BEFORE THE WRECKING BALLS SWING...

examining the potential for architectural re-use, the consequences of loss and the politics of concrete through the lens of Brutalist Architecture
“When a building is being built, there is an impatience to bring it into being. Not a blade of grass can grow near this activity. Look at the buildings after it is built. Each part that was built with so much anxiety and joy and willingness to proceed tries to say when you’re using the building, “Let me tell you how I was made.” Nobody is listening because the building is now satisfying need. The desire in its making is not evident. As time passes, when it is a ruin, the spirit of its making comes back. It welcomes the foliage that entwines and conceals. Everyone who passes can hear the story it wants to tell about its making. It is no longer in servitude; the spirit is back.”

Louis Kahn, Conversations with Architects.
“Chicago has a choice. It can save a building. Or it can save lives, provide thousands of jobs and bring in millions of research dollars”.¹ The fall of 2012 proved to be a tumultuous time for the Prentice Women’s Hospital. Northwestern University’s proposed demolition of this 1974 Bertrand Goldberg icon garnered notable opposition from non-profit organizations, practicing architects (more than 80, including eight Pritzker Prize winners), and a number of architectural advocacy groups. The Chicago Architectural Club (CAC) in partnership with the Chicago Architectural Foundation issued a call for proposals that re-envisioned, rather than replaced, Goldberg’s design; and the sheer scale of the response—CAC’s best yet—only further testified to the urgency of the protest. On November 1st the Chicago Commission on Public Landmarks voted to approve landmark status for the building; yet just six hours later, it rescinded its decision. Demolition permits were issued shortly thereafter and the building’s dismantling is now underway.

The Prentice’s fate is a just higher-profile instance of what has become a familiar sequence of events. As urban cityscapes transform with fluctuating densities and shifting patterns of use, they leave behind an inventory of spaces that have tremendous embodied energy yet often challenge expectations of performance, efficiency and aesthetic tastes. With resources straining and the built landscape increasingly saturated, demolition and redevelopment are perhaps less tenable as strategies than they once were—financially, materially and spatially. “Architecture can no longer limit itself to the aesthetic pursuit of making building,” Jill Stoner asserts in her recent book, Towards a Minor Architecture. “It must now commit to the politics of selectively taking them apart”.²

While architectural refurbishment and renovation are hardly novel practices, more recent preferences for adaptive re-use and selective preservation have emerged as clearly viable paradigms. Such approaches offer alternatives to full demolition, at one end of the spectrum, and, at the other, fastidious historical restoration; they work to preserve the traces of history that leave their mark on any building, collaborating with the existing structure and composing for it new layers of use. It is an approach that found an early advocate in Ada Louise Huxtable, who wrote in 1997 that “the perfect fake or impeccable restorations wipe out all the incidents of life and change”.³ At stake, then, are not merely material resources, but history and cultural memory as well.

One highly visible locus for such an approach has been those relics of industry—warehouses, factories, mills—willingly transformed into residential lofts, creative workplaces, trendy retail spaces, and contemporary art galleries and museums. Yet where are the limits of this practice? Do overlooked, even explicitly derided, spaces embody this same potential for change? And what of more stubbornly inflexible spaces—those that lack the wide-span column grids, high ceilings, open programs, and warm brick walls more common in post-industrial space?

The principal objective of this Branner proposal, then, is to identify and examine such difficult sites in an effort to define an architectural toolkit that can more fully re-work and revise our built landscape. To that end, I propose an in-depth case study of Brutalist Architecture—a post-war architectural style that particularly as of late has found itself subject to these conflicting imperatives of demolition and preservation.

STATEMENT OF INTENT
BRUTALISM: A CASE STUDY

LOGISTICS

"If there is a fate worse than death for Brutalism, surely it is preservation, or even ghastlier, sympathetic and considerate restoration. These are, as Reyner Banham put it, bloody-minded buildings, not gentle in manner and eloquent in detail. A shove in the back, not a tap on the shoulder. Knock them around—they can take it."
Salvatore Dellaria

CULTURE

"Originally seen to reflect the democratic attributes of a powerful civic expression—authenticity, honesty, directness, strength—the forceful nature of Brutalist aesthetics eventually came to signify precisely the opposite: hostility, coldness, inhumanity."
Michael Kubo, Chris Grimley & Mark Pasnik

MATERIAL

"New brutalism" inevitably, in global dissemination, degenerated into a rough concrete style."
Anthony Vidler

Brutalism—typically identified as heavy, superscaled massings in concrete, brick or block—had its building boom from the 1950s to the 1970s, with some later examples in Eastern European Soviet cities. The heroic, monumental scale and inexpensive materials that characterized the style made it especially popular for public projects—examples of this oft-maligned building style can be found throughout the globe. This broadly defined and globally pervasive architectural style presents an effective case study in which to consider and test these limits of architectural re-use for a number of reasons.

To begin with, the very nature of Brutalist buildings is unyielding. With their spatial programs virtually frozen in concretes, their inflexibility not only limits user adaptability, it challenges alterations—those both large and small often result in costly sums. By the same token though, these hulking masses are anything but delicate; lacking any preciousness, they may support a more forceful and, ultimately, radical approach to transformation—one that leverages these buildings’ mass rather than coddling it.

Even so, many remain unconvinced of Brutalism’s potential and there continues to be a great likelihood that a fair number of these spaces will be demolished. Which all calls into question what is at stake if these buildings are lost. And even further can they be lost? Is it possible to effectively catalog these buildings and keep an accurate record through photography and more static mediums? Or do their spatial peculiarities and haptic béton brut exceed the photographic, necessitating phenomenological experience? What are the consequences of losing these architectural works?

