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Published online: 12 Oct 2012.

To cite this article: Steve Parnell (2012) AR's and AD's post-war editorial policies: the making of modern architecture in Britain, The Journal of Architecture, 17:5, 763-775, DOI: 10.1080/13602365.2012.724858

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2012.724858
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AR’s and AD’s post-war editorial policies: the making of modern architecture in Britain

Steve Parnell

This paper discusses the magazine in which Townscape was conceived and disseminated, The Architectural Review (AR), in the context of its closest rival, the more avant-garde Architectural Design (AD), by comparing how each operated in terms of their contributors, economics and editorial policies.

The period from immediately after the Second World War up to the early 1970s demonstrated unprecedented stability and prosperity in the Western world. After the initial austerity measures, the UK bloomed economically, culturally and socially, leading this period to be commonly called the ‘golden age’ of capitalism. Politically, it is also known as the ‘age of consensus’ due to the general agreement between the two main political parties that a left-of-centre welfare state based on Keynesian economics was best for Britain. The British architectural press echoed this with a coincidental period of stability (in editorship) and growth (in circulation) of its own. James Richards was on the AR’s editorial committee from 1937 to 1971 (with a brief period away during the war) and Monica Pidgeon edited AD from 1946 to 1975. The resulting 25-year overlap (1946–1971) of these editorships forms a unique opportunity for comparing these two magazines and the architectural discourse they carried. This period witnesses the rise, growing disillusionment and ultimate demise of modern architecture in the UK, which is reflected in an analysis of the respective editorial policies and operations of these leading British architectural magazines. The rare announcements of their editorial policies within a month of each other at the beginning of this period renders the comparison even more remarkable.

January, 1947, marked AR’s fiftieth anniversary. Its committee of directing editors, consisting of James Richards, Nikolaus Pevsner, Osbert Lancaster and the proprietor Hubert de Cronin Hastings, stated that the magazine’s purpose was to provide primarily ‘the raw material of architectural history’ and secondly a ‘space for literary discussion of the visual arts’. But the overall objective of the magazine’s policy was to instigate a ‘visual re-education’ in order to ‘re-establish the supremacy of the eye’. Townscape was a product of this policy.

The editorial committee changed only slightly over the next quarter century. Under this trio’s editorial direction the content of the magazine remained faithful to the core policy outlined in the 1947 editorial statement. While Hastings’s ‘Socially Paternal’ Toryism, Richards’s Socialism and Pevsner’s art historicism underwrote the magazine’s ideology, as owner of the Architectural Press, the reclusive moneyed gentleman Hastings set the magazine’s agenda. His all-pervasive interest and belief in the Picturesque resulted in a series of Townscape campaigns culminating in its swansong, Civilia, in 1971.

The constitution of AD was completely different to that of its rival. In the December, 1946, editorial entitled ‘About Ourselves’, the joint editors Monica Pidgeon and Barbara Randell issued what they considered to be a policy for the future of the
magazine based on the original one of ‘trying to serve, within reason, the whole nature of the architect—cultural as well as constructional, poetic as well as practical’. They continued:

First, there is news; news in paragraph and comment, and news in the way of the detailed descriptions, photographs and drawings of the latest buildings and industrial design. Second, there is technical information: for instance, articles on new methods of construction and general articles on contemporary building technique and new developments in materials and components, equipment and installations. Third [...] are the articles on some general matter of interest to architects and designers, such as the history of art or architecture, or contemporary design and planning in foreign countries.

However, this is less a policy than a typology of content. Pidgeon later revealed that her unwritten policies in reality were a) to publish what she considered to be good architecture, simply ignoring the bad (never making enemies in print) and b) always to be forward-looking. Whereas Hastings wanted the AR to be a cultural magazine keen on history and aimed at policy makers, AD was very much a trade rag aimed at professional architects and promoting the avant-garde.

