

ULTRA

Positions and Polarities Beyond Crisis

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The Reconceptualization of the City's Ugliness Between the 1950s and 1970s in the British, Italian, and Australian Milieus

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Keywords

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Ernesto Nathan Rogers
Gordon Cullen
Reyner Banham
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Abstract

The paper examines the reorientations of the appreciation of ugliness within different national contexts in a comparative or relational frame, juxtaposing the British, Italian, and Australian milieus, and to relate them to the ways in which the transformation of the urban fabric and the effect of suburbanization were perceived in the aforementioned national contexts. Special attention is paid to the production and dissemination of the ways the city's uglification was conceptualized between the 1950s and 1970s. Pivotal for the issues that this paper addresses are Ian Nairn's *Outrage: On the Disfigurement of Town and Countryside* (1956) Robin Boyd's *Australian Ugliness* (1960), and the way the phenomenon of urban expansion is treated in these books in comparison with other books from the four national contexts under study, such as Ludovico Quaroni's *La torre di Babele* (1967) and Reyner Banham's *The New Brutalism: Ethic Or Aesthetic?* (1966).

Introduction: Transnationalisation and the Reconceptualization of the City's Ugliness

1. Marianna Charitonidou, "Réinventer la posture historique: les débats théoriques à propos de la comparaison et des transferts", *Espaces et Sociétés*, 167 (2016): 137-152. <https://doi.org/10.3917/esp.167.0137>.

Transnational historical research focuses on how connections function as central forces for historical processes. The "transnationalization" of historical discourse is based on the effort to understand the impact of cross-border relations on the transformation of certain concepts and ideas in each of the national contexts under study.¹ The transnational approach in social sciences aims to take into consideration the historical dimension when analysing how international exchanges of ideas and values evolve. Therefore, in order to better grasp the exchanges between the three different cultural and socio-economic contexts under study particular emphasis should be placed on a relational analysis of the production and dissemination of the ways the city's uglification was conceptualized between the 1950s and 1970s. The paper departs from the conviction that an analysis of Boyd's conception of ugliness is useful for better understand the debates on ugliness within the Italian and the British contexts.

Australian Ugliness and Featurism

2. Andrew Leach, "The Gold Coast Moment", *Architectural Histories*, 3(1) (2015). <http://doi.org/10.5334/ah.cd>; Leach, "Letter from the Gold Coast", *AA Files*, 70 (2015): 24-27.

3. John Macarthur, "Robin Boyd's The Australian Ugliness, ugliness, and liberal education", *RMIT Design Archives journal*, 9(2) (2019): 50-57.

The questions addressed in this paper are relevant to the architectural history of Australia or New Zealand, in the sense that one of its main case studies will be the case of Gold Coast Architecture. As Andrew Leach notes, in "The Gold Coast Moment", Boyd tried to interpret the "Tiki aesthetic" employing the term 'Austerica' in order to describe the neon signs and a "rainbow of plastic paint" mere extensions of a cultural surface that captured, too deep suntans and what one writer called a 'climate dictated exposure'.² Informative for understanding Boyd's conception of ugliness are the photographs of Australian photographer Nigel Buesst that appeared in the 1968 and 1971 editions of *The Australian Ugliness* (fig. 1), as well as the photographs taken by Robin Boyd during the late fifties when he spent some time as visiting professor at MIT and travelled around the US, and the illustrations he included in *The Australian Ugliness* (fig. 2). Macarthur claims that Boyd agreed with the distinction that Kant drew between aesthetic judgment and pleasure.³

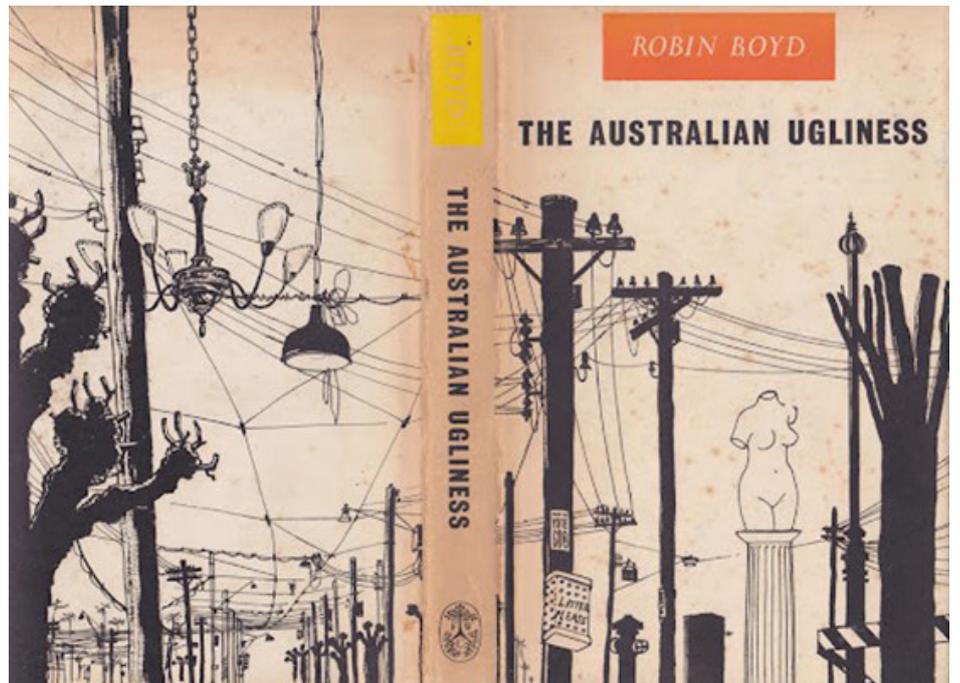


Figure 1: Front cover and back cover of Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness* (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1960).

