Park Hill housing, Sheffield

But to return to the three units (which, to say it again, are hardly those of Aristotle). Their effect together is more than the sum of the three. They combine in the specific unit into a particular feeling, giving Park Hill a certain identity, a certain viewpoint, this view, to use the old school term, the background, which is to be replaced by a new school on the same site.

The skylight museum on the east end of the site—some of the shops are under the deck, others in the independent pavilions seen here.

11. The smallest domestic and most convivial, brickling point, with three beds of decks spanning the information in the site. The "open-air" environment, aside from the ills it may cure (sunbathing, smoking, etc.), is its structural condition, which is to be replaced by an integrated school on the same site.

12. The skylight museum on the east end of the site—some of the shops are under the deck, others in the independent pavilions seen here.

13. Port Hill Bowervenue, 14, 16, 18, deck doors in skylight museum, with pure enclosed in concrete walls at night, to which the building is adaptable on the site of the Bowervenue, etc. 15, the site created by the deck and 16, the pavilion beneath a street-deck roof and is grouped from.

For the ultimate unity of Park Hill depends on the viable continuity of horizontal communications; the street-decks make it possible to walk in any other point on the same floor level without ever having to go down to ground and come up again. But these decks are more than glorified access balconies. Their width is sufficient to accommodate children's games and small wheeled vehicles for deliveries and furniture removals, they gather up all the entrances to flats and maisonettes, and the residents' addresses are quoted by a number on a particular named deck. Functionally and socially they are streets without the movement of through vehicular traffic, and a lively argument is developing, and will continue, about the social function in particular—whether it is worth having—because here the scheme is certainly programmable. It is set out to create a certain kind of social relationship, substantially deprived by the TCFPA Journal* and "Skidmore," and that is one of the points by which it must ultimately be judged.

But by qualified social scientists, not by my—The humorous in hand here is to discuss its architectural qualities—qualities which have been somewhat obscured by the tendency of critics and columnists to concentrate, so far, on the question of who invented street-decks in the first place. This matter (which will be discussed later) seems to be of marginal significance when compared to the fact of how far the street-decks, on this very grand scale, and with complete success and conviction, and not as a clipped-on gimmick but as something integrally part of the whole architectural conception.

As an access system, each deck serves a storey of flats below deck, and maisonettes at a deck-level rising into the storey above, and each deck, except the highest, runs out to ground level at some point up the site—the roof-line is at the same level throughout the building, but the rise of the ground reduces the number of storeys from fourteen at the low end of the site to four at the top. But the deck system is more profoundly involved with the design of the apartments than this, since it is a rule, throughout the building, that living rooms shall have the preferred, sunny aspect, and the deck lies on the other, bedroom side. Since the building changes direction several times, the deck, so almost as many occasions, has to change from one side of the block to the other—hence the observation that the building has two façades (public and private, so to speak) not always on the same side. But the logic of the situation also requires that the deck will change sides mainly at points where the regular rectilinear structure of the block has to be deformed to accommodate the bend, and thus the penetrations of the deck through the building are usually associated with a split-open version of the H-plan stair-court that forms the main internal load-bearing member throughout the structure. As a result these penetrations are not just rectangular passages, but polygonal public places interrupting the regular run of the decks, and preparing the street-deck strider for a change from an 'outside' view over the city to an 'inside' view into one of the interior spaces of Park Hill, or vice versa. Thus, while the deck never offers grandioses perspectives, but keeps down to a domestic scale along its length, the act of walking along one is a serial scenic experience, punctuated by irregular spatial contrivances, that is continuously fascinating.

This system of minor architectural punctuations is itself interrupted by more emphatic punctuations—full stops and commas, so to speak, among the continuous commas. The full stops are clear and straightforward enough; at each of the ends of the block the street-decks expand into small public spaces running the full width of the structure, serving as a landing for the escape stair and a 'box-stop' for the lifts. These two vertical circulations are each hewn in what appear from most ground-level views to be uninterrupted brick ducts standing side by side and effectively masking the pattern of the façade. The semi-voids, however, are a different matter. At three points on each floor, the pedestal, finding himself at an apparent full stop, will discover that a bridge leaps away between the two vertical ducts and connects to further extensions of the street-deck running to left and right beyond. Furthermore, he finds himself facing an exactly symmetrical composition, with a large reverse lift (for visitors, etc.) exactly on the axis of the bridge.

Three points of intersection are ideal on plan, all perfectly symmetrical with the three limbs meeting at angles of 112°, 185°/125°. They strike so naturally from the general planning that their formality is not noticed at first, and I cannot see personally that the aesthetics of the whole scheme would be noticeably impaired if the three limbs met at any other combination of angles, provided they were obtuse. But symmetrical they are, and they make it clear that there must always have been some quantum of formalist intention from the very inception of the design.

Indeed, this intention was institutionally and administratively recognized in the retention of the Constructivist sculptor, John Forrester, as a kind of aesthetic consultant to the project team in the early stages, and many details, particularly of the façade treatment (relationship of plans of brick, concrete, etc.) were resolved with his advice. Purists will doubtless sneer at the thought of an aesthetic consultant guiding the architect's hands in moments of indecision, but Forrester's presence on the project team at all reflects a must extraordinary breadth of mindness on the part of the city authorities who had hired for him, and reachable expertise on the part of the city architect who employed him. After which it may seem both expiation and ungracious to suggest that his presence was not entirely where beneficial, even though one also says that the most obvious evidences of his contribution—the Mendesanoque wind-screens by the lift entrance—to less than justice to his capacities as a designer.

Nevertheless, at these crucial points of intersection, I cannot help feeling that Forrester's presence may have influenced the project team in rather past Constructivist programmes of 'Integration of the Arts,' when they had much more creative and existing possibilities at hand, arising from their own architectural and curvatures. The touch of formalism at the intersections suggests that the constructivists' impressiveness of these passages to the whole design was felt by the project team, but it is