Beyond the implications of cultural loss, there is, too, physical and material loss. Though not explicitly identified as a tenet of the movement, concrete is deeply associated with Brutalism and can be found—typically exposed and rough cast—somewhere in nearly all examples of Brutalist architecture. This limited material palette provides an interesting control of sorts. Given the movement’s global proliferation there are now numerous examples of how this one material was employed, detailed and finished. Brutalism’s concrete has been derided for its overbearing presence, its inflexible spatial definitions but it seems much of the criticism directed at Brutalist buildings has been in regards to their explicit weathering. Can the haptic qualities of these rough, patina-ed buildings be made a virtue? A satisfying counterpoint to the slick, flat surfaces of today’s ever-proliferating glass towers?

Concrete’s low cost at the height of Brutalism and its ubiquity within the style resulted in a significant volume of unextraordinary, even deficient, buildings and their subsequent characterization as “Brutalist”. These unremarkable, yet often overbearing, structures pepper much of the global architectural landscape, and even dominate many former Soviet cities. Which presents an even further challenge of what to do with these mediocre, more banal examples of Brutalism… What lessons can be learned from both the extraordinary and the everyday? Using Brutalism as a case study, my aim is to examine the potential for architectural re-use, challenging and testing its limits within the Brutalist buildingscape.
NOTES


3 "...what are gone are the cumulative clues, the patina of age and use, the sense of 'others', and 'resonance', it is precisely this central, intrinsic quality that has been eliminated...these objects and places simply do not resonate. They are mute. They are hollow history". Ada Louis Huxtable, The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion (New York: The New Press, 1997), 27.


6 The relationship between Brutalism and photography is an important-if somewhat complex-one. In defining the three traits of New Brutalism, Reyner Banham noted "Memorability as an Image" as the movement’s first identifying tenet. While this initial definition seems to promote heavily visual/aesthetic components of Brutalism (rather than experiential), one that might be content to persist in a static medium, Banham further explains "basically, it requires that the building should be an immediately comprehensible visual entity, and that the form should be confirmed by the experience of the building in use. Further, that this form should be entirely proper to the function and materials of the building, in their entirety". What is the relevance— if any — of all this in the face of potential loss? Could this criteria be used to shape a value spectrum? How does one measure "memorability"? Reyner Banham, The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic? (London: Architectural, 1966).
SITE SELECTIONS

The proposed list of projects that follows comprise by no means an exhaustive or complete list, but rather a foundation for further study. Sites or projects profiled are representative, selected for the conditions they exemplify in circumstance or locale, and intended as discreet destinations from which to seek out and stumble upon lesser known projects.

For the purposes of my research I am embracing the loose boundaries of Brutalism's definitions, considering appearance over essence, so as to allow a comprehensive range from buildings simply labeled as “brutalist” to those intentioned as Brutalist. Within this, I am confining my sites of study to only those constructed of concrete rather than brick or block, as concrete has come to be a principal aesthetic signifier of the movement.

Criteria delineated below further winnows this broad catalogue.

**ORIGINS**
- projects that have been credited and identified as originators of Brutalist thought;
- projects that embody many traits of Brutalist architecture in material or massing yet worked outside the movement and have transcended the oft-pejorative Brutalist label;
- projects that have been routinely identified as icons of Brutalism and in many cases have received landmark or listed status from the relevant agencies.

**CONTESTED**
- projects that have been subject at some time to proposals for redevelopment or demolition;
- projects that are currently in ongoing talks to address proposals for redevelopment or demolition, or those that have fallen into great disrepair;
- projects that have been approved for demolition.

**AFFINITIES**
- projects that have been credited and identified as originators of Brutalist thought;
- projects that embody many traits of Brutalist architecture in material or massing yet worked outside the movement and have transcended the oft-pejorative Brutalist label;
- projects that have been routinely identified as icons of Brutalism and in many cases have received landmark or listed status from the relevant agencies.

**EXEMPLARS**
- projects that have been credited and identified as originators of Brutalist thought;
- projects that embody many traits of Brutalist architecture in material or massing yet worked outside the movement and have transcended the oft-pejorative Brutalist label;
- projects that have been routinely identified as icons of Brutalism and in many cases have received landmark or listed status from the relevant agencies.

**BROADSCAPE BRUTALISM**
- urban environments characterized by a density of Brutalist works, such as post-war Soviet developments.

**RENEWED**
- projects that have been restored, refurbished or re-envisioned within the last 15 years as a result of change in use, needs for spatial adjustments or modernization.
Proposed methods of evaluation at each site are as follows:

1 **SURFACE STUDIES**
   Detailed photographic studies of the site’s surface treatment capturing:
   a. Surface treatment - how is concrete finished?
   b. Evidence of weathering/aging - are there points of deterioration? where?
   c. Material intersections

2 **MASS-VOID STUDIES**
   Much like a Nolli map, a figure ground reading of the building’s partitions and poché (in plan and section) will abstract each project, distilling them to mass and void. A catalogue of all the principle sites will serve as underlays for experimentation.

3 **INTERVIEWS**
   At every opportunity I will engage a dialogue with both site occupants as well as passersby to determine both the performance of each project and its influence in the urban realm.
   For sites that have been renovated or reworked I will arrange meetings with project architects to discuss and better understand the specific challenges they faced.

4 **CATALOGING SPATIAL STRATEGIES**
   Throughout my travels I will seek out and record via photographs, sketches, and text potential spatial strategies of alteration. All this will be in service of further developing a vocabulary of architecture change, a lexicon of re-use.
A GLOBAL MOVEMENT
Widely used as the architectural language of post-war reconstruction, Brutalism buildings can be found over much of the world. Identifying regional threads will not only yield more in-depth focused study, but can also reveal how different cultures adapt and address the built works of this polarizing architectural movement as they age and become increasingly obsolete.

