

Theory and Principle: Berthold Lubetkin's Highpoint One and Highpoint Two

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Berthold Lubetkin, the Russian-born architect responsible for the design of two modern housing landmarks in London in the 1930s, Highpoint One and Highpoint Two, was modern architecture's most elegant apologist in England between the wars. Believing that architecture could improve society by transforming it, Lubetkin explored the role of ideology as a semantic and social foundation necessary for generating an architecture of social responsibility. A dialectical process underlying Lubetkin's ideology contributed to an evolution of the content expressed in Highpoint Two, questioning both fundamental principles of modern architecture and the cohesion of Lubetkin's own theoretical principles expressed earlier in Highpoint One. The ensemble of the two buildings poses teleological questions concerning the function of transformation within societal contexts governed by themes of continuity.

TWO BUILDINGS IN LONDON, HIGHPOINT ONE AND HIGHPOINT TWO, designed by the Russian-born architect Berthold Lubetkin in the 1930s, exemplify the struggle of early modern architects in post-World War I Europe to direct the transformation of architecture in a manner both theoretically and socially consistent with new perspectives of emerging modern conditions.¹ World War I had demonstrated that old political structures needed to be rethought, while a crisis atmosphere surrounded capitalism and the basis of social order. Embedded in the modernist desire for open space, light, and greenery was the fulfillment of the idea of progress exemplified in the theories of Charles Darwin and Karl Marx, which offered a vision of human progress leading to a better world.²

Highpoint One was widely accepted as a statement confirming the aspirations of an evolving modern architectural language and a contemporary solution to the problems of urban housing, whereas Highpoint Two has been relegated to a one-off attempt to accommodate an upscale clientele and an exploration of compositional semantics. In opposition to these opinions, Lubetkin himself stated that he did not see the two buildings as being sufficiently distinct enough to represent different ideological views.³ This article explores Lubetkin's principles in light of conventional viewpoints that viewed the buildings as theoretically incompatible.

The role of the architect as a leader in the process of social transformation was outlined by Leon Battista Alberti during the Renaissance.⁴ In the years following the Renaissance, Alberti's concept of the architect as creative genius and interpreter of aesthetic direction encouraged architects to pursue their explorations with little regard for broader cultural associations. The concomitant growth of what was called architectural ideas, in which architects expanded the definition of formal languages to include theoretical

and cross-cultural explorations, loosened the relationship between architecture and specific social settings.⁵ The relevance of these architectural theories was not seriously tested until the established cultural structure was challenged by the social and political upheavals preceding and following World War I.⁶ Envisioning artists and architects again as agents of social transformation, the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) set out to establish guidelines for the new architecture of the twentieth century. The CIAM conference of 1928 exemplified how the development of theory shifted from conjecture anchored in cultural references or communal values (Alberti and Francesco Borromini were architects working for the Church and other communal enterprises) to expressions of private visions, often relative and subjective.⁷ With CIAM, design became self-referential; while codifying the utopian visions of early modernism (no ornamentation, flat roofs, white walls, large windows, abandonment of material expressions in favor of dematerialized rectangular outlines), they promulgated an architectural language deemed appropriate to the new era of modernity by a small group of avant-garde architects. Design intentions and content shifted from the belief that they emerged *from* culture to individual ideas *about* culture.

Highpoint One and Highpoint Two exemplify Lubetkin's growing opposition to the notion that architectural principles did not emerge from a social grounding. Although he believed that change and progress were inevitable, indeed necessary, to facilitate social development, he also believed that there are continuities with the past that should be maintained and that there is a cultural necessity to express shared values and experiences. The confusion this position brought to a profession transfixed by the idea of progress is evidenced in contemporary commentary that in exalting Highpoint One with palpable excitement viewed Highpoint Two with a labored seriousness.⁸ Subsequent commentary has continued to demote Highpoint Two, conferring on it the status of a "man-nerist reaction."⁹

Scholars who have documented the breadth of Lubetkin's vision and the range of his oeuvre have not completely examined the relationship of theory to practice in the Highpoint ensemble and the consistency of these buildings to his design principles. In this article, I argue that in this ensemble resides a critique of Lubetkin's architecture: He expressed his vision for a better world in the language of modernism espoused by Le Corbusier and CIAM, yet the reconciliation of his theoretical position with this formal expression remained elusive.