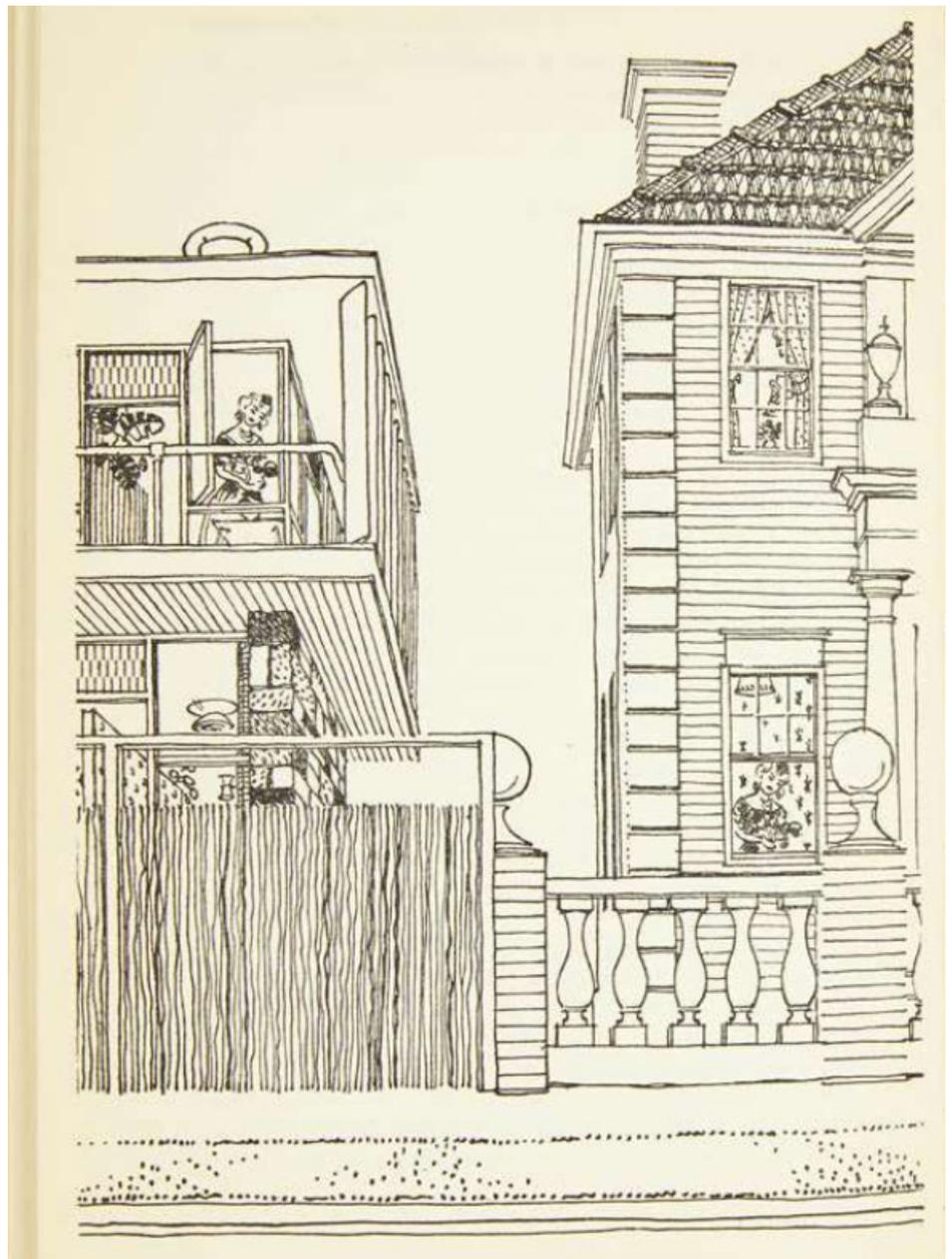


Figure 2. Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1960), 174, Roy Simpson Collection, RMIT Design Archives. Illustration by Robin Boyd, ©2019 Estate of Robin Boyd, courtesy Robin Boyd Foundation

4. Robin Boyd, "The Australian Ugliness", in Chris Feik, Robert Manne, eds., *The Words That Made Australia: How a nation came to know itself* (Collingwood: Black Inc. Agenda, 2013); Boyd, *Australian Ugliness* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1963), 23.

5. Macarthur, "Robin Boyd's The Australian Ugliness, ugliness, and liberal education", 51.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Naomi Stead, "(Not So) Anti-Architecture", *Places Journal* (2017). Accessed 08 Aug 2021. <https://doi.org/10.22269/171017>.

Of particular interest for this paper is an ensemble of neologisms that Boyd employed in *The Australian Ugliness*, such as *Featurism*, *Austerica*, and *Arboraphobia*. *Featurism* referred to "the subordination of the essential whole and the accentuation of selected separate features".⁴ According to John Macarthur, "Featurism is an internationally observable aesthetical and ethical failing, but one that Boyd claims to reach an apogee in the Australia of the 1950s".⁵ Macarthur, in "Robin Boyd's The Australian Ugliness, ugliness, and liberal education", analyses Boyd's critique of popular taste, and compares Boyd's understanding of ugliness with that developed in the pages of the *Architectural Review*.⁶ Naomi Stead has described *The Australian Ugliness* as "a kind of taxonomy of local ugliness", and as "an account of the social and cultural elements that this ugliness was intended to hide".⁷

8. Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism", *The Architectural Review*, 118(708) (1955): 359.

During the post-war period, a reorientation from the cross-cultural exchanges between Australia and the UK as far as architectural discourse is concerned towards the cross-fertilization between Australia and the United States of America took place. This shift should be taken into account if we try to describe the specificities of the Australian ugliness. Boyd was not only influenced by the ideas of "Townscape" movement and Nairn and Cullen's "subtopia" and "outrage" but also from the so-called New Brutalism to which Reyner Banham devoted his seminal article "The New Brutalism" published in the *Architectural Review* in 1955. Boyd was a casual contributor to the *Architectural Review*. Banham, in "The New Brutalism", paid special attention to the exhibition "Parallel of Life and Art", held at the Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) in London in 1953 and curated by Alison and Peter Smithson, Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi. Banham described New Brutalist aesthetics "as being anti-art, or at any rate anti-beauty in the classical aesthetic sense of the word."⁸ The tension between New Brutalist anti-art and anti-beauty aesthetics and Tendenza's anti-aesthetic and anti-elitist stance is insightful for recognizing what was at stake in post-war debates around the notion of ugliness in relation to the question of morality in architecture.

9. Boyd, "The Sad end of the New Brutalism", *Architectural Review*, 142(45) (1967), 11.

In "The Sad End of New Brutalism", Boyd criticised Banham's understanding of New Brutalism. He maintained that his analysis of New Brutalism, due to his effort to legitimise Alison and Peter Smithson's work, neglected the importance of several buildings and architects that could have been described as New Brutalists. Characteristically, he remarked: "the only straightforward and consistent rule followed by Dr. Banham was that New Brutalism was anything the Smithsons permitted".⁹ Despite his critique towards Banham's conception of New Brutalism, he was supportive of the ideals of New Brutalism, and believed that it was among the very few post-war movements that were revolutionary. This becomes evident in his following words: "The greatest hope of every evangelical movement like New Brutalism is that it will lead the world away from seductive aesthetic pleasures to the pure intelligence of building".¹⁰ The aforementioned article, which was published in the *Architectural Review* in 1967, is like a critique of Banham's book entitled *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* published a year earlier.¹¹

10. Ibid.

11. Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1966).

