

‘...“dragging a rough poetry” from the urban debris and detritus...’

‘...artists and architects asking, “what groupings might begin to order the post-war universe”?’

## Ashley Mason asks ‘must we really build and create each time anew?’

### ‘Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945–1965’

Barbican Art Gallery, London  
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Reviewed by Ashley Mason

*Sometimes one can stumble upon a thing of great joy seemingly by pure accident. Some may say it is all by design. That an unknown hand is twisting and turning, in turn lifting and lowering, a hidden world of fine threads, vibrating strings. We are all entangled. Resonance often holds an under-acknowledged sway yet possesses the power to reach deep inside our lungs and take the air right out from the tiniest of chambers. Our lives are littered with frozen moments, as we attempt to comprehend the significance of the correspondences that befall us. Or dismiss them. Breathing is easier without ricochets. The cavities replenish and renew their purpose, ceaselessly sieving atomic particles that are choreographed to the rhythm of a distant drip, drip, drip we fail to notice. Leaky situations pervade, as our bodies bleed between one another; V ^, we are all vessels between earth and cosmos. It is an earth found to be as craterous as the heavens, scattered with dot, dot, dots. A question of infill; how to eliminate the voids, the emptiness we feel. Could it be, rather than filling in the blanks with baseless constructions, that our only hope for fertile ground is through existing, intimate connections? Choose carefully, or else with complete abandon to coincidence.*

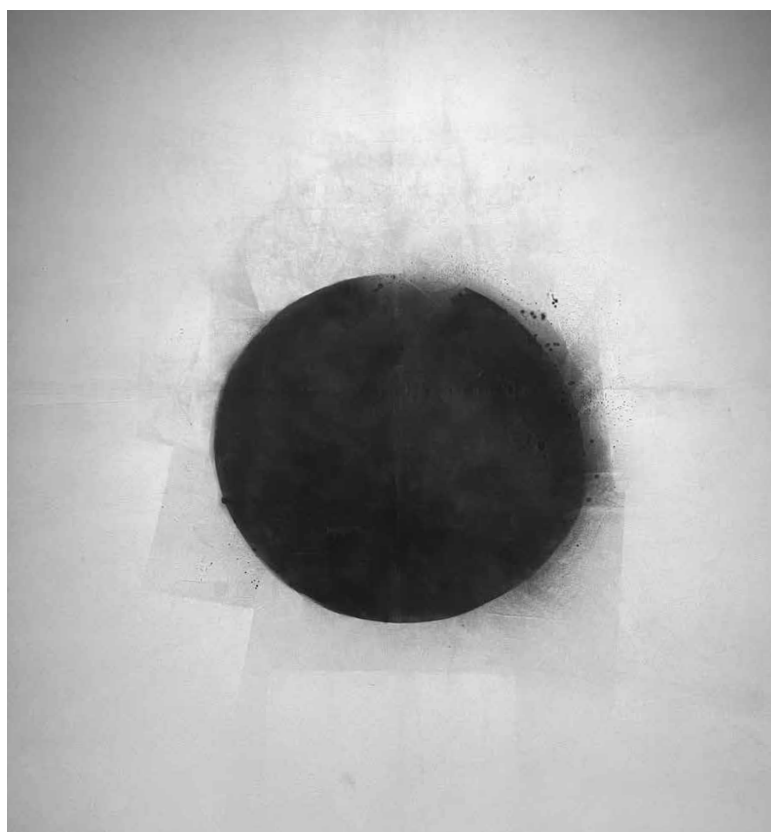
### Resemblances

‘Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945–1965’, held at London’s Barbican Art Gallery in the spring and early summer of 2022, re-examined art made in the period of twenty years following the end of

the Second World War. Shell-shocked survivors at this time were left to deal with both inner and outer turmoil wrought from a war that caused destruction on a vast scale. The bombs brought a city centre full of holes into bird’s-eye view, while the icy threat of Cold War nuclear annihilation brought the precarity of life into microscopic focus. Oscillations between the infinite and infinitesimal abounded, as artists immersed themselves in emerging scientific and technological advancements with

which they attempted to gather and make sense of the chaos surrounding them. How to heal and reconcile the vast swathes of razed built environment was a prevailing question, as well as how to do so in a way that might eliminate inequalities and liberate those previously marginalised, whether refugees (from Nazism and the remains of empire) or women.

