


The Reconceptualization of the City's Ugliness between the 1950s and 1970s: The Exchanges between the British, Italian, Australian and American Milieus

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The Reconceptualization of the City's Ugliness between the 1950s and 1970s: The Exchanges between the British, Italian, Australian and American Milieus

The paper aims to examine the reorientations of the appreciation of ugliness within different national contexts in a comparative or relational frame, juxtaposing the British, Italian, Australian and American Milieus, and to relate them to the ways in which the transformation of the urban fabric and the effect of suburbanization were perceived in the aforementioned national contexts. The paper's methodology will be based on the principles of transnational historical research, focusing on how connections function as central forces for historical processes. A point of departure will be the idea that the "transnationalization" of a historical discourse is based on the effort to understand the impact of cross-border relations on the transformation of certain concepts and ideas in each of the national contexts under study. The transnational approach in social sciences aims to take into consideration the historical dimension when analysing how international exchanges of ideas and values evolve. Therefore, the exchanges between the four different cultural and socio-economic contexts under study will be examined on the basis of a relational analysis of the production and dissemination of the ways the city's uglification was conceptualized between the 1950s and 1970s.

Pivotal for the issues that this paper will address are Robin Boyd's *Australian Ugliness* (1960) and Donald Gazzard's *Australian Outrage: The Decay of a Visual Environment* (1966), and the way the phenomenon of urban expansion is treated in these books in comparison with other books from the four national contexts under study, such as Peter Blake's *God's own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape* (1964), Ludovico Quaroni's *La torre di Babele* (1967) and Reyner Banham's *The New Brutalism: Ethic Or Aesthetic?* (1966). Special attention will also be paid to Boyd's contributions to *The Architectural Review* from 1951 to 1970 and to the recently published book entitled *After The Australian Ugliness* (2021) and edited by Naomi Stead. The paper places particular emphasis on the analysis of a selection of never-before-published photographs taken by Robin Boyd during the late fifties when he spent some time as visiting professor at MIT and travelled around the US. Apart from the photographs of Boyd, those of Australian photographer Nigel Buesst are also examined. These photographs by Buesst were originally appeared in the 1968 and 1971 editions of *The Australian Ugliness*. The questions addressed in this paper are relevant to the architectural history of Australia or New Zealand, in the sense that one of its main case studies will be the case of Gold Coast Architecture. As Andrew Leach notes, in "The Gold Coast Moment" (2014), Boyd tried to interpret the "Tiki aesthetic" employing the term 'Austerica' in order to describe the neon signs and a "rainbow of plastic paint" mere extensions of a cultural surface that captured, too deep suntans and what one writer called a 'climate dictated exposure'.

Selective References

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