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**'A London Architect Who Has Specialised': Peter Moro and Festivity in Theatre Design, c. 1955–82**

**ALISTAIR FAIR**

When in 1956 the Directors of the Nottingham Theatre Trust were considering alterations to the city's Playhouse, they sought advice from Peter Moro (1911–98), describing him as 'a London architect who has specialised in matters of this sort'.<sup>1</sup> Moro's reputation stemmed principally from his role as co-designer – with Robert Matthew, Leslie Martin and members of the London County Council Architect's Department – of the Royal Festival Hall on London's South Bank (1951), but he had also recently converted Adastral House, London, into studios for Associated Rediffusion, part of the Independent Television (ITV) network. The new Nottingham Playhouse was completed to Moro's designs in 1963. Thereafter theatres remained a mainstay of his work until his retirement in the mid 1980s. Moro's status as an expert was furthered by his authorship of articles on theatre design for the architectural periodicals as well as his membership of such professional groups as the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT). Accordingly *Architectural Design* referred in 1973 to a 'varied practice. Has specialised in theatre design'.<sup>2</sup>

Peter Moro's specialism meant that he was well placed to contribute to a remarkable period in the history of British theatre architecture. The opening in March 1958 of Coventry's Belgrade Theatre, the first all-new professional theatre to be built in Britain since 1939,<sup>3</sup> was followed by what turned out to be a 25-year boom in theatre-building across the country.<sup>4</sup> Between the early 1960s and 1980, the ABTT's Theatre Planning Committee commented on some 232 schemes.<sup>5</sup> Construction then slowed as government funding for the arts was cut, but virtually all the country's major theatre organisations had already benefitted.<sup>6</sup> Two of the last large projects of this period were Plymouth Theatre Royal, designed by Moro and completed in 1982, and the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the subject of an architectural competition in 1984–85 for which Moro acted as lead assessor. Yet despite Moro's prominence in post-war theatre architecture, historians to date have focussed on his pre-war career, i.e., his arrival in England and membership of the avant-garde Modern Architecture Research (MARS) Group,<sup>7</sup> and his employment by Berthold Lubetkin's famous practice, Tecton, from which he later stated that he had learnt more than in all his formal architectural education.<sup>8</sup> As far as his subsequent work is concerned, Moro's involvement in the design of the Festival Hall has been noted,<sup>9</sup> while the political context in which the Nottingham Playhouse was conceived has been set out.<sup>10</sup> The text of an autobiography survives, but publishers did not consider it a commercial proposition.<sup>11</sup> Moro's ambivalent relationship with academic art history is summed up by his recollection of one interview that his questioners 'wanted me to theorise, but I just can't because [design] came naturally'.<sup>12</sup>

This essay seeks to refocus our understanding of Moro's career by starting the process of examining in detail his work after 1945. It examines two theatres, the Nottingham Playhouse and Plymouth Theatre Royal. Given that a bid to

design the National Theatre was unsuccessful,<sup>13</sup> these examples are the largest theatres completed by Moro's office, and they essentially bookend his career (**table 6.1**). The detail of both will be discussed in due course, but it is worth setting down some key points at the outset. The Nottingham Playhouse, seating 756, was intended for a resident repertory company of actors (**fig. 6.1**). It has a two-tier auditorium that could either be used in conventional proscenium-arch mode (in which the stage and auditorium are separate spaces) or with a projecting forestage (the stage being essentially within the auditorium volume). Like the Festival Hall, the auditorium is articulated as a solid object at the core of the building,<sup>14</sup> which reads as an assemblage of simple volumes – a drum housing the auditorium, and a number of overlapping cuboids accommodating the rest of the foyer and backstage areas. However, the elevations avoid what might be considered the whimsical mannerism of the Festival Hall (in its original state):<sup>15</sup> the auditorium drum is board-marked concrete, the main front is steel and glass, while the side and rear of the theatre are brick with concrete detailing. There is an implicit hierarchy of decorum in the distinction made between the public 'front' and working 'rear', with the one bleeding into the other along the side elevation.

Plymouth Theatre Royal, meanwhile, was to stage visiting shows as well as in-house productions (**fig. 6.2**). It has a three-tier auditorium with a proscenium-arch stage and a small forestage; its capacity can be reduced from c. 1200 to 700 by dropping the auditorium ceiling to hide the upper gallery. There is also a small studio theatre. The volumetric massing of the building recalls the Nottingham Playhouse but contrasts with Nottingham in its more complex 45-degree geometry. The auditorium, essentially octagonal in plan, is faced in aggregate blocks and once again is expressed as the central element of the building. Around it are wrapped lower volumes containing the foyers and backstage areas, their elevations coupling bronze cladding (since

replaced) with slot-like windows and, at the lowest foyer level, expansive areas of glazing.

In discussing these two buildings as the products of Moro's office, it is worth noting the contributions of specialist external consultants as well as Moro's partners and assistants. Michael Mellish started working with Moro in the late 1950s and remained until its closure. Michael Heard, who arrived in the mid-1960s, played an important role along with Andrzej Blonski, who joined a little later. Moro, like Lubetkin before him, apparently drew relatively little but was a constant presence, interrogating and refining his colleagues' ideas. Just as the Festival Hall emerged from a collaborative process in which the various contributions of Matthew, Martin and Moro are not always clear (and may ultimately be irrelevant if the Modernist ideal of teamwork is followed through),<sup>16</sup> so too was Moro's a collaborative practice, though one guided by its rather charismatic leader.

The essay begins with a little context before continuing with a close examination of the Playhouse and Theatre Royal. In its focus on two examples and in making a particular argument it is inevitably selective. In this respect, it is intended as a preliminary mapping of territory, or perhaps a dress rehearsal. Nonetheless, whilst contributing to the emerging architectural history of post-war British theatre,<sup>17</sup> the essay is also intended to amplify our understanding of Modern architecture. Moro's office designed other buildings – notably housing and schools – because, even at the height of the boom, theatres alone could rarely sustain an architectural practice. Yet Moro considered theatres 'the ultimate in architectural design',<sup>18</sup> with 'everything that real architecture is made of.'<sup>19</sup> His vision of an enriched Modernism, which this essay suggests was not only the product of his time with Lubetkin in the late 1930s but also his earlier training at ETH Zürich, might thus be

conceived as potential critique of Modern architecture more generally as well as a vision for its future development.

### **'TO BE USED AND ENJOYED'**

In 1963, Nottingham's residents were not universally convinced by their new Playhouse, Some, presumably inspired by its concrete surfaces, dubbed it 'the bunker'.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile the theatre's management irritated Moro by insisting that he indicate more clearly its theatrical function.<sup>21</sup> He thought such signage unnecessary, arguing that the visible combination of an auditorium volume and an adjacent stage tower was sufficient to suggest the purpose of the building.<sup>22</sup> This exchange of views reveals the extent to which the Playhouse challenged established ideas of what a theatre ought to look like. Not only that, but by virtue of being supported by the civic authorities, the Playhouse also posed the question of what a modern public building might be. Moro wrote:

To those who find it difficult to get away from preconceived ideas of what a civic building should look like, this building may come as a shock at first. But when one realises that such ideas are based on associations with a period entirely different from our own it will not be surprising that this difference will express itself architecturally. Whereas civic buildings tended to be heavy and pompous, modern methods of construction and a change of spirit produce exciting solutions, elegant and adventurous; a building to be used and enjoyed, not a building to subdue and impress.<sup>23</sup>

What was this 'change of spirit'? One might point to a certain optimism in post-war Britain, with the arts seen as the essential counterpart to technological progress.<sup>24</sup> Also important was an egalitarianism that promoted

access to culture.<sup>25</sup> The context in which the arts were funded and practised had changed, too. The Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) was founded in 1946, informed by the successful experience of the wartime Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA).<sup>26</sup> Theatre, previously essentially a commercial enterprise, became eligible for a degree of state support. The Arts Council favoured repertory companies; the number outwith London enjoying subsidy almost doubled between the 1950s and 1970, from 28 to 52.<sup>27</sup> The non-metropolitan focus of this support was initially the legacy of CEMA's policy of promoting regional work; later the Arts Council encouraged a network of provision.<sup>28</sup> The Arts Council also began during the 1960s to offer grants towards construction through its 'Housing the Arts' fund. Meanwhile the Local Government Act of 1948 allowed local authorities to levy a rate (a local tax) of up to sixpence in the pound for the support of the Arts. Although the sums involved in both of these initiatives were initially limited, they offered not only the chance to improve the accommodation of the Performing Arts but also allowed practitioners and the authorities to formulate and connote a potential social role for theatre, and to use it as a vehicle for community formation and enlightenment. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the 'arms' length' nature of arts funding in Britain meant that theatres remained largely independent in their activities. They were usually managed by trusts and boards, and while funders might be represented on these bodies, programming – essentially the responsibility of the artistic director – was rarely the direct consequence of political agendas.