The premise of the exhibition, as its programme notes, was that ‘it was these very conditions that gave rise to extraordinary and deeply



1 John Latham, ‘Full Stop’ (1961).

moving art in these years – an art more vital and distinctive than had tended to be recognised.<sup>1</sup> From a raw and wounded reality of ruins emerged a resilient populace preoccupied with reorientation toward rehabilitation.

Thus, while ‘Postwar Modern’ was in principle an art exhibition, its foregrounding of the built environment as a source and stimulus means that it offers as much to architectural as to art history and theory. Indeed, the closing paragraph of the introductory wall panel of the exhibition borrowed from postwar architects and Independent Group (1952–63) founders Alison (1928–93) and Peter Smithson (1923–2003), concluding that the creatives collected within the gallery were ‘dragging a rough poetry’ from the urban debris and detritus. The original citation continues, that this rough poetry was directed: ‘not to representing disconnection, but to generating resemblances’.<sup>2</sup> That, despite the severing and detachment induced by a war-torn, craterous cityscape, intimate connections might still be found in the spaces between, within the charged voids.

*Sometimes one can stumble upon a gathering of unimaginable insights unintentionally, catching their lingering eyes while intersecting with an acquaintance in the city and wondering*

*what might be on display to see. Snakes and ladders. Unaware in advance of their curation, one might say such serendipitous discoveries are meant to be. For contained within this gathering is a fantôme. Something recurring, unshakeable. We are suddenly unable to dismiss the feeling that we have (once again) happened upon something significant. Yet following faint footsteps relies on non-myopic faith, an openness to swerves beyond intention. That may lead astray, that may lead to nowhere in particular; though once coincidence holds sway, dead ends are doubtful. Everywhere, the scratched marks in the ground, on the page, are untameable. Look carefully, or else tumble down the rabbit hole.*

### Commonalities

The ‘Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945–1965’ exhibition captured the works of forty-eight artists from this period. The roll call was undeniably impressive, concretising the significance of this revelatory era. And yet it is an era devastatingly without earthly (human) full stop, as present-day wars globally, too, proceed to decimate lives, livelihoods, and homes. Not everyone attended *The Class*; <sup>3</sup> not all lessons were learned. Indeed, it’s a challenge to identify key moments within this significant body of experimental yet burdened work, since so many of the pieces continue to resonate with

contemporary events and concerns.

Recognising the prevailing intersectant nature of common experience, the exhibition was conceived to ‘move beyond familiar groupings of artists by “school”, medium, or geographic origin, instead paying close attention to shared experiences and preoccupations’.<sup>4</sup> The audience moved through thematic sections, between lower and upper galleries: 1. *Body and Cosmos*; 2. *Post-Atomic Garden*; 3. *Strange Universe*; 4. *Jean and John*; 5. *Intimacy and Aura*; 6. *Lush Life*; 7. *Scars*; 8. *Concrete*; 9. *Choreography of the Street*; 10. *Two Women*; 11. *Cruise*; 12. *Surface / Vessel*; 13. *Liberated Form and Space*; and, lastly, 14. *Horizon*. The titles inexplicitly revealed a further subtext of the items curated, as being engaged with things *para-* and with peripheralities: the edges and outskirts; the overlooked and neglected; the microscopic and macroscopic; the fleeting and ephemeral.<sup>5</sup>

Each piece held within these sections had its own breathing space. None of the ‘rooms’ were cluttered, and no piece dominated the others or competed for attention. It was an exhibition set within conversations of equality and its display was thus conceived through the lens of equitable immersion.<sup>6</sup> The show was comprised of a combination of wall-mounted photographs and paintings, set alongside films,