12. Boyd, "The Sad end of the New Brutalism".

Boyd also remarked that "the New Brutalism was certainly the most articulate of all the attempts to re-establish the original integrity and strength of modern architecture that occurred after the soft decade following the war".¹² Boyd believed that New Brutalism was unoriginal in the sense that its ideals were not new. He claimed that "unoriginality is of course the weakness of the argument for New Brutalism as an independent movement".¹³ Boyd remarked regarding the value of appreciating ugliness or the unbeautiful: "A capacity to appreciate the unbeautiful is a quality which no Featurist would envy and few would be interested in cultivating; yet this is the key to depth in appreciation of architecture..."¹⁴

13. Ibid.

14. Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, 224.

Subtopia and Ugliness within the British Context

An important movement for grasping the conception of ugliness within

15. Gordon Cullen, "Hazards", *Architectural Review*, 103 (1948): 99-105; Cullen, "Lees and wheels", *Architectural Review*, 104 (1948): 77-80; Erdem Erten, "Thomas Sharp's collaboration with H. de C. Hastings: the formulation of townscape as urban design pedagogy", *Planning Perspectives*, 24 (2009): 29-49.

16. Mira Engler, *Cut and Paste Urban Landscape: The Work of Gordon Cullen* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016).

17. Macarthur, "Robin Boyd's The Australian Ugliness, ugliness, and liberal education", 56.

18. Mathew Aitchison, "Ugliness and Outrage: The Australian Townscape", in Alexandra Brown, Andrew Leach, eds., *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 30, Open* (Gold Coast, Qld: SAHANZ, 2013), 415.

19. Ivor de Wolfe, "Townscape: A Plea for an English Visual Philosophy", *Architectural Review*, 106 (1949): 354-362; Mathew Aitchison, "Who's Afraid of Ivor De Wolfe", *AA Files*, 62 (2011): 34-39; Aitchison, "Townscape: scope, scale and extent", *The Journal of Architecture*, 17(5) (2012): 621-642; Macarthur, Aitchison, "Oxford Versus the Bath Road: Empiricism and Romanticism in the Architectural Review's Picturesque Revival", *The Journal of Architecture*, 17(1) (2012): 51-68

20. Cullen, "Townscape Casebook", *Architectural Review*, 106 (1949): 363-374.

21. de Wolfe [Hastings], "Civilia. The End of Sub Urban Man", *Architectural Review*, 149 (892) (1971): 326-408.

22. Ian Nairn, "Outrage Twenty Years After", *Architectural Review*, 158 (1975): 328-337.

23. Gavin Stamp, *Anti-Ugly: Excursions in English Architecture and Design* (London: Quarto Publishing Group, 2013), 8.

24. Timothy Hyde, *Ugliness and Judgment: On Architecture in the Public Eye* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton Architectural Press, 2019), 64.

25. Stamp, "Anti-Ugly Action: An Episode in the History of British Modernism", *AA Files*, 70 (2015), 80.

the British context during the 1950s is the "Townscape" movement. The activities of Hubert de Cronin Hastings as editor of the *Architectural Review* are of great significance for better understanding the context within which the ideas of "Townscape" movement emerged. An ensemble of articles aiming to explain the guiding principles of this movement appeared in the pages of the *Architectural Review* starting in October 1948.¹⁵ Gordon Cullen was along with Ian Nairn one of the main authors of the "Townscape" articles until 1959, when he stopped collaborating with the *Architectural Review*.¹⁶ Ian Nairn started collaborating with the *Architectural Review* later than Gordon Cullen, that is to say in 1954, and departed in 1969. Macarthur relates Hastings's approach in the *Architectural Review* towards ugliness to liberalism. According to Macarthur, Hastings "would accept modernist featurism alongside meretricious historicism and vernacular mis-appropriations of style."¹⁷

Mathew Aitchison has claimed that "Townscape's proponents saw ugliness, sprawl and blight as symptomatic of the general collapse of the design professions' ability to engage with real-world problems."¹⁸ The "Townscape" movement should be understood in relation to the critiques towards the newly built New Towns and the suburbanization effect that accompanied their construction. Another aspect that is of great significance for comprehending the ideology of the "Townscape" movement is the impact that the generalised use of the car on the urban and suburban landscapes. Despite the fact that the ideas that are at the basis of the "Townscape" movement were already present in an ensemble of articles published in the *Architectural Review* since 1948, an important turning point was the issue of December 1949, which included not only Hastings's article entitled "Townscape: A Plea for an English Visual Philosophy", which was published under the pseudonym Ivor de Wolfe,¹⁹ but also Gordon Cullen's homonymous article as well.²⁰ An article entitled "Civilia. The End of Sub Urban Man", authored by Hastings in 1971 is also of great importance for understanding his critique of suburbanization.²¹ Another text that was published during the seventies in the *Architectural Review* and is useful for revisiting the ideas around "outrage" and "subtopia" is Ian Nairn's "Outrage Twenty Years After."²²

Another aspect that should also be taken into account when we try to understand the specificities of the conception of ugliness within the British context is the Anti-Ugly Action (AUA), which was a group formed by students at the Royal College of Arts (RCA) in order to protest against the buildings that they considered ugly (fig. 4). As Gavin Stamp remarks in his book entitled *Anti-Ugly: Excursions in English Architecture and Design*, "[i]n December 1958, [...] Anti-Ugly Action demonstrated outside two new buildings they found offensive: Caltex House in the Old Brompton Road and Agriculture House (the monumental Neo-Georgian headquarters of the Farmers' Union, since demolished) in Knightsbridge."²³ According to Timothy Hyde, the critique of ugliness of the Anti-Ugly Action "was an unabashedly aesthetic critique rather than a moral or material one."²⁴ However, Ken Baynes, who was the Chairman of Anti-Ugly Action, have related the approach of the Anti-Ugly Action to the ideas of the Independent Group²⁵ of which Alison and Peter Smithson were members along with Lawrence Alloway, Reyner Banham, Colin St John Wilson, Richard Hamilton, Nigel Henderson, John McHale

26. Stamp, "Anti-Ugly Action: An Episode in the History of British Modernism", *AA Files*, 70 (2015), 65.

27. Nairn, *Outrage: On the Disfigurement of Town and Countryside*, special issue of the 1955 *Architectural Review* (London: The Architectural Press, 1956); it brought together articles published in the *Architectural Review*, 117 (702) (1955): 364-460.