The staff composition of each magazine highlights the difference in each magazine’s available resource. In March, 1953, the AR’s masthead lists Richards, Pevsner and Hastings, as well as the executive editor Ian McCallum, art editor Gordon Cullen, two assistant editors and Reyner Banham as assistant literary editor. By the end of the 1950s, Sir Hugh Casson had joined the directing editors, Lance Wright had been added as a Technical Editor, Kenneth Browne as Features Editor and Ian Nairn as Counter-Attack Editor, and they also counted two staff photographers in their midst. These were not all full-time positions; but in contrast, AD’s masthead in October, 1953, comprised only Pidgeon and Theo Crosby, first as joint editor and subsequently as Technical Editor a year later. Pidgeon and her Technical Editor worked only during the afternoons and by the end of the 1950s were joined by a full-time Editorial Assistant and Editorial Secretary. Until the late 1960s, when they could afford to hire independent architectural photographers, photographs were provided by the architects, or Pidgeon would take them herself using her maiden name of Lehmann. An Art Director was not employed until May, 1968. Besides the back-office staff, such as the advertisement manager employed by AD’s owner The Standard Catalogue Company (SCC), this was the full contingent of staff that AD utilised during this period.

The staff at AD were not paid particularly well, but the Standard Catalogue Company was a commercial operation and did make money from AD. According to David Dottridge, grandson of the SCC’s founder Samuel Dottridge and listed as Publications Manager from June, 1967, to December, 1968, ‘In its heyday it was making between £60 and £70,000 [a year] which were good numbers in those days.’ This heyday is ambiguous, but considering that ‘Revenue from advertising far exceeded sub revenue’, by examining the number of advertisements published in AD, it can safely be assumed to be the early- to mid-1960s (Fig. 1).
Although Pidgeon didn’t understand most of the architectural arguments going on in her magazine,\textsuperscript{15} she was the embodiment of the spirit in which it was produced. She also had a real ability to network and recognise young talent. In particular, between 1953 and 1972, she employed the three technical editors who would take AD from an obscure technical trade rag to leading avant-garde architectural ‘little’ magazine: Theo Crosby (October, 1953 to June, 1962), Kenneth Frampton (June, 1962 to December, 1964) and Robin Middleton (December, 1964 to July, 1972). Each of these had a profound impact on the magazine’s form and content, a result of Pidgeon’s spirit meeting the technical editors’ interests and contacts.

By 1954, the first generation of inter-war modernists dominated architecture. Many of this first generation of architectural modernists were Pidgeon’s peers from her student days at University College London, with whom she mingled at the MARS group and the post-war CIAM meetings. This generation were the architectural elite, having established modern architecture as mainstream thanks to their influential positions in architectural institutions and government.\textsuperscript{16} Banham has since pointed out that ‘the student generation were without much means of public expression (until Theo Crosby joined Architectural Design in October 1953) and little of the polemic is visible in print.’\textsuperscript{17} Banham himself was a member of the same younger milieu but as one of Pevsner’s most promising doctoral students from the Courtauld, had joined the AR earlier that year.\textsuperscript{18} By disposition and temperament, he would have sat more comfortably with AD, but although an anomaly at the AR, he gave it a balance of editorial opinion through the younger generation’s outlook.\textsuperscript{19}
Banham at the AR and Crosby at AD sat either side of the Smithsons, ‘the bell-wethers [sic] of the young throughout the middle fifties.’ In 1950, at the ages of only 21 and 26 respectively, Alison and Peter Smithson won the competition to build Hunstanton school. This generated an early reputation upon which they would capitalise with their professional and personal relationships. They were well known to Banham through the small, subversive Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in which they were both involved in the early 1950s. Although Crosby was an ICA regular, he was not directly involved with this group, even though he was best friends with Peter Smithson, having met him in Florence in 1948. They subsequently shared a ground-floor flat in London while Smithson attended the Royal Academy School that autumn. Crosby and Smithson shared an intense friendship that continued for many years and when the Smithsons married in 1949, they remained in the ground-floor flat and Crosby moved upstairs. The Smithsons effectively became Crosby’s surrogate family in Britain: ‘Theirs to dominate, theirs to command, something like your family’s attitude to you, which makes them almost kin.’ Although the Smithsons had previously been published in AD, it was Crosby who offered them AD as a platform for broadcasting their ideas.

