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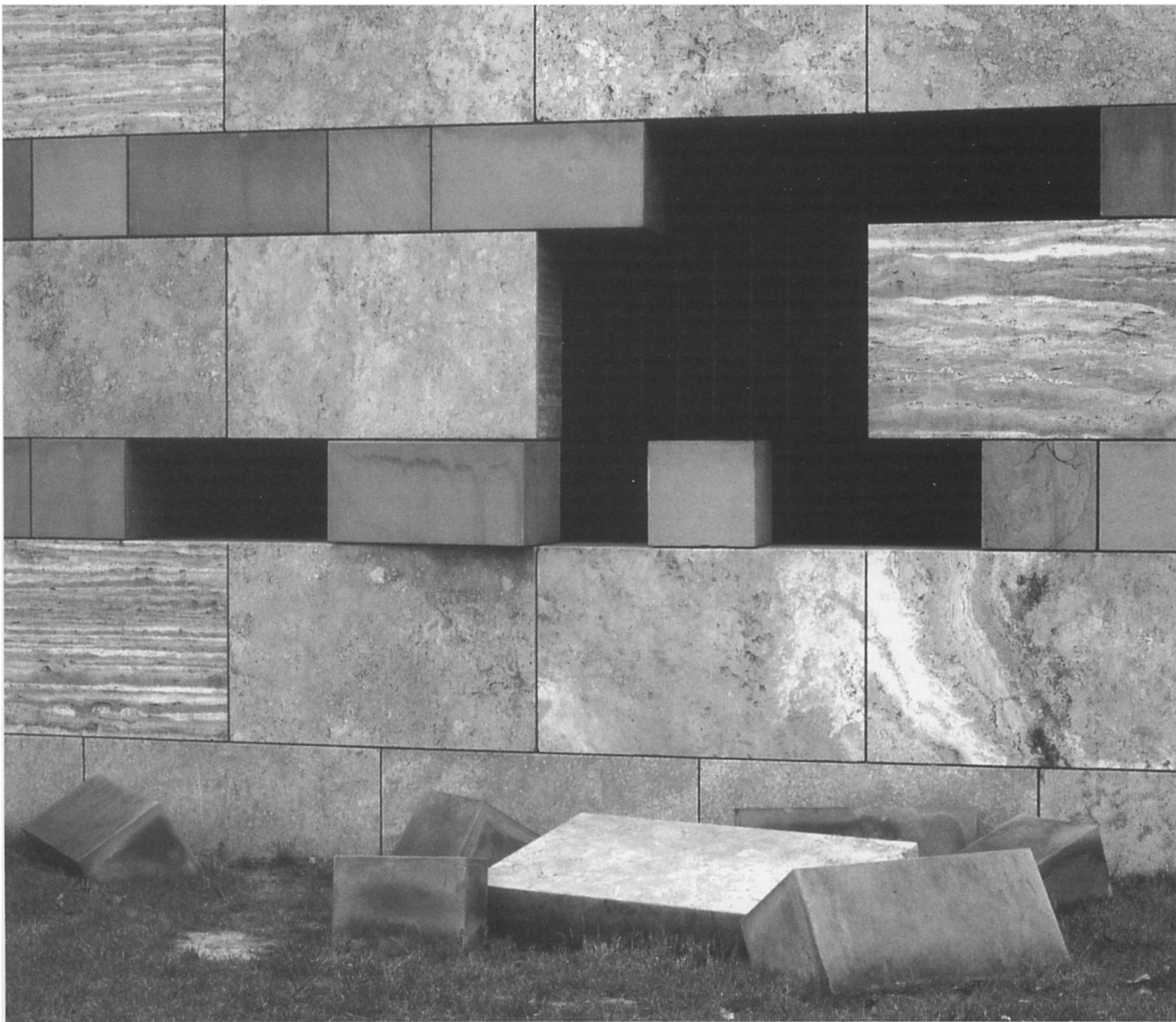


Photo Valerie Bennett

James Stirling Reassembled

Claire Zimmerman

Despite the stature he achieved before his early death in 1992, James Stirling has been nearly absent from the consciousness of architecture in recent years, relegated to the sort of anonymity reserved for those who are not only deceased but also, it seems, outmoded. The 'end' of any architectural style, though, often turns out to be no more than the death of a set of its authors. Thus the first brandished end of modernism coincided quite neatly with the deaths of Le Corbusier, Gropius and Mies, just as the end of postmodernism was equally connected with the deaths of Stirling, Aldo Rossi and Charles Moore, regardless of how little the moniker pleased them – leaving Robert Venturi, Robert Stern and others as productive islands in a shrinking archipelago. And although Venturi and Stern have exposed these stylistic 'deaths' as nothing more than temporary historical markers, many today would also admit that the outer limits of architectural modernism are yet to be defined. Stirling consistently resisted the term 'postmodernism', but the tag has stuck to his work with Michael Wilford in an age of resolute neo-modernisms of various kinds. It is up to a new generation of architects and scholars to reconsider Stirling's work within the heterogeneous contexts in which it was executed, and to come to a more sustained understanding of the range of issues that such a reconsideration brings in its wake. These issues include that of architectural postmodernism, a term which was evidently more carefully strategic than historically descriptive.¹

The extent to which Stirling is now ignored stands in inverse relation to the degree to which he was revered little more than fifteen years ago, particularly in the United States. Such a dramatic shift is itself provocative. Why did he disappear after 1993? What is it in Stirling's work that we have found so difficult to acknowledge in recent years? Some new studies seem to suggest that his greatest projects were executed during his partnership with James Gowan, and that a re-evaluation of this period of the architect's career, together with a new assessment of Gowan's pivotal role in the practice, could set the record straight. But this approach elides the sticky question of postmodernism altogether, and misses a host of other important questions as well. Mark Crinson rightly points out, in an article in *Architectural History*, that the question of authorial credit between two talented young architects is considerably less interesting than questions raised by the extremely productive synergy between two very opinionated figures.

