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Changes in the structure of historical consciousness and the perception of architectural style: A case study in the popular perception of Brutalism from 1945 to 2019

Introduction

Beginning in the summer of 2014, a spate of newspaper feature stories, book reviews, and magazine articles declared that Brutalism, the architectural style that many of us had learned to hate, could now be loved. The question is, why the sudden change of heart? A few observations before attempting an answer. Unlike the large public projects conceived during the heyday of Brutalism from 1950 to 1975, most of the Brutalist development and redevelopment in the last ten years has been private and upscale. To mention just a few examples, a one-bedroom, split-level duplex in the Barbican Estate, a heritage-listed, Brutalist residential complex in London which was designed by architects Chamberlin, Powell, and Bon is listed at \$1,181,000. Media mogul Rupert Murdoch lives in a Denys Lasdun-designed Brutalist apartment block overlooking Green Park in London. The Park Hill Estate in Sheffield, England, a contender for the Stirling Prize in 2013, has been gentrified and is now home to artists and new media professionals.

In addition to this renewed interest in inhabiting Brutalist buildings, we also love to look at these giant slabs of monochromatic concrete, hove-

ring in negative space, their striking contrasts reminiscent of Suprematist paintings. A very substantial proportion of the images of buildings posted online by architects and aficionados are photographs of Brutalist buildings. In December, 2019, over 68,000 images on Instagram are tagged (#beton-brut).

In 2010, *Cosmic Communist Constructions Photographed*, a collection of photographs of Soviet era Brutalist buildings built between 1970 and 1990, was chosen as the best book on architecture by the International Artbook and Film Festival in Perpignan, France. However, there is more to the resurgence of interest and appreciation of Brutalism than market forces and photogenic qualities.

Theory and Method

Buildings are existential metaphors that symbolize the spirit of the age. In different epochs, and under different circumstances, the popularity of Brutalist buildings waxes and wanes as a symptom of deeper structures of relevance. References to particular Brutalist buildings are meant to illustrate that point. Our methodological framework is derived from Reinhardt Koselleck's work on historical consciousness in the field of conceptual history, Martin Heidegger's phenomenological approach to temporality, mood, and perception, and Ernst Becker's work on the denial of death and the quest for immortality. Our thesis is that changing perceptions of Brutalist architecture, in many cases radically different evaluations of the same buildings, are the effects of historically specific systems of relevance.

Although specific works of Brutalist architecture will be discussed, the emphasis in this article is on the ways that the configuration of three aspects of social life manifest differently in three distinct historical periods and produce significantly different perceptions of the Brutalist style. The three distinct time periods are conceptualized as three distinct "systems of relevance."¹ Each system of relevance exhibits an identifiable historical consciousness, a dominant mood, and a recognizably distinct collective attitude toward risk, terror, and the fear of death. The designations we have given these systems of relevance are: (1) *Collective mobilization of social life in the service of progress* (1941–1970); (2) *Living in the shadow of the tyrant-*

¹ Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers Vol. I: The Problem of Social Reality* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), pp. 6–10.

ny of the state (1970–2001); (3) *Maintaining ontological security in the age of ambiguity and global risk* (2001–2019).

The insight we take from Koselleck's work in conceptual history is that the definition and demarcation of a given historical epoch is structured in part by concepts that gain hegemony in political and social discourses. Concepts such as freedom, justice, diversity, community, or nation assume different meanings in different epochs. The concepts that gain hegemony cohere in systems of relevance that define the salient problems and possibilities of a given epoch, provide motivation for social action, and structure the scope and significance of the relationship between the past, the present, and the future.² Each epoch manifests a distinct orientation towards looking to the past, staying in the present, or focusing on the future. This historical and temporal orientation can be framed as a series of questions that emerge as members of each society reflect on their situation. Are things getting better? Does the path we are on provide us with something to look forward to or should we attempt to invent a new myth or recreate a lost golden age? Are we in control of our destiny or are we walking backwards into the future? Is there a sense of optimism in the air or a mood of malaise, anxiety, or omnipresent danger? Is progressive social change possible or is it better to simply focus on minimizing the damage that we do to each other and to our environs?³

From Heidegger we make use of the deceptively simple notion that the moods we find ourselves in shape our memories, expectations, hopes, and perceptions. The human encounter with the world, which Heidegger refers to as "Dasein" (being there) is always attuned, or tuned in, to self, others, and the surrounding world through moods.⁴ However, moods themselves are initially very hard to grasp. They are always with us yet they conceal themselves because they are a part of the conditions of possibility for any experience at all. We can only become aware of a mood upon reflection, and even then, we are bound to be in a reflective mood which structures the retrieval and interpretation of the mood we are trying to become aware

² Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002).