In Coventry, the contrast between the contemporary (i.e. apparently Festival Hall-like) appearance of the Belgrade Theatre and the architecture of older theatres was seen by some not simply as the inevitable product of the Belgrade being the first completed professional theatre in Britain for twenty years, but also symbolically, as evidence of the changed context. The

difference between old and new connoted the novel idea of theatre as a civic operation.<sup>29</sup> In this way, the alien quality that might be inferred from Modern architecture – specifically from its reluctance to reproduce historic precedents directly – could be embraced to positive effect as the signifier of a new age and purpose.<sup>30</sup> Such difference was certainly intended in Nottingham. From the outset, the intention was to create something that would connote the changed context in which theatres were being constructed and operated: the brief stated that ‘a theatre provided by the civic authority should look different from a theatre provided by one of the big Syndicates [...] the building should, in its position and style, say quite clearly that there is new attitude to theatre in this country and that Nottingham is taking the lead.’<sup>31</sup>

The city’s Repertory Company, based at the old Playhouse, had been founded in 1948 and received Arts Council subsidy from 1950.<sup>32</sup> By 1955, the Trust sought a new building for several reasons: to further its artistic record; to create financial stability (because ‘a modern, more comfortable auditorium’ might attract a larger audience); and to compete more effectively with cinema by offering a similar quality of experience.<sup>33</sup> These ideas found a ready audience in Nottingham City Council, which, like nearby Coventry, believed that ‘providing for people’s leisure is almost as important as jobs, housing and education’.<sup>34</sup> The council offered the money raised when the municipal gasworks had been nationalised; the proceeds of the sale had been earmarked for a scheme that would benefit the people of Nottingham. This aspirational, even paternalistic agenda was echoed if only for pragmatic reasons by the theatre company, which suggested that a new building would be ‘to the benefit of our citizens and the greater reputation of Nottingham’ and that it would ‘add to the quality of life here and [...] fame for our city’.<sup>35</sup>



The project was not universally welcomed. Sustained debates between antipathetic Conservative and supportive Labour councillors and the shifting balance of political power in the city meant that the half-built theatre was at one stage offered to Moss Empires as a commercial touring venue.<sup>36</sup> The deal faltered when Moss decided that the building was unsuitable for such use. In this respect, the 'civic' aspect of civic theatre referred not only to the architectural vocabulary that might be appropriate to such a building but also to more pragmatic features. Subsidised venues could have smaller auditoria than their commercial counterparts and would often have extensive public and backstage facilities.

Moro initially was asked to advise on the reconstruction of the existing Playhouse.<sup>37</sup> Although a workable scheme was devised, by June 1957 an alternative location in Wellington Circus had been selected.<sup>38</sup> The City decided to proceed in January 1958 though the brief remained fluid, with such matters as seating capacity not yet decided.<sup>39</sup> Moro's formal appointment at this stage was logical given his work with the theatre since 1956. Nonetheless others were considered, including William Holford, Leslie Martin, and Donald Gibson (the Nottinghamshire County Architect who had while City Architect in Coventry been responsible for the early Belgrade Theatre designs).<sup>40</sup> The Festival Hall was closely examined to ascertain Moro's contribution, and a weekend was spent with him. Although some councillors favoured the appointment of a local architect, Moro was selected. Leaving aside his specialist experience, someone of his stature would allow the Playhouse to 'make some contribution to theatre architecture nationally and internationally', as one letter put it.<sup>41</sup> This choice of words was in part a critique of the nearby Belgrade Theatre. It was reported in 1959 that Nottingham's design brief had been prepared 'in consultation with many theatre people' to avoid 'the defects in such buildings as the Stratford-upon-

Avon theatre and the Belgrade'. For example, Richard Southern, a historian of theatre, was appointed as an adviser.<sup>42</sup> He had known Moro since at least 1952;<sup>43</sup> his role – described as 'stage consultant' in the project correspondence – was largely concerned with the planning and equipment of the acting area.<sup>44</sup> By contrast, the Belgrade had lacked a theatre consultant, and the design had also been developed without the committed involvement of its eventual users.<sup>45</sup> Another key figure in developing the stage design was Val May, who became the Playhouse's artistic director in 1957, although in reality he left before the theatre was completed; his successors had different requirements and various late changes were made.

Like the Nottingham Playhouse, Plymouth Theatre Royal was politically contentious. Its opening in 1982 followed nearly twenty years' manoeuvring. The news in 1965 of the creation of the 'Housing the Arts' fund was greeted with interest in the city, which was poorly served by theatre, though the chairman of the City Council's Finance Committee suggested it would be ten years before a new venue might be realised.<sup>46</sup> A theatre was deemed critical if Plymouth was 'to progress and become a city worthy of the name'; similarly one correspondent to the local press suggested that 'the essential work of rebuilding the City Centre and providing administrative and shopping facilities having been completed, now is the time for the council to get down to the job of putting a real heart into the city' – terms which echoed the 1950s Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM).<sup>47</sup> Others argued that a theatre would bring economic benefits by attracting visitors.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile a 1967 newspaper image of the projected theatre's site dubbed it an 'ugly survival from the pre-war scene [which] mars the sleek, modern appearance of the city centre'.<sup>49</sup> Thus the new building itself might contribute positively to the image of a modern city, just as the activities within might also make their contribution to perceptions of Plymouth.

Planning stepped up a gear in 1970, with funding being allocated for 1974–75.<sup>50</sup> However, financial pressures were reported in early 1971,<sup>51</sup> and an alternative was suggested, namely the creation of a small performance space within the soon-to-be-subdivided ABC Cinema.<sup>52</sup> Bernard Delfont and the EMI corporation then proposed the construction of a new entertainment complex including theatres, a disco, a restaurant, shops and offices.<sup>53</sup> Tenders were invited during 1973; that of Ernest Ireland, with architects Whicheloe Macfarlane Partnership and Peter Moro, was selected.<sup>54</sup> The financial crisis of the mid-1970s forced the abandonment of this scheme,<sup>55</sup> but the City Council nonetheless decided to construct the theatre element, retaining Moro as architect.<sup>56</sup>

In contrast to Nottingham, where the for/against split had roughly corresponded to Labour/Conservative party lines, it was Labour members in Plymouth who attempted to have the scheme scrapped in 1970. They suggested that a larger ‘multi-purpose’ venue would be more appropriate than the 700-seat theatre then favoured.<sup>57</sup> A small theatre, it was feared, would be a minority interest: ‘we must build to cater for the needs of the majority of the citizens, so that it would be economic to bring artists of national reputation, including “pop” stars, to the city.’<sup>58</sup> In response, Moro devised the variable capacity auditorium, and political lines were redrawn. Many Conservative members now opposed the theatre, fearing that it might not pay its way and that ever-greater local subsidies would be needed. An alternative proposal to adapt the city’s Palace Theatre came and went; the Arts Council weighed into the debate about auditorium capacity and at one stage suggested that separate repertory and touring (commercial) theatres should be built, although this advice was later retracted.<sup>59</sup> However, following a slight reduction in the area of the building to save money amidst

the difficult economic circumstances of the late 1970s,<sup>60</sup> the tender was approved at the end of 1978 and the theatre opened in 1982.<sup>61</sup>

## PRAGMATISM AND FESTIVITY

Reflecting on his career in 1986, Peter Moro told John R. Gold that 'It is quite difficult enough to do a decent building within a small context – I am a man who is interested in detailed planning and not grandiose schemes [...]'<sup>62</sup>

Moro's essentially pragmatic view of architecture was surely the product of his architectural education. He initially studied at Stuttgart and then Berlin-Charlottenberg (under Heinrich Tessenow) until the discovery that his maternal grandmother had converted to Catholicism from Judaism caused Moro to be expelled from his course by Nazi officials.<sup>63</sup> He then continued his studies at ETH Zürich with Otto Salvisberg. Swiss architectural education is often considered in terms of its focus on detailed design, and other graduates of ETH in this period, such as Christof Bon, made a speciality of this area of architecture when later practising in Britain.<sup>64</sup> Certainly Moro's appointment by Leslie Martin suggests that he was seen as someone who could carry out the detailed execution of a complex building.