Lubetkin's vision of assisting in the process of social transformation grew from a series of unique experiences. Born in 1901 in

Tiflis, Georgia, Lubetkin matured in Saint Petersburg and Moscow while absorbing the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In the euphoria surrounding the Russian Revolution, an exploratory atmosphere in which “nothing was certain but everything seemed possible” undergirded the creation of the Free Workshops that replaced established art institutions. With an informal structure that allowed occasional advice from such explorers as Alexander Rodchenko, Vladimir Tatlin, and El Lissitzky, Lubetkin was able to envision art as an ideological weapon for the advancement of society.¹⁰ This vision was refined and given formal direction through stays in Germany, Poland, and Paris, where Lubetkin “studied” with Ernst May, Wilhelm Worringer, Auguste Perret, Georges Braque, Le Corbusier, and others in formal educational settings and sidewalk cafés.

In 1931, Lubetkin, sensing diminishing opportunities in Europe and becoming alarmed at repressive measures rumored to be occurring in Russia, moved to London. Within a year, he established the architectural office Tecton with seven recent graduates of the Architectural Association. After designing a series of houses and a project for the London Zoo, Lubetkin and Tecton were commissioned to provide housing for the open market in an area of London known as Highgate.

In Highpoint One, constructed in 1935, Lubetkin addressed the problem of improved housing through the social and formal tenets of the Modern movement (Figure 1). Eight stories in height, Highpoint One was constructed using cast-in-place concrete. It housed sixty-four two- and three-bedroom flats with shared open spaces on the ground floor and rooftop (Figure 2). Composed in a double cruciform plan of extended wings, it offered maximum exposure to sun, light, view, and ventilation. The open space created through vertical organization was promoted as a benefit of modern, well-conceived building, expressing confidence in the future and an enlightened architectural response to problems of urban housing.

Lubetkin, however, had a larger, more abstract, and more inclusive intention for Highpoint One. It was to be a statement expressing faith in rationality and ideology, containing a message for the future.¹¹ With this message Lubetkin manifested a theoretical position concerning architecture and its role in social and cultural advancement.

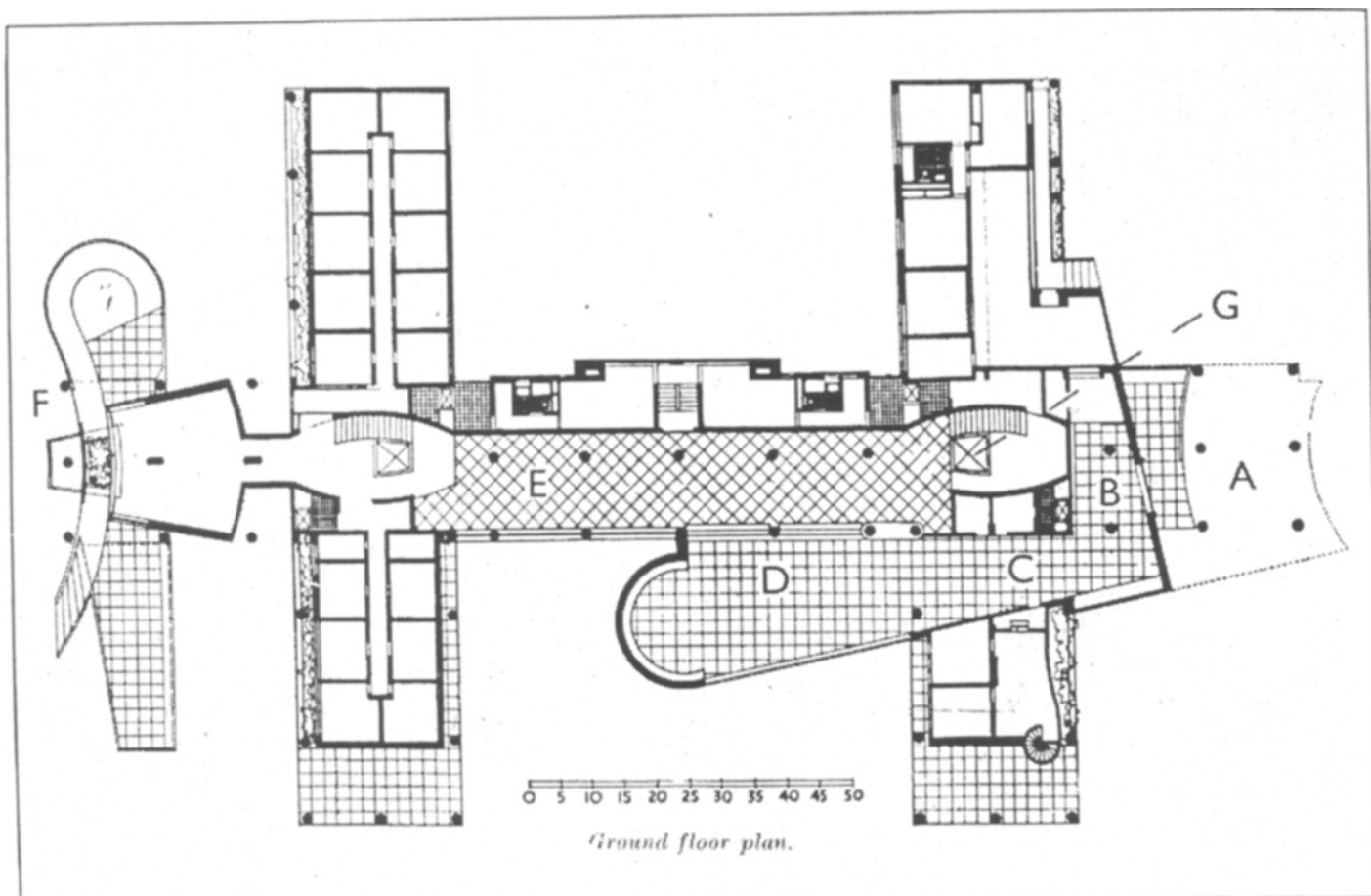
Highpoint Two, built three years later in 1938, stands at its closest point only six feet from Highpoint One (Figures 3 and 4). Composed as a linear block facing the street, Highpoint Two was constructed with two poured-in-place concrete wings (as in Highpoint One) that flank a central core constructed with a reinforced-concrete frame (Figure 5). The central frame accommodates