NORTH AMERICAN BRUTALISM
A once-common choice for government and campus buildings, North American Brutalist buildings are faced with significant popular disapproval and many are now vanishing amidst redevelopment approvals and calls for demolition. At the same time though, many American cities are embracing adaptive re-use as a strategy for addressing older or un-used buildings; can this practice be extended to ameliorate many of these out-of-favor Brutalist structures?

PAULISTA SCHOOL // BRAZILIAN BRUTALISM
Beginning in the 1950s, the “Paulista School” emerged in Brazil in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, distinct from the previous “Carioca School” of architects that included Lucio Costa. These young Brazilian architects embraced the Brutalist movement as it was carried over from Britain. Notable for a more plastic and lighter use of concrete, Brazilian Brutalism is also undergoing a bit of a resurgence with renewed appreciation upon the 2008 win of Brazilian Brutalist architect Paulo Mendes de Rocha.
JAPANESE "BRUTALISM"
Though Japan’s post-war architectural works can be characterized more accurately as Metabolist, formally and aesthetically these built works share many traits with Brutalism. Indeed, many of the practicing Metabolists built works outside of Japan which were subsequently identified as Brutalist. Perhaps of greatest interest though is the Japanese relationship with concrete; due to an extremely high level of skill with the material, public opinion of concrete has remained consistently positive and many of the nation’s contemporary practitioners favor the material.

SOVIET BRUTALISM
Already established as a popular post-war building style, Brutalism was adopted by many developing Soviet cities as a means of achieving a new modern identity. The rough aesthetics of Brutalism meant that many low-cost concrete “brutalist” buildings could passably cohere with the more extraordinary examples. Today many of these Soviet cityscapes have been derided as their concrete ages and weather. Because of its widespread use in Soviet cities, many have come to identify the more global Brutalist style as “communist” or “Soviet-style” building.
ORIGINS, AFFINITIES & EXEMPLARS

UNITE D’HABITATION
Marseilles, France
Le Corbusier
1947-1952

A modern icon relevant in most any architectural discussion, Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation is repeatedly cited as the genesis for Brutalism. The building’s béton brut (raw concrete) shaped the rough material language of Brutalism, that favored honest expression of materials. The building’s large massing as well as spatial concepts such as “streets in the sky” would also prove to be highly influential, finding new iterations in a number of Brutalist projects.

CHANDIGARH SECRETARIAT
Chandigarh, India
Le Corbusier
1951-1962

A post-colonial Indian city planned by Le Corbusier, Chandigarh’s Capitol Complex hosts three large government buildings—all also designed by Corbusier. The largest of the three, the Secretariat is a massive, long cast-in-place horizontal band punctuated on the facade by a brise-soleil that provides shade from the hot Indian sun.

Of added value is the notable lack of renovations or alterations made to this complex which provide extremely useful insight into how this building has aged and adjusted to over 50 years of use.

source: Lacuna
source: flickr user - Scott Norsworthy
Though Kahn did not explicitly ally himself with the Brutalist movement, his use of rough cast concrete in the National Assembly Hall of Bangladesh has drawn many comparisons and allusions to more overtly Brutalist buildings. Kahn challenged himself to use readily available local materials, though his use of concrete is notable for its ability to maintain an element of human scale. Breaks in the daily pours are acknowledged with a band of white marble which helps to humanize the sheer size of the complex.

Perhaps at first glance a Brutalist style structure, Scarpa’s Brion-Vega Cemetery arguably sits outside the movement with its fine, delicate and often historicist detailing. Though it is this same careful, meditative approach to material that make this site an important resource to include in considerations of Brutalism.

A recent Pritzker Prize winner (2011), Eduardo Souto de Moura’s work is not historically Brutalist, but his Braga Stadium holds valuable lessons in its elegant use of concrete and its sensitive modulation to site.
ORIGINS, AFFINITIES & EXEMPLARS

projects that have been routinely identified as icons of Brutalism and in many cases have received landmark or listed status from the relevant agencies.

TRELLICK TOWER
London, UK
Erno Goldfinger
1966-1972

Though the Trellick Tower at times experienced waning popularity, the building's designation as a listed property in 1998 helped to bolster support and bring recognition to the structure. Built as social housing and still predominantly so, upgrades and alterations to the building have consisted of only relatively minor cosmetic work and comprised mainly additional security features.

BARBICAN COMPLEX
London, UK
Chamberlin, Powell and Bon
1965 – 1976

Listed in 2001, the sprawling Barbican Complex comprises buildings of varied program from residential towers to a school to an arts centre and is considered a prominent example of British Brutalism.

FLAINE SKI RESORT
Haute-Savoie, France
Marcel Breuer
1969

Marcel Breuer designed both the master plan as well as all the facilities for this ski resort in the French Alps. This project provides a rarer example of Brutalism in a more natural environment. Protected in 1991, many have praised the project's harmony with its site. Breuer took care to match the concrete to the surrounding mountainscape, and the buildings' positions within the valley of ski bowl allows for overhead views from the slopes that humanize the typically overbearing Brutalist scale.
FAU SÃO PAULO UNIVERSITY
Sao Paulo, Brazil
João Batista Vilanova Artigas
1969

BANCO DE LONDRES Y AMÉRICA DEL SUR
Buenos Aires, Argentina
Clorindo Testa
1959-1966

GUNMA MUSIC CENTER
Takasaki, Japan
Raymond Antonin
1961

NICHINAN CULTURAL CENTER
Nichinan, Japan
Kenzo Tange
1963

One of many celebrated examples of the Paulista School–Brazilian’s own thread of Brutalism. The building’s exterior mass is contrasted with the open airy interior, achieved through an open egg-crate roofing system.