28. Nairn cited in Steve Parnell, "Ian Nairn: the pioneer of Outrage", *The Architectural Review*, 27 May 2014. Accessible online: <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/outrage/ian-nairn-the-pioneer-of-outrage>

29. Aitchison, "The Boyd Ultimatum", *AA Files*, 66 (2013), 61.

and Eduardo Paolozzi. As Hyde reminds us, in *Ugliness and Judgment: On Architecture in the Public Eye*, "Ian Nairn [...] addressed the embers of Anti-Ugly Action in a lecture just after the group was founded."²⁶ During the fifties, within different contexts other terms also emerged to describe the new features of urban and suburban landscapes related to the phenomenon of suburbanization and the generalised use of the car. Such a term within the British context was "subtopia" used by Ian Nairn, in *Outrage: On the Disfigurement of Town and Countryside*, which collected several articles written for the *Architectural Review* during the early fifties and was published in 1956.²⁷ Nairn defined "subtopia" as "the annihilation of the site, the steamrolling of all individuality of place to one uniform and mediocre pattern", as well as "the legalization of the urge to dump on a national scale."²⁸ As Mathew Aitchison remarks, in "The Boyd Ultimatum", "[t]oday, many of the developments Nairn observed are commonplace but in the mid 1950s they were distinct enough to be grouped under one Nairn term, 'subtopia'.²⁹ Of great significance for the dissemination of Nairn's ideas were the illustrations by Gordon Cullen (fig. 3), which have many similarities with Boyd's own illustrations in *The Australian Ugliness*. Particularly informative regarding Nairn's understanding of "subtopia" and "outrage" are the episodes of "Nairn Across Britain", which were released by BBC the same year as Reyner Banham's film "Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles", that is to say in 1972.



Figure 3: Gordon Cullen's illustrations enlivened the 'Outrage' special issue of June 1955.

ANTI-UGLY ACTION

ANTI-UGLY ACTION sets out by novel means to combat:

- i. Lack of imagination in architecture.
- ii. Needless suburban sprawl.

and to encourage:

- i. The erection of lively modern architecture.
- ii. The appreciation of modern buildings.
- iii. Urbanism as opposed to Sub-urbanism.
- iv. The preservation of anything worthwhile, from the countryside to individual buildings.
- v. To further better understanding between artists and architects.

It hopes to do this by:

- i. Attracting and awaking public interest in Architecture by means of public demonstrations, posters, dissemination of literature, exhibitions.
- ii. Attacking bad schemes and buildings at the public meeting stage.
- iii. Supporting other societies (New Hampstead Society etc.) in their efforts.
- iv. Petitioning councils etc. who erect rubbish.

ANTI-UGLY ACTION was formed, without too much hope, in the Royal College of Art (Oct. 1958). So far there have been six demonstrations for and against buildings. These demonstrations have attracted a satisfactory amount of publicity. It is hoped that branches of the society will be formed in Architectural and Art Schools up and down the country, which will then be linked by a Central Representative Committee. Already eight branches have been formed.

ANTI-UGLY ACTION has immediate plans for:

A comparative EXHIBITION of housing to be shown in the London Parks.

The production of a BOOK putting forward the group's views in a hard hitting and graphic form.

A study group is preparing a report on art and architectural EDUCATION.

Something must be done to create a better environment for clerks, coloured people, directors and old age pensioners.

D O I T

Make those who build realise that appearance matters. Make other people realize that they are concerned with appearances.

Chairman: Ken Baynes, Secretary: B.J. Newman, Treasurer: W. Wilkins.
23, Cromwell Road, LONDON, S.W.7. Telephone: KNightsbridge 1362.

Figure 4: AUA manifesto, March 1959

The Conception of Architecture and City's Ugliness within the Post-war Italian Context

Pivotal for understanding the conception of ugliness within the Italian context are the debates around Tendenza and Neorealist architecture. Taking as main actors Ernesto Nathan Rogers and Aldo Rossi, for the former, and Ludovico Quaroni, for the latter, my aim here is to clarify their respective positions regarding the relation of post-war (sub)urbanization to city's uglification. Ernesto Nathan Rogers, Quaroni and Rossi shaped

discourses based on the idea that architects are responsible for society. Both Tendenza and Neorealist architecture intended to reformulate the ways one judges architecture through new models corresponding to post-war urban expansion, establishing criteria that aim to take into consideration the struggle for social reconstruction. Within this context, continuity was seen as antidote to modernism's crisis.

30. Ernesto Nathan Rogers, "Elogio della tendenza", *Domus*, 216 (1946), 47.

31. Rogers, "Ortodossia dell'eterodossia", *Casabella Continuità*, 216 (1957), 4; Rogers, *Esperienza dell'architettura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1958), 90.

32. Enzo Paci, "L'architettura e il mondo della vita", *Casabella Continuità*, 217 (1957): 53-55.

33. Paci, *Diario fenomenologico* [1931] (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1961).

34. Rogers, "The Image: The Architect's Inalienable Vision", in György Kepes, ed. *Sign, Image, Symbol*, (New York: George Braziller, 1966), 242-51.

The term "tendenza" was originally employed by Ernesto Nathan Rogers in "Elogio della tendenza", in 1946.³⁰ Rogers also referred to "tendenza", in "Ortodossia dell'eterodossia" (1957) and in *Esperienza dell'architettura* (1958). He drew a distinction between the concepts of "tendenza", style and coherence, defining "tendenza" as "an act of modesty that integrates the activity of each individual in the culture of their own epoch, inviting them to consider their selves before anything else as parts of society".³¹ Rogers's temporally-driven aesthetic model, which lied on the concept of continuity and the idea of "sensing history", is the result of his encounter with Enzo Paci's phenomenological approach. Rogers believed that a balance between utility and beauty should be found, while Paci considered that architects should not conceive society as "theorized or ideologized or structured beforehand according to the perspectives of a given sociology". Instead, they should "make alive and real social relationship of [...] [their] country, with its needs and miseries, with its illusions and hard sense of reality, of the limits and conditions of life."³² Paci was convinced that, to achieve such an engaged view, it is indispensable to "see the things the way they are". In his *Diario Fenomenologico*, he defined as phenomenon "what appears, what we see as we see it and we can faithfully describe, without judging it before we can see it precisely as it is."³³ Rogers' view in "The Image: The Architect's Inalienable Vision"³⁴ drew on Paci's phenomenological approach.

35. Casciato, "Neorealism in Italian Architecture", in Sarah Williams Goldhagen, Réjean Legault, eds., *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press; Montreal: CCA, 2001), 31.

36. *Ibid.*, 29.