1. Highpoint One, aerial view. (Photo courtesy of John Allan, from Berthold Lubetkin: *Architecture and the Tradition of Progress* [London: RIBA Publications, 1992].)

larger flats containing double-height spaces. These two structural systems give Highpoint Two an aesthetic feature of infill frame construction in the center flanked by monolithic paneled surfaces on the wings, which borrow visual clues from Highpoint One. Nearly as tall as Highpoint One, Highpoint Two contains two four-bedroom plan types arranged in a two-story configuration.

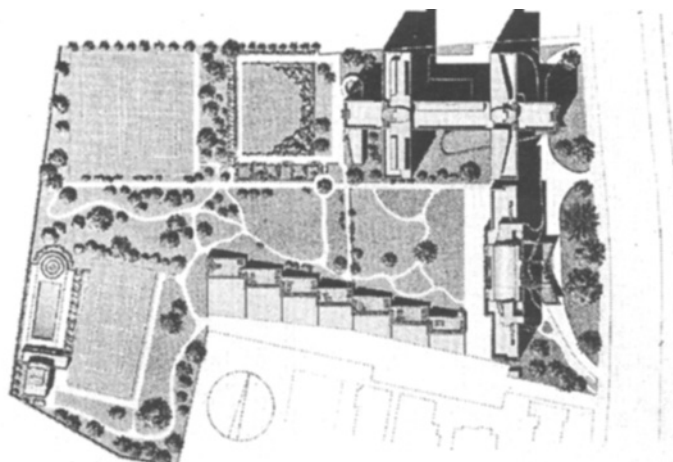
In Highpoint Two, the manifesto-like character was less intense in deference to intentions of a different, somewhat subversive nature. Becoming alarmed with what he began to perceive as the “aesthetic bankruptcy” of functionalism, Lubetkin sought in Highpoint Two to integrate a broader semantic role into architectural expression.¹² In this regard, he saw Highpoint Two as anti-International Style. He expressed this most clearly in the caryatids supporting the entry canopy at the front of the building, and in his own loft atop Highpoint Two (Figures 6 and 7). Here, a blend of surfaces and furnishings inspired by vernacular themes allowed Lubetkin to challenge the international urbanity he cultivated in similar living accommodations atop Highpoint One.