Still in use today, Tange’s Cultural Center is a valuable example of Japan’s foray into Brutalism. Examination of how the building has aged will prove especially fruitful, given Japan’s renowned skills in concrete work.

One of many celebrated examples of the Paulista School–Brazilian’s own thread of Brutalism. The building’s exterior mass is contrasted with the open airy interior, achieved through an open egg-crate roofing system.

Working in Japan after Tokyo’s devastating 1923 earthquake, Czech-American architect Raymond Antonin embraced the burgeoning popularity of concrete as an alternative to the more established timber construction that proved inadequate amidst the earthquake. A pioneer in exposed concrete modernism, Antonin’s later work is a fascinating hybrid of his earlier Modernist work and the newer Brutalism.

Considered the premier example of Brutalism in Argentina, reception both critical and public is more universally favorable. In contrast to most other Brutalist built works, Architect Clorindo Testa overtly engages the plasticity of the concrete, achieving a notably more porous presence.
ORIGINS, AFFINITIES & EXEMPLARS
projects that have been routinely identified as icons of Brutalism and in many cases have received landmark or listed status from the relevant agencies.

HABITAT 67
Montreal, Canada
Moshe Safdie
1967

Influenced by Mediterranean vernacular architecture and the work of Team Ten, Safdie’s study in prefabrication has remained quite popular with residents. The smaller cellular units result in a more pixelated massing that is notably less hulking than many of its Brutalist counterparts. The shoreside location has also resulted in notable weathering patterns on the precast concrete pods.
CONTESTED, AT RISK & LOST

PRESTON BUS DEPOT
Preston, UK
Building Design Partnership
1968-1969

Twice proposed for demolition, first in 2000 and then again in 2010, Preston Bus Depot was recently saved by a local benefactor in Feb 2013. Factors such as decreased bus ridership, poor pedestrian linkages and high costs for renovations and maintenance were all cited in arguments favoring demolition. Though public opinion of the building was favorable as revealed in surveys and signed petitions, Preston City Council rejected applications for listed status to protect the building and did vote for demolition. If not for the last-minute investment, this building surely would have been lost.

source: wikimedia

BOSTON CITY HALL
Boston, MA
Kallmann McKinnell & Knowles
1968

Oft-cited as a prime example of Brutalism. Boston City Hall’s popularity has long been in decline. Proposals in 2006 from Boston’s Mayor to sell the building and relocate resulted in a preliminary review by the Boston Landmarks Commission for protection. Though decisions have been postponed until demolition plans become more forthcoming, a number of advocacy groups have formed in hopes of protecting this divisive urban icon.

source: Berkshire Fine Arts

J. EDGAR HOOVER FBI BUILDING
Washington, DC
Charles F. Murphy and Associates
1974

Long reviled as oppressive and unfriendly, the building’s valuable real estate may be its undoing. Recent invitations for development proposals indicate that the FBI is considering a move so that the site might be developed for mixed use. Planning commissions suggest the building could be demolished or re-used, providing an interesting and revealing potential result.

source: openbuildings.com
CONTESTED, AT RISK & LOST

Projects that have been challenged, abandoned, are under threat of demolition or approved for demolition. Sites in the midst of demolition can likely yield nearly as much information, if even more, as those still standing. After all with buildings of this stature, demolition is often much like construction in reverse, like an x-ray through the hulking mass.

PRENTICE WOMEN’S HOSPITAL

Chicago, IL
Bertrand Goldberg
1974

Proposals from owner Northwestern University to demolish and redevelop this site for a new research hospital - though initially met with protests and even an emergency landmark hearing - were eventually approved. Demolition on the structure began in spring of 2013 and is expected to continue through the year into the winter.

ROBIN HOOD GARDENS

London, UK
Alison and Peter Smithson
1968-1972

Despite repeated efforts to spare these buildings from demolition—including a high profile campaign in 2008 supported by Zaha Hadid and Richard Rogers— demolition on this vast housing complex began in April 2013. Requests for historic designation were denied and conflicting surveys—one that indicated widespread support for demolition, and another that indicated support of refurbishment—did little to help save the building. With a complex of its size, demolition could likely still be continuing, providing a valuable insight.

BIRMINGHAM CENTRAL LIBRARY

Birmingham, UK
John Madin
1971-1974

Echoing Boston City Hall’s inverted ziggurat, Birmingham Central Library is clad in precast concrete panels which have been a major source of criticism over the years as they remain uncleaned and badly weathering. Rejected twice for historical listing, despite being placed on WMF’s watch list in 2011, the library will be demolished upon completion of a new Central Library currently under construction. The library closed permanently in June of 2013.
Abandoned since the 1980s, St. Peter’s Seminary has already undergone a number of uses—being briefly used as a drug rehabilitation center after the seminary closed in 1980, and more recently the site of informal artist fellowships through a local non-profit. Despite its status as a Grade A protected site, the advanced state of decay and dearth of proposed new uses for the building make the future of this building insecure.

Announcements in 2008 of intentions to relocate the Police Administration were met with concern from a number of Philadelphia residents, some even forming a “Save the Roundhouse” advocacy group. These groups have encouraged studies that investigate the potential for adaptive re-use, concerned that as the Police Administration leave the building, it would become vulnerable to demolition.

