

Fashion and Architecture

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Figure // 01 Mary Quant's Mod girls (1960)

Postmodernism became the buzzword of contemporary society in the 1990s (Wood, 2003). An elusive design style that is notoriously difficult to define, postmodernism now finds itself in a period of reassessment. 2011 saw the opening of a major exhibition at the Victoria and Albert museum questioning "What is Postmodernism?" (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2019). At the same time Charles Jencks published a re-assessment of postmodernism discussing the architecture from its inception during the 1960s to present day analysing how it developed as a style and proclaiming that the postmodern style is still very much alive (Jencks, 2011). This prompted a series of books revisiting postmodernism, therefore igniting a re-evaluation of this movement. Although the re-evaluation of postmodernism has discussed the evolution throughout the 1980s, the notable scholarly literature regarding an expansion on Jencks statement expressing "in the 1960s Post-Modernism started with the counter culture" (Jencks, 2002, p. 51) is non-existent to my knowledge, as to be discussed within the literature review. Sixties Britain showed a driving force of evolution through its culture (Donnelly, 2005), henceforth without reviewing the socio-political changes throughout the 1960s, British postmodernism cannot be credible assessed. Therefore this research will study through reflection how an attitude of informality was adopted within the wider arts – "swinging London" (Donnelly, 2005, p. 91) and pop art, specifically focusing on the work of Mary Quant and how this was translated through subcultures - Mods and Rockers, society - sexual revolution, and politics - Conservative and Labour governments' responses to these evolutions, which formed the growth of a counter culture that informed British postmodernism (Donnelly, 2005). Hence this study will investigate, how has attitude of informality adopted by the fashion during the 1960s has influence the development of British postmodern architecture?

Investigating informality, the research will first discuss its application within 1960s youth culture as a method to distinguish between old and young, furthermore as a method this superseded old social hierarchy. This started in 1955 and 1956 with two crucial components that defined the counter culture of the "swinging sixties". In 1955, Bazaar, Mary Quant's flagship boutique open on Kings Road, London (Quant, 2012). Following on from this in 1956, "This is Tomorrow" and art exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London was the first and arguably most important British pop art exhibitions. This set the tone for what was to come. An attitude of informality towards a revolution was a reintroduced by the creative arts specifically through fashion and pop art as discussed, this was first used however by Coco Chanel to challenge gender roles in 1920 as a method to liberate women. This attitude of informality within the sixties coincided with the baby boom. These changes in demographics lead to an informal revolution rejecting old aristocracy. This attitude of informality started to spread throughout the creative arts, music started as albums begun to include lyrics encouraging rebellion against the establishment, as seen in 'Revolution' (Miles, 2009). The younger generation of the sixties had begun to stand up for their beliefs and their individuality. With the infiltration of music within British culture came the use of recreational drugs which in turn made the people optimistic about life and as a result influenced the formation of the 'hippie' movement (Miles, 2009) (Donnelly, 2005). In turn the effects of seeing vibrant colours and patterns was translated within the art and film scene, reflected perfectly in the music video of Yellow Submarine, 1966 showing a combination of psychedelic art and music, described as "hippie publicity" (Miles, 2009, P.182). The search for an alternative design methodology to liberate people (Jencks, 1991) was found through the "denial of significant structuring of power" (Marchand and Parpart, 2003, P. 5).

The main theme to address regarding informality within postmodernism is subversion, and its commitment to undermine dominance. The subversion theme whether in art, architecture, literature or philosophy seeks to demonstrate the inherent instability of seemingly hegemonic structures. This is with the intention that the power is diffused throughout society and as a result offering more opportunities for the suppressed people (Handler, 1992). Archigram, formed in 1960, were a collection of architects who often used subversion as a tool to propose changes to society within the new age. They achieved this through capturing the essence of the 1960s counter culture through their pop aesthetic, using representation as a tool to superimpose a message. This was achieved by drawing influence from comic books and pop art. This was discussed regarding the development of Peter Cook's proposal of 'the lump'. This would function as an informal revolution, where the lump spreads throughout society conceiving its own metropolis. Cedric Price another architect of the 1960s also adopted an attitude of informality within his theoretical project "The Fun Palace", 1962, to develop an argument that learning should be available to everyone, not just the elite (Price and Littlewood, 1968). This project drew influence from the theatre particularly to develop a user's understanding and awareness of society through the experience of play. Both the projects were translated into the Pompidou Centre, through the combination of Archigram's representation and Prices precedents of program, it is apparent that the adoption of informality in the Pompidou has achieved through the playful notion present in the project translated through the use of images and overlapping sequence which expressed the shift in power (Buchanan, 2010) (Colquhoun, 1969).

Through this historical review we have found that informality has certainly been adopted by architects as an alternative design methodology to liberate people (Jencks, 1991). However, since this was not the first time informality was used as a tool for subversion "perhaps unsurprisingly, this is one aspect of postmodern practice that did not take its lead from architecture" (Adamson, Pavitt and Antonelli, 2011, P. 13) as suggested by Antonelli. As discussed in this research we first see informality used as a tool by Chanel in 1920 before being reintroduced by Quant in 1955, this attitude was reinforced by a "This is Tomorrow" pop art exhibition of 1956, which both went on to define the 1960s. Since "postmodernism also inhabited the peripheries of practice, often finding its most effective projections through the lenses of gender, race or identity politics" (Adamson, Pavitt and Antonelli, 2011, P. 13).

Therefore, this research has proven that it would be safe to assume that the use of informality introduced and used as tool by fashion and adopted by other creative art fields during the 1960s have directly and passively influenced the development of British postmodern architecture. Firstly through theoretical projects by Archigram and the Fun Palace by Cedric Price as well as younger generations of architects who would produce magazines that challenge to assumption, tradition, limits – of the architect – and launch a whole new field of concerns: ecology, the space program cybernetics, politics and protest (Klotz, 1988). Before being used as a tool for subversion within realised projects as such as the Pompidou Centre as discussed.



Figure // 02 Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, The Pompidou Centre (1971)

Figure // 03 Coco Chanel, The Little Black Dress (1926)

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