and festive interiors, now exposed to the prying eye of public authority, capable of imposing a legal order asserting that some people have no rights, because housing is indeed still a right.

Through the images of the demolitions, the absence of the private indoors becomes blatant - only the shared walls remain standing, as the only visible signal of what was common property, of those moments when inside and outside did not belong to just one owner. Rescued from the demolitions in Bairro 6 de Maio, the structures holding these fragments together are an echo of other structures from the Smithsons ... Bricolaged fragments, once again raw materials for yet another cycle of

construction and destruction, and structures that, in their fullest sense, are moving relations between the parts.

Joaquim Moreno
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