2 Gallery view, Post-Atomic Garden.

models, and sculptures, as well as display tables of prints and catalogues – a veritable array of formats and mediums conveying the unboundedness of explorations of this period. Common threads between works were carefully and creatively unravelled and re-entwined by the curators, echoing the artists and architects themselves asking ‘what groupings might begin to order the post-war universe’?<sup>7</sup>

*Sometimes one can stumble upon a shy activist inadvertently, can try and unravel the entangled threads of their thoughts before the next slip of the needle, before Apollo's child is cast into the cup. Coming undone relies on trust, on forgiveness, on a willingness to allow the once tightly interlocking stitches to work loose and open to new lines of knit, no matter how vulnerable the yarn. New, and yet returning, full circle, but maybe this time it will be without shadow. Or maybe messing up is inevitable, the only truly human action.*<sup>8</sup> All scars fade with time, with patience, with Janus looking both ways towards beginnings and endings, pacing between war and peace. Listen generously to the love falling from the sky. Will it matter in a year's time? A space between is left for healing; a door is left ajar, winking, hoping for a twinned reply.

### Resonances

Wandering through the ‘Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945–1965’ exhibition was a nostalgic revisit – a spatialisation, even – of long-loved footnotes. The exhibition featured many creatives and works with which I was already familiar, having completed a doctoral thesis in architecture by creative practice that emerged from the Independent Group's post-Second World War exhibition ‘Parallel of Life and Art’ (1953), which was held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London. Indeed, the research included intensive investigation into not only the Independent Group, but the craterous contexts from which they arose and within which they were situated. Nevertheless, there were still a few pieces with which I was unacquainted and which I may now add to the archival box.<sup>9</sup> In what follows, I have selected pieces that particularly resonated, owing to prior engagements as well as preoccupations with margins and craters. The remaining works, though noted, are not discussed with the same depth, not in oversight, but in honest acknowledgement that there are

always further footsteps within the referential universe for our bodies to trace. Perhaps, by cunning or coincidence, I will recover them again one day.

### Body and Cosmos

After the first encounter with Man Ray's (1890–1976) muse Lee Miller (1907–1977) in the entranceway, the second meeting was with artists Eduardo Paolozzi (1924–2005), John Latham (1921–2006), and Francis Newton Souza (1924–2002). This set, like many within the overall display, was one of monochromatic compositions that forced the viewer to focus on presence and absence, and all their metaphors. Latham's *Full Stop* (1961) was – unsurprisingly, given the ellipses of my own research – a personal favourite [1]. As the exhibition guide eloquently explained, this piece is:

*[...] poetic and monumental. Partially disintegrating, the central form evokes a solar eclipse, or perhaps a black hole. Its resounding title suggests an ending, which Latham viewed as necessary for new creativity to emerge. For him, it was only through searching beyond established systems of belief and thinking that humanity could uncover new possibilities.*<sup>10</sup>

This quotation powerfully communicates the cruelly confounding reality that faces humanity in the aftermath of any (though, perhaps, especially man-made) devastation, where one must wrestle with the uncertainty of life being at once there and not there, cratered, and with the ethical burden of creating from destruction. The full stop marks not only an end point, but simultaneously a new beginning; we are thus left with the understanding that these points are both weapons and wombs.

### Post-Atomic Garden

Certainly, in the postwar era bombsites were inescapable reminders of loss and suffering, yet also vessels which ‘embodied the hopes of a society desperate for renewal’.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in the *Post-Atomic Garden* section of the exhibition, derelict landscapes replete with pits and craters captured by the social documentary photographer Bert Hardy (1913–1995) were revealed as not only playgrounds for children but nurseries for artists’ imaginations, showing seeds of hope can grow from even the most devastated ground follow the plants [2].<sup>12</sup>