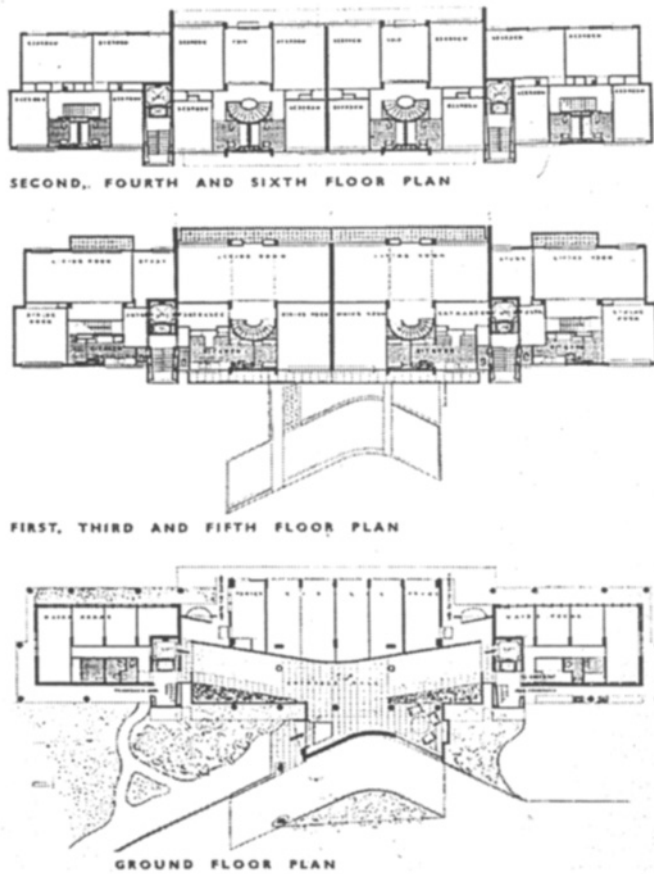
2. Highpoint One, floor plan. (Photo courtesy of John Allan, from Berthold Lubetkin.)



3. Highpoint One and Two, garden elevation. (Photo courtesy of John Allan, from Berthold Lubetkin.)

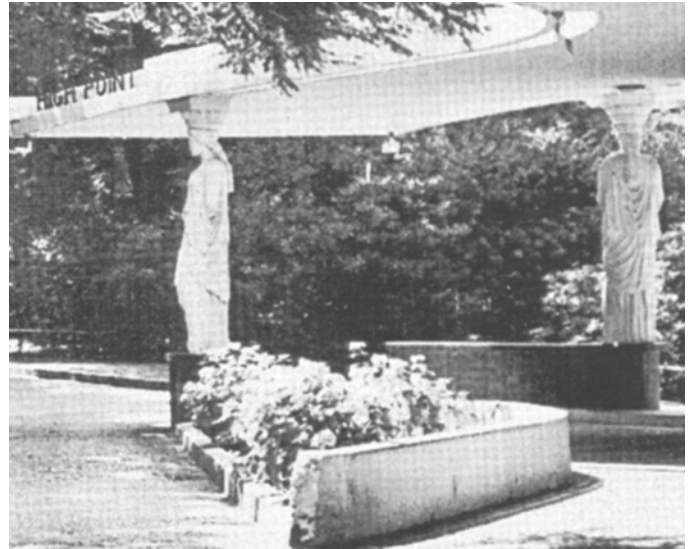


4. Highpoint One and Two, site plan. (Photo courtesy of John Allan, from Berthold Lubetkin.)



5. Highpoint Two, floor plans. (Photo courtesy of John Allan, from Berthold Lubetkin.)

In the span of three years, Lubetkin designed, in Highpoint One, a building seen by many as a directive for the beliefs and aspirations of modernism and, in Highpoint Two, a building challenging aspects of that direction. During this time, Lubetkin had come to perceive British architecture as coalescing around theories of functionalism, as opposed to an architecture of meaning and social responsibility. He understood from his early training in architecture that the responsible architect advanced the cause of architecture and culture by working from a defined ideological base.¹³ The basis for this attitude grew from Marxist theory which stressed deeper interpretations of the nature of reality. Lubetkin believed that one did not come to know reality by mere observation; one had to proceed to a “higher level of generalization” in which “analytical thought is able to deduce from the mass of observed characteristics what is general, significant and common to all.” For Lubetkin, nothing was gained through replacing one inoperable theoretical system with a new but untested one. He preferred the process of disputation represented in the dialectical process of Georg Hegel and Marx, which enabled one to penetrate the “essence of things.” The format of point and counterpoint, generating a new, elevated synthesis, represented for Lubetkin a method by which design efforts could be confirmed and validated beyond simple formal preferences; the result could be “integrated into a



6. Highpoint Two, entry canopy caryatids. (Photo courtesy of John Allan, from Berthold Lubetkin.)



7. Highpoint Two, penthouse. (Photo courtesy of John Allan, from Berthold Lubetkin.)

theory” serving as a guide to practice, a tool designed not only to explain the world, but to transform it.¹⁵