Neorealist attitude should be understood within the context of the process of city creation in a new Italy after the WWII damages. As Maristella Casciato underlines, "[i]t was in the south that the new national architectural language of Neorealism found its concrete expression."³⁵ The contrast between south and north Italy is important for grasping the differences between Neorealist and Tendenza architecture. The context *par excellence* of Neorealist architecture is Rome, while the milieu *par excellence* of Tendenza is Milan. For instance, "[m]ilanese architectural culture had maintained a sense of the continuity of the modern movement and the rationalist European experience."³⁶ This can explain Rogers' choice to give *Casabella*, which he directed since 1953, the subtitle "continuità".

37. Luca Molinari, "Constructing New Continuities in a Post-War World: the relationship between Jaap Bakema and Ernesto Nathan Rogers", in Carlo Togliani, ed., *Un palazzo in forma di parole. Scritti in onore di Paolo Carpeggiani* (Milan: Franco Angeli 2016), 487-495.

BBPR's Torre Velasca is a thought-provoking case study for reflecting on Tendenza's aesthetic theory (fig. 5, fig. 6). Given that it provoked several reactions and has been often characterized as ugly, its examination could illuminate Tendenza's stance towards ugliness. A common preoccupation of Tendenza and Team 10 was the concern for architecture's moral dimension. Despite the affinities between Team 10 and Ernesto Nathan Rogers' aesthetic views, which have been highlighted by Luca Molinari,³⁷ Peter Smithson and Jaap Bakema criticized sharply BBPR's Torre Velasca, when it was presented at the 1959 CIAM conference in Otterlo. Smithson argued that it was aesthetically and ethically wrong and "a bad model to give because

38. Peter Smithson cited in Oscar Newman, *New Frontiers in Architecture: CIAM '59 in Otterlo* (New York: Universe Books, 1961), 94-97.

39. "Casabella . . . casus belli?", *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 77 (1958), 55.

40. "Si vis pacem demain . . . para bellum . . . aujourd'hui", *Casabella Continuità*, 220 (1958), 53.

there are things that can be so easily distorted and become not only ethically wrong but aesthetically wrong."³⁸ He described it as a model with dangerous consequences and blamed Rogers for not being aware of his position in the society. Before this controversy, Torre Velasca had received an equally negative critique in France, in *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, where it was regarded as an effect of the Italian appreciation for "ugliness, baroque inflammation, exaggeration, false originality, the strange, and the bizarre."³⁹ Casabella responded to the ironic title "Casabella . . . casus belli?" of *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, which attacked BBPR's aesthetics, publishing a text with the equally caustic title "Si vis pacem demain . . . para bellum . . . aujourd'hui."⁴⁰



Figure 5: BBPR's Torre Velasca featured on the cover of the issue 232 of *Casabella Continuità*, published in October 1959



Figure 6: Torre Velasca (1950-1958) by Ludovico Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti and Ernesto Nathan Rogers (BBPR) in Milano

41. Rogers, *Esperienza dell'architettura* [1958], ed. Luca Molinari (Milan: Skira, 1997).

The double stance of embodying cultural values without literally imitating past forms is emblematic of BBPR's posture. Rogers underlined that the significance of Torre Velasca's design strategy lied "in its intent to epitomize, culturally speaking – while avoiding repetition of the expressive language used in any of its buildings – the atmosphere of the city of Milan, its ineffable yet perceptible character."⁴¹ This endeavour to transcribe through architectural composition a given culture's characteristics without imitating an existing visual language brings to mind Neorealist approach, which also aimed to invent an architectural language, based on cultural points of reference. A difference between *Tendenza* and Neorealist architecture is that the latter, in contrast with the former, developed an architectural language based on a set of mimetic devices. Neorealism's paradox lies in its double vocation to imitate and re-invent cultural identity's points of reference.

42. Rogers, "Le responsabilità verso la tradizione", *Casabella Continuità*, 202 (1954): 1-3.

43. Ludovico Quaroni, "Il ratto della città", *Spazio e Società*, 8 (1979), 28.

Tendenza and Neorealist architecture shared their interest in the intensification of architects' responsibility, the reestablishment of the relationship between reality and utopia and the critique of modernist homogenised and impersonal functionalism. Rogers invited architects to understand their "responsibilities towards tradition",⁴² shaping an aesthetic view based on the understanding of tradition as "life-world". The notion of responsibility was also central for Quaroni. He believed that cities had become "too anonymous, too ugly, too inefficient", because architects did not try to change this situation, and left "political friends [...] and] city planning cousins"⁴³ to decide about their future. For him, city's ugliness was a result of losing the sense of architects' responsibility for city's transformation.

Both Quaroni and Rogers aimed to reinvent the relationship between utopia and reality. Quaroni's approach is characterized by the belief in the potential of imaginary reality to revitalize urban design. In *La torre di Babele*, he expressed his belief "in the creative value of utopia – of an imaginary reality [...] which [...] holds the seeds for revitalizing a process

44. Quaroni, *La Torre di Babele* (Padova: Marsilio Editore, 1967).

45. Rogers, "Utopia della realtà", *Casabella-Continuità*, 259 (1962), 1; Rogers, *Utopia della realtà* (Bari: Laterza, 1965).

46. Rogers, *Esperienza dell'architettura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1958); Paci, *Esistenza ed immagine* (Milano: Tarantola, 1947); EPaci, "Il cuore della città", *Casabella Continuità*, 202 (1954), vii.

47. Quaroni, *La Torre di Babele*.

48. Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn* [1939] (London: Penguin, 2015), 176.

49. Rossi, "Introduzione", in Quaroni, *La Torre di Babele*.

like urban planning that has lost its capacity for energetic response."⁴⁴ Quaroni's conception of utopia's creative force as imaginary reality, capable of revitalizing urban planning processes, brings to mind Rogers' understanding of "utopia of reality" as "teleological charge that projects the present into the possible future". Rogers underscored utopia's capacity "to transform reality in its deepest essence, in the moral and political, as well as in the didactic and pedagogical fields."⁴⁵ The existential aspects of his perception of architecture's "experience" draw on Paci's phenomenological perspective, who associated the problem of "The Heart of the City", the 1951 CIAM's topic, to the necessity of a "synthesis of permanence and emergence."⁴⁶