Similarly, various collaborators have claimed responsibilities for projects that bear Stirling's name, citing a working method in which he played the role of editor after the fact rather than designer before it. This occasionally results in authorial counter-claims from various individuals, which cannot be verified, and which miss an essential continuity of method from career beginning to end. Stirling's seeming lack of fussiness about sole authorship, but insistence on authorial credit, may indicate an implicit acceptance of the idea of an 'author-function' in both his work and his name; alternately, it may be an index to his acute visual editing, which seems to have been impressive indeed. During the years in which the single name defined his office identity, Stirling frequently entered into collaborative working relationships with younger architects; the question of productive synergy evidently cannot be confined to his relationship with Gowan. Leon Krier is perhaps the most renowned of the collaborators within the James Stirling office, but he was by no means the only one. For the longest stretch of his professional life, Stirling shared the work and the office name with

the one person who might legitimately claim more credit for all the major projects of Stirling's career, and apparently never does: Michael Wilford. Yet, even knowing that Stirling's working method was inherently and perhaps unconventionally collaborative does not affect the original question: why have we ignored this figure in recent years? Does his work reveal something about the mechanisms of architectural production that are still in operation, and not adequately confronted? Or is there a residual effect in the work itself, from the days when Stirling had a regular habit of saying and doing things people did not particularly want to hear or see?²

Architecture as Mass Medium

There is ample evidence of Stirling's commitment to the publicising of his work and of his awareness of the importance of visual communication. Krier attests to this commitment when noting that what he learned from his years in Stirling's office was how to publish architecture, and he is not the only one to make such a point. The monograph that Stirling published in 1975, with Krier's assistance, copied the format and size of the *Oeuvre complète* – the site of his first and most enduring encounter with Le Corbusier's work.³ Stirling visited the Villa Stein at Garches and other important buildings by Le Corbusier for the first time in 1954, nearly ten years after committing his life to architecture.⁴ The intensity of effort in documenting work for publication shows that Stirling understood that projects had to be presented to an architectural public through innovative drawing techniques, which in his case included Choisy-esque worm's-eye views and perspectives animated with cartoons of himself and his colleagues (also courtesy of Krier) as well as photographs with dramatic *mises-en-scène* that take inspiration from Nigel Henderson's (courtesy of both Stirling and Gowan). In addition, the international architecture elite to which Stirling belonged in the latter half of his career, and which he embraced wholeheartedly, was itself the creation of an emerging media's intersection with architecture. It was not only an obvious affiliation of objects and goals that drew Stirling together with a figure like Peter Eisenman in the early 1960s, for instance. It was, rather, architecture as a medium of modernity circulating freely over the surface of the globe in countless monographs and journal articles, and celebrity culture itself (the architect as public intellectual and star, first challenged and inevitably reinstated by the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York, 1967–84). What emerges most clearly from a look at Stirling's work is how astutely he understood the difference between pictures and buildings, with all that that entailed.

If on the one hand we find an architect with a clear understanding of the importance of print circulation in architecture, on the other we encounter a set of constructed objects that seem to play games with reproductive media at the outset. This has nothing to do with deficiency; Stirling's use of drawing and photography is extremely sophisticated. With its serious engagement with both representation and construction, this work renders the gap between printed matter and physical space (an essential aspect of modern architecture) newly visible. At the assembly hall in the London borough of Camberwell (1958–62), for example, a very modest building snaps into focus on site thanks to a set of characteristics that are scarcely modest, and might even be called monumental. Neither the published drawings nor the many compelling photographs capture the ghosts



Title page: James Stirling and Michael Wilford's homage to James Wines and SITE at the Neue Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart (1977–83).

Above: Photograph by Richard Einzig of architect Eldred Evans sitting within Stirling and Gowan's Brunswick Park School Assembly Hall, Camberwell, London, 1961.

of geometric purity and English history that define this small building. Instead, the narrative potential of photography is deployed to tell a story about occupation, about carefree children dancing in sunlit interiors (actually Gowan's own children, playing up for their father behind the viewfinder), and about the engaging pictorial potentials of a geometrically derived architecture (with Eldred Evans, in Richard Einzig's photograph, looking like a recumbent Miesian statue). These early photographs, almost all taken by the architects, appear to radiate the aspirations of their grandiose yet unsuccessful Churchill College competition entry of 1958. They are wish images *par excellence*. In contrast, site visits convey a group of simultaneous readings impossible to deploy in the service of a single compelling narrative. The strengths of many of the projects on site lie in the simultaneity of seemingly contradictory readings operating at once, and in the particular elaboration of unexpected construction details. Such subtleties of detail, construction method, overall formal disposition and most of all, scale, elude photographic representation.⁵ The photographs are generally engaged in telling a different kind of story, one whose final goal is visual persuasion. The distance between image and object emerges with particular clarity throughout Stirling's work and career, providing tantalising glimpses of analysis to come.