For Lubetkin, the essential component in this process was reason, which made it possible to predict and control the creative process. Reason alone could not solve all problems, however. It needed to be synthesized with imagination to give a particular work direction. “Imagination, intuition, . . . that capacity of our brain to seize on the ensemble of phenomena . . . to see them as a whole in relation to the norms of the past and the needs of the present, assists in any particular situation to determine how a particular work should be done.”¹⁶ This synthesis between reason and imagination became, for Lubetkin, the way in which earlier design efforts succeeded and modern design could advance beyond the sterilization of thought bounded by simple cause-and-effect relationships and the “barren doctrine” of functionalism. Lubetkin positioned him-

self and his beliefs against this mechanistic process of rules formation that confined one to dogma or style.¹⁷

Rejecting a complete break with the past as "replacing chaos with chaos,"¹⁸ Lubetkin extracted from the past the principles of classicism expressed through geometric regularity that he felt were still applicable in contemporary times. The rational nature of geometric expression manifested an approach historically guided by reason. "Reason's debates, conclusions, and verdicts are all couched in clear geometric terms. The analytical work done has to be done, and geometry not only affirms it but also proves and confirms. Clean edged regularities of crisp geometric formations assert themselves against chaos and turbulence, and have universal meaning subject to an unequivocal logical proof."¹⁹

Lubetkin also made it clear that reasoning was not to be equated only with the programmatic resolution of the building. To be a part of the transformation of society, "forms ought not to be allowed to fulfill their functions merely passively. They should on the contrary create a powerful impression on the ideology of the masses by every means which the imagination can command."²⁰ Thus the content of a building was to be a message transcending mere function, offering an opportunity to influence meaningfully one's perception of reality.

Beneath this was the belief that architecture, by expressing the social aims of the age, could provide a world outlook, visually guaranteeing the consistency of the whole human experience, providing a weapon on the side of enlightenment for the betterment of the human condition. To achieve this, architecture had to overcome some of the shortcomings of western cultural conditioning. Lubetkin states,

One of the recognizable dividing lines between the philosophies of the east and the west is gnoseology [philosophical theory of knowledge] and relates to the interpretation and generalization of the observed phenomena of life and the co-ordination of the results into coherent theories and systems. The West is . . . basically skeptical, hostile to theoretical generalizations, to historical motivation, to the embodiment of experience into binding conclusions with the validity of objective laws. . . . The resulting intellectual atomization and fragmentation finds its counterpart in economics, in the crises of productive relations, and it is revealed clearly and hauntingly in the manifestation of our art.²¹

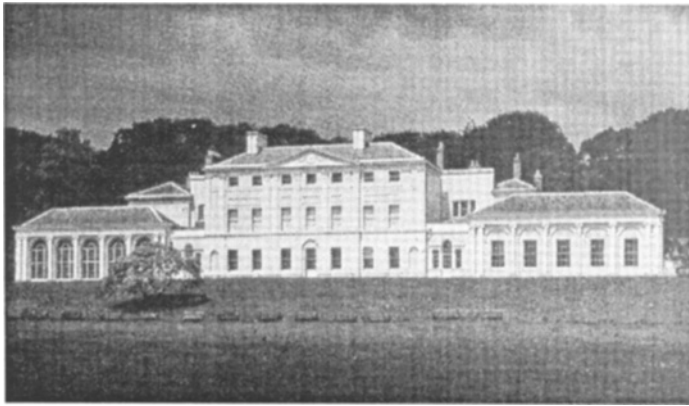
This fragmentation is particularly evident in western attitudes toward historical continuity, which is perceived as something to take

apart and reassemble according to the desire of each succeeding generation. This is quite different from the attitudes Lubetkin felt were a part of the East, where

the prevailing assumption is that each generation stands on the shoulders of the preceding one . . . that civilization rests on continuity, upon the transmission of skill and experience from one generation to another. This view of history, as an ascent, lends special significance to artistic activity. Art is conceived, not only as an object of aesthetic contemplation, but as a universal, in which our shared ideas, passions, and illusions, our sense of order, relation and value are transmuted into images of enduring beauty. A society which openly professes that the past is irrelevant, the present expendable and the future unintelligible and opaque begets art forms which stun since they need not edify.²²

This theme of the continuity of civilization surpassed abstract historical relationships and included continuity of formal composition. Lubetkin admired baroque architecture and structures like Kenwood in London for their formal balance and integration, eliciting a visual as well as a physical sense of continuity and unity that were important to the Modern movement, in which a visible, rational order was paramount (Figure 8). Convinced that ugliness is the informality of disorder, Lubetkin sought designs that expressed a lucid universal meaning.²³ This search meshed the perspectives acquired through the spirit of the Russian Revolution and the nascent modernism fermenting in Paris.²⁴ It was Lubetkin's fortune that these views were formulated at the apogee of these movements, giving his beliefs a utopian cast that would remain with him for his entire life.