The design for the Nottingham Playhouse was developed during 1958–59.<sup>65</sup> Adjoining a quarter of Wellington Circus, the theatre is planned such that the restaurant and café are located in a block that projects forward from the main front (**fig. 6.3**) in a manner akin to the Malmö Stadsteater (Sigurd Lewerentz, Erik Lallerstedt and David Helldén, 1944), where a projecting finger of building accommodates similar functions. This theatre had been published in the British architectural press in 1945–46,<sup>66</sup> reflecting a wider interest in Scandinavian Modern architecture at this time that could be related to its

regional and social-democratic overtones.<sup>67</sup> Malmö was certainly known to Robert Matthew,<sup>68</sup> and it is highly likely that Moro was also aware of it. As far as the main part of the Playhouse is concerned, the combination of a drum rising above a cuboid recalls precedents including Erik Gunnar Asplund's Stockholm City Library (1930) and the Münster Stadttheater (Werner Ruhnu et al., 1956). (As originally proposed, the projecting finger at Nottingham was to have a upper part containing actors' flats, like the Belgrade Theatre at Coventry.)

Plymouth Theatre Royal occupies a site first identified in Patrick Abercrombie's 1943 plans for the city, which proposed a theatre and concert hall south of the commercial area, grouped with the existing Royal Cinema and adjacent to new municipal offices.<sup>69</sup> By the time the Whicheloe Macfarlane/Moro design was prepared in late 1974, this location was bounded to the east by the civic office tower of 1962, to the west by Derry's Cross (a large traffic roundabout created during the city's post-war reconstruction), and to the north by Royal Parade. The 1974 scheme proposed a continuous building bent at 45-degree and 60-degree angles.<sup>70</sup> The theatre at this stage had a stretched octagonal plan and a nine-sided stage tower (**fig. 6.4**), and these geometries were carried through into the executed scheme. They were typical of Moro's later output. Birstall School, Leicester (1963), for example, features octagonal classrooms arranged in groups around an octagonal hall, while the Gulbenkian Centre at Hull, the Riverside Theatre, Bristol Theatre Royal's studio, and the Hounslow schemes all deploy eight-sided plans. Polygonal plans were fashionable throughout this period;<sup>71</sup> theatre examples include the Chichester Festival Theatre (Powell and Moya, 1962), the Crucible Theatre at Sheffield (Renton Howard Wood, 1971) and the foyers at Eden Court, Inverness (Law and Dunbar-Nasmith, 1976).

In general terms, the composition of both theatres as a series of discrete volumes suggests the *architecture parlante* of Enlightenment France, but it may well also represent Lubetkin's influence. Geometry, Lubetkin argued, imposed unity upon complexity,<sup>72</sup> a particularly valid issue for major public buildings accommodating a variety of functions. Furthermore, an interest in clear planning and its expression had long been evident in Moro's own work. When in 1941 he began teaching at Regent Street Polytechnic, his reputation in the eyes of his students was cemented by the house that he had designed with Richard Llewelyn-Davies in 1939 at Birdham, Sussex. Trevor Dannatt, one of Moro's first pupils, suggested that Birdham offered in its clarity a corrective to the students' 'rather wimpish' approach.<sup>73</sup>

As we have noted, the Nottingham Playhouse presents elevations of concrete, brick and glass. The first designs reportedly made greater use of glass than the executed building, with large windows originally being intended at both levels facing Wellington Circus. Although such usage clearly follows the Festival Hall, there is a particular precedent in the Gelsenkirchen Nationaltheater (Werner Ruhnau, 1958), the front of which comprises several storeys of glazing.<sup>74</sup> It is true that Moro recorded that West German theatres offered little of real value to British practice because of the greater budgets available there,<sup>75</sup> but even after forming this view he returned to West Germany to see Gelsenkirchen: indeed, such was his haste that he arrived before the theatre was completed, having apparently mistaken a photograph of the theatre model for the completed building.<sup>76</sup>

A model of the Nottingham Playhouse, photographed in 1959, reveals the evolution of the design.<sup>77</sup> The recessed ground floor retained its glazing but the projecting upper elevation was now solid with a horizontal ribbon of glazing. In essence, this level reads as a kind of *piano nobile*, though the overall

effect – with a glazed slot in a solid white elevation that seemingly floats over the lower part of the building – is also reminiscent of Le Corbusier’s 1920s villas. In the executed design, the horizontal Corbusian ribbon window gave way to a more complex arrangement of openings. Vertical ‘slits’ of glass are connected by smaller square windows, above and below which are white panels. The resulting pattern, which resembles the Festival Hall auditorium panelling, reads in an ambiguous way. Are we to see it as a residual ribbon that has been interrupted by vertical openings? Or, is the elevation made of a regular pattern of alternating slits and smaller square openings? Or, do the white rectangles with their black frames in fact suggest a perforated screen set in front of a glazed elevation? Or, in view of the classical overtones of the *piano nobile* and the projecting vertical fins of the slot windows, might we even imagine dematerialised columns?

The elevations at Plymouth reprise the *piano nobile* and horizontal slot window of Nottingham, but the use of bronze cladding and aggregate blocks is different. Reviewing the theatre, Dan Cruickshank thought the exterior turned a ‘chilling concrete shoulder’ to its surroundings.<sup>78</sup> Just as Nottingham moved away from the lightness of the Festival Hall, so might we see Plymouth as evidence as evidence of a continued shift to an architecture based on mass.<sup>79</sup> Certainly, the intervening theatres by Moro’s practice had deployed an increasingly tough, even uncompromising architectural vocabulary, often with weighty materials placed above lighter finishes. For example, the lower two levels of the Gulbenkian Centre at Hull are faced in brick with a variety of window sizes while the second floor is finished in concrete, the apparent solidity of which is reinforced by the limited number of openings in this upper part of the building.<sup>80</sup> Nonetheless, Plymouth, like Nottingham, had full-height glazing to the lower part of the foyer, offering views into and from this part of the building from Royal Parade and a small

new public open space to the east. The 'chilling concrete shoulder' was thus not fully turned.

In an analysis of the contemporaneous Barbican Theatre, London (Chamberlin Powell and Bon, 1969–82), the historian David Heathcote suggested that the language of Brutalism supplied a suitably weighty expression for major public buildings.<sup>81</sup> This analogy relies partly on a hard-to-define label, 'Brutalism', as well as an acceptance that solidity and public architecture go hand in hand, but it is not unhelpful. Miles Glendinning has noted of the Festival Hall that 'in its near symmetrical massiveness and stand-alone situation, and in its very building type, it formed part of an essentially nineteenth-century tradition of the grand public building'.<sup>82</sup> Something similar might be said of the Nottingham Playhouse, especially if we consider it in terms of Classicism restated. Plymouth Theatre Royal is even more a 'stand-alone' building, having roads to three sides and pedestrian access along the fourth. In its scale and materials (not least 'luxurious' bronze), it too makes a prominent statement of civic and national patronage of the arts, all the more so if one considers that by the time of its completion in 1982 ideas of impermanency had gained traction in theatre architecture (in such examples as the Royal Exchange, Manchester (1976), in part a conscious reaction against Denys Lasdun's National Theatre) while an increasingly diverse theatre landscape included vibrant, experimental and often small 'found spaces'.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, though it was perhaps less introverted than Cruickshank suggested, the theatre's island site certainly placed on prominent view the 'working' parts of the theatre, with necessarily fewer windows. The studio theatre, for example, is located in a windowless octagonal blockwork volume at the corner of Royal Parade and Derry's Cross; arriving in the city centre from the north or west, it is the first part of the building that is seen. The western elevation to Derry's Cross also largely comprises windowless



blockwork with only slight relief provided by narrow bands, while the flytower, again in block, rises above.

Yet while one might suggest that these theatres do not represent a radical reconceptualisation of public or theatre architecture, in other respects they nonetheless took a critical view of precedent that went beyond a simple contrast between the appearance of these buildings and their predecessors. A widely publicised debate in post-war public architecture concerned the extent to which a form of monumentality appropriate to Modern civic and public buildings might be devised.<sup>84</sup> Traditional approaches to the monument were not only problematic in their historicism but could also have undesirable echoes of totalitarian regimes. One way to create a so-called 'modern monumentality' was by means of geometric clarity. Historian Philip Goad, paraphrasing the architect Robin Boyd, has written that 'in the absence of a sanctioned ornamental language, and where structural license [sic] was not always an appropriate solution, the reversion to significant form via geometry was understandable if not inevitable.'<sup>85</sup> Lubetkin's way of thinking certainly suggests something along these lines; for him, such forms transcended their own time. Drawing on Constructivist ideas, he suggested that 'the sharp-edged regularities of crisp geometric formulations have universal meaning independent of whims or moods'.<sup>86</sup> In essence, these so-called 'formulations' allowed buildings to be located within a historical continuum. Thus simply articulated, strong volumes such as Moro provided at Nottingham and Plymouth might, if we accept that Moro was thinking along the same lines as Lubetkin, engender the dignity appropriate to civic architecture without necessitating ornament.