Currently closed as a result of storm damage from Tropical Storm Irene in September 2011, Orange County government officials have been calling for demolition and replacement of Rudolph’s iconic structure, criticizing both its condition and its appearance. Placed on World Monument Fund (WMF)’s Watch List in 2012, efforts to urge officials to reconsider have been making progress. A visit to the recently completed restoration of Rudolph’s Claire Carney Library at UMass Dartmouth resulted in an RFP to conduct a more in-depth assessment study. At the time of writing, the fate of this building is still unresolved.

Listed in 2012 on World Monument Fund’s Watch List under the “British Brutalism” category, recent redevelopment proposals have threatened the Brutalist complex. Scope of redevelopment is still being determined.
BROADSCAPE
BRUTALISM

Often criticized by many as “eyesores” or “carbuncles”, Brutalist buildings typically sit in sharp contrast to their more traditional urban neighbors. How does Brutalism perform without this architectural dissonance? Popular as a low-cost construction strategy, Brutalist buildings fill many Soviet cities, providing a nearly immersive environment in which to consider built examples both banal and extraordinary. A reminder of Soviet rule, Brutalism also carries significant emotional baggage in many of these cities. In addition to those sites proposed below, Roosevelt Island in New York City will also be considered as it provides a small scale, more neutral “immersive” Brutalist environment.

SKOPJE, MACEDONIA

Student Dorms
Georgi Konstantinovski, 1975
source: Nate Robert - www.yomadic.com

Skopje City Centre Model
Kenzo Tange, 1965
source: Kenzo Tange

St Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje.
source: Nate Robert - www.yomadic.com

NOVI ZAGREB, CROATIA

Rakete Apartment Blocks
Vjenceslav Richter,
Zagrepčanka
Slavko Jelinek and Berislav Vinković, 1976

“Kockica” or “Cube”
Vo Višić, 1961-1968
source: Nate Robert - www.yomadic.com

NOVI BEOGRADE, SERBIA

Western Gate of Belgrade, 1980
source: Blago Tebi

Supermarket
Sava Centar
source: Nate Robert - www.yomadic.com
A devastating earthquake destroyed nearly all of Skopje in 1963. Rebuilding efforts were planned largely by Japanese metabolist Kenzo Tange. From the mid 1960s through the 1980s, much of the new city was constructed in the Brutalist style. However a new government project, “Skopje 2014”; aimed at giving a “more monumental” appearance to the city has resulted in construction of a great number of public projects all in a more “historicist” language, though the project has been dismissed by some as nationalistic kitsch. The more comprehensive Brutalist environment provides an especially interesting study in the midst of the city's attempt at re-envisioning itself. Which buildings are targeted first for replacement? What is the public response?

Primarily a residential district outside of the city of Zagreb (Novi Zagreb, translates to “New Zagreb”), major development took place during the Soviet era. Characterized by modern city planning principles, a vast majority of the city's buildings are Brutalist in manner with mixed-use programming.

Constructed as the capital city to the no-longer Yugoslavia, Novi Beograd embodies so many of the ambitious modern city planning principles. It developed quickly on previously undeveloped land, pulling many inhabitants and businesses from the historic Belgrade across the river as they sought out larger spaces and more modern infrastructure. In recent years a lack of maintenance and care for these aging structures has resulted in a dilapidated cityscape.
RENEWED, REWORKED & RESTORED

Projects that have been restored, refurbished or re-envisioned. Visiting these, as well as meeting with the project architects where possible, will provide invaluable insight into executed strategies—be they successful or not—for working within existing Brutalist structures.

WESTYARD DISTRIBUTION CENTER

New York, NY
Davis, Brody & Associates
1970
REX
Pending

A former distribution center occupying a full New York City block, this project is in the schematic phases for a conversion into more conventional office space. The facade is comprised of massive precast panels—that have aged notably well—behind which is a flexible panel window system. REX has suggested though that adjusting the facade is in order to tone down building’s hulking presence.

UMASS DARTMOUTH - CLAIRE T CARNEY LIBRARY

Dartmouth, MA
Paul Rudolph
1972
DesignLAB / Austin Architects
2012

Continually lauded as an example of a successful but respectful renovation of a once unpopular Brutalist campus “eyesore”, the approach was both to restore while altering as necessary.

Gwathmey Seigel’s painstaking renovation restored Rudolph’s building to its original turn-key state. At times criticized as too sensitive, the renovation proves a valuable example of how a Brutalist building can be modernized without the need for demolition.
CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

Cleveland, OH
Marcel Breuer
1971

Rafael Viñoly
2012

source: Rafael Viñoly Architects / Brad Feinknopf

Upon engaging Viñoly and associates for the CMA's expansion, board trustee member were set on covering up and suppressing Breuer's 1971 wing of the museum. But Viñoly skillfully managed to convince the board members of the architectural merit of Breuer's wing. His addition is especially notable for its skillful transition between Breuer's Brutalist wing and traditional Neoclassical gallery, achieved through a striping of the facade.

GEISEL LIBRARY - UCSD

San Diego, CA
William Pereira
1968-1970

Gunnar Bikerts
2012

source: UC San Diego

Embraced by the University as an icon. Renovations and an addition in the mid-1990s favored a more subordinated approach to expansion, placing the two additional floors underground so as not to alter the library's formal expression.

PARK HILL

Sheffield, UK
Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith
1957 – 1961

Hawkins Brown
Ongoing since 2010

source: Paolo Margari

Initially a desirable place to live, waning popularity in the 1980s lead to proposals to demolish the development. However the public attention proved favorable as the complex was Grade II listed in 1998. As a result, renovations of Park Hill have had to adhere to conservation guidelines to ensure that the building's heritage is maintained. The phased execution of the project provides especially a special opportunity to compare renovated parts of the project to those in their deteriorated state.

