expressed by something else, by the bridges themselves. Viewed from the ground, or from other parts of the building, their visual importance is overwhelming. Surprising as it may seem, they assume complete architectural dominance over the vertical ducts of lifts and stairs, however powerful these may appear when they are not in visual competition with the bridges, and their dominance makes clear, as nothing else does, the horizontal continuity of the whole building. The functional reason for these bridges is to make clearance for service roads entering the site, but the effect is not of connections between independent blocks of flats; rather, one sees and feels a continuous building which at these points has been pared down to its bare essentials, to communications that are more basic to the whole design than even the structural skeleton.

Now the strength of this effect comes largely from the starkness of its expression—the first model had weather canopies over each bridge, with intermediate supports, and this, I am sure, would have muffled the whole effect. The reason why these plain concrete trough-beams are so immediately effective in conveying the idea of communicative continuity lies, in some way, in their visual relationship to the well-known photographs of the breakdown model of the Unité at Marseilles,* in which blocks representing the duplex apartments are shown being threaded into the frame, and around a cardboard duct, representing the rue intérieure, which projects from the end of the assembly in much the same way as do the deck bridges at Park Hill.

It seems unlikely that the project team simply took over a visual effect from this photograph, but the fact remains that they are members of a generation that has never recovered from the impact of the Unité, and, furthermore, the idea of the rue intérieure, borrowed from Corb, is one of the few influences that was admitted by Park Hill’s defenders during the early disputes about who thought of it first.† These street-decks are rues intérieures in so far as they are within the frame of the block and partly wrapped round by the maisonettes, but in being at the side of the building and open to the air, they approximate to an English tradition that runs from the Chester Rows to the Stirling and Gowan housing in Preston, by way of many spec-built terraces of shops which have access decks at first floor level, over the sales area.

More immediately to the point, however, is a development visible among student designs in the very early Fifties, in which some form of continuous horizontal circulation at high levels, with public spaces at intersections, was more or less de rigueur in all projects for high-density housing, and was finally summed up in two of the unsuccessful entries in the Golden Lane competition: one by the Smithsons, by whom the term street-deck may have been coined, and another by Ivor Smith and Jack Lynn, which was instrumental in their being invited to join J. L. Womersley’s then very young team at Sheffield to develop a street-deck scheme for a site there (not, originally, Park Hill).

Now, the desire to revise Corb, visible in all these projects, was part of a loosely anti-classicist movement that was to produce its most extreme manifestation in the Smithson’s ‘topological’ project for Sheffield University as early as 1958, in which even more dramatic emphasis is laid on the exposition of circulation as the unifying factor of the design.* But it must be remembered that the existence of this movement only appears by hindsight from a decade later, that the terms ‘un-classical’ or ‘anti-classical’ were equally retrospective, and applied by some critics and some of the architects involved to explain what they thought had been done, rather than as slogans or tenets of faith while the designing was in progress. The Smithsons did not set out to be topological, though they seemed pleased enough to discover later that this was what they had been. It is to be doubted if the Park Hill project team set out to be anti-classical (the author can testify from first-hand, or first-hand, experience, that they were much more concerned with Constructionist Integration), and their design is not to be regarded as programmatic on that subject.

But against this, it must be noted that it is very conspicuously a child of its time—the hammer-headed lift towers standing away from the main structure are as much the indicator of a specific mental climate as was the Venetian window in its day. It represents a kind of building that a great many young architects in Britain in the early Fifties wanted to put up, and very few succeeded—the Market building in Sheffield, by Andrew Derbyshire, represents the same mood on a smaller scale, and Derbyshire, too, was in on the birth of the street-deck. Park Hill seems to represent one of those rare occasions when the intention to create a certain kind of architecture happens to encounter a programme and a site that can hardly be dealt with in any other way, and the result has the clarity that only arises when—as in the Villa Rotonda—aesthetic programme and functional opportunity meet and are instantly fused. But what Park Hill abundantly demonstrates is that there are other kinds of architectural clarity besides the Classical.

* Cf. THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW, December 1955, page 360.