This line of argument can be extended. A key figure in the 'modern monumentality' debate was Sigfried Giedion, for whom monumentality

would be achieved not by pure forms but rather by means of 'a unity of the architectural background, the people, and the symbols conveyed by the spectacle'.<sup>87</sup> In this context, it is significant that Moro stated that the novel feature of the Nottingham Playhouse was that it would welcome its users.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, the design brief for the Playhouse stressed the architectural potential of 'progress from the vestibule, through foyers and bars, by way of staircases and places designed for the mingling and circulation of the audience [...]'.<sup>89</sup> It was to be the spatial experience and inhabitation of the building that would generate excitement, rather than ornament. In this respect, *Architectural Design* dubbed the main stair at Nottingham a 'display shelf' for people that served to show off the gathering audience in their 'sub-formal' clothing (**fig. 6.5**).<sup>90</sup> While such an interpretation recalls the traditional theatrical idea of seeing and being seen (particularly at Nottingham, where the various foyer levels are organised as galleries pulled away from the auditorium drum), *Architectural Design* went on to highlight the way in which the muted tones of the board-marked concrete of the foyer walls and the extensive use of black-painted steel acted as a backdrop for the colour and movement of theatre patrons. (Indeed, the only form of 'decoration', conventionally understood, within these spaces was an abstract metal sculpture by Geoffrey Clarke applied to the drum.)

The 'fronts' of the theatres suggest a similar unity of architecture and users. An early artist's impression of the Playhouse's Wellington Circus elevation, published in the *Builder*,<sup>91</sup> renders the glass almost imperceptible. Not only do the foyers thus read as an extension of their urban surroundings, but the people using these spaces – and particularly those on the main stair – are presented on view to the world outside. They serve, in effect, to animate the elevation as they move about the building, not least after dark. Much the same can be said of Plymouth, where the main stair is adjacent to and follows

the cranked, fully glazed lower elevation to Royal Parade. Although Moro did not invoke Giedion, he was certainly interested in the way that the elevation at Nottingham might set up views of the foyers from the street.<sup>92</sup> In this respect, the replacement of the original all-glass elevation with the upper ribbon window (discussed above) was intended to create and frame glimpses of activity that might intrigue and tempt, rather than simply revealing everything in one fell swoop, and the executed pattern of glass did the same: in essence, it connoted the very idea of theatricality. Old and new therefore collided: established notions of theatricality played a part in expressing the 'modern monument'.

#### **'THE RIGHT ATMOSPHERE'**

In 1982, Moro suggested that 'theatre design is based on hard facts and is rarely a matter of inventing new forms'.<sup>93</sup> Yet this almost mechanistic statement conceals the complexity of Moro's approach. Certainly, successful plans were repeated and reinterpreted: for example, Plymouth Theatre Royal and the contemporaneous first design for the Hounslow Arts Centre (1974–75) both feature an auditorium with an asymmetric gallery that steps down to the stalls level on one side (**fig. 6.6**).<sup>94</sup> However, there is less sense of an archetypal arrangement being repeated than is evident in designs by Leslie Martin or, later, Theatre Projects Consultants.<sup>95</sup> More important as a common factor in Moro's auditoria was the way that they represented 'an attempt to create the right atmosphere for this unique ritual'.<sup>96</sup>

Moro's auditoria provide a strongly defined architectural envelope within which a degree of flexibility is possible. The relationship between permanence and adaptability was first explored at Nottingham, where the design brief had

suggested that the stage should permit not only the traditional proscenium-arch arrangement but also open-stage forms.<sup>97</sup> There was much discussion of the possibilities of non-proscenium layouts during the 1950s and early 1960s by authors including Stephen Joseph and, perhaps significantly, Richard Southern.<sup>98</sup> The debate essentially concerned the extent to which, in the face of competition from cinema and television, theatre ought to emphasise its three-dimensional, live nature, rather than retreating within a frame. A related issue was the scale of many older theatre auditoria (which meant that the rear rows of seats could be a long way from the stage) and their segregated arrangements, in which patrons occupying the cheapest seats suffered poor sightlines and acoustics. Alternatives included the Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh, which was equipped with a thrust stage in 1948, and the reconstruction of the Old Vic in 1949, while a number of purpose-built open-stage theatres were constructed, including the Chichester Festival Theatre. Yet the proscenium arch never disappeared. London's National Theatre offered not only the open-stage Olivier Theatre but also a more conventional confrontational arrangement in the Lyttelton auditorium. The survival of this stage type was not simply a matter of unimaginative conservatism.<sup>99</sup> The proscenium-arch stage was seen as being particularly suited to certain types of play but was also thought to be flexible, allowing a range of scenic possibilities. At Nottingham, enthusiasm for adaptability was tempered by a sense that a definite statement of what mid twentieth-century theatre might be was preferable to a compromise solution.<sup>100</sup> It was further stated that 'the majority of plays to be performed at this theatre during the next ten or twenty years will be ones written for performance within the proscenium arch' and so the stage and auditorium should be 'suitable (or flexible) enough for the performance of plays of many periods and countries'.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, early shows ranged from *Coriolanus* (playing to an average capacity of 78 per cent) to *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (97.1 per cent).<sup>102</sup> In the case of the

Plymouth Theatre Royal, it was stated that 'a proscenium stage arrangement is essential to the principal requirements of the management policy', which included the need to accommodate touring plays; the majority of venues visited by such productions were proscenium-arch theatres,<sup>103</sup> often dating from before 1914.

The task, therefore, was to provide a type of proscenium-arch auditorium without the features thought to be problematic.<sup>104</sup> Moro suggested that 'the problem facing the architect [...] is [...] to eliminate the division between auditorium and stage [...] and to shape the stage so that it interlocks with the geometry of the auditorium.'<sup>105</sup> The Nottingham Playhouse auditorium drum was intended as a strong architectural form which could accommodate the two stage layouts without privileging one over the other (**fig. 6.7**). The transformation from proscenium-arch to open stage was effected by removing the front rows of stalls seating to create a forestage projecting into the auditorium. It was suggested that the circular auditorium would offer the desired sense of containment in both arrangements whilst also housing actor and audience in a single space when the forestage was used, although in reality the open-stage arrangement was never wholly successful because sightlines from the gallery were compromised in this layout.<sup>106</sup> At Plymouth Theatre Royal, a small forestage was a permanent feature. A distinctive cranked stage curtain was provided to allow the use of scenery and props on the forestage. However, the flexibility of this auditorium lay in the opportunity to change its capacity to suit different types of production. As has been discussed, the size of the theatre was contentious, with councillors split between those favouring a capacity of c. 700 and those who preferred c.1200. Moro's solution was devised with the technical theatre consultant, Martin Carr, during 1974.<sup>107</sup> The uppermost of the theatre's two galleries could be shut off, leaving c. 700 seated in the lower gallery and stalls only.

The change was achieved by a movable ceiling which dropped on inverted screw jacks to hide the upper balcony. In this way, the theatre could present lyric plays whilst also accommodating larger, commercial touring shows. The idea was tested on a smaller scale by Moro in London's Piccadilly Theatre. Not all were convinced in Plymouth, with one councillor dubbing it 'a Heath Robinson contraption',<sup>108</sup> but it was sufficiently successfully that it was reprised by Blonski and Heard in their theatre at Milton Keynes in 1999.

A further common theme is a concern with architectural character. Moro noted that 'in the less utilitarian buildings it is essential to evoke deliberately an emotional response from those who use them and see them. [...] theatres [...] are failures when they have no magic.'<sup>109</sup> In 1963, he called for 'a festive atmosphere',<sup>110</sup> while later he suggested that 'theatricality should not be sacrificed to technological euphoria'.<sup>111</sup> We have already seen how this idea played out in the spatial arrangement of the theatre foyers and the contribution made to these spaces by the gathering audience, and we can now extend this idea by examining how auditoria could be affected by the same concern. In this respect, Moro suggested that 'far from form following function, theatre technology and other purely rational considerations are often in direct conflict with irrational but very important aspects such as theatrical atmosphere, on which the success of the building equally, or perhaps even more, depends.'<sup>112</sup> A rational auditorium, offering good sightlines for all would, he suggested, comprise rectangular seating the width of the stage opening, but this layout would hinder contact between actor and audience. Similarly, the Plymouth Theatre Royal design brief, formalised by Martin Carr, stated that 'practical experience in several recently completed auditoria has revealed all too clearly the barren character and lack of theatrical atmosphere that result from too strict an adherence to theoretical sightline criteria.'<sup>113</sup> Here, then, is 'a conflict between mechanical perfection

and theatrical atmosphere' that theatre architects have to resolve.<sup>114</sup> The results would be 'part and parcel of the theatrical experience'.