Real Things 1

Stirling's buildings highlight the gap between architecture and its media thanks to their very particularity – their strange juxtapositions, games of scale and combinative formal logics are what make them interesting in the first place.⁶ And it is these same juxtapositions and combinations that typically resist reproduction, or are transformed into something completely different in the process of being transported from building to drawing, or building to photograph.⁷ At their best, the particularities of the buildings are utterly unexpected, as much in their proportion and scale as in the disposition of their parts and their implied temporal dynamism. What is one to make of the Florey Building (1966–71) at Oxford, for example? An impossibly skinny wall staggering backwards as it breaks into vertical segments then bends into an amphitheatral shape propped up on angled legs? The project has a narrative dimension; it is a quasi-literary exercise, the construction of a fabled or fictional architecture with the valence of a psychedelic dream. The building resembles, and is likely a riff on Alison and Peter Smithson's unbuilt terrace housing project published in *The Architectural Review* in 1957 (for Stirling, it is a one-off; for the Smithsons, a system), recast in hyperbolic mode, with typically Stirlingsque humour.⁸ What is this rather improvised creature but a very personal elaboration on the theatre of architecture, on spectacle, on communal social life, on Oxbridge culture (see Stirling's rendering: punt poles in the foreground, punt poles supporting the architecture) and on glass architecture? What but a 'red brick' UFO planted within the most well fortified academic precinct on earth? What but a Trojan Horse within the gates?

The Florey Building in person holds many surprises for those who have come upon it first in photographs and drawings. But in moving backwards in time to the equally controversial (and more infamous) Cambridge History Faculty (1964–66), we move from the sphere of Stirling's creative intentions and the controlled media representation of his work, to a discussion of the buildings as negotiated with clients, as built and as lived in over time. And so

here, what are we to make of an industrial greenhouse as a reading room, as at the History Faculty library? And in the case of this building, how could we possibly concentrate on the architect's intentions, when the building is primarily known through its controversies and the loud broadcasts of its many failings? The implausible fact is that Stirling was compelled, due to a breakdown of real estate negotiations at the university, to turn a building ninety degrees on its site so that its glass reading room faced the rising rather than the setting sun, with dubious retrofitting and relatively little additional alteration. The question of architecture's intersection with its publics (of which the client is the very first) becomes pressing at this juncture. We must then accept the insistent possibility of an architect concentrating intently on one half of his job and not the other, possibly as a direct result of client intransigence.

Stirling evidently cared deeply about the articulation and development of the History Faculty, but was perhaps more philosophical about its many functionalities over time, and its likely reception, given the climate in which the commission had been executed. While the ghost of a specifically English past (of glass architecture from Smythson to Wren to Paxton and beyond) again plays with the history of continental modernism in haunting yet humorous ways in this building, the grandeur of the whole scheme is drowned out by the noise of client opprobrium. And while the functional problems have clearly been substantial, one is tempted to wonder about the end effect of the building's conflicted clients on the architecture as constructed. Never in unilateral agreement about their choice of architect in the first place, and utterly culpable in their failure to procure the promised building site, have the clients also failed to invest in their architecture in the years since construction? A single conversation with the current custodian is enough to suggest that every opportunity has been taken to amplify the building's inadequacies whenever humanly possible, possibly as part of a campaign aimed at its ultimate demolition (to tear it down, you have to wreck it first).⁹ These anecdotal historical facts – outside the architect's apparent control, and equally outside the acceptable limits of contemporary architectural criticism – have nevertheless been critical for the life of this building, even up to the current day. Thus the Cambridge History Faculty narrates the two sides of the architecture coin: on the one side, the architect absorbed in the larger conceptual task of architecture, maintaining absolute control of the media representation of his work; on the other, the thing as it gets built, in an environment that runs from client-driven to client-plagued. Architects ignore this latter aspect at their peril, for it invariably contributes to the subsequent histories of their work. And here a fundamental question about postwar architecture emerges: how much have the internal demands of professional culture (practice and academe) diverged from the external demands of public construction? How many publics now exist for architecture and how are they all to be satisfied?

Real Things 2

The Leicester Engineering Building (1959–63) illustrates the same point from the other side; Leicester professor Edward Parkes may possibly go down as the ideal client for modern architecture in postwar Britain. Gowan, a critical force in this project, has related as much in his description of the successes (and failures) of the

building. It is striking, not only for its manifesto-like qualities, but also for its unexpected proportions, the humour of its assemblage of discontinuous fragments and the persuasiveness of mass-produced elements, all adding up to a simultaneous engagement with a range of historical and autobiographical objects. It is difficult to dismiss these sustained references to history, industrial and popular culture and autobiography as 'formalist', although much of the discussion rests precisely on the compositional analysis of building parts and their spatial relationships.¹⁰ Part of Stirling's talent lay in his infusion of non-formal qualities into familiar forms that were also sometimes awkward or unexpected in their juxtapositions. Leicester may well be the best example of this strategy of infusing the particular into the familiar or generic, but there are many others in Stirling's work, many of them concerned with enacting or recording building process or temporality in architectural form.

Rather than discussing architectural formalism, we might turn to an expanded notion of context, wherein different sorts of context merit different discussions. The referential context of Stirling and Gowan's architecture at Leicester, which nods to Russian constructivism, to Corbusian modernism, to Hannes Meyer, to Peter Ellis, to British industrial and greenhouse architecture (to name just a few of its references) is self-evidently a very different sort of context from the physical one that surrounds the building at Leicester University. And both of these contexts differ markedly again from the larger political and sociological environment of British modernism in the 1950s, and again from the still-larger sphere of European modernism in the twentieth century. The linked ideas of 'implicit' and 'explicit' context might be applied here, from both literary theory and a variety of biological and computational applications. An analysis of Stirling's architecture seems to beg for consideration within this expanded framework, in which the buildings give up some of their abashed secrecy for more relevance and public agency. Communication with a lay public was, after all, an explicit concern of this architect.