In *La torre di Babele*, Quaroni argued that "the modern city is really ugly", claiming that the lesson of historic cities, which was neglected in modern cities, is the well-integrated synthesis of functional, technological and aesthetic aspects. For him, the quality of architectural and urban artefacts depends on the extent to which the synthesis of these aspects is based on "an immediate, direct, good-natured relationship". Quaroni focused on the tension between historic and modern city, assimilating historic city to beautiful city and modern city to ugly city. He associated historic city's beauty with its "clear design [...] [and] structure." For him, modern city was ugly because it was chaotic. *La torre di Babele* opens with the following phrases: "The architect tends by its nature, and by professional deformation, to the total control of the city, as if it were a single building. But the mythical Tower of Babel, you know, never came to fruition."⁴⁷ Quaroni adopted Henry Miller's definition of confusion as "an order that you do not understand"⁴⁸ to explain the non-possibility of modern city's control with the non-capacity of architects to understand the order of post-war cities and their transformation and expansion. He related the inability to comprehend the order of contemporary city's urban fabric to his belief that modern city is ugly. As Rossi mentions, in his introduction to *La torre di Babele*, "Quaroni's theory [...] revolves around the significance of the city and of architecture, and the fundamental question: what does it mean for us architects if the modern city is ugly?" Rossi claimed that Quaroni failed to recognise modern city's potential beauty, because he blamed modern architecture itself instead of speculation and ignorance. Rossi, instead, considered that modern city's ugliness is the result of "an absurd mechanism which operates on several different levels."⁴⁹

Quaroni's aesthetic approach could be explained drawing a distinction between architects' disinterested view vis-à-vis beautiful architectural and urban artefacts and architects' engaged view vis-à-vis ugly architectural and urban artefacts. The spectator of beautiful objects is disinterested, in contrast with that of ugly objects. When a viewer is confronted with ugly objects a desire to intervene emerges. The subject cannot be disinterested any more. Such an interpretation can help us explain post-war Italian architects' engagement vis-à-vis the re-invention of conceptual tools seeking to reshape the ugly aspects of urban and suburban formations. The belief that the problem of urban expansion should be part of architects' task became a common demand of different post-war Italian approaches. The spectator became engaged vis-à-vis post-war Italian cities' reality.

In contrast with Karl Rosenkranz's thesis that ugliness is the active

50. Karl Rosenkranz, *Aesthetics of Ugliness: A Critical Edition* [1853], trans. Andrei Pop and Mechthild Widrich (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

51. Mark Cousins, "The Ugly", *AA Files*, 28 (1994): 61-64.

52. Manfredo Tafuri, "Les 'muses inquiétantes' ou le destin d'une génération de 'Maîtres'", *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 181 (1975), 17.

53. André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Volume II, ed. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 25.

54. Bruno Reichlin, "Figures of Neorealism in Italian Architecture (part 1)", *Grey Room*, 5 (2001), 83.

55. Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. John Baxter and Patrick Atherton, trans. George Whalley (Montreal; Kingston; London; Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 62.

56. Tafuri, *Ludovico Quaroni e lo sviluppo dell'architettura moderna in Italia* (Milan: Comunità, 1964), 94.

negation of beauty,⁵⁰ Mark Cousins maintains that the ugly cannot be thought of as the opposite of the beautiful and defines ugly "as a matter of place" and the ugly object as "an object which is experienced both as being there and as something that should not be there."⁵¹ This sense of not belonging to one's place could be related to Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Neorealism as a profound stage of confusion that had led to the loss of feeling of belief in this world. Deleuze's understanding of confusion could be compared to Quaroni's conception of post-war Italian city's confusion. Even if Deleuze is affirmative, while Quaroni is negative towards confusion, both share the conviction that such a confusion makes necessary the invention of new modes of relating creative processes with reality. Tafuri described Quaroni's compositional method as "poetic of non-fabulation."⁵² This distinction between poetic of fabulation and poetic of non-fabulation could help us grasp the perceptual mechanisms of Quaroni's design process.

Neorealist approach constitutes an endeavour to conceive ugliness as a path to the real putting forward the reality of post-war Italian city. Neorealism's intention to recuperate the immediacy of reality instrumentalized and aestheticized urban ugliness. Such a point of view vis-à-vis the connection between ugliness and reality is apparent in post-war Italian Neorealist Cinema, as in Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (1945) and Vittorio de Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (1948). André Bazin, a major theorist of Neorealism in cinema, highlighted the opposition between "aesthetic refinement and a certain crudeness, a certain instant effectiveness of a realism which is satisfied just to present reality."⁵³ He related this conflict between aesthetic refinement and crudeness to the enlightening power of reality. This crudeness to which he refers could be associated with ugliness. The attachment of neorealism to the aesthetic of ugliness has been also highlighted by Bruno Reichlin, who shed light on the relation of neorealism to "the propensity for an aesthetic of the ugly."⁵⁴

The endeavour of transforming ugly features of the urban landscape into architectural instruments of social and moral engagement was at the heart of Neorealist approach. In the context of post-war Italy, architects often aimed to transform ugly elements into devices of reflection about how one's aesthetic criteria interferes with the meaning they give to reality. Tiburtino district, designed by Ludovico Quaroni and Mario Ridolfi, is often interpreted as a Neorealist expression in architecture. In this case, Quaroni and Ridolfi conceived the construction of social housing in a suburban neighbourhood of post-war Rome as a way to contribute to citizens' moral engagement towards life. This transformation of the norms according to which a city is judged as beautiful or ugly was paralleled with a shift from aesthetic criteria to politic, ethic, moral, social and civic criteria. The moral implications of aesthetic evaluation are apparent in Aristotle's *Poetics*, where "aischros" (ugly) has moral as well as aesthetic implications.⁵⁵ Characteristic of this moral engagement linked to Tiburtino district's spirit is Tafuri's description of it as a "manifesto of a state of mind, of an impelling need to communicate, to build a reality together with society and not simply for society."⁵⁶

In terms of formal expression, neorealist architecture is characterized by a shift from a pre-established concept of compositional unity to one obtained by means of superposition and expressed through

57. Quaroni cited in Tafuri, *Ludovico Quaroni e lo sviluppo dell'architettura moderna in Italia*, 190.

58. Quaroni, "Il paese dei barocchi", *Casabella continua*, 215 (1957), 24.

the aggregation of successive elements and the obsessive fragmentation of walls and fences, as in the case of Tiburtino district's (fig. 7). Furthermore, it is characterized by the elaboration of formal discontinuities and the rediscovery of streets' value. It is also based on the surgical examination of the singularities of the visible world and everyday life. Quaroni wrote, in 1954, regarding Rome's character: "The baroque spirit is the spirit of Rome. It is a spontaneous generation, a creature of the site: autochthonous. It uses, even in the order of architecture, the vital disorder of the life of Rome."⁵⁷ This remark is penetrating for grasping Tiburtino district's intention to capture Rome's vitality (fig. 8). Quaroni's appraisal of Rome's vital disorder is indicative of Neorealism's transformation of city's ugly features into architectural instruments of social and moral engagement. The aesthetic project of Neorealist architecture lies in the double vocation to render architectural composition mundane and renounce the artificiality of the new. Quaroni wrote in 1957 regarding Tiburtino district's vitality and aestheticization of ugliness: "There was life, in any case, in the neighborhood. Beautiful or ugly, it lived as best it could."⁵⁸ The vitality is more important than anything else, for him, and, for this reason, he replaced the antagonism beautiful/ugly by that of vital/non-vital.