At Nottingham, neutral as the drum-like plan may have been, Moro wanted to avoid any sense of 'negative' or 'black box' space. Thus the inner auditorium walls were lined with three-inch wide slats spaced at one-inch intervals and located in front of an illuminated cavity. This idea echoes the 'layered' surfaces of Tessenow's theatre at Hellerau. As executed at Nottingham the resulting pattern is very similar to that created by the windows and the opaque panels on the main elevation. Seats (by Robin Day) were peacock blue, while the stage curtain was yellow. The *Sunday Times'* drama critic described the result as 'the only modern theatre that I have seen which, spurning chandeliers and cherubs, gilt and plush, manages to be warm and glamorous and glowing'.<sup>115</sup> The *Architectural Review* commented, meanwhile, that the textures and materials of Modern architecture (including board-marked concrete and timber panelling) had been used to create a 'suitably festive and ceremonial environment'.<sup>116</sup> In the case of Plymouth Theatre Royal, Moro couched the idea of festivity in historically inflected terms: 'one registers how the old Victorian theatres sparkled and you try to translate it into modern equivalents.'<sup>117</sup> The yellow of the Nottingham curtain became at Plymouth the colour of the seats, which were coupled with moss green walls, grey carpet, and English chestnut detailing to the proscenium arch. The fire curtain was realised in mirrored metal, the audience in effect casting themselves as actors as they gathered – another 'unity' of user and architecture.

Moro was not alone in favouring character. Roderick Ham stated in his influential *Theatre Planning* of 1972 that auditoria should not 'obtrude' during performance but should nonetheless engender 'a receptive frame of mind'

through their materials, textures and lighting.<sup>118</sup> In this respect, the examples of Nottingham and Plymouth certainly counter to some degree the accusation that was levelled in the late 1980s at theatres of the 1960s and 1970s, i.e., that they lacked (as Michael Forsyth put it) ‘mood, intimacy, magic and memory’.<sup>119</sup> Where these theatres became problematic for later critics was in seeking such qualities through the intrinsic properties of materials and lighting rather than the application of ‘decoration’. ‘We have eliminated the usual clutter’, Moro said of Nottingham, ‘which so often tends to separate the actor from the audience.’<sup>120</sup> In other words, it was not necessary to abandon all sense of architectural presence to achieve a direct connection between player and spectator, but rather only the extraneous decoration.

Given Moro’s view of theatres as the ultimate architectural type, his views arguably had wider resonances. While he eschewed abstract theory, a degree of consistency can be discerned in his thinking. In the early 1980s, he suggested that:

The simplistic notion that form follows function has, in the case of architecture, been exploded long ago. Narrow functionalism, with its almost exclusive emphasis on the physical function of buildings, has been found sadly wanting and is partly to blame for the public rejection of the so-called “Modern Movement”.<sup>121</sup>

Not that Moro was a fan of the ‘bizarre excesses’ of Postmodernism.<sup>122</sup> When judging the West Yorkshire Playhouse competition in 1984, he questioned why one scheme adopted the style of an older building.<sup>123</sup> What was required was a dash of character: ‘most buildings affect the spirit of those who use them’<sup>124</sup>; ‘faceless buildings cannot win hearts’.<sup>125</sup> An ‘emotional response’ would distinguish ‘architecture from building’.<sup>126</sup> This distinction recalls Leslie Martin’s view that a common language of architecture should be used for works of prose (the majority of buildings) or poetry (buildings for special



purposes).<sup>127</sup> Certain types offered opportunities for artistic exploration lacking in more mundane commissions; in this respect it is significant that Moro spoke of the potential for 'non-utilitarian' buildings to embody qualities of magic and mystery. The way that the idea played out in practice is illuminated by a discussion about symmetry with Lubetkin. Responding to the latter's suggestion that 'a programme that invites a visitor with open arms demands a centralised entrance with the equivalent of directions once you are in',<sup>128</sup> Moro argued that:

one of the many things I learned from you was to appreciate [sic] the deliberate as against the accidental in matters of art and architecture. This, to my view, not only concerns pipes & unwanted beams but also fortuitous effects which have little to do with deliberate aesthetic decisions. [...] Of course symmetry is the logical solution to a symmetrical brief but to use symmetry in order to create order is a kind of trick done with mirrors & a rather hackneyed device. To achieve clarity & balance with asymmetry makes much greater demand on the designer's skill and sensitivity & being subtle rather than obvious has a particular appeal (Highpoint I entrance hall). How boring an axial entry would have been!<sup>129</sup>

In another letter, he suggested that 'contrast, variety, syncopation, surprise etc' were architectural principles, asking in conclusion, 'is a romantic unprincipled?'<sup>130</sup> Something similar, if with different results, is evident in the work of some of Moro's contemporaries; for example, Chamberlin Powell and Bon's abstracted allusions to historic precedent caused Nikolaus Pevsner to blanch.<sup>131</sup> In Moro's case, the influence was no doubt Lubetkin. Tecton's work typically sought to deploy a rich formal vocabulary that might address the spirit.<sup>132</sup> Lubetkin suggested in 1936 that 'the modern architect might try to be a little more of the gentleman. He should abandon his theories of pure

functionalism and approach architecture as an artist who, at the same time, has a fundamental mastery of the technique of his art.'<sup>133</sup>

Though Moro's interest in character and geometry both suggest that we might see him as the inheritor of Tecton's mantle, other influences could also be at play. The German Neoclassical tradition may well be significant, given the Classical overtones of Nottingham. In addition, we might productively look to Moro's time in Zürich. Notwithstanding his recollection of the importance of Lubetkin to his work, noted above, Moro also suggested that his understanding of Modern architecture had been significantly developed during his time in Switzerland,<sup>134</sup> and so we might consider the influence of his tutor, Otto Salvisberg. Salvisberg had begun his career in a pared-back regional/vernacular idiom, but by the mid 1920s had embraced the so-called 'International Style' in such buildings as the Lory-Spital at Bergen (1924–29) and the Institut der Universität, Bern (1929–31), the latter a monolithic concrete structure with window openings rhythmically punched out and wedge-like lecture theatres perched at roof level.<sup>135</sup> Salvisberg advocated a holistic Modernism, relating building and setting and demonstrating a feeling for rhythm, mass, structure, colour and detail.<sup>136</sup> 'Architecture is not solely the technical solution of a mathematical formula, nor any less to do with external decoration alone,' he wrote in 1937.<sup>137</sup> Rather, for Salvisberg architecture united functional requirements, construction and form-making as a total synthesis.<sup>138</sup> In this respect, what we might call the transnational element of Moro's theatres was perhaps less the direct influence of contemporary continental precedents but rather comprised his entire approach to design.

## CONCLUSION

In discussing two theatres by Peter Moro's practice, this essay has sought to begin the process of placing his post-war work in a historical context. It has explored some of the ways in which a rigorous and at times austere Modernism was balanced with an interest in festivity and character. These qualities were generated by means of spatial progression, lighting and the richness of internal finishes. Such an approach functioned not only as a critique of the Modern Movement from within, but by the 1980s also offered an alternative to Postmodernism.

How do we weigh Moro's achievement? At the time of writing, twelve post-war theatres figure on the English list of buildings of 'special architectural or historical interest' and so the inclusion of the Nottingham Playhouse at Grade II\* is notable.<sup>139</sup> Moro was fond of recounting that Oscar Niemeyer thought it good enough to stand in Brasilia.<sup>140</sup> Also listed are the practice's London offices for the furniture maker Hille (1963), Fairlawn School at Lewisham (1957), Moro's own house at Blackheath (1956), and the Birdham house. That Moro's work has not achieved wider recognition amongst historians is surely the result of his specialism and the location of almost all his theatres outwith London; the apparent loss of much archive material does not help. Yet the office's output stands as positive evidence of a fertile 'middle ground' between a small number of theory-oriented avant-garde architects (much discussed by architectural historians) and more overtly commercial firms, a middle ground which not only encompassed private practices but also designers employed in public sector. The diverse work of this field, now increasingly of interest to historians,<sup>141</sup> usefully cautions against a narrow focus on the avant-garde. Furthermore, Moro's stance in relation to theory perhaps also warns against an over-reliance on theorising in writing architectural history. What mattered was to build well.