In contrast to Stirling's acutely progressive engagement with transient media mechanisms, his equal investment in the singular object both architectural and representational seems hopelessly traditional – architecture with a capital A, in the tradition of Hawksmoor and Soane. And in spite of inevitable clashes with those interested in systems theory in the postwar years, Stirling's investment in the singular work of art is surely also rather modern, in the manner of 'master' architects like Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright. This fact is only underlined by these architects' own qualified attempts to invent architectural systems that might have widespread application, calibrated against the unqualified failure of both 'systems' (the domino-five points nexus and the Taliesin fellowship) to mass produce the sort of architecture that emerged from the studios of both men. These efforts were then followed by remarkably diverse work that had little to do with industrial process. Stirling apparently accepted the failure of attempts to systematise the production of architecture, even in his own prefabricated buildings – which do all they can to contradict the notion of industrialised assemblage, even as they put it on display. This fabled contrariness in Stirling's architecture is remarkably potent, disarming the essentialist values of old modernists like Mies (whose work Stirling explicitly opposed). Had he copped out, as Alison and Peter Smithson implied, or did he just astutely recognise the self-imposed limits of

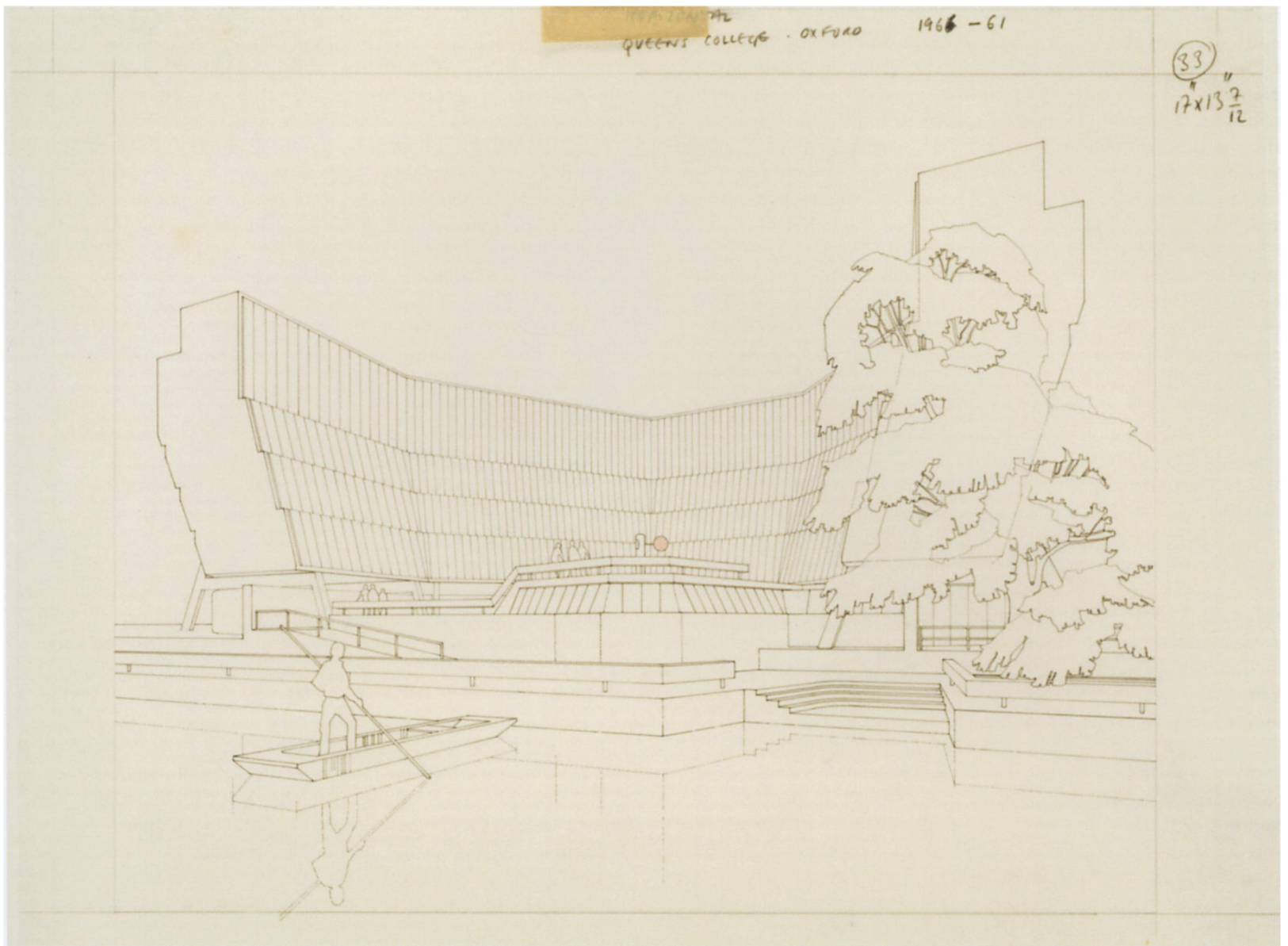
a post-CIAM world, in which 1920s modernism retained the power of potent myth together with a set of distinctly pre-modern habits?