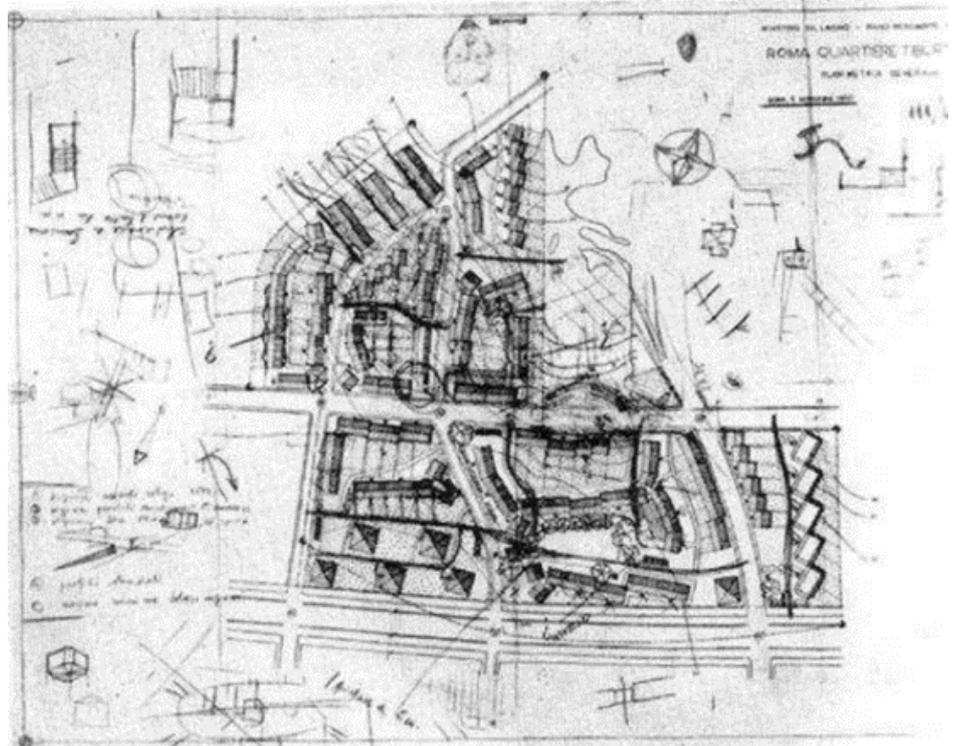


Figure 7: Tiburtino District, general plan (1949)



Figure 8: Via Luigi Cesaza, Tiburtino District, by Ludovico Quaroni and Mario Ridolfi

59. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment* [1790] (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 180.

60. Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* [1966], trans. Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1982), 127.

61. Bruno Zevi, *Architecture as Space: How to Look at Architecture* [1948] (New York: Horizon Press, 1957).

According to Kant, aesthetic judgments are judgments made about beauty. Kant focuses on the subject's experience of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure and conceives beauty, not as a property of objects, but as related to the subject's feeling of pleasure. He notes: "Fine art shows its superiority precisely in this, that it describes things beautifully that in nature we would dislike or find ugly."⁵⁹ Kant's conception of beauty as related to the subject's feeling of pleasure brings to mind Aldo Rossi's remark that architecture's "capacity to be transmitted and to give pleasure" is part of technics, that is to say architecture's "means and principles."⁶⁰ Zevi's distinction between beautiful and ugly architecture is based on the idea that "[b]eautiful architecture [is] [...] architecture in which the interior space attracts us, elevates us and dominates us spiritually [...] [while] ugly architecture would be that in which the interior space disgusts and repels us."⁶¹

62. Rossi, *Arquitetura da Cidade* [1966] (Lisbon: Edições Cosmos, 1977).

63. Rossi cited in Terry Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy, Volume II: Visions of Utopia, 1900–Present* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005).

64. Pier Vittorio Aureli, "Rossi's concept of the locus as a political category of the city", *OverHolland*, 8 (2009), 59.

65. Rossi, *L'Analisi urbana e la progettazione architettonica: contributi al dibattito e al lavoro di gruppo nell'anno accademico 1968/69* (Milano: clup, 1974), 61.

66. Rossi, "Introduzione", in *Architettura razionale* (Milan: Angeli 1973), 13.

Rossi noted, in 1977, in the introduction of the Portuguese edition of *Architettura della città*: "Topography, typology, and history come to be measures of the mutations of reality, together defining a system of architecture wherein gratuitous invention is impossible. Thus, they are opposed theoretically to the disorder of contemporary architecture."⁶² Rossi understood typology as an instrument for measuring reality and resisting to contemporary architecture's disorder. His conception of typology as antidote to disorder and means to evaluate the real explain why Rossi believed that the "choice of typology at the beginning of the design process" was the means to avoid ugliness. He maintained that a "lot of architecture is ugly because it cannot be traced to a clear choice; without one, it is left deprived of meaning."⁶³ For Rossi, "the individuality of the urban artifact was the moment of decision in which typological principles were applied to the real city."⁶⁴ Rossi asserted in 1974: "If the modern city is ugly, as Quaroni says, it means that the models of reference have gradually worn out [...] rationalism that arose from the Haussmannian solutions has been lost; the capitalist modern city has, in its instability, the inability to give itself a face."⁶⁵ If we juxtapose the above thesis with Rossi's assertion a year before, in the catalogue of the XV Triennale di Milano "Architettura razionale", where he declared that "there is no longer any ideological shield for ugly architecture",⁶⁶ we would be confronted with the paradox of Rossi's declaration of the non-effectiveness of the very notion of rational architecture, just a year after

his choice of this title for the XV Triennale di Milano.

67. Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, 103.

68. *Ibid.*, 130, 127.

69. Aureli, "The Common and the Production of Architecture: Early hypotheses", in David Chipperfield, Kieran Long, Shumi Bose, eds., *Common Ground: A Critical Reader* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2012).