Evidence of the adherence Lubetkin gave to his beliefs was demonstrated politically as well as architecturally. The years from 1933 to 1936 were a charged period politically in Britain as well as in the rest of the world. Lubetkin was forced to confront the reality of residing in a country that, while giving him the freedom to explore architecturally, was in conflict with his views politically. His response was to engage the British context through combined architectural and political activism. In creating the firm Tecton, Lubetkin was intent on establishing a progressive architectural standard while developing a strategy for initiating projects of social importance. Additionally, Lubetkin wanted to introduce the dialectical methodology he extracted from Marx as a method of guiding the design process through argued decisions.²⁵ This methodology gained a reputation as "the directed Tecton attack" and would be put to use in gaining council approval for both Highpoint One and Highpoint Two.



8. Kenwood, London. (Photo courtesy of John Allan, from Berthold Lubetkin.)

The directed attack was used politically in the Architects and Technicians Organization (ATO), formed by Lubetkin and others in 1935 for the purpose of “building a better future.” Lubetkin insisted that it was not possible to separate aesthetic beliefs from social commitment, as they should be interrelated dialectically.²⁶ It was the lack of such relationship that led him to abandon the Modern Architecture ReSearch Group (MARS), which had been formed with similar aspirations. The lack of a grounded social commitment ultimately led to a more formalist position, advancing the cause of the new formal and technological possibilities of modern architecture without the accompanying social commitment. Sensing a dead end, Lubetkin organized the more politically activist ATO.

The ATO was organized around political action and social commitment. Fellow Tecton partner Francis Skinner issued a memorandum for discussing the goals of the organization and the role of the architect:

Few of those connected with architecture have not at certain times appreciated the lack of conscious unified control which they and allied technicians exercised upon the problems of society. . . . A small group of architects and ancillary specialists . . . who completely reject this viewpoint, which leads in their opinion to the acceptance of the present impotent and degrading position of the architect in society, are responsible for this memorandum. They feel that, today, when the need for a skilled solution of housing and town planning problems is becoming more and more urgent, the architect is finding himself completely unable to assume his proper social responsibilities.²⁷

To this end, the ATO became involved in diverse political and social activities ranging from critiquing the government’s policies on housing and air raid shelters to organizing an “aid for Spain” march against fascism. As in the organization of Tecton, Lubetkin demanded a form of dialectical discussion within the ATO for anchoring architectural decisions on commitments that transcend formal iconic positions.

Lubetkin’s adherence to this position is relevant; although he was a utopian socialist, he was not a dogmatic one. His move from socialist Russia and his decision to practice in a country that, while

giving him the freedom to experiment within his aesthetic beliefs was in conflict with his social ones, points to flexibility regarding the application of those beliefs.²⁸ Similar observations are possible concerning aesthetic criteria. Theoretical pronouncements for clean-edged regularities and crisp geometric formations left a margin for maneuverability and interpretation. His initial adaptation of primarily Corbusian forms reflects a convenient, if not self-fulfilling, prophesy articulating his vision. The freedom found in synthesizing reason with imagination establishes a much more malleable position. Lubetkin could orchestrate multiple philosophical positions while simultaneously allowing for commitment to one belief over another.

For Lubetkin, flexibility was a part of a process toward a larger search for content in architecture. Yet he maintained a different attitude regarding flexibility, or rather equivocation, on the part of architects not guided by a defined commitment to principles. In analyzing the architecture of the eighties, Lubetkin makes the point that such architecture may lack easily identified content or a sense of commitment beyond personal agendas: “Today we thrive on ambiguity, obscurity and uncertainty, and our architecture is impoverished by unrelated fragments at hand, guided by impulses, obscure urges and swollen ambitions. . . . In the absence of sovereign issues of universal portent, it aims to startle, confuse and puzzle rather than clarify, inform and guide.”²⁹

Transformation on a scale envisioned by Lubetkin requires a radical form of flexibility or adaptation involving significant social adjustment, yet the issue of content in Highpoint One and Two may approach simple metaphoric representations owing in part to the differing audiences Lubetkin was addressing in the two buildings. These audiences represent, on one hand, the “stratified hierarchical society” of conservative attitudes that Lubetkin found in the nondialectical nature of the British empiricist tradition; and on the other hand, progressive architects like Lubetkin who were exploring the potential for social transformation of new modern ideals and methods of thinking. The audiences become points of contact from which the buildings, for Lubetkin, engage in their transforming dialectic. During the three years that separated the construction of the two buildings, the themes engaging these audiences evolved. The “message for the future” of Highpoint One was replaced with “a desire to re-integrate a broader semantic role” in Highpoint Two. These evolving themes integrated with Lubetkin’s perception of transformation that, when occurring dialectically, assists in determining appropriate social responses in architecture. Through linking (via dialectical transformation) more thoroughly to their audiences, it was Lubetkin’s belief that buildings could provide more meaningful content while simultaneously assisting in the transforma-

tion of society. Yet the metaphorical issue relates to a teleological one. Can the rate of transformation exceed the ability of the audience to comprehend the message? Stated otherwise, is Highpoint Two standing on the shoulders of Highpoint One and conveying expressions of the continuity of civilization, or are the two buildings metaphorical fragments that fail to embody their cultural context?