³ For an example of the application of the method of conceptual history see Andrew Glencross, "From 'Doing History' to Thinking Historically: Historical Consciousness across History and International Relations." *International Relations*, Vol. 29, No. 4, (Dec. 2015), pp. 413–433.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1962), p. 172.

of.⁵ Moods are also not entirely private events manifesting in our heads. Moods are often public and shared. They emerge as a necessary condition of our experience of the world, which is a shared world that Heidegger calls a “mitwelt” or “with-world.”⁶

Heidegger says that moods are disclosive, they color our world and bring experience to light in a certain way. To be depressed is to be in-the-world in a different way than to be joyful, or indifferent. A mood such as wonder fills us up, enchants our surroundings, enlivens the group, and makes time fly, whereas the mood of boredom empties us, disenchanting our surroundings, engenders group malaise, and makes time drag. Moods structure our perceptions and evaluations, and they do so most effectively when we are simply entangled in them and unaware of their effects. Moods also affect the way that individuals and entire societies are disposed toward the past, present, and future. Moods play a significant role in revealing or concealing our possibilities as we attempt to plot our courses of individual or collective action.

In his classic work, *The Denial of Death*, Ernst Becker argues that the most basic motivation in human life is a deep need for certainty and security that allows us to go on from day to day. Gaining this security often involves denying, repressing the terror of death. The world is terrifying and our lives in nature and society remind us of the terror of existence; one animal must consume another, people get ahead by competing, reducing, and often killing each other, and it all turns, literally, to waste and decay.⁷

This is the terror, to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression – and with all this yet to die.⁸

As part of the system of relevance in society, dealing with risk, terror, and death affects the way we understand ourselves, perceive our world, inhabit various moods, and interpret our possibilities. In response to the terror, we repress our awareness of death, or we attempt to become immortal by “creating a hero system that allows us to transcend death by participa-

⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 175.

⁶ *Ibid.*, *Being and Time*, pp. 82–84.

⁷ Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973).

⁸ *Ibid.*, *The Denial of Death*, p. xii.

ting in something of lasting worth.”⁹ This often involves the construction of monuments, durable structures that emphasize the permanence and continuity of the group and its values.

[We] earn this feeling [of security and lasting worth] by carving out a place in nature, by building an edifice that reflects human value: a temple, a cathedral, a totem pole, a skyscraper, a family that spans three generations. The hope and belief is that the things that man creates in society are of lasting worth and meaning, that they outlive or outshine death and decay, that man and his products count.¹⁰

In addition to the symbolic meaning of monumental structures, the form and content of the monuments themselves usually suggest permanence and immortality. In 1874, Friedrich Nietzsche developed this idea in *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*.

What is the advantage to the present individual, then, of the monumental view of the past, the concern with the classical and the rare of earlier times? It is the knowledge that the great which once existed was at least possible once and may well again be possible sometime; he goes his way more courageously, for now the doubt which assails him in moments of weakness, that he may perhaps want the impossible, has been conquered.¹¹

With more direct reference to architecture, in their classic essay, *Nine Points on Monumentality*, Sert, Léger, and Giedion describe, in architectural terms, what Becker calls immortality projects, that is, structures which humans create to confirm our ideals and assure our continuity through history.