The Smithsons were particularly disappointed at not being invited to contribute to the 1951 Festival of Britain, acclaimed by the AR as the most complete implementation of Townscape principles and whose director, Hugh Casson, was added to AR’s editorial committee in 1954. Perhaps embittered by their unsuccessful competition entries (in association with Crosby), Peter Smithson remembered it as ‘dowdy’, ‘provincial’ and ‘disappointing’, and claimed that they avoided it by going on holiday to Greece. Their response was to translate the themes of low, mass-culture and everyday taste they had been cultivating within the Independent Group, into a fresh architectural movement: the New Brutalism. The first mention in the press of the term was in December, 1953’s AD—the first issue of the magazine that Crosby oversaw—where the Smithsons wrote of a house design with no internal finishes: ‘had this been built it would have been the first exponent of the “new brutalism” in England.’ If the Smithsons were the architects of the New Brutalism, Banham was its historian and Hunstanton School became the first building in its canon, as defined by his *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* 1955 is a particularly profitable early year for comparing the two magazines’ agendas. In January, Crosby published the Smithsons’ New Brutalism manifesto as the AD editorial and in December, Banham wrote his early apologia of the movement in the AR. In June, the AR published Ian Nairn’s Outrage issue, a continuation of the Townscape campaign in the form of pointed criticism of the ‘subtopia’ that Nairn felt was consuming the country (Fig. 2; and see also Figure 2 on p. 736 in Gillian Darley’s article in this Issue). That same month, AD published the Smithsons’ ‘Urban Reidentification’ (Fig. 3), which questioned the acceptance of the old order of CIAM and laid a claim to the new. The Smithsons were heavily involved in the formation of Team 10, a group responsible for CIAM’s dissolution in 1959.
Figure 2. The cover of Nairn’s Counter Attack, *The Architectural Review* (December, 1956): the follow-up to his Outrage of June, 1955 (reproduced courtesy of EMAP Ltd).
Figure 3. Alison and Peter Smithson’s ‘Urban Reidentification’, Architectural Design (June, 1955), p.185 (reproduced courtesy of John Wiley & Sons Ltd).

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THE BUILT WORLD: URBAN REIDENTIFICATION
by Alison and Peter Smithson

Each generation feels a new dissatisfaction, and conceives of a new idea of order.
This is architecture.
Young architects to-day feel a moral and dispassionate dissatisfaction with the buildings they are going up around them.
For them, the housing estates, the social centres and the blocks of flats are meaningless and irrelevant. They feel that the majority of architects have lost touch with reality and are building yesterday’s dreams when the rest of us have woken up today. They are dissatisfied with the idea that buildings represent, the ideas of the Garden City Movement and the Rational Architecture Movement.

These two movements achieved their bulk form by discovering the aesthetic means to achieve a social programme.
The Garden City Movement is basically a social movement; Ebenezer Howard saw in the idea of combining town and country, a ‘Peaceful Path to Real Reform.’
The image left to him by his book is one of a railway architecture for men but colder working men.
The Garden City idea was Ebenezer Howard’s, but its first came from Castello Sito, who first conceived of ‘Town Design.’
Until Castello Sito it had not occurred to anyone that a town could be anything other than the most conventional and artificial organization of the social hierarchy. After Castello Sito, meaning was to give way to ‘Ecoscape’. The garden cities as realized over more to the misunderstanding of the self-serving town than to the reforming drive of the railway age.

From the garden cities has come forty years of town planning legislation. They have filled the density structure, the pattern of garden and house, and the simplest road system of our new council housing schemes. They have presupposed in this day the official opinion, in 1912, of what the deserving working man should have.
The Garden City Movement has fathered the New Towns. In them the concept of ‘balanced social structure’, and the careful provision of survey assessed amenities, has reached its ultimate anti-climatic.