In referencing English architecture of the past three centuries, and the recent history of modern art, Stirling moved quickly beyond the question of architecture's socialist utopias to a different set of questions about the role of art in the latter half of the twentieth century. He combined dense architectural quotation with postwar ambivalence (sometimes called ambiguity). From his adoption of the Queen Anne style window that adorns the front of his house in Belsize Park, to the same motif deployed at the Clore Gallery and at No. 1 Poultry, as well as in countless other projects, Stirling copied, repeated and recombined motifs. At Leicester, a stair motif that has been linked to Gropius's factory building in Cologne in 1914 is merged with its antipode, the rather modest, hidden and highly functional stair in Peter Ellis's Cook Street office building in Stirling's home town of Liverpool; in a lecture of 1974, it was Ellis's building that Stirling cited as precedent for the Leicester stair. Other architectural references multiply and soon become so numerous and contradictory as to constitute the tools of a rhetorical method.

The means of assembling these varied references resembles that of the *monteur* or collage artist. But like his compatriot and friend Eduardo Paolozzi, Stirling disciplined the elements of a collage aesthetic within a single object, largely through the use of continuous surface. Furthermore, Stirling's comments on the facture of the Maisons Jaoul provide important hints into his own Paolozzi-esque aesthetic; he found the houses to be regrettably lacking in traces of industrial process. His own buildings process the individual objects of which they are combined, much as Paolozzi's work (both two- and three-dimensional) renders up the flotsam and jetsam of industrial culture within the singular surface of a newly constructed thing. The montage artist is no longer assembling found objects, like Kurt Schwitters; rather, the found objects of industrial modernity are fed through the processing machine of a production aesthetic. They represent montage rather than enact it. In this both Stirling and Paolozzi reframe the work of an earlier avant-garde into a working procedure absolutely reflective of their own situation; it may be their single most important act.

Montage into Collage

Stirling's process of montage subsequently grew into a highly selective working method deploying referential devices on surfaces and through volumes. Making painstaking efforts to knit his Clore Gallery extension (1980–86) to the original Tate Gallery with archaeological precision, Stirling went to equal pains to break its wall surface into discontinuous but contiguous elements and, finally, to attach these elements to one another with the equivalent of architectural rubber bands. Thus the windows and cornices tie discontinuous fragments together. The changing fabric of the exterior wall only vaguely references functional conditions within the building; the transitions between zones are kept rough and abrupt. Thus the window/cornice elaboration at the point where the Clore turns the corner and recedes from its ceremonial front to its industrial rear marks a rather extraordinary collision of window, cornice and wall detail. The sense of any base condition here is elusive; the built object is just a box of space with a skin affixed to its



Perspectival drawing by Leon Krier and model photograph by John Donat of the Florey Building, Oxford (1966-71).



Photograph by Alessandro Vasella of a figure walking along the west facade of the Cambridge University History Faculty (1964–66).

exterior in collage segments, lined and filled up inside in similar fashion. Hardware, such as windows and stone detail, is mounted onto this blank. The architect's job comes down to a great deal of highly creative overwriting, editing and affixing, and to a full conflation of montage (3D) and collage (2D) practices. In this, Stirling apparently mounted his own version of the critique articulated by figures like Peter Bürger; the fate of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes was not to succeed in the effort to integrate art and life (a dubious claim anyway, it is now generally agreed), but rather to fundamentally re-cast the relationship of art to society for the world to come.

Thus Stirling launches a similar project from within the highly determined limits of conventional architectural practice, and within the envelope of single building commissions. Unlike the Smithsons, Archigram and Cedric Price, he ultimately bypassed utopia in favour of construction, at the same time reabsorbing utopian traces into constructed objects. Subsequent critiques of Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974/1984) question his vision of the entire project. But Bürger's interpretation was, like Stirling's, a function of his own context in postwar Europe. Bürger's book was first published as Stirling mounted his monographic exhibition at the RIBA, celebrated from within the precincts of the neo-avant-garde by Reyner Banham in the exhibition catalogue.

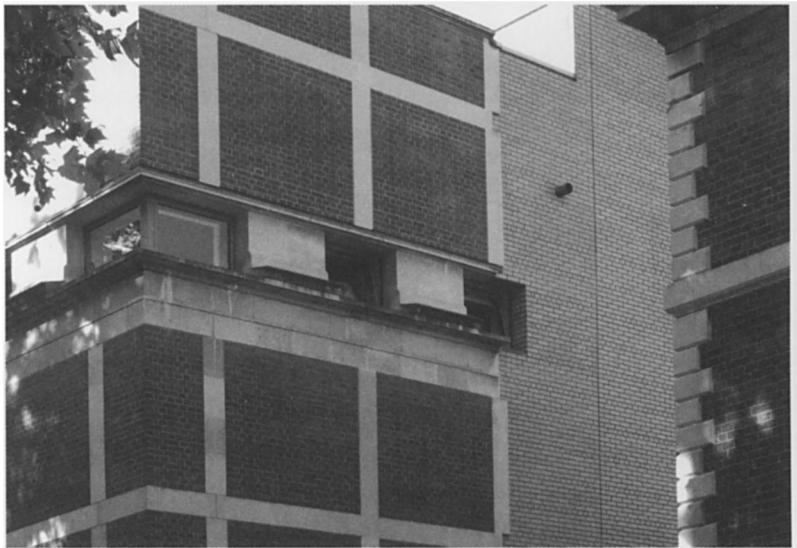
Stirling internalised the work of the 1920s avant-gardes in these years through close study of the likes of Le Corbusier, and by absorbing the achievements of Schwitters, Raoul Hausmann and Hannah Höch, just as Paolozzi and Henderson had also done in different media. Stirling then deployed related strategies in an architecture that seeks no more than its own physical and disciplinary limits – at least on the site of the constructed object. This stands in contrast to the ambitions of systems building architects on the one hand and figures like the Smithsons on the other. It is this project that Stirling's singular buildings carry forward so well, standing on their sites like mobile provocations. Next to them, the unbuilt paper architecture of many of Stirling's contemporaries takes on the appearance of, to quote Banham very unfairly, 'infantile regression'.¹¹ But Stirling always has the last laugh: rather than projecting futuristic ideas onto paper, his work transfers collage onto a building site, transforming paper into matter, subjecting representation to a reverse transformation into substance that puts the mechanisms of media culture to a new use, and upsets established hierarchies between built and depicted. He went on in later projects to continue parsing the notion of montage and continuous surface in a continuously self-critical method that resulted in the alarming Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, with its discontinuous floor plan and unifying external wrapper: the disjunction between plan and elevation constructed.¹²