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Den Haag, Netherlands
Jo Vegter & Mart Bolten
1968-1975

Meyer and Van Schooten Architecten (MVSA)
2008

source: skyscraper city

Using glass to create new enclosures and better define interstitial space, this renovation modernized the existing building with the addition of high-tech double layer facade. One central courtyard, previously open to the sky was covered with a glass roof to create a winter garden, while the other was converted into a public urban square.
FOR CONSIDERATION
ALONG THE WAY

Embracing approaches and developments both architectural and artistic, strategies for re-use and re-envisioning will be continually developed and considered.

Though more frequently discussed under the tag-line “Brutalists Beware”, this concrete recycling machine, currently under development in Sweden, could hold significant potential towards re-envisioning and thus saving Brutalist works. With a more targeted approach to demolition, this emerging technology will likely transform the methods for altering and re-working buildings.
CLOG
New York, NY
Kyle May and Julia van den Holt, Editors
NY-based architectural journal that solicits outside contributions from scholars and practitioners. A recent issue explored Brutalism in depth.

DOCOMOMO
(Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement)
Global
International non-profit dedicated to preservation of Modern architecture. Many larger cities have local chapters that monitor and advise on pending loss of significant Modern buildings. As I travel I will seek out the relevant local chapters for more in-depth insights.

pinkcomma // over,under
Boston, MA
Micheal Kubo, Chris Grimley and Mark Pasnik
Curators and designers currently involved in an ongoing research project on Boston’s concrete modern structures titled “Heroic”.

ERO CONCRETE RECYCLER
Umeå, Sweden
Omer Haciomeroglu, Product Designer
Swedish-based product designer prototyping a hydro-demolition machine that enables selective disassembly and recycling of concrete.

BRUTALIST CONNECTIONS
Sao Paulo, Brazil
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


“IT GETS EVEN BETTER”
KaDeWe and Urban Memory in Berlin
ARCH 239: Intro to Architectural Theory

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In 1950 West Berlin, as both halves of the divided city struggled toward redefinition and reconstruction, the *Kaufhaus des Westens* ("Department Store of the West") reopened its doors for the first time in some seven years. Founded in 1907 and operated until its partial destruction during the war, the historic department store had long been an important part of the city's identity. With its postwar reopening, however, *Kaufhaus des Westens* (*KaDeWe*) acquired a new symbolic significance: while its return was initially celebrated by both East and West Berliners alike, *KaDeWe* would soon become an emblem of Western capitalist excess and a source of bitter envy for the city's Eastern counterpart. Since 1950, *KaDeWe* has continued to undergo near-constant transformation with countless renovations and expansions, yet, in spite of this mutability, it has retained its central identity. *KaDeWe*’s *architectural mutability is a function of the department store’s secure identity as a city icon and an urban institution*. *Endowed with such prominence by its substantial history and long-standing presence in the urban landscape, KaDeWe ultimately makes a virtue, even a commodity, of its narrative of constant transformation.*

**Divided Berlin and the Everyday**

At the end of the Second World War, Berlin emerged as both a city in ruin and a city divided. Border divisions placed Berlin’s historical center within the Eastern, Soviet-occupied portion of the city, leaving the Western, Allied-occupied half without a defined “city center” (*fig. 1*). As historian Brian Ladd notes in his book *The Ghosts of Berlin*, West Berlin was faced with the challenge of “turning a half city into a whole and autonomous one”.¹ What followed was a search not only for new urban form, but also for new identity.

As East and West Berlin fought to define themselves as distinct urban halves, each increasingly formed its own identity in terms of the other. With the trauma of postwar food shortages and the challenges of navigating a quotidian existence in a war-torn urban center still fresh in the minds of Berliners, the "everyday" itself became an important realm within which each government fought for the favor of its citizens. In his book, *Consuming Germany in the Cold War*, historian David Crew describes the experience thus:

> Sitting in the ruins of the “Third Reich”, most Germans only wanted to know which of the two postwar German states would be able to banish the reality and memory of wartime hardships more quickly, more thoroughly. Consumption and the quality of everyday life rapidly emerged as important battlefields upon which East-West conflict would be fought out.²

Capitalism and consumption, a fraught subject in the East, proved to be a powerful method of distinction for West Berlin. Given its staunch socialist ideology, East Berlin was an impotent, if nonexistent, competitor in this respect. In this context, historians Alexander Sedlmaier and Barthold Pelzer propose that “the department store acquired an additional symbolic meaning, becoming a contested space”.³ Within a tumultuous and newly-divided Berlin, *KaDeWe* thus established itself as the department store of West Berlin.

**Shopping as Citizenry**

In the West consumption became a function of self-identity. For German scholar Erica Carter, West Berlin's government adopted “consumerism as the source of core values for the nation”.⁴ Indeed it “was as consumers,” Carter elaborates further, “that West Germans in the postwar period gained one form of access to citizenship”: they became “active participants in...the reconstruction of the Federal Republic as social market

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economy*. Sedlmaier and Pelzer similarly argue that KaDeWe served as a unifying, yet still individualized, commercial realm for Western Berliners:

The KaDeWe consciously appealed to the West Berlin population in its entirety. The simultaneous emphasis on a rich supply of mass-produced goods as well as articles for a decidedly distinctive taste effected the strange dialectic allowing all social strata to construct their identities through the acquisition of apparently unique goods, albeit from dept stores and therefore shared with innumerable others.

Through its carefully considered offerings, moreover, KaDeWe was able to function simultaneously as both a global and a local marketplace. In heavily isolated West Berlin, for instance, KaDeWe's wares undoubtedly served as a connection to the broader globe – a connection surely denied their Eastern neighbors. What is more, the abundance of goods available in KaDeWe defined West Berlin's identity as distinct from the more sparsely-stocked shelves in the East. At the same time, KaDeWe's history as an established pre-war department store made the experience of shopping there markedly German, rooted as it was in Berlin's urban history. West Berliners were thus able to celebrate their privileged access to a wide selection of global goods while still affirming their German citizenry.