Monuments are human landmarks which men have created as symbols for their ideals, for their aims, and for their actions. They are intended to outlive the period which originated them, and constitute a heritage for future generations. [...] They have to satisfy the eternal demand of the people for translation of their collective force into symbols. The most vital monuments are those which express the feeling and thinking of this collective

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Becker, *The Denial of Death*, p. 5

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), p. 16.

force – the people [...] Monuments are, therefore, only possible in periods in which a unifying consciousness and unifying culture exists.¹²

Monuments help to actualize cultural ideals, but they can also be redefined to accommodate emerging ideals. Monuments can also be re-monumentalized, rechristened as monuments that reassert ideals that are perceived as having been lost, or threatened. These processes of redefinition and re-monumentalization have contributed to the waxing and waning, and waxing again of the popularity of Brutalist Architecture. The social, economic, and geopolitical factors that have contributed to redefining and re-monumentalizing of Brutalist Buildings are explored in some depth below, after a brief characterization of the common elements of the Brutalist style.

A Characterization of the Brutalist Style

As an artform, architecture differs from painting, music, literature, film, or dance in significant ways. When people do not like a particular style of painting, literature, or film they simply ignore it and turn to something they do like. When the program on the television or the song on the internet does not satisfy, we change the channel. But it is more difficult to turn away from the built environment that we inhabit. More than any other artform, large-scale architecture situated in publically accessible spaces commands our attention. It is also encountered, simply as part of the fabric of everyday life, by a much wider set of audiences, cultures, and sub-cultures than most other forms of art. Because of this, architecture tends to be perceived through a broader lens, from the vantage point of a general mood and spirit of the age. The spirit of an age is historically relative and so are the perceptions engendered by it. For example, a building may have been planned, built, and celebrated during a wave of optimism, fallen out of favor during a period of malaise, only to re-emerge as an architectural icon one generation later.

Brutalism has come in and out of fashion like a barometer of the times. Brutalist buildings provided physical evidence of progress and efficiency in the post-WWII Era. After a period of cultural malaise, high crime, social

¹² Josep Lluís Sert, Fernand Léger, and Sigfried Giedion, “Nine Points on Monumentality,” in: *Architecture Culture 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology*, ed. Joan Ockman, (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), pp. 27–30.

disorganization, and economic stagnation in the mid-1970s, the Reagan-Thatcher-Gorbachev program for moral, political, and economic renewal and privatization gained ascendancy.

Originally seen as reflecting the democratic attributes of a powerful civic expression - authenticity, honesty, directness, strength - Brutalism eventually came to signify hostility, coldness, and inhumanity. Ambitions which had been viewed as positively monumental were condemned as bureaucratic and overbearing.¹³

During this period, Brutalist buildings were identified with the failures of big government and often destroyed. After September 11, 2001, the dawning of the age of precarity and global risk, Brutalist buildings have re-emerged as monumental symptoms of terror management, providing us with ontological security in an era of instability.

Brutalism is the term for sculptural concrete architecture that was developed by Peter and Alison Smithson in the United Kingdom and by Le Corbusier in France and India in the early 1950s. Prominent examples include Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* (1952), Alison and Peter Smithson's *Smithdon High School* (1955), Marcel Breuer's *The Breuer Building* (1966), Moshe Sadie's *Habitat 67* (1967), and *HemisFair* park in San Antonio (1968).¹⁴ Brutalism is characterized by arrestingly large, monumental, concrete forms. The buildings possess a Lego-block quality whose durability and efficiency signifies strength, security, and permanence. The resemblance to bunkers and military fortifications is unmistakable.

Brutalism itself is often perceived in a negative light, as a description of the hulking, monstrous, quality of the buildings themselves, the brutality of the regimes that sponsored their development, and the tragic lives of many of the residents of Brutalist public housing. This is a valid perspective for those who became familiar with Brutalism in the 1970s and later. The buildings, already in a state of decay, became an ideological symbol of state tyranny and the failure of the welfare state. However, the earliest references to the term have different origins. As Reyner Banham claimed

¹³ Mark Pasnik, Michael Kubo, and Chris Grimsley, *Heroic: Concrete Architecture and the New Boston* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2015), p. 18.