But all this talk of individual objects brings one back to the starting question. Is it precisely the close affiliation to particular, non-typical objects that makes Stirling unfashionable? In a time when architecture is promoting type as a means to individual particularity, one wonders how this might be. The recent interest in custom fabrication implies that singular, non-typical objects have some sort of intrinsic worth. And yet, with all the hype of contemporary fashion, individualised objects are now to be marketed largely on their validity as mass commodities. Against this language of mass-produced individuality, Stirling offered individual assemblages of mass products – perhaps

the heart of the modernist project, reconceived within the limits of a postwar world. At the same time, he infused his buildings with the tools of self-critique, with what Crinson has recently called a 'principle of contrariness', and what Manfredo Tafuri equally referred to as a kind of 'cruel disintegration' in his 1974 essay, 'L'Architecture dans le Boudoir'. We might rather see this internalised critique as a function of constructive and semantic logics within the world of late modern architecture. If we begin to do so, Stirling's work starts to offer very significant provocations to the future.

It is no longer the notion of industrial process that motivates today's mass customisation but the rather different notion of both/and – both mass-produced and singular at the same time. This is precisely the quality that characterises a building like Andrew Melville Hall at St Andrews University in Scotland. This dedication to complexity is also worthy of another great 1970s figure, for something similar figured prominently in Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction* when he explicitly advocated the layering of reference and functionality with precisely these words – and therein lies a clue. Could it be that what has structured much of architecture's engagement with its own history in recent years bears striking continuities with the very discourses it loves to hate? Was Stirling's method uninteresting to architects and critics of the 1990s because, having jettisoned the rhetorical specificities of 'postmodern historicism', they were loath to admit that nothing much had really changed in the way architecture is produced and understood? In this case, instead of a rather overt engagement with historical languages resonant of Schinkel and Soane, a renewed interest in the stylistic vocabularies of modernism emerged in the 1990s to dominate a sector of the profession and its apologists in museums and publishing houses. But the revivalist impulse, the desire to invoke specific historical reference (the Barcelona Pavilion, not the Altes Museum) has often remained. Colin Rowe's effort, for example, to reconnect the threads of the past and present through figures as remote as Palladio is not unrelated to recent efforts to exhume the ghosts of the 1920s and 1930s and to reconnect the abruptly truncated efforts of dedicated modernists to new building production.¹³ But gone from contemporary criticism is Rowe's parodic tone, heavily laced with irony and Oedipal desire. The revival of the (modernist) past has rather been undertaken in deadly earnestness.

Around the time of Stirling's death (or a little before) we plunged headlong into this age of revivalism. But this modernist revival has apparently ignored the troubling conclusions of Stirling's generation in its embrace of the utopia of modernist autonomy. At a time when pluralism is perhaps less a concern than a sort of soft-headed ideological propriety, modernism has been taken up by the post-Cold War world in the extent to which it has become a house style. Paradoxically, 1970s architectural postmodernism may turn out to hold the last Oedipal thread of a continuous modernist dialectic in its radically reactionary grasp – utopian or not. For postmodernism, at its best, was no sort of revivalism at all, but rather an attempt to go on inventing with whatever lay still to hand: among other things, the materials of textual reference and representation themselves. If its rhetoric was rebellious, its goals were fully in line with the avant-garde project framed many years before – in contrast to many recent neo-modernisms, which have elected to throw out the baby, but hold onto the tepid bathwater.



Cornice, facade and window details at Tate Britain's Clore Gallery extension (1980–86). Photos Aram Mooradian

Conclusion

James Stirling had been witness to a different historical phase in England after the war, one that saw 1920s modernism as proximate and unfinished, a project waiting for its vindication on English soil. While embracing this belief himself, he also quickly moved to a position that differed quite significantly from those of his contemporaries in interpreting 1920s modernism not as dogma but as an 'open work' (quoting Umberto Eco) with a flexible vocabulary – a procedure rather than a style. Stirling, more so than others, realised a critical difference between the 1920s and the 1950s; not only was there no going back, but going forward in the wake of cataclysm did not allow for unilateral certainty in social and cultural values formulated after the very different revolution of 1917. And from the distance of postwar London, Stirling understood right away that a sense of irony was essential to any use of modernist dogma, that deploying the language of the 1920s would immediately involve an element of quotation, as Tafuri so astutely noticed. He was not operating in a vacuum but rather in a world in which the certainties provided by pre-war structuralism were gradually being replaced by the fissures that defined postwar post-structuralism; the replacement of implicit belief with a renewed sense of the relative nature of all practices of faith, of which modernism included the most attractive and, in the end, the most pernicious. Tafuri identified these issues in Stirling's work, but infused them with his own centrifugal Adornian pathos, apparently rejecting or ignoring the irreverent optimism implicit in Stirling's own hard-headed 'contrariness'. Beyond any other impression conveyed by buildings or images, here was someone who loved the positive potentials of the work that he did.