In the more (progressive) places, the Garden City tradition has given way to the National Architecture Movement of the ‘50s.
The social driving force of this movement was then clearer, the pressures on city, light, air, and green space in the over-populated cities. This social concern was perfectly matched by the forms of functional architecture, the architecture of the academic period which followed the great period of culture, and data, and the Style of the American century. This was the period of the minimum kitchen and the four functions, the mechanical concept of architecture.
While the two magazines were both promoting the New Brutalism from the start, the contrast between Nairn’s Outrage and the Smithsons’ ‘Urban Reidentification’ highlights the difference of the contribution of each to architectural discourse: the AR through Townscape and AD through the neo-avant-garde. Until the end of 1964, when Banham left the AR and Frampton left AD, superficially there would appear to be more similarities than differences between the magazines—a kind of architectural magazine consensus in format and content, if not approach or ambition. They each carried criticism of buildings (often even the same buildings), news and technical information. The differences appeared in, to borrow Pidgeon’s words from her 1946 editorial, ‘the articles on some general matter of interest to architects and designers.’ For the AR, these articles tended to emanate from the Townscape campaign, whereas for AD, they originated from the technical editors’ interests and contacts.

From 1965, however, the situation changed. At the AR, Banham was replaced by a pair of editorial assistants while Ian Nairn and Kenneth Browne were consolidated specifically as ‘Townscape Editors’. On Crosby’s advice, Robin Middleton (like Banham, a doctoral student of Pevsner, but at Cambridge) took over as Technical Editor at AD. Middleton had previously worked for Crosby at Taylor Woodrow contractors, alongside the members of the Archigram group, who had started their protest sheet in 1961 in disgust at the state of architecture going up at the time in Britain and had produced Archigrams 3 to 6 while at Taylor Woodrow. AD published the first mention of Archigram in the British press with a brief review of Archigram 4, the ‘Zoom’ issue, in June, 1964, also briefly reviewed in the AR two months’ later. Coincidentally, Banham lived opposite Peter Cook and it was he who, having bumped into Cook in the street, took this ‘Zoom’ issue to America where Philip Johnson and Peter Blake received it enthusiastically. The next generation of the architectural neo-avant-garde was once more supported by Banham and Crosby (and Crosby’s chosen successor, Middleton). Despite a good review, no doubt by Banham, the AR left the Archigram group well alone until it had passed as a phenomenon, only returning to the group in January, 1973, after it won the Monte Carlo Competition. Without Banham’s avant-garde tendencies, the AR returned to Townscape. Through Middleton, AD was also the first British mainstream architectural periodical to publish Archigram’s work, alongside Banham’s first contribution to AD, ‘A Clip-on Architecture’, a contextualisation of the group’s work in November, 1965. Archigram would feature regularly in AD until January, 1970, when they set up an office on the back of their Monte Carlo competition win.

The other major change that Middleton introduced to the magazine was the section Cosmorama, which replaced the News section in July, 1965. It was introduced as ‘a commentary on buildings or on events throughout the world that impinge upon architecture’. Cosmorama quickly evolved into a scrapbook of ideas and processes that were relevant to architectural production, rather than of buildings. The magazines from which it reported on technologies and products from outside the
Manplan was a series of eight themed issues published between September, 1969 and September, 1970 (Fig. 4) that pessimistically reviewed the state of the nation (in contrast, AD’s first ‘little’ issue appeared the very next month; Fig. 5). Manplan was a direct response to Banham et al’s Non-Plan idea published earlier in 1969 and took the form of a series of progressive visual essays with photographs focussing on people and activity, taken with grainy 35mm cameras by leading photojournalists rather than the usual high-contrast, personless large-format photography on which the AR had built its reputation. They were then printed with a specially developed matt black ink that generated an air of dystopia. As objects of design, the Manplan issues were ahead of their time, but as a commercial venture, a disaster, as advertisers instead shifted to the Architects’ Journal. According to Peter Davey, there was panic in the AR’s offices that Manplan was losing readers. However, the figures for AD, AR and the Architects’ Journal show that they all lost a similar proportion of readers during 1969 and 1970. In terms of circulation, Middleton’s influence on the magazine was initially very successful and AD eventually overtook the AR for one year only, 1968 (Fig. 6), the year it discovered its will to autonomy and employed as Art Director Dave Chaston, who redesigned the magazine.

By examining the content and context of these two rival magazines during the quarter century from their policy statements in 1946/47, it is possible to offer an explanation of how and why they ended up so distinct.