For Rossi, ugly architecture is the architecture that is not characterized by a clearly defined individuality and has not emerged through a clear typological choice. Pivotal for understanding what Rossi understood as clearly defined individuality is the notion of "locus", which should not be assimilated to the notion of context, and concerns the "relationship between a certain specific location and the buildings that are in it [and] is at once singular and universal."⁶⁷ For Rossi, the city as the "locus of the collective memory" and the defining parameters of an architectural artefact are "the autonomous principles according to which it is founded and transmitted."⁶⁸ What is at the centre of his conception of architectural artefacts is his double understanding of them as individual and social works. His view towards common architecture is not negative, since Rossi's research [...] [is] "focused on the whole city, and not just on authored architecture."⁶⁹ Rossi's interest in non-authored architecture is pivotal for understanding how his view appropriates in an affirmative way characteristics that in a different context could be treated as ugly.

70. Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, trans. Lawrence Venuti (Cambridge, Mass.; London: The MIT Press, 1981), 83.

Rossi's aesthetic view towards ugliness in *Architettura della città* and *A Scientific Autobiography* are distinct. In the approach, he developed in *Architettura della città*, he identified of ugly architecture with architecture that does not derive from a clear choice of typology and understood disorder as necessarily negative. He adopted as criterion for judging if architecture is ugly or not the extent to which form-making was based on clear choices of typologies. Progressively, his approach incorporated an elective affirmation vis-à-vis disorder. In contrast with his disapproval of disorder in *Architettura della città*, in *A Scientific Autobiography*, Rossi is more positive towards disorder. He drew a distinction between arbitrary and non-arbitrary disorder, aiming to understand the space of encounter between order and disorder: "I felt that the disorder of things, if limited and somehow honest might best correspond to our state of mind. But I detested the arbitrary disorder that is an indifference to order, a kind of moral absurdness, complacent well-being forgetfulness."⁷⁰

70. Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, trans. Lawrence Venuti (Cambridge, Mass.; London: The MIT Press, 1981), 83.

71. Rossi, "The Analogous City", *Lotus International*, 13 (1976), 6.

72. Mojca Kuplen, "The Aesthetic of Ugliness: A Kantian Perspective", *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, 5 (2013), 275.

73. *Ibid.*

In "The Analogous City", Rossi referred to the importance of the dialectics of the concrete and underscored the "capacity of the imagination born from the concrete."⁷¹ Kant's claim that "ugliness is constituted by the free imagination being unrestrained by the understanding's need for order"⁷² could be associated with Rossi's interest in this kind of disorder described above. Rossi's belief in the creative force of the concrete could be associated with Kant's conviction that "ugliness pushes the freedom of the imagination to a high degree."⁷³ Both positions interpret ugliness as a powerful source of creativity. Kant's connection of free imagination with ugliness and Rossi's belief in the capacity of the concrete to activate imagination are useful for understanding ugliness' imaginative potential.

74. Paci, *The Function of the Sciences and the Meaning of Man* [1963] (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 24.

When confronted with Torre Velasca, we are in face of a paradoxical parallel effect of estrangement and familiarization, which lies on the tension between "continuità" and "preesistenze ambientali" and can be explained through Paci's view of the relationship between past and present: "It is while questioning the past (but not by becoming the past) that I understand the present and the interest of the present for its own transformation."⁷⁴ Similarly, what is at stake in Aldo Rossi's

concept of analogy is a process of de-familiarization, which provokes an intensification of semantic ambiguity. Quaroni's replacement of beautiful/ugly by vital/non-vital shows that his concepts of the "città meravigliosa" and the "qualità diffusa" cannot be understood without untying their existential load, which as in Ernesto Nathan Rogers and Aldo Rossi's case, moralizes ugliness. This appropriation of estrangement and de-familiarization and their existential implications justify Neorealism and Tendenza's aestheticization of post-war Italian cities' ugliness.

At the Crossroads the British, Italian, and Australian Conception of Ugliness

75. Banham, "Neoliberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture", *Architectural Review*, 125(747) (1959): 231–235.

76. Romaldo Giurgola, "Reflections on Buildings and the City: The Realism of the Partial Vision", *Perspecta*, 9/10 (1965): 107-130.

The exchanges between Italy and the UK played an important role for the evolution of the debates around the architecture and city's ugliness. Another case that is enlightening regarding the debates between the Italian and British architectural theorists is the controversy between Reyner Banham, who was enthusiastically defending Alison and Peter Smithson's aesthetic view, in 1959, and Ernesto Nathan Rogers's approach. More specifically, Banham attacked Rogers's approach using the label "Neoliberty."⁷⁵ Regarding the exchanges between the Australian and the Italian milieu, an important figure was Romaldo Giurgola, who migrated from Italy to Australia.⁷⁶ In parallel, Aldo Rossi's proposal for a tower in Melbourne in 1979 is a case that could serve for exploring if there is any common ground between Australian Featurism, as Boyd understood it, and Rossi's understanding of typology and the analogous city.

77. Macarthur, "Robin Boyd's The Australian Ugliness, ugliness, and liberal education", 56.

78. Boyd, "The Sad end of the New Brutalism".

79. Naomi Stead, Tom Lee, Ewan McEoin, Megan Patty eds., *After The Australian Ugliness* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria and Thames and Hudson, 2021).

80. Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness* (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1960), 118.

Helpful for comparing Boyd's Featurism with the Townscape movement is Macarthur's remark claiming that "Hastings would accept modernist featurism alongside meretricious historicism and vernacular mis-appropriations of style, on the grounds that buildings of very varied architectural quality could be composed by an architectural eye at an urban level."⁷⁷ In parallel, useful for understanding Boyd's conception of ugliness and New Brutalism is the fact that New Brutalist ethic functioned as an antidote against architecture and city's ugliness.⁷⁸ Of great importance for better grasping the cross-cultural exchanges between Australia and the UK regarding the concept of ugliness in architecture and urban design is Boyd's article entitled "The Sad End of New Brutalism", and *After The Australian Ugliness*.⁷⁹ Boyd, in *The Australian Ugliness*, refers to New Brutalism to Ian Nairn's work. In parallel, he authored several articles for the *Architectural Review* between 1951 and 1970. Boyd remarks in *The Australian Ugliness*: "The solution then is to recognise that there is an appropriate time and place for both the technology of space-enclosure and the architecture of expression, and to work to eliminate the neuter type: neither scientific nor artistic."⁸⁰ On the one hand, the Townscape movement related ugliness to the difficulty to distinguish urban features of the town and those of the countryside. On the other hand, Boyd related ugliness to the lack of capacity to eliminate what he called "the neuter type".