Returning to Stirling's relationship with the present, we can see the desire to avoid looking at his work as more than just a reaction to the difficulty of the gigantic No. 1 Poultry, completed after the architect's death to replace Mies's unbuilt Mansion House Square project in London. The current unpopularity from which both Stirling and Venturi suffer bears more relation to an unresolved paradox of our own time. That paradox rests on recent desires to see modernism as if it were really still there, even when there is ample evidence that the notion of a unified modernism was always illusory, and when it is equally evident that many of its presuppositions belong to a different century.¹⁴ To this desire for continuity with the religious faith of secular modernism, the major figures of 1960s and 1970s architecture provide an unwelcome reminder of the fact that not only was there no continuity in the way things looked, but even more disturbingly, there was possibly great continuity in the basic heterogeneity of a 'modern' way of building – and that it could resemble No. 1 Poultry or the Stuttgart Staatsgalerie as well as the Smithsons' school at Hunstanton. In fact, the gradual incorporation of Dada and Surrealism into the mainstream of modern avant-gardism from Bürger to the present day has also carried postmodern collage practice into the heart of the so-called modernist project. In the end, it was that same postwar generation – having grown up in the immediate wake of cataclysm, on 1920s collage overlaid with the eruptions of postwar consumerism – that handed us the tools we use to construct the semantic apparatuses of architecture today.

The tale of Jim Stirling cannot be effectively distilled to that of a misunderstood genius whose star has temporarily fallen, at least not

here. Other lessons about modernity are emitted by his work – chief among them the paradox of an architect who fundamentally realigned the project of architecture for professionals and their critics, but whose achievements went nearly unrecognised by the public that used the buildings, at least until the last decade of his career. In addition to this important caesura between audiences and object, other problems eroded Stirling's British career. The problems included buildings that leaked, that were too hot, or that appeared to pay little attention to the local environments in which they had to function, or the sociologies of their clientele. Like many of Wright's buildings, they needed sustained tinkering, thanks to the bravura of many of their technical solutions. Perhaps most difficult for his later career was Stirling's alienation from clients at Oxford and Cambridge within the span of just a few years – a historical fact with significant class implications that seem to have impinged directly on the process of design and construction at both locations, and even more profoundly on the subsequent histories and historiographies of the two buildings. The controversies that surrounded these institutional commissions followed Stirling and interrupted the stream of work that he fully expected as his right. It is small wonder that, beginning with Francesco Dal Co, he turned with such enthusiasm to the international architecture scene that admired him so fervently.

Thus another contemporary mechanism is narrated by Stirling's history: the self-ghettoisation of leading western architects into the small enclaves that protected academics and fostered practitioners until Rem Koolhaas (and others) used that same mechanism to make the architect a fashionable figure in a larger sphere. While the formation of the professional cadre long predates the Second World War, the current phenomenon of the international architecture elite probably only dates to the early meetings of CIAM. It certainly acquired new force in the 1970s and 1980s in the United States, when Philip Johnson and the IAUS identified a select group roving from conference to conference, celebrated in the pages of *Oppositions*, *Assemblage* and *ANY*. If anything distinguishes this elite from the localised professional elites that intersect with a wider population of potential clients and journalists (cf. Leslie Martin in postwar Britain), it is the architects' dislocation from these localised patronage mechanisms in favour of more international ones (such as international competitions), where an architect's track record depends more on publication than on building. Stirling was a presence in this new clique, a legend of bigness and good-natured self-satire, with his purple socks and green plastic briefcase – legacies of a 1970s sartorial aesthetic and a determination not to be pushed around. The celebrity architects did not really care what the Cambridge population made of the History Faculty – they knew its lasting value as both expression and polemic. And they knew that it would continue to live an autonomous existence unchallenged by the rarefied, short-lived site visit of the architecture pilgrim.

The problems of this defensive approach came to the fore through the contemporaneous critique of Tafuri, who noted that by the mid-1970s self-ghettoisation had produced a boutique of underemployed, rather impotent fellow travellers in architecture. Stirling was at the centre of the story for Tafuri as a positive counter-example, as one architect trying hard to navigate a well-trodden path with a new kind of gear. The tale of architecture since then has revolved, to one degree or another, around Tafuri's critique of architecture's social impotence in the creation of the built environment. For example, Koolhaas has made a project of eroding the borders of the architecture

ghetto and reconnecting the practice of building to things that people are actually committed to, like shopping and celebrity culture.¹⁵ In these efforts, together with the liberation promised by mass customisation (one might only ask, whoever thought that having exactly what you wanted was a logic for anything?), Stirling appears like very small beer indeed. But as the dust settles, as shopping seems a little less urgent, and as mass customisation threatens the utter atomisation of greed (and the ludicrous spectre of mass-produced individuality), historians return to this fascinating and conflicted figure to assess a variety of possibilities offered in the provision of unexpected and interesting buildings that complicate or openly defy both the shorthand of media dissemination and prevailing definitions of what it means to be modern.