This organically derived section of the exhibition focused on three experimental installations that ‘drew on scientific imagery and were inhabited by a hallucinogenic overload of creatural and vegetal forms’.<sup>13</sup> Two such installations were held at the ICA, London: ‘Growth and Form’ (1951), inspired by D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson's 1917 publication of the same name and produced by Richard Hamilton (1922–2011); and ‘Parallel of Life and Art’ (1953) edited by the Independent Group. The third, ‘This is Tomorrow’ (1956) was held at the Whitechapel Gallery and comprised contributions from twelve groups of creatives, including the Independent Group. Their piece *Patio and Pavilion* featured a bunker-like construction littered with ‘as found’ objects – reappropriated weeds<sup>14</sup> – a response to the persistence of everyday life in the face of a built environment still fractured from the war. In ‘Growth and Form’ and ‘Parallel of Life and Art’ particularly, previously invisible worlds beneath the microscope – in addition to aerial views made possible through advances in reconnaissance technologies – were drawn from to begin to explore how life might be renewed within the city's gaping holes. With frequent oscillations between microscopic and macroscopic scales, ambiguity abounded.<sup>15</sup> Yet, rather than instigate dissonances, this collective of work raised resonances across scales and across life forms. For the viewer of ‘Postwar Modern’, it was thus made clear that many mutant creatures and botanical figures were cultivated within, and cut from, the ‘post-atomic garden’<sup>16</sup> and that new worlds had flourished directly from the rubble.

### Strange Universe

War is brutal on bodies, frequently generating mutilations.<sup>17</sup> It is not by chance that, in this period, the cyborg (the merging of human with machine) stirred the creative imagination. As the ‘Postwar Modern’ exhibition catalogue offered:

*Scavenged materials, whether from wreckage yards or popular magazines, were fashioned into futuristic bodies. Wounded, collapsed, and shattered forms were countered with primeval goddess imagery that celebrated fertility and rebirth; while ambiguously gendered bodies throb with mutant energy.*<sup>18</sup>

Bodies thus became imperfect bricolages – a term indebted to

structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009)<sup>19</sup> and resemblant of the ‘as found’ – with a diverse array of available entities resourcefully reused in resistance to a newly realised (at that time) and soon-to-be all-consuming world fashioned through expendability. Tinkering, improvising, making do with and adaptively reusing: all were unveiled to the ‘Postwar Modern’ audience as wasteland acts that refuted disposal and destruction; all were countering techniques that serendipitously breathed new life into maimed and once dead bodies, with prosthetics darning the holes.

These bodies were thereby resilient, yet also delicate. The ‘fragile beings’ of Franciszka Themerson’s (1907–1988) *Comme la vie est lente et comme l’espérance est violente* (*How Slow Life Is and How Violent Hope*, 1959) among others, exposed the precarity of the postwar period where hope was often difficult to bear, yet still held close.<sup>20</sup> What the ‘Postwar Modern’ exhibition’s curators omitted from the title of this piece was the parenthesis (*Apollinaire*). This parenthesis revealed the genealogy of the title: a quotation from two lines of poet Guillaume Apollinaire’s (1880–1918) poem ‘Le Pont Mirabeau’ (‘Mirabeau Bridge’) from *Alcools* (*Alcohols*, 1913),<sup>21</sup> which recorded the end of his love affair with the avant-garde painter Marie Laurencin (1883–1956). While he remained as unwavering as the then-recently constructed bridge, his love flowed onward like the River Seine. Within this poem, he was resilient despite his loss, and continued to strive for intimate connection in spite of the transient flow before him.<sup>22</sup> For Franciszka, it was a fitting theft to title a painting that captured life in the aftermath of the Second World War with soft, gentle male and female bodies overwhelmed by darkness, yet clutching a yellow object – perhaps a book, perhaps a beacon of hope? Held within the *Strange Universe* section of the exhibition, this artwork, and those selected to accompany it, spoke of the softer, hidden, emotive worlds beyond the hardened, visible, war-ravaged realms of reality, letting the audience share in the extraordinary of the ordinary, revealed tenderly, much in the same way the artists carefully unearthed for themselves the often buried yet wondrous peculiarities of everyday, postwar life.

