From 1970 Jerusalem to the Future: Sir Nikolaus Pevsner’s Functionalist Vision of a Tolerant Architectural World

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This paper examines the impact of the architectural historian Sir Nikolaus Pevsner’s visit to Jerusalem in 1970 on his functionalist and social reformist vision of the architectural world of the future.

In December 1970 Pevsner stood in the Holy Land, visiting the city of Jerusalem as one of the international members of the famed Jerusalem Committee, set up by Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, to discuss the future urban development of the city.

In the 1930s, Pevsner had found Zionism unappealing. Intrepidly moving to the desert of Palestine to start a new, frugal life was not a dream with which young Pevsner, a Functionalist-Modernist devoted to raising standards of living conditions, was easily able to sympathise.
Nearly forty years later, however, at the meetings of the Jerusalem Committee, Pevsner had come to realize that the assembled experts enjoyed the wealth of the capitalistic Western world while expecting old Zionists and their descendants to sacrifice their own living standards and well-being for the sake of the spiritual, historical-archaeological significance of Jerusalem. Many of the committee members expressed intolerant, self-righteous views on the development of the city, taking no thought of the realities of the lives and needs of the people who actually lived in the city. Jerusalem’s frustration with such demands was succinctly expressed by Mayor Kollek: ‘You would like to drive up in big cars but you want us in Jerusalem riding on donkeys.’

Sympathizing with this frustration, Pevsner, now nearly 70, yet still a fervent Modernist and Functionalist, reconfirmed his conviction that architectural design and urban planning must be placed in the service of the lives of ordinary people to ensure the fulfilment of their daily lives and needs.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Ariyuki Kondo PhD(Edin), born in Tokyo, Japan in 1971, read architectural design at the School of Art and Design of the University of Tsukuba, Japan, before pursuing a postgraduate study in architectural history at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. He completed his Doctor of Philosophy in 2001, and after taking up several academic posts in Japan, he has, since 2012, been Professor of History of British Art and Architecture at Ferris University, Yokohama, Japan, where he teaches the history of eighteenth- to twentieth-century British art, architecture and design. He is the author of several books on the subjects of 1) the interrelation between eighteenth- to twentieth-century British architecture and the Zeitgeist; 2) contemporary church architecture; and 3) the images of Christ as depicted by the members of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood and contemporary British painters. His recent publications in English include Robert and James Adam, Architects of the Age of Enlightenment (2012 & 2016), which came out as part of the series The Enlightenment World, published by Pickering & Chatto in London.