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- 1 Terminology is problematical in discussions of postmodernism. Architectural postmodernism, as defined by Charles Jencks in the 1970s, is a highly localised phenomenon; postmodernism as a broader cultural movement in a wide array of fields bears an ambiguous relationship to it.
- 2 Stirling was, after all, notoriously diffident – some might even say ornery – with clients. Kurt Forster recounts the experience of attending the committee charged with appointing an architect to design the new Getty Center in Los Angeles in the early 1980s, as they considered Stirling's candidacy. According to Forster, Stirling took this group of important patrons to his modest early housing project at Ham Common, to a leaky Cambridge History Faculty in the midst of renovation and to the construction site of the unfinished Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart. He did not get the Getty commission.
- 3 For this and other information about Stirling's collaboration with Krier, see Mark Girouard, *Big Jim: The Life and Work of James Stirling* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000). Stirling's educational training at the University of Liverpool's School of Architecture also included an increasingly international array of buildings which were only encountered through publications. Examples include the publication of Polish modernist work executed by émigré students at Liverpool in 1945, the year that Stirling arrived to begin his degree. It is, however, the published work of Le Corbusier that shaped an early phase of Stirling's career.
- 4 Stirling had seen one building by Le Corbusier before this time, according to Mark Girouard: the Pavillon Suisse, in a brief trip of 1950. See *Big Jim*, p. 80.
- 5 For a discussion of scale in architectural photography, see Claire Zimmerman, 'The Monster Magnified: Architectural Photography as Visual Hyperbole', in *Perspecta* 40: 'Monster' (forthcoming).
- 6 One can imagine Stirling reading Reyner Banham's chapter on Julien Guadet and his 'Éléments et Théories de l'Architecture' (1901–04), on composition as the aggregation of volumes. Banham first quotes JNL Durand: 'Any complete building whatever is not, and cannot be, anything but the result of the assembly and putting together (composition) of a greater or lesser number of parts.' He then moves to Guadet, noting, 'The approach is particulate; small, structural and functional members (elements of architecture) are assembled to make functional volumes, and these (elements of composition) are assembled to make whole buildings. To do this is to compose in the literal and derivational sense of the word, to put together.' Banham published these words in 1960; but the ideas articulated may well have been known to Stirling and Gowan well before they began the Leicester project. See Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980), pp. 16, 20.
- 7 This is not to imply any collapse between photographs and drawings of architecture. As different orders of representation, the two forms invite radically different forms of study. But they share the fact of two-dimensionality – a feature that neither shares with the building they depict. If I invert the order of drawing to building here – not in the order implied by design followed by construction – this results from Stirling's systematic revision of his work for publication in the 1974 'Black Book' carried out with the assistance of Krier. Many projects were redrawn for this publication; they include various innovations unique to their publication there. As documents after the fact, their common ground with architectural photographs only increases. See James Stirling, *James Stirling Buildings and Projects 1950–1974* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975).

- 8 The extent to which Stirling teased the Smithsons by copying motifs from their work in totally altered circumstances, and to radically different effect, has yet to be fully investigated – but the investigation promises to be rewarding.
- 9 The custodian at Cambridge seems especially obsessed with the non-functionalities of the building he tends. In spite of his evident interest in many aspects of the architecture, he also believes that the building is 'diabolical'. This cannot be good for him, or the architecture. MJ Long, a London architect who worked for Stirling in the late 1960s, claims that the administration of Cambridge University 'would pull it down if they could'. Conversation with author, October 2006.
- 10 Peter Eisenman's fascinating exegesis of this building is carefully selective of relevant source material; but this is reflective of Eisenman's own operative intentions. Through criticism of other architectures, Eisenman skilfully advances the goals of his own creative project. See 'Real and English: the Destruction of the Box I', in *Oppositions* 4 (1974), pp. 5–34.
- 11 See Reyner Banham, 'Neo-Liberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture', in *The Architectural Review* 4/50. In spite of fervent admiration for Banham, I deploy this quotation, with which Banham condemned the misnamed 'Neo-Liberty', to exact revenge. Banham's premature burial of Italy's neo-realist architects (to borrow a more appropriate term from cinema studies) only fuelled their pale and ghostly resurrection in historicising postmodernism twenty years on. He thus suppressed a legitimate response to one pressing crisis (the role of architecture in the wake of totalitarian appropriations of modernism) and helped precipitate a considerably more overblown one (postmodern historicism). For a fascinating example of Banham's operative work, see Anthony Vidler, 'Toward a Theory of the Architectural Program', *October* 106 (Fall 2003), pp. 59–74. My thanks to Edward Yelonik for bringing this reference to my attention.
- 12 Britt Eversole has written a probing analysis of the place of this building within postmodern architectural discourse, entitled 'Tangents: James Stirling's Wissenschaftszentrum' (unpublished manuscript).
- 13 The recent projects on Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, in exhibitions and books, could be enlisted to support this claim; other efforts in similar directions can be traced in projects as different as the recent 'Modernism' show at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Dada exhibition at MoMA. In terms of contemporary production, other MoMA shows like 'Light Architecture' and 'The Unprivate House' performed similar tasks. For historians, a look at Peter Eisenman's work on Terragni raises similar questions, albeit through a project considerably less tied to historical accuracy, and considerably more engaged in contemporary refashioning.
- 14 Of many sources, in many different fields, perhaps most compelling is Bruno Latour's 1991 *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1993). See also Reinhold Martin's recent riff on Latour, 'Architecture's Image Problem: Have We Ever Been Postmodern', in *Grey Room* 22 (Winter 2005), pp. 6–29.
- 15 Koolhaas' efforts to reconnect the architecture ghetto to the world of planning deserve a less opportunistic, less frivolous citation, for which I here offer an IOU.

All images, except where stated, James Stirling/Michael Wilford Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal

Opposite: A contact sheet of photographic images taken by James Stirling of Reyner Banham, his wife Mary and children Debbie and Ben during an impromptu picnic at the Cambridge University History Faculty.