### Lush Life

With a title drawn from Hamilton’s painting *Hers is a Lush Situation* (1958), this section of the ‘Postwar Modern’ exhibition was focused on the home environment. The war damaged approximately two million homes in the UK, while rationing and measures of austerity continued long after the final bombs fell. Looking to the US, by contrast, the British were confronted with overwhelming affluence borne out in consumer objects. Consequently, many artists became fascinated by the impacts of this emergent consumerist society on both the realms of the domestic and the feminine. This included Hamilton, whose selected work surveyed vehicular marketing imagery. Meanwhile Independent Group founder and member Paolozzi’s ironic ‘Bunk’ collages ‘borrowed and recontextualised’ from US magazines. Indeed, it was precisely the quest for orientation within the new, blitzed, yet increasingly mediated environment, which further promoted the Independent Group’s fascination and experimentation with collage.<sup>23</sup>

One of the final pieces to feature on the ground floor of the Barbican gallery was an architectural proposal. For the ‘Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition’ of 1956, the Smithsons offered a *House of the Future*, a radical scheme for futurist living. Like the soft bodies of Themerson’s painting, the interior walls of the home were curvilinear, almost carved out from the enclosing frame. The inner contours were evocative of a womb-like environment, safe from the chaos of the world left outside, ‘as if the house were a modern cave’.<sup>24</sup> Yet, it was all an illusion, ‘staged’. The Smithsons drew from the ‘transient materials’ of an ever-changing market, moving from displaying the object ‘as found’ to ‘displaying the image of the object, as exemplified in the glossy ads they collected, the shining fantasy of consumer goods’. The H.O.F. was [thus] itself just an advertisement, a seductive image.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the architects thought of the house as a car, with curved body panels like those of Hamilton’s painting.<sup>26</sup> The house revelled in transience, knowingly sifting from consumerist imagery. It was thus a very different ‘kind of bomb shelter’ to *Patio and Pavilion*, yet one that nevertheless was borne from and responded directly to the wreckage

it sealed itself against.<sup>27</sup> The emerging desire-driven routines of everyday life were exposed in *Lush Life* as an equally valuable referent, confirming these creatives’ conception that popular culture was not to be dismissed but worked with to unravel social and cultural predilections and their destructive origins.

### Choreography of the Street

Postwar artists also scavenged textures – of graffiti, advertising, and worn surfaces – from the spaces between. In the *Choreography of the Street* section of ‘Postwar Modern’, with the visitor now in the upper level of the gallery, Independent Group founder and member Nigel Henderson’s (1917–1985) photographs of inner-city streets conveyed the vitality of life amid the ruins,<sup>28</sup> though a sense of unease still lingered. Both Paolozzi and Robyn Denny’s (1930–2014) collages, and the radical prints created by Henderson and Paolozzi for their company Hammer Prints Ltd (1954–62) continued in this vein. Henderson’s late 1940s and early 1950s photographs of shopfronts within the East End of London were also an extension of the surrealist ethnography of Mass-Observation (1937–1949) and revealed the ‘overwhelming beauty of the occasional throw-away image [...] (a sort of *objets trouvés*)’, which subsequently brought the discoveries of the surrealist ‘chance encounter’ and the ‘latent energies, impulses, and desires in overlooked and ephemeral materials’ into play.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, it was within this period that the Smithsons coined the term ‘as found’, inspired by Henderson’s ethnographic photographs of Bethnal Green, and by the items scattered in the detritus of bombed sites.

Exploring similar themes, of unstaged street life as well as social injustice, the space dedicated to *Two Women* presented the works of Eva Frankfurter (1930–1959) (who fled the Nazis aged nine) and Mancunian Shirley Baker (1932–2014) [3]. Frankfurter’s experience as a migrant (one shared by many refugees at this time) was one of displacement, and her works thus revealed her ‘profound compassion for those living on the social margins’.<sup>30</sup> Alongside repairing the wounds of bomb damage, state-led demolition and slum clearance programmes sought to improve poor and working-class housing conditions, yet with the result that



entire streets were razed, and families uprooted overnight:

*There was so much destruction: a street would be half pulled down and the remnants set on fire while people were still living in the area. As soon as any houses were cleared, children would move in and break all the windows, starting the demolition process themselves. There was no health and safety in those days; they could do as they liked. I never posed my pictures. I shot scenes as I found them.<sup>31</sup>*