This dialectical thinking underlies a component of Lubetkin's conceptual methodology, which permits multiple beliefs without violating underlying principles. Within the dialectical process one is confronted with a unique characteristic of this method of inquiry: the tendency toward ambiguity.³⁰ Dialectical thought, not unlike creative thought, requires leaps from idea to idea in the process of eliciting new resolutions from opposing tendencies. The analogies, metaphors, and linkages necessary to synthesize new resolutions rarely follow precise formats guaranteeing predictable results. This process permitted Lubetkin to search deeper into the nature of the conditions with which he was working. Reality, then, was not understood through preconceived or preordained rules, but with a range or flexibility grounded in a process he believed would allow him to respond, evolve, and adapt to differing demands.

As Highpoint One and Highpoint Two are considered within their architectural and British contexts, questions of content and correspondence of principles to reality evoke multiple readings. The construction of Highpoint One in London appears to place Lubetkin somewhat at odds with the expressed desire of imbuing a building with a social role. Rather than providing Highpoint One with a role appropriate to its culture, Lubetkin delivered a building that expressed attitudes about social organization that were not prevalent in Britain at the time. The visions expressed by the building—a new abstract aesthetic language, a detachment from the surroundings, and overall organizational and aesthetic references to a general group rather than specific individuals—engaged British culture dialectically, with Lubetkin's modernist views serving as the counterpoint to the conventions of British housing precedents.³¹

Highpoint Two presents a more complex image, visually not as pure as Highpoint One and socially not as deliberate. Detractors point out that it was more upmarket, less of a statement of social aims, and portending the emergence of the "idea" over socially relevant issues.³² Beyond the challenge to the International Style and functionalism, it was for Lubetkin an attempt to introduce the concept of the ensemble or neighborliness as a way of addressing the criticism that Highpoint One received from the neighboring community as being out of context with its surroundings. The desire to have Highpoint Two respond to this criticism by changing from one theme of social development to another illuminates the dialectical

component of Lubetkin's architectural position and points to the paradox of his beliefs. In the attempt to ground his buildings socially, his utopian belief regarding the continual evolution of ideas effectively distanced Lubetkin from the society he was trying to improve. The vision to which Lubetkin aspired bears the ring of the theoretical dialectics of Hegel versus the materialism of Marx. Although it was necessary that theory precede and guide practice for clarity and continuity, it was also necessary that theory evolve or progress as a part of the dialectic methodology.

As the vision matured conceptually, its expression in architectural terms was forced to undergo a concomitant change. This duality was a significant determinant of the relationship between theory and practice in Highpoint One and Highpoint Two. The two opposing components of this relationship underscore the difficulty Lubetkin faced in trying to express the full range of his beliefs. In part, this is because much of his social and architectural theory was governed by the concept of sudden transformation that often accompanies utopian visions, whereas the expression of content in a meaningful way to society often requires continuity and evolves over time.³³ To the small and "progressive" architectural-artistic community, Highpoint One and Highpoint Two generated considerable debate, much of which focused on the question of social advocacy. However, this debate was of importance only to the architectural community itself. The buildings, as beautiful or problematic as they may have been were not well received by the public at large.³⁴ With a response of that nature by the major culture in which they were placed, the question of social content or expression was irrelevant.

Transformation as a vehicle for social change, and the potential it possesses to communicate beyond specific audiences, remains the relevant issue. This was the theme that influenced the design of both Highpoint One and Highpoint Two and also the minor, but fluid, architectural culture. Lubetkin's vision of Highpoint One as a transforming, transparent statement concerning the relevance of modern architecture for the future is, in Highpoint Two, shifted to combat "the fashionable propaganda of the international style." He also saw Highpoint Two as stressing, in its Palladian composition, the value of constant virtues and the underlying importance of order.³⁵ This exemplifies the difficulties in interpreting Lubetkin's aims. The shifts in belief are not in opposition to Lubetkin's principles, as he clearly allows each building to challenge accepted conventions without demanding differing ideological views. The constant is transformation. This represents a more important issue than whether Highpoint One reflected the ideas of the Modern movement and was thereby "progressive," or that Highpoint Two fell short and was somehow "regressive."