Moro's continued adherence to an uncompromisingly 'heavy' Modernism – and the apparently increasing heaviness of his work – might now seem anachronistic. Analysing Moro's unbuilt design for the Burrell Collection, Glasgow (1971), Barnabas Calder recently dubbed its marble-clad upper level, set above glass, 'an incongruously weighty and monumental treatment in the context of the emerging well-serviced sheds of Foster and his followers.'<sup>142</sup> Yet though Moro may have fallen out of step during the 1970s with what contemporary critics and subsequent historians have deemed significant, one might see his work as positive evidence of at least an 'other' approach, if not an 'other tradition', in which Modernism, loosely defined, remained a relevant basis for design. Indeed, Moro's work surely reflects what Guy Ortolano has recently dubbed the 'untidy' nature of the history of post-war British architecture, in which attempting to define and periodise 'Modernism' or its sub-species (or, indeed, other, 'non-Modern' currents) may ultimately prove unhelpful.<sup>143</sup>

In 1957, Moro's contemporary Bill Howell suggested that 'maybe we should get more vulgarity [...] we should also get some splendid eccentricities, a department in which we used as a nation, to excel'.<sup>144</sup> 'Vulgar' architecture is understood here to be something with mass appeal. In this respect, it is surely significant that Trevor Dannatt recalls that Moro had suggested that he would have made a good dance band leader; Dannatt thought the showbiz side of theatre appealed to Moro, a somewhat irreverent figure, more than high culture.<sup>145</sup> The Modernism that Moro offered was not only carefully conceived but also afforded opportunities for participation and excitement – despite sometimes severe choices of materials and external appearance. That this should be the case is no surprise when we remember Moro's contribution to the 1938 MARS Group exhibition (**fig. 6.8**).<sup>146</sup> The screen that he and Gordon Cullen contributed illustrated Henry Wotton's trilogy: 'commodity, firmness

and delight’ – qualities that in subsequent decades would shape Moro’s approach to theatre.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **IMAGE CAPTIONS**

Fig. 6.1: Nottingham Playhouse, detail of main front in 1963 (RIBA Library Photographs Collection)

Fig. 6.2: Plymouth Theatre Royal, elevation to Royal Parade (photo: author, 2013)

Fig. 6.3: Nottingham Playhouse, plan at entrance level (from a commemorative brochure of 1959, in the collection of Andrzej Blonski)

Fig. 6.4: Plymouth Theatre Royal, plan at stalls level in 1982 (by kind permission of Andrzej Blonski Architects)

Fig 6.5: Nottingham Playhouse, main stair in 1963 (Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection)

Fig. 6.6: Plymouth Theatre Royal, auditorium (Photo: Fiona Walsh. Used with permission from Plymouth Theatre Royal)

Fig. 6.7: Nottingham Playhouse: auditorium in 1963 (Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection)

Fig. 6.8: Peter Moro and Gordon Cullen's screen illustrating Wotton's trilogy (Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection)

## TABLE

**Table 6.1: Theatres by Peter Moro's practice  
(Based on a list of work supplied by Michael Mellish)**

Date	Theatre	Brief description of work	Contract val
1963	Nottingham Playhouse	New Repertory theatre for local company of actors, supported by the city authorities, for c. 750.	£327,000
1964	Royal Opera House, London	Balcony alterations and reconstruction	£150,000
1968-75	Ballet Rambert, Notting Hill, London	Schemes for a theatre within a commercial office building by Arup Associates. Initial proposal akin to Thorndike (Leatherhead); later more flexible.	n/a
1969	Gulbenkian Centre, University of Hull	Flexible 'laboratory' for the teaching of drama with some use for performance, capacity c. 200. Overall university masterplanner was Leslie Martin, who presumably provided the introduction.	£195,000
1970	Theatre Royal, Bristol [aka 'Old Vic']	Reconstruction of interior of adjacent Cooper's Hall to form new foyers, extensions to provide improved stage, backstage accommodation and studio theatre.	£646,000

1975	Riverside Theatre, New University of Ulster, Coleraine	Performance venue with c. 300 capacity open-stage auditorium. Site masterplan was by Robert Matthew's practice, RMJM.	£320,000
1975-78	Schemes for an Arts Centre, Hounslow	1975 scheme with three auditoria, 1978 scheme with a single performance venue. Not built.	n/a
1978	Piccadilly Theatre, London	Improvement work including a movable auditorium ceiling	£63,000
1982	Theatre Royal, Plymouth	Major civic venue for in-house and touring productions, capacity variable between 700-1200. Smaller auditorium alongside.	£7.2m
1983	Taliesin Theatre, Swansea	University performance venue. Largely the work of Michael Mellish	£1.864m
1985	Academy of Performing Arts, Hong Kong	Multi-auditorium venue. Largely the work of Michael Heard and Andrzej Blonski.	-

<sup>1</sup> Nottingham, Nottinghamshire Archives [hereafter 'NA'], DD/NP/1/2/1/1, memorandum of 8 October 1956.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Moro, 'AD Briefing: Theatres', *Architectural Design* 43, no. 3 (1973): 162–69. See also the title of the RIBA's survey of his work: Stephanie Williams, '15 Years of Theatre Design', *RIBA Journal* 86, no. 2 (February 1979): 65–71.

<sup>3</sup> Alistair Fair, "'A New Image of the Living Theatre": the Genesis and Design of the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, 1948-58', *Architectural History* 54 (2011): 347-82.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. George Rowell and Anthony Jackson, *The Repertory Movement: a History of Regional Theatre in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 89.

<sup>5</sup> London, ABTT Archives, folder entitled 'Reports, 1963 to 1994'.

<sup>6</sup> Roderick Ham, 'Buildings Update: Theatres', *Architects' Journal* 174/32 (12 August 1981): 309–23 and 355–69. See p. 356.

<sup>7</sup> Charlotte Benton, *A Different World: Émigré Architects in Britain, 1928–1958* (London: RIBA, 1995), 14, 41, 89, 93; John R. Gold, *The Experience of Modernism: Modern Architects and the Future City* (London: E & FN Spon, 1997), 91, 128–29.

<sup>8</sup> London, RIBA Drawings and Archives Collections, MoP/1/1, 'A Sense of Proportion: Memoirs of an Architect', unpublished MS., c. 1989 [hereafter 'Moro, "A Sense of Proportion"'], 46.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. John McKean, *Royal Festival Hall: London County Council* (London: Phaidon, 2001). Miles Glendinning's book *Modern Architect: the Life and Times of Robert Matthew* (London: RIBA

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Publishing, 2009), 80–119, revises his earlier article ‘Teamwork or Masterwork? The Design and Reception of the Royal Festival Hall’, *Architectural History* 46 (2003): 277–319.

<sup>10</sup> Nick Hayes, *Consensus and Controversy: City Politics in Nottingham, 1945–66* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996); see also, for a general account, John Bailey, *A Theatre for All Seasons: Nottingham Playhouse, the First Thirty Years, 1948–1978* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> Moro, ‘A Sense of Proportion’. See also, in the same archive, LuB/12/34/5, letter from Moro to Lubetkin, 15 August 1990.

<sup>12</sup> British Library, Architect’s Lives, C467/07 [hereafter ‘BL interview’], Peter Moro interviewed by Louise Brodie, 1996, part 14.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Rosenthal, *The National Theatre Story* (London: Oberon, 2013), 74.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Webb, *Architecture in Britain Today* (London: Country Life, 1969), 197.

<sup>15</sup> Glendinning, ‘Teamwork or Masterwork?’, 279.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 281–82.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Alistair Fair, ‘British Theatres, 1926–91: an Architectural History’ (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2008); a book is projected for 2016–17.

<sup>18</sup> Williams, ‘15 Years’, 69.

<sup>19</sup> Moro ‘A Sense of Proportion’, 132.

<sup>20</sup> *The Times*, 2 August 1963.

<sup>21</sup> NA, DD/NP/1/2/1/1, letter from Peter Moro to Nottingham Playhouse Trust, 16 December 1963.

<sup>22</sup> An image of the proposed signage can be found with correspondence in NA, DD/NP/1/2/1/1.

<sup>23</sup> *Guardian Journal Souvenir Supplement*, 11 December 1963.

<sup>24</sup> Rowell and Jackson, *Repertory Movement*, 91.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Roy Shaw, *The Arts and the People* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987), 29–36.

<sup>26</sup> For a summary see Alistair Fair, ‘“Almost As Important As Jobs, Housing and Education”: the Context of the Publicly Funded Arts in Britain’, in C. Alan Short, Peter Barrett and Alistair Fair, *Geometry and Atmosphere: Theatre Buildings from Vision to Reality* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 13–20.