Established in 1896, not only had the AR become the magazine of the establishment, but its editors...
Figure 4. The cover of the last Manplan issue, *The Architectural Review* (September, 1970) (reproduced courtesy of EMAP Ltd).
Figure 5. The cover of the first ‘little’ issue of Architectural Design (October, 1970), featuring Cedric Price inflating himself (reproduced courtesy of John Wiley & Sons Ltd).
were establishment figures themselves. It was owned by a rich, educated gentleman amateur who believed in connoisseurship as the basis for taste. Members of its pre- and post-war editorial board, James Richards, John Betjeman, Hugh Casson, and Osbert Lancaster were all educated at public school and Oxbridge, and all knighted. Pevsner was educated in Germany but also knighted. The exception is Ian McCallum who, although educated at Gordonstoun and the AA, left architecture and was never knighted. Pevsner received the Royal Gold Medal in 1967 and Hastings in 1971. Pevsner and Richards both broadcast with the BBC and Richards was also The Times’ architecture correspondent. In contrast, none of the AD editors were ever honoured by the RIBA or the Queen or involved with other established mass-media broadcasters.

Hastings had money to pursue his own objectives and policies: the AR always had considerably more pages of advertising and, with the exception of 1968, a greater circulation. It could afford to employ more staff pro-actively to find buildings to review, and to campaign. AD, on the other hand, was owned by the SCC who considered it a commercial operation rather than cultural: until Middleton arrived, it was a vehicle for connecting product manufacturers with specifiers, reminiscent of its origins in 1930 as a freely distributed entertainment magazine for the Architects’ Standard Catalogue. Although it did make money, the profits were not for architecture’s benefit and the magazine was run parsimoniously, relying largely on architects sending in their material for publication.

While both magazines were attempting to move modern architecture forwards, the AR’s contents were driven by the editors under the aegis of Townscape while AD’s were driven by their contributors, specifically the Smithsons and then the Archigram group, each of which were extremely conscious of writing themselves into history and leaving behind substantial archives to ensure that this happened. The Smithsons never received recognition (more than likely due to their persistent snubbing of the RIBA), but Archigram received the Royal Gold Medal in 2002 and Peter Cook was knighted in 2007.

So the rivalry between AR and AD during the Townscape years can unsurprisingly be explained by the respective magazines’ constitutions: the ideologies of the editors and the financial resources
available to implement them. It was the establishment versus the avant-garde, history versus the future, Townscape versus Brutalism and Archigram, and finally, a professional trade rag versus a little magazine. By 1975, both magazines had new editors and new directions, the political pendulum swung towards the right, and the world irrevocably changed.

Notes and references
1. Colin Boyne was also editor of the Architects' Journal from 1947 to 1970.
3. Ibid., p. 22.
4. Ibid., p. 23.
9. Ibid.
11. De Burgh Galwey and W.J. Toomey. This list was taken from October, 1959, when Richards had just taken over from McCallum as Executive Editor and Banham made his Assistant. There was also just one Assistant Editor.
14. Ibid.
18. In an interview with Susie Harries, Richards claimed the introduction of Banham for himself. However, Harries noted that ‘although Richards was perfectly composed in the interview, he was quite anxious to establish his own contribution to the AR’; Susie Harries to Steve Parnell, ‘Banham’, August 19th, 2011.
21. Although he did publish over forty pieces about or by members of the Independent Group, including Lawrence Alloway, Eduardo Paolozzi, John McHale, James
Stirling, John Voelcker et al., during his tenure as AD's Technical Editor.
22. 32, Doughty Street in Bloomsbury.
27. 'NLSC: Architects' Lives. Peter Smithson', interview by Louise Brodie, mp3 from original tape, September 17th, 1997; F5952 Side A, British Library Sound Archive.
32. See Gillian Darley's article in this issue.
33. See Mathew Aitchison's 'Introduction' in this Issue.
34. B. Randall, M. Pidgeon, 'About Ourselves', op. cit., p. 322.
38. Banham at 64, Aberdare Gardens and Cook at 59.
43. Robert Elwall, 'The rise and demise of Manplan in the Architectural Review' (February 26th, 2010); http://www.culture24.org.uk/art/architecture/art76477 [accessed 22/03/12].
45. Peter Davey, comment during Townscape Conference, 23rd July, 2011.