A Shared Memory, A Safe Memory

In Berlin's postwar reconstruction period, the resurrection of certain objects in the city's damaged built landscape became important symbols of Berlin's new beginning. In 1950, KaDeWe reopened its doors for the first time in seven years, and the momentous event was enthusiastically attended by over 180,000 Berliners-so

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5 Carter, 7.
6 Ibid, 222.
many, in fact, that the police eventually intervened to limit admission to the store (fig. 2). The crowd, however, was by no means limited to West Berliners; because passage between the East and West was still somewhat fluid (after all, the Wall would not be erected until 1961), the occasion was greeted eagerly by both Ossis (East Germans) and Wessis (West Germans) alike. As the Berlin Wall closed passage, this shared memory resonated with East Berliners, who continually defined their standards of everyday life within the frame of this fully-stocked, cornucopia of wares. This mundane yet potent, everyday, consumer experience of the department store now in the custody of the West is embedded in the consciousness of all Berliners, East and West.

Opened in 1907 by a Jewish businessman, KaDeWe offered Berlin a neutral historical touchstone, a "safe memory" of a city before the ravages of two world wars. For David Crew, “traditional forms of patriotism and national identification, irretrievably tainted by Nazism and the Second World War, were no longer available to aid in the process of physically and morally reconstructing Germany after 1945”. Badly bombed in the Second World War and damaged even further as the result of an American plane crashing into the building, KaDeWe had certainly shared in the wartime suffering of Berliners (fig. 3). The nearby Kaiser Wilhelm church (1897) similarly bore the scars of war (fig. 4). Left unrepaired, the site became a sort of urban memorial, or, as one scholar notes, “an earnest reminder of the Reich’s demise and of the wartime suffering”. Upon initial proposals to tear down the church, mass protests were held to protect it. Together these two icons, the Kaiser

8 Antonia Meiners, *Hundert Jahre KaDeWe* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2007), 101.
9 Crew, 2.
12 Ladd, 177.
Wilhelm Church and KaDeWe, framed an important urban space in West Berlin and defined for it a new urban city center.

**A Prominent Position in the Public Consciousness**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s amidst international student unrest, KaDeWe became the site of repeated attacks (*figs. 5-6*). This can be seen as validation of KaDeWe’s position beyond the consumer realm. As KaDeWe gains greater symbolic power in the public conscience, it takes on the role as a sort of civic space. In the context of Vietnam War protests, Sedlmaier and Pelzer argue that,

> Those who wished to declare their solidarity with the victims of the American engagement could not rely on the organizational framework of the department store but inclined to attack it as the epitome of capitalist aggression.\(^{14}\)

The entanglement of the West German state and capitalist consumption undoubtedly gave KaDeWe a unique role in these years of unrest. Similarly, Crew proposes that,

> By the 1960s, a younger generation began to question and reject the obsession with consuming that appeared to have dulled the older generation’s critical faculties and allowed them to evade any serious confrontation with the Nazi past.\(^ {15}\)

Indeed, between the years of 1967-1971, KaDeWe was the venue of a Vietnam War protest (Oct. 21 1967), the recipient of 26 broken store windows as a result of a student protest against Greek military regime (Jan. 18 1969), and the site of a small bombing by the Red Army Faction (RAF) (May 6 1971).\(^ {16}\)

After the fall of the Wall in 1989, KaDeWe continued to serve as an important venue for historical Berlin moments. In the weeks following the opening of the border, KaDeWe experienced its largest rush since its

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14 Sedlmaier and Pelzer, 228.
16 Meiners, 111-112.
initial re-opening in 1950. Over 100,000 customers flocked from the East each day (fig. 7). Warmly welcoming Ossis for the first time in almost 30 years, KaDeWe management gave out coffee and milk for free and, as noted by Sedlmaier and Pelzer, “sold bananas, which due to their chronic lack in East Germany, had acquired extraordinary symbolic value” at wholesale prices. A 1990 newspaper article quoted KaDeWe’s managing director asserting that “the house [KaDeWe] represented… the Western model of life. A department store as a daily showcase in the fight of systems.”18 West Berlin’s embrace of capitalism made KaDeWe the seminal urban locale it became, and KaDeWe seized upon this position of prominence, taking up and celebrating its place within Berlin’s history.

**Es Kommt Noch Besser / It Gets Even Better**

Beginning with the renovations required to reopen KaDeWe in 1950 after it had been so badly damaged during the war, a pattern emerged over the following 50 years in which the store undertook a major renovation or expansion approximately every ten years—and often with even greater frequency than that.19 Though renovations are not unusual for retail spaces attempting to keep up with changing cultural trends, KaDeWe’s have consistently been both frequent and extensive, testifying to its important symbolic role for Berlin. Not only has KaDeWe expanded dramatically over the years, growing from five floors and 24,000 sq.m to seven floors and 60,000 sq.m, but it has also undergone extensive transformation. With the exception of primary spaces such as the central entrance hall, most of the store has been dramatically reworked in each.

17 Sedlmaier and Pelzer, 225; Sedlmaier and Pelzer’s footnote for this anecdote references an August 7 1990 article in Die Welt titled: “Für die Berliner mehr als nur ein Ort zum Einkaufen” which translates to For the Berliner, more than just a place to shop; an apt summary of KaDeWe’s position in Berlin.
18 Sedlmaier and Pelzer, 225.
renovation (figs. 8-9). Yet given KaDeWe’s prominence in Berlin’s consciousness, it is safe from the risk of rendering itself unrecognizable. KaDeWe’s identity—as a brand, a retailer, an urban position—have been cemented, allowing the interior space a more fluid existence.