Both photographers were dedicated to documenting displacements of local communities, voices otherwise lost to history, and to 'capturing marginalised lives with warmth and humour', often 'as found' through the eyes of the suppressed and innocent – women and children. The *Two Women* section of 'Postwar Modern' honoured the works of two women who operated in a period in which women were dissuaded from becoming artists. Their dedicated space within the exhibition was thus imperative for raising crucial conversations about how, through their care, candidness, and resolve, they stood against this inequality and broke new ground, and for reflecting on what lessons we might take forward to challenge the inequities that persist today.

#### Intimacy, aura, and liberation

There were further sections to the 'Postwar Modern' exhibition, including *Jean and John* in which was presented the paintings of Jean Cooke (1927–2008) and John Bratby (1929–1992) who sought to expose the 'troubling reality' that lay behind gender stereotypes of the period – of traditional (female-oppressive) views on (nuclear) family and marriage – cautioning against the use of the home as a symbol of stability within the evidently unstable environment of postwar Britain as it underwent radical social reconstruction.<sup>32</sup> Further reconsiderations of gender could be found in *Intimacy and Aura*, where the interior depictions featured female figures that conveyed simultaneously both 'vulnerability and a haunting power',<sup>33</sup> undermining the erroneous yet predominant perception of women as only and inevitably weaker. In Sylvia Sleight's (1916–2010) private portraits, deemed too transgressive to exhibit at the time, her lover – the art critic Lawrence Alloway (1926–1990) – appeared dressed as a 'bride' in (at that time shockingly still



3 Shirley Baker, 'Colour photographs taken in Hulme and Manchester' (1965).

scandalous) fluid gender play. Further, in the section *Cruise*, viewers were reminded of the stark reality of male same-sex love and intimacy that remained horrifically illegal in the UK until 1967. Urban cruising (or looking for a casual sexual encounter in a public place) inspired both Francis Bacon's (1909–1992) *Man in Blue* series (1954) and David Hockney (1937–), with both artists 'shining a light on society's prejudices and restrictions'.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, society for many has not yet changed enough.

While early postwar works were typically angst-ridden, later works often 'conveyed a dreamlike

sensuality and tactility, their serenity offering refuge and comfort in a world still at sea',<sup>35</sup> as could be found in the works of *Surface / Vessel*.<sup>36</sup> In *Liberated Form and Space*, too, pieces were characterised by lightness, sensuality, heightened materiality, psychedelia, and brilliant technicolour.<sup>37</sup> The work *Big Bird* (1965) of Frank Bowling (1934–) in particular, with its two wounded birds set against a background of geometric blocks of vivid colour representing lives that had been broken, felt poignant. This was mirrored in the section *Horizon*, which featured the work of David Medalla (1942–2020), and Metzger, who were among the

co-founders of London's Signals gallery, a ground-breaking space devoted to radical interdisciplinary practice. In contrast to his earlier work, by the early 1960s Metzger had turned towards 'auto-creation'. *Liquid Crystal Environment* (1965) was an immersive installation with 'undulating chromatic patterns [that] perhaps evoke the mushroom clouds of nuclear war but also a seductive future of limitless change and possibility'.<sup>38</sup> An apt closing referent: a piece, like the overall 'Postwar Modern' exhibition, at once of destruction and creation, of absence and presence, of loss and hope.