<sup>27</sup> Rowell and Jackson, *Repertory Movement*, 91. See also John Elsom, ‘The Regional Rep Boom’, *Observer Magazine*, 27 April 1975, 15–20.

<sup>28</sup> Bailey, *Theatre for All Seasons*, 8–10; author’s interview with Peter Longman, 9 August 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Fair, ‘“A New Image”’, 372–76.

<sup>30</sup> One might contrast the Prince of Wales’ later suggestion that London’s National Theatre was ‘a clever way of building a nuclear power station in the middle of London without anyone objecting’: see William J.R. Curtis, *Denys Lasdun: Architecture, City, Landscape* (London: Phaidon, 1994), 193. For another example of the idea of the positive contrast that might be inferred from an embrace of Modernism, see William Whyte, ‘The Modernist Moment at the University of Leeds’, *Historical Journal* 51/1 (2008): 169–93 (p. 170).

<sup>31</sup> NA, DD/NP/1/2/1/1, memorandum, n.d., to help brief architect.

<sup>32</sup> NA, DD/NP/1/2/1/1, memorandum of 8 October 1956.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* See also *The Stage*, 30 June 1960: ‘the new theatre would not only be a civic building of great importance but had to be sufficiently attractive to appeal to a large public in the face of competition from television’.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Hayes, *Consensus and Controversy*, 167.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Civic Theatre Need Not Be Charge On Rates’, *The Stage*, 22 December 1960.

<sup>36</sup> Bailey, *Theatre for All Seasons*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> NA, DD/NP/1/2/1/1, memorandum of 8 October 1956.

<sup>38</sup> NA, DD/NP/1/2/1/1, letter from Nottingham Theatre Trust to J.L. Hodgkinson of the Arts Council, 3 January 1957, and letter to Bertrand Hallward, 29 June 1957.



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- <sup>39</sup> NA, DD/NP/1/2/1/1, letter to Bertrand Hallward, 11 May 1959, and letter from Peter Moro, 19 November 1958.
- <sup>40</sup> NA, DD/NP/1/2/1/1, letter to Bertrand Hallward, 11 May 1959. (For Gibson, see Fair, “‘A New Image’”, 352.)
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid. See also Bristol, University Theatre Collections, box 2.8/23/A5 (uncatalogued Southern material), letter from Hugh Willatt to Southern, 1 March 1956.
- <sup>43</sup> Bristol, University Theatre Collections, box 2.8/23/A5, letter from Moro to Southern dated 14 November 1952.
- <sup>44</sup> Bristol, University Theatre Collections, box 2.8/23/A5, letter from Southern to Moro, 12 July 1961.
- <sup>45</sup> Fair, “‘A New Image’”, 369.
- <sup>46</sup> ‘No Civic Theatre for Ten Years’, *Western Evening Herald*, 26 February 1965. (This and subsequent clippings relating to the Theatre Royal were consulted in the press clippings files at Plymouth Central Library).
- <sup>47</sup> ‘Time For Action’, letter from G.R. Sloggett, *Western Evening Herald*, 21 June 1965.
- <sup>48</sup> ‘700 Seat Theatre Plan Going Ahead’, *Western Morning News*, 11 August 1970.
- <sup>49</sup> ‘Site For Theatre in Plymouth’, *Western Evening Herald*, 3 June 1967.
- <sup>50</sup> ‘Labour Won’t Back 600-seat Plan’, *Western Evening Herald*, 27 February 1970; ‘Moves Towards Civic Theatre’, *Western Evening Herald*, 27 May 1970.
- <sup>51</sup> ‘8-Man Trust To Plan New Civic Theatre’, *Western Evening Herald*, 11 June 1970.
- <sup>52</sup> ‘700 Seat Theatre For Plymouth’, *Western Morning News*, 19 June 1971; Plymouth, City Archives [hereafter ‘PCA’], 185/88, City Finance and Policy Committee Minutes, 23 February 1972 and 5 April 1972.
- <sup>53</sup> ‘It Won’t Just Be a Theatre – Shops and Offices, Too’, *Plymouth Times*, 26 May 1972.
- <sup>54</sup> ‘Council’s Leisure Complex is Imaginative and Inspiring’, *Western Evening Herald*, 10 April 1973; ‘Civic Theatre Goal Within Sight’, *Western Morning News*, 13 December 1974. See also PCA, 185/90, City Finance and Policy Committee minutes, 8 August 1973, 31 October 1973, and 185/91, City Policy & Resources and Leisure Services minutes, 5 December 1974.
- <sup>55</sup> ‘Theatre Poll’, *Western Evening Herald*, 13 September 1976.
- <sup>56</sup> ‘Plymouth Theatre: the £3m Secret Revealed’, *Western Morning News*, 19 August 1976.
- <sup>57</sup> ‘700-seat Theatre Plan Going Ahead’, *Western Morning News*, 11 August 1970.
- <sup>58</sup> ‘Small Theatre “Would Only Be For Minority”’, *Western Morning News*, 5 June 1970.
- <sup>59</sup> London, V&A Theatre Collection, Arts Council archive, ACGB 120/3, Housing the Arts Papers, minutes of 27 July 1977 and accompanying papers.
- <sup>60</sup> London, V&A Theatre Collection, Arts Council archive, ACGB 120/3, Housing the Arts Papers, Report of 19 October 1977.
- <sup>61</sup> ‘Theatre Project Passes the First Audition’, *Western Morning News*, 5 January 1977; ‘Plymouth Is To Have Its Theatre’, *Western Morning News*, 18 January 1977; ‘Theatre: Can It Be Stopped?’, *Western Evening Herald*, 10 February 1978; ‘Bid to Kill Civic Theatre Fails’, *Western Evening Herald*, [clipping of January 1979]; ‘£5m Tender For Civic Theatre Gets Nod’, *Western Evening Herald*, 16 December 1978.
- <sup>62</sup> Transcript of interview of Peter Moro by John R. Gold, 15 December 1986, kindly supplied by John Gold.
- <sup>63</sup> Benton, *Different World*, 41.
- <sup>64</sup> Elain Harwood, *Chamberlin Powell and Bon* (London: RIBA Publishing, 2011), 17–19.
- <sup>65</sup> Kenneth King, ‘Project for the Playhouse Theatre, Nottingham’, *Architects’ Journal* 130 (1959), pp. 209–10.
- <sup>66</sup> ‘New City Theatre and Concert Hall, Malmö’, *Architect and Building News* 182 (20 April 1945): 40–44; ‘Theatre at Malmö’, *Architectural Review* 99 (March 1946): 72–76.

