CIAM, the Return of Individualism, and the Proliferation of Modernities

The beginnings of “brutalism” (Le Corbusier’s ‘beton brut’ or ‘brute concrete’; Smithson’s coining of term in English as simultaneous origins of term): attempt to address buildings as unique solutions to unique building problems of program, structure, materials, without resorting to formulas. Peter and Alison Smithson, Hunstanton School, Norfolk, 1954; homage to and departure from the “technical excellence” achieved by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in post-war U.S., but also before the war, in a remarkable series of buildings: Barcelona Pavilion, 1929; Farnsworth House, Plano IL, 1946-50, the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, 1952-56+, the Seagram’s building, New York city, 1958 (with Philip Johnson), and other works of carefully considered modernist elegance. Hunstanton School has greater frankness about exposing the building’s systems and infrastructure, handles the school as an individualized building problem requiring a rigorous solution. Other brutalist works celebrate distinctiveness of their individual forms and solutions, consciously departing from historical references or precedent but belonging to the modernist tradition nonetheless. Examples: James Stirling and James Gowan, Leicester University Engineering Laboratories, 1963; the Smithsons, Economist building group, London, 1964. A more formalist solution involving greater use of “hi-tech” elements in the still highly individualistic solution at James Stirling’s History Faculty building, Cambridge University, 1963-68.