*Sometimes one can stumble upon an imaginary museum without intention, perhaps drawn to its installation following unverifiable familial branches to Stefan and Franciszka Themerson's recital of Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi (ICA, London, 1952).<sup>39</sup> We found you in a photograph. Except it wasn't you behind the mask. Captured in an erroneous caption, we'd otherwise never have known of our shared familiarity with a science;<sup>40</sup> your name was there only fleetingly, a momentary window of opportunity we had somehow fallen through and right into your outstretched arms. Now the opening between our worlds is glazed over; there are no traces left on the server. It was you who extended our voyage into a world of para-, from a world of pata-; it was you who sent us all to sea in a sieve. Once bound for Russia but brought off the ship at the last breath – what of your father and brother? A quest for you, a much-loved man, a stranger of the stage. We echo, frankly, how can we fear when you've gone on ahead?<sup>41</sup>*

### Coincidences

The Independent Group underpinned much of the work on display in 'Postwar Modern'. If one dusted carefully enough the fingerprints of Henderson, Paolozzi, the Smithsons, and later member Magda Cordell (1921–2008), could be found throughout this exhibition. The Independent Group were an avant-garde collective moved by contradictions, as well as by seeming dissonances between artistic and scientific disciplines. One text appears to have particularly captivated the group's attention: Thompson's *On Growth and Form* (1917). Within this text, Thompson reasoned that the scientist must contend with the 'ephemeral, accidental, not the eternal nor universal'; ideas that

came to be reflected within the Independent Group's works.<sup>42</sup>

Their approach was one of 'urban gleaning': scavenging the debris and detritus of war-torn London, using leftover, discarded, and neglected materials. These *bricoleurs* (or ragpickers) sought affinities where they might be least expected and accepted all that seemed accidental. There was a hunt for correspondences, or parallels, which 'they undertook less as subjects overwhelmed by the expanded repertoire of images around them than as mythographers curious as to how these images might "go together" – and what groupings might begin to order the post-war universe'.<sup>43</sup> Their 'as found' practice was curatorial, where 'the art is in the picking up, turning over, and putting with'.<sup>44</sup> Understood in architectural terms, the 'as found' was equally concerned with: 'treating the site as a found object with valuable meanings embodied in the fabric'.<sup>45</sup> By the 'as found' they thus meant 'not only adjacent buildings but all those marks that constitute remembrancers in a place and that are there to be read through finding out how the existing built fabric of the place had come to be as it was [...]'.<sup>46</sup> It was a practice of care founded upon the understanding that the existing urban environment should be worked with and within, rather than flattened and substituted with a shiny new alternative.<sup>47</sup>

The exhibition 'Postwar Modern' thus sought to reveal how new artistic practice in the aftermath of the Second World War, such as that of the Independent Group, arose from the ruinous cityscape within which the artists were situated. Of course, much emphasis was placed on London but, as B. S. Johnson's (1933–1973) *The Evacuees* (1969) film revealed, many devastated UK landscapes played their role in shaping these postwar creatives and their subsequent actions within the capital city, including, for Alison, South Shields and Sunderland (by coincidence, my home city).<sup>48</sup> Their materials were those already in existence: those they found scattered around them. 'Postwar Modern', although dedicated to a different time period to our own, thus offers much to present-day conversations concerning: how we might work with what we have rather than starting again on each occasion; conserving materials; and

our need to acknowledge overlooked and marginalised stories no matter the seeming emptiness of a particular site. For our future is equally precarious, founded on mountainous waste and carelessness, asking us to look more closely once again and drag a rough poetry from the debris and detritus, in order to create new creative-critical means of communicating the slow violence we have struggled to see and have thus far failed to thwart.<sup>49</sup> This time, the craters have not been caused by bombs but by cumulative tripping on our own wires, bringing us full circle to reflect: how slow life is and how violent hope.

*Sometimes one can stumble upon a thing of great joy seemingly by pure accident. Some may say it is all by design. That within the scissures of this world is a scaffold, a support structure, with the opportunity to open onto other beams of light. Ours, overall, has been a portfolio not of construction but of reluctance. Once burdened by indecision, we're now resolute with the conviction that each proposal, each writing has asked and is asking only: must we really build and create each time anew? Humanity is an invasive species; our intrusion upon the lives of our companions (more-than-human) knows no boundaries. Must we continue to excavate and devastate? What is the least with which we can make do? Our reparations are wholly inadequate; popular poetry, documented realities, and cautionary tales are no longer radical enough to halt the swagger of the coming storm. We must listen more generously to, care more deeply for, and no longer take for granted the scaffolds that support us. We must call out for all craters, voiceless vessels, and bare chambers. We ought, now, to cast all differences aside, and in every emptied site plant a field of wheat, a forest, or, else, a blooming wildflower meadow.<sup>50</sup>*