- <sup>67</sup> Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002), 30–33.
- <sup>68</sup> Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, 92.
- <sup>69</sup> J. Paton Watson and Patrick Abercrombie, *A Plan for Plymouth* (Plymouth: Underhill, 1943), 74–75; see also colour plate between pp. 66 and 67 and plate opp. p. 71.
- <sup>70</sup> *Plymouth Times*, 10 January 1975.
- <sup>71</sup> See e.g. Philip Goad, 'Post-war and Polygonal: Special Plans for Australian Architecture, 1950–70', *Architectural Theory Review* 15/2 (2010), 166–86, esp. pp. 166–73.
- <sup>72</sup> John Allen, *Berthold Lubetkin: Architecture and the Tradition of Progress* (London: Black Dog, 2012), 141–46.
- <sup>73</sup> Quoted in Roger Stonehouse, *Trevor Dannatt: Works and Words* (London: Black Dog, 2008), 29.
- <sup>74</sup> Interview with Michael Mellish, 15 February 2013.
- <sup>75</sup> Moro 'A Sense of Proportion', 125.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.
- <sup>77</sup> King, 'Project', 209.
- <sup>78</sup> Dan Cruickshank, 'Raising The Roof', *Architects' Journal* 175, no. 19 (12 May 1982), 32–34 (p. 32)
- <sup>79</sup> One might dub this approach 'Brutalism' in the sense put forward by Barnabas Calder as a stylistic label referring to bold massing, visual weight and exposed concrete, rather than the 'New Brutalism' of Banham et al. See Barnabas Calder, 'Castles, Cows and Glasshouses: The Burrell Collection Architectural Competition', *Twentieth Century Architecture* 10 (2012), 37–49 (pp. 38–41).
- <sup>80</sup> Note however the 'lighter' elevations of the initial scheme, published as 'Drama Studio: Hull University', *Architectural Review* 137 (1965), 25.
- <sup>81</sup> David Heathcote, *Barbican: Penthouse over the City* (Chichester: Wiley, 2002), 204.
- <sup>82</sup> Glendinning, 'Teamwork or Masterwork?', 279.
- <sup>83</sup> Alistair Fair, 'The End of "Optimism and Expansiveness"? Designing for Drama in the 1970s', *Twentieth Century Architecture* 10 (2012), 75–89 (pp. 82–86).
- <sup>84</sup> Fair, "'A New Image'", 372–76.
- <sup>85</sup> Goad, 'Post-war and Polygonal', 177.
- <sup>86</sup> Allen, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 141.
- <sup>87</sup> Sigfried Giedion, 'The Need For a New Monumentality', essay of 1944, reprinted in his *Architecture, You and Me: the Diary of a Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958): 25–39. See p. 39.
- <sup>88</sup> *Guardian Journal Souvenir Supplement*, 11 December 1963.
- <sup>89</sup> NA, DD/NP/1/2/1/1, memorandum, n.d., to help brief architect.
- <sup>90</sup> [Peter Moro], 'Playhouse Theatre, Nottingham', *Architectural Design* 34, no. 2 (February 1964), 90–94.
- <sup>91</sup> Peter Moro, 'The Nottingham Playhouse', *Builder* 203 (1961): 893–95
- <sup>92</sup> Interview with Michael Mellish, 15 February 2013.
- <sup>93</sup> Peter Moro, 'Notes on Designing a Modern Proscenium Theatre', typescript of 23 August 1982, copy supplied by Andrzej Blonski.
- <sup>94</sup> The initial Hounslow scheme is preserved in drawings in Andrzej Blonski's archive.
- <sup>95</sup> Leslie Martin: see Peter Carolin and Trevor Dannatt, *Sir Leslie Martin: Architecture, Education and Research* (London: Academy Editions, 1996), 85. For Theatre Projects, see Richard Pilbrow, *A Theatre Project* (New York: PLASA, 2011), 232–33. Nonetheless, Moro did publish what might be deemed an 'idealised' theatre scheme. See Peter Moro, 'Theatre Buildings', *Architects' Journal* 145 (1967): 319–35.
- <sup>96</sup> Williams, '15 Years', 65.
- <sup>97</sup> NA, DD/NP/1/2/1/1, 'Appointment of Quantity Surveyor', undated memorandum.

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- <sup>98</sup> E.g. Richard Southern, *The Open Stage and the Modern Theatre in Research and Practice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953); Stephen Joseph (ed.), *Actor and Architect* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964).
- <sup>99</sup> For a summary of the arguments in favour, see Fair, 'British Theatres', 132–38.
- <sup>100</sup> DD/NP/1/2/1/1, memorandum, n.d., to help brief architect.
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>102</sup> London, V&A Museum Theatre Collections Archives, Nottingham Playhouse production file.
- <sup>103</sup> Peter Moro, 'The Architect's Statement', text of 1982 reprinted in *Theatres Magazine*, 1 (2004), 9–11.
- <sup>104</sup> Fair, "'A New Image'", 369–71.
- <sup>105</sup> Moro, 'Modern Proscenium Theatre', 23 August 1982.
- <sup>106</sup> Richard Eyre, foreword to Short, Barrett and Fair, *Geometry and Atmosphere*, xxii.
- <sup>107</sup> 'Civic Theatre Goal Within Sight', n. 54 above. A precedent for the movable ceiling is Elidir Davies' St David's Theatre in Wales (1962); see also Pierre Sonrel's theatre at Limoges. Both are discussed in Elidir Davies, 'Limoges Theatre', *TABS* 24/1 (March 1966), 19–21.
- <sup>108</sup> *Western Evening Herald*, [??].1.79
- <sup>109</sup> Moro 'A Sense of Proportion', 76
- <sup>110</sup> Peter Moro, 'The New Playhouse at Nottingham', lecture, n.p.
- <sup>111</sup> Peter Moro, MS of undated/untitled talk beginning 'At the risk of being considered arrogant...', copy supplied by Andrzej Blonski, 2.
- <sup>112</sup> Moro, 'At the risk...', 2.
- <sup>113</sup> Carr and Angier, 'Plymouth City Council – New Theatre: Design Brief', 19 November 1976, copy in Andrzej Blonski's archive.
- <sup>114</sup> Moro, 'At the risk...', 4.
- <sup>115</sup> Quoted in Moro 'A Sense of Proportion', 130.
- <sup>116</sup> 'ID: Nottingham Playhouse', *Architectural Review* 135, no. 807 (1 May 1964), pp. 347–52.
- <sup>117</sup> *Western Evening Herald/Western Morning News*, Theatre Royal Supplement, 5 May 1982.
- <sup>118</sup> Roderick Ham, *Theatre Planning* (London: Architectural Press, 1972), 26–27.
- <sup>119</sup> E.g. Michael Forsyth, *Auditoria: Designing for the Performing Arts* (London: Mitchell 1987), 125.
- <sup>120</sup> [Moro], 'Playhouse Theatre, Nottingham', 94.
- <sup>121</sup> Moro, 'At the risk...', 1.
- <sup>122</sup> Moro, 'At the risk...', 1.
- <sup>123</sup> Leeds, University Special Collections, West Yorkshire Playhouse Archive, uncat. folder entitled 'Buildings, Architectural Competition and Fundraising, 1982–85, File A, File 1 of 3', copy of Assessor's Report.
- <sup>124</sup> Moro, 'At the risk...', 1.
- <sup>125</sup> BL interview, part 5.
- <sup>126</sup> Moro, 'At the risk', 2.
- <sup>127</sup> See e.g. Roger Stonehouse, *Trevor Dannatt, Works and Words* (London: Black Dog, 2008), 10.
- <sup>128</sup> RIBA Drawings and Archives Collections, LuB/12/6/6, letter from Lubetkin to Moro, n.d. [March 1984].
- <sup>129</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>130</sup> RIBA Drawings and Archives Collections, LuB/12/6/7, letter from Moro to Lubetkin, 23 March 1984.
- <sup>131</sup> Harwood, *Chamberlin Powell and Bon*, 6.
- <sup>132</sup> Bullock, *Post-War World*, 67.
- <sup>133</sup> Allen, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 139.
- <sup>134</sup> BL interview, part 3.
- <sup>135</sup> Claude Lichtenstein (ed.), *O.R. Salvisberg: der andere Moderne* (Zurich, 1995).

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<sup>136</sup> Otto Salvisberg, 'Zeitfragen der Architektur' (1937), pp. 254–55 in Lichtenstein (ed.), *O.R. Salvisberg*: 'was aber dieser neuen Entwicklung fehlte, war das taktvolle Einorden der Bauen in ihre Umgebung, war das Reingefühl für Struktur und Farbe, für Sauberkeit und Pflege des Details und werkgerechter Technik.'

<sup>137</sup> Salvisberg, 'Zeitfragen', p. 254: 'Architektur ist nicht allein technisches Ergebnis mathematischer Ordnung, noch viel weniger äußerliches Dekorationsmittel.'

<sup>138</sup> Salvisberg, 'Zeitfragen', p. 254: 'Sie vereinigt Zweckbestimmung, Konstruktion und Formausdruck zur Synthese'.

<sup>139</sup> National Heritage List for England, <[list.english-heritage.org.uk](http://list.english-heritage.org.uk)> (accessed on 3 August 2013). The twelve are: Chichester Festival Theatre (Grade II\*); Nottingham Playhouse (II\*); National Theatre (II\*); Christ's Hospital School Arts Centre (II\*); Belgrade, Coventry (II); Congress, Eastbourne (II\*); Barbican Arts Centre, London (II); Gardner Arts Centre, University of Sussex (II\*); Thorndike Theatre, Leatherhead (II); Crucible, Sheffield (II); Billingham Forum (II); Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford (II).

<sup>140</sup> Moro, 'A Sense of Proportion', 130.

<sup>141</sup> As evidenced by the RIBA/English Heritage series on such practices as Ahrends Burton and Koralek, Chamberlin Powell and Bon, Powell and Moya, and so on.

<sup>142</sup> Calder, 'Castles, Cows and Glasshouses', 46.

<sup>143</sup> Guy Ortolano, 'Planning the Urban Future in 1960s Britain', *Historical Journal* 54, no. 2 (June 2011), 477–507.

<sup>144</sup> Otto Saumarez Smith, 'A Strange Brutalist "Primitive Hut": Howell, Killick, Partridge and Amis's Senior Combination Room at Downing College, Cambridge', *Twentieth-Century Architecture* 11 (2013), 149–65 (p. 157).

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Trevor Dannatt, 16 January 2013.

<sup>146</sup> Gold, *Experience of Modernism*, 128–29.