The problem remains: How does the concept of transformation coexist with the concept of continuity? It is a question of how the buildings stand side by side theoretically. As Anthony Cox stated in 1938, "Highpoint One stands on tiptoe and spreads its wings; Highpoint Two sits back on its haunches like Buddha."³⁶ The symbolism in this statement reflects the status often given to theory—in effect elevating it to a "truth." For Anthony Cox and other contemporaries, Highpoint One was progressive not only because of the content (both real and metaphorical) represented in its program, but also in its Corbusian language exemplifying the meshing of modern architecture with the new progressive realities of industry, science, education, and medicine. For Lubetkin, however, this association would pale in relation to the validity of artistic volition as a barometer for society, which Lubetkin extracted from the historian Wilhelm Worringer. For Worringer, the urge to abstraction was both culturally and psychologically motivated by times of uncertainty in which existential anxiety was relieved through the abstract certainties of geometric order.³⁷ For Lubetkin, this revelation, following the turmoil of the Russian Revolution and World War I, was of much greater validity as a tool assisting the development of a meaningful social construct rather than the "validity" of a particular formal vision of architecture.

Highpoint One and Highpoint Two exemplify this vision of the power of artistic volition that Lubetkin extracted from Worringer. This theme, coupled with the social component associated with Marx's concept of the dialectical process, required that he address different issues in Highpoint Two as part of a process necessary to define the needs of a society in a state of flux. Highpoint Two does not so much sit back on its haunches as it does affirm the certainties of continuity and neighborliness against the "propaganda" of the International Style. When put into the context of theory, "truth" easily becomes transportable and able to reside equally in different expressions of transformation, as presented in Highpoint One and Highpoint Two.

Yet with issues of transformation often superseding continuity (and thereby the rules of operation that continuity governs), the expression of content, and ultimately principles, is thrown off balance. The designs of Highpoint One and Highpoint Two are based on different criteria not only in the conventional sense of site, program, and budget, but also in their intentions (versus ideology). What is revealed in the two buildings is that stated intentions of order, continuity, and understanding are questioned by underlying and varied intentions regarding transformation.

This conflict between continuity and transformation creates unlikely ambiguities in Highpoint One and Highpoint Two. Their

expressive conflicts may cross a threshold in Lubetkin's attempts at synthesizing potentially irreconcilable beliefs. In the context of these beliefs, the two buildings together may have been successful in fulfilling his intentions. However, this success was achieved at the price that continuous transformation often exacts: a dilution of content due to the lack of perceptible continuity as a basis for the perception and comprehension of the work. In addressing themes of transformation and continuity, his principles were in interminable battle. Although these themes affect reality directly, it is the theory of dialectics and the synthesis of ideas into a refined and progressive whole that Lubetkin found most intriguing. Highpoint One and Highpoint Two reflect this. In each building, Lubetkin established a determined stance toward issues that he advocated and addressed, but to allow each building to fulfill a transforming role, the issues by necessity must change. This process of continual progression revisits the teleological question: Is there an end to this process, or is it an end in itself?

The relationship of dialectics to transformation underpinned many of Lubetkin's beliefs. However, he also realized the teleological issues confronting this process and the importance of grounding his theories of transformation in a context of continuity: Between endless transformation and unresponsive continuity, Highpoint One and Two represent dialectical statements in themselves. Always probing and refining, they document Lubetkin's principles, beliefs that contained enough utopian vision to perceive a method by which one could transform the world. To the extent that these beliefs served as a guide to practice, they were articulate and well reasoned. It is only in looking for an end to this process of transformation that the theoretical vision is questioned and the ensemble of Highpoint One and Highpoint Two becomes a dialectical metaphor of ideas reaching for an ideal synthesis.

This teleological issue has remained a basic question for modern architecture. The issue of transformation, suggested in the Renaissance by Alberti, evolved into a major force in modern thinking, especially for the avant-garde. Although the initial vision of the avant-garde has dimmed, remnants move across the modern landscape in discordant syncopation. Modernism suggests not a reference to simple interventions or consensus building, but rather a play for the validation of theoretical positions. These expressions are often themselves transformations of the teleological question grounded in individual expressions, promoting solipsistic responses rather than enlightened thinking about social aspirations. Berthold Lubetkin perceived this, marked the beginning of the debate, and essentially retired from architecture, primarily on matters of principle in 1955 at age fifty-four.