Indeed KaDeWe has even adopted as its slogan “Es Kommt Noch Besser” ("It gets even better"), making a virtue of its constant state of transformation. Throughout the store, placards and posters publicize the ongoing renovations (figs. 10-12). Foregoing typically apologetic formalities—"Forgive our appearance as we upgrade"—KaDeWe celebrates and commodifies its frequent alterations. A female fashion model recurs throughout its campaign accompanied by various accoutrements of the construction trade: a slick jackhammer, a cement mixer, a painter’s ladder. What is more, in each glossy image, a ruptured white backdrop recalls the ceremonial reveal of reinvention, of the new. What few areas of the store have remained relatively constant throughout the years, such as the central entrance hall, too embody this theme of reinvention and transformation. The main entrance hall serves as a frame for rotating installations and highlighting particular brands, seasons or themes (figs. 13-17). It is a narrative of transformation and reinvention that Berlin shares as well, particularly amidst its many post-reunification construction projects. As historian Janet Ward notes, Berlin, like KaDeWe, marketed this widespread change, adopting the crane in the sky as celebrated emblem of the city.21

20 Meiners.
A National Gem & A Global Marketplace

An informational pamphlet distributed at *KaDeWe* gives further insight into the store’s approach to its frequent renovations, and perhaps more importantly, the manner in which it relates to its customers:

Dear Customers! Under the slogan: “It gets even better” we are beautifying and extending many of our departments for you. On the respective floors you will find information about the new locations. Always, we strive to keep our floor information up-to-date, but we request you bear with us, if changes have occurred in the meantime. Remember, our employees will be glad to assist you at anytime.

Your KaDeWe

The valedictory use of the possessive pronoun “your” is particularly telling, offering to its customers a token of familiarity and of endearment. And in many ways, it is an earned, rather than an affected, familiarity. *KaDeWe* is very much *Berlin’s* department store. Its layers of history, which it proudly displays on its website and recently celebrated to much fanfare at its 100th anniversary, mirror those of Berlin. *KaDeWe* and the city of Berlin have together experienced the same complex history.

This rich history uniquely positions *KaDeWe* to balance the tensions between global and local relevance. For Janet Ward, Berlin faced the challenges associated with globalization and wide-scale transformations as it transitioned through its phase of post-reunification reconstruction:

Whatever Berlin’s long-term achievements will finally be in terms of its renewed sites of *genius loci*, we must situate them within the millennial skepticism that sees urban identities, no matter how overwritten and tended to, at permanent risk of losing out to today’s myriad, globalized “non-places” like malls, freeways, and airports that no longer take the history and the locality of the city – even the European city – into consideration.

Given its program and scale, not to mention its extensive transformations, surely the *KaDeWe* risks becoming a globalized “non-place”. And admittedly much of its interior architecture has an element of placelessness—

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22 “Floor Information Guide”, Promotional pamphlet received by Author at KaDeWe. Berlin, 2012.
23 Ward, 283.
ubiquitous plastic construction sheeting, sheetrock wall, endless rows of clothing racks, abundant escalators.

However because of its importance and its prominent role in establishing West Berlin’s identity, it also retains a layer of locality. It commodifies, and in doing so caricatures, the global and the local (figs. 18-19); nevertheless, rooted as it is in Berlin’s history, KaDeWe avoids becoming overly globalized or generic.

Arguably, KaDeWe’s role in establishing and shaping an identity for West Berlin, even West Germany, has guaranteed its lasting presence. KaDeWe is able to effectively balance its status as both global and local. While its sheer size and extensive selection place it in the company of other renowned international retailers such as Harrod’s and Galleries Lafayette, KaDeWe’s storied past and significance within Berlin’s commercial, cultural, and urban history imbue it with a local relevance and pride. Like Berlin, KaDeWe has had to build upon the foundations of its past. And like Berlin, KaDeWe has made a virtue of its narrative of transformation: It gets even better.

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Figure 1. Figure-Ground Map showing Berlin in 1989 with KaDeWe and location of Wall noted by author. “Berlin Planen, Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung.” Berlin.de. http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/planen/stadtmodelle/de/innenstadtplaene/sp/index.shtml

Figure 2. Crowds gather and wait to enter into KaDeWe on its re-opening day on 1950. "History - KaDeWe Berlin." KaDeWe Berlin. http://www.kadewe.de/en/the_kadewe/history/.
Figure 3. KaDeWe as seen in 1943 in its postwar state. "History - KaDeWe Berlin." KaDeWe Berlin.

Figures 5 & 6. Protestors outside KaDeWe; Clean-up after a bomb explosion in the men’s dept. Antonia Meiners. *Hundert Jahre KaDeWe*. Berlin: Nicolai, 2007. 102, 103.

Figure 7. Crowds fill Ku’Damm near KaDeWe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Graham Davies. “The Week the Wall Came Down: A Personal Account”. [http://www.camsoftpartners.co.uk/berlin.htm](http://www.camsoftpartners.co.uk/berlin.htm)
Figure 8. 1930 Ground floor plan.
Max Osborn, *Kaufhaus des Westens – KaDeWe 1907-1932*, Berlin: 1932, 188.

Figure 9. Contemporary plans of KaDeWe floors 0-3.
“Zibell & Zmania Visit KaDeWe.” *Pomeranian Adventure Tour.*
Figure 18. Lady Liberty & Cheese Zip. Photograph by Author, 2012.

Figure 19. Ampelman, Construction & Commerce. Photograph by Author, 2012.