Ashley Mason is a Research Associate at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University, United Kingdom. Her feminist research is concerned with creative-critical and textual-spatial practices within architecture, especially concerning matters of site activism. Her doctoral thesis in *Architecture by Creative Practice, Towards a Paracontextual Practice* ("with Footnotes to 'Parallel of Life and Art'") (Newcastle University, 2019), attended to (among many things) the post-Second World War built environment and the work of the

*Independent Group, especially that of fellow Sunderland-raised architect and author Alison Smithson (1928–1993). Recent publications include the volume, co-edited with Adam Sharr, Creative Practice Inquiry in Architecture (Routledge, 2022).*

## Notes

- [n.a.], 'Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945–1965' [exhibition guide] (Barbican, 2022), unpag.
- Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, 'The New Brutalism', *Architectural Design*, 27 (April 1957), 113.
- BBC Monitor, *The Class*, 1961, dir. by John Schlesinger.
- [n.a.], 'Postwar Modern', unpag.
- Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Paris: Seuil, 1987; repr. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1–2, 5, 26, 346.
- [n.a.], 'Postwar Modern', unpag.
- Hal Foster, 'Savage Minds (A Note on Brutalist Bricolage)', *OCTOBER*, 136 (spring 2011), 182–91 (p. 191).
- 'We are all our actions.' Harold Lang epitaph, Cairo.
- Ashley Mason, 'Draught/Draft Papers', in *Creative Practice Inquiry in Architecture*, ed. by Ashley Mason and Adam Sharr (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 40–50 (p. 50).
- [n.a.], 'Postwar Modern', unpag.
- Ibid.*
- Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (1987; repr. London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 11. The section *Scars*, too, attended explicitly to such gaping urban wounds that were soon to become sites of reconstruction, through Frank Auerbach's building site studies (1931–), Leon Kossoff's London landscapes (1926–2019), and Gustav Metzger's art of 'auto-destruction' (1926–2017).
- György Kepes, *Language of Vision* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1995), p. 150. The oscillation between the micro and the macro that characterised these exhibitions equally resonated with Prunella Clough's (1919–1999) painted evocations of pulsating energy and cellular division.
- Claude Lichtenstein and Thomas Schregrenberger, 'As Found', in *As Found: The Discovery of the Ordinary*, ed. by Claude Lichtenstein and Thomas Schregrenberger (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2001), pp. 8–10 (p. 9).
- Elsewhere, in the section *Concrete*, the Constructivists – a group established by Victor Pasmore (1908–1998) that included Robert Adams (1917–1984), Adrian Heath (1920–1992), Anthony Hill (1930–2020), Mary Martin (1913–1990), and Denis Williams (1923–1998) – sought a 'democratic, universal language that could transcend human differences'. Their geometric harmonies were intended to replicate the underlying beauty of the natural world rather than abstracting from it. See [n.a.], 'Postwar Modern', unpag.
- Including those of Lynn Chadwick (1914–2003), Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993) (*Harbinger Birds* (1961)), and William Turnbull (1922–2012).
- Bodies were reimagined by many, including Avinash Chandra (1931–1991), Alan Davie (1920–2014), Peter King (1928–1957), and Aubrey Williams (1926–1990).
- [n.a.], 'Postwar Modern', unpag.
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- [n.a.], 'Postwar Modern', unpag.
- Ibid.*
- Including William Scott's paintings (1913–1989), and ceramic vessels by Lucie Rie (1902–1995) and Hans Coper (1920–1981).
- By Gillian Ayres (1930–2018), Anwar Jalal Shemza (1928–1985), Kim Lim (1936–1997), and Patrick Heron (1920–1999).

38. [n.a.], 'Postwar Modern', unpag.
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The author declares none.

#### Author's affiliation

Newcastle University, United Kingdom.

#### Author's address

Ashley Mason  
 ashley.mason@newcastle.ac.uk