¹⁴ San Antonio History, "HemisFair San Antonio - Part 1," Youtube, January 24, 2010, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umOBo47xfo8>.

in his pivotal article, “The New Brutalism,” published in the December 1955 issue of *The Architectural Review*,

It was, in the beginning, a term of Communist abuse, and it was intended to signify the normal vocabulary of Modern architecture, – flat roofs, glass, exposed structure – considered as morally reprehensible deviations from The New Humanism.¹⁵

In addition to this ideologically motivated designation, Brutalism also originally referred to the *Béton Brut*, or “raw concrete” surfaces that were popularized by Le Corbusier and Auguste Perret. This type of raw concrete, roughly cast, with the surfaces showing the imprints of the formwork, can be seen clearly in the *Unité d’Habitation*, *Boston City Hall*, and *Habitat 67*.

Brutalist designs place emphasis on the fitment of joints and connections, as well as the texture, solidity, and strength of the materials. The solid build and the rough, unfinished concrete surfaces give the buildings a tangible presence and an undeniable sense of strength and permanence. Concrete is a democratic material that can assume any shape. Commenting on the design and construction of *Boston City Hall*, Michael McKinnell, one of the architects, said:

Concrete could be the structure. It could be the cladding. It could be the floors, it could be the walls. There’s a kind of all-through-ness about it. I think if we could have done it, we would have used concrete to make the light switches.¹⁶

McKinnell also emphasized the way that the concrete construction “symbolized longevity, it symbolized permanence.”¹⁷ The lead engineer on the *Boston City Hall* project, William LeMessurier, stated that the only way to destroy the building would be “with a controlled nuclear device.”¹⁸ This durability and reliability are intrinsic features of the style.

Most Brutalist buildings feature a fortified zone of transition between the exterior and interior spaces. When exiting a Brutalist building, one can notice the interior hallways and passages are rationally organized, clearly

¹⁵ Reyner Banham, “The New Brutalism,” *October*, 136 (Spring 2011), pp. 19–28.

¹⁶ Interview with Michael McKinnell, “Concrete is Patient,” in: *Heroic: Concrete Architecture and the New Boston*, eds. Pasnik, Kubo, and Grimsley, p. 309.

¹⁷ Pasnik, Kubo, and Grimsley, *Heroic: Concrete Architecture and the New Boston*, p. 37.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

marked, open and, at the same time, protected by the massiveness of the structure. Concrete piers and beams enclose the exits in heavy, fortress-like transitional spaces. A Brutalist building is a statement of human technology and mastery over the environment. It has nothing to do with its surroundings and no amount of landscaping or softening can blend the building with its environs. At the same time, the horizontal emphasis, the rough concrete texture, and the sheer mass of the Brutalist structures do connect with the landscape; not by thrusting up out of it or by blending in with it, but by imposing themselves on the ground, thereby expressing a sense of control, mastery, and protection.

It is also important to stress the leftist and working-class associations of Brutalism and its relationship to England's Council Housing Estates such as Alison and Peter Smithsons' *Robin Hood Gardens* in East London. The original intent of the Smithsons was to create "a more ethical way of inhabiting."¹⁹ These Brutalist buildings were designed to signify as honest structures, with the materials left raw and the labor value of the builders readily apparent. Brutalist architecture was also designed to affect those inhabiting and using it. *Robin Hood Gardens* was designed with a number of shared spaces to foster "a strong sense of community" and create "building[s] for the socialist dream."²⁰

The exemplar of Brutalism is the *Cité Radieuse* in Marseille, built between 1947 and 1952 in Marseille, France by Le Corbusier.

As early as 1920 Le Corbusier was designing plans for high density maximum efficiency modernist housing units known simply as the Unité d'habitation buildings. By naming the structures 'housing units' Corbusier expressed the modernist idea of truth in art. There is no symbolism to carry us away from the integrity of the design by adding a value that isn't there. Another modernist principle is that the form of the building should express its function and *Cité Radieuse* does not lie to us in this regard. From any vantage point, inside or out, it is obviously a "machine for living in."²¹ A third principle of modernism is that the work should be true to materials, allowing the distinct properties and qualities of the materials to express themselves. The building in Marseille is constructed in rough cast

¹⁹ Oli Mould, "Brutalism Redux: Relational Monumentality and the Urban Politics of Brutalist Architecture," *Antipode*, 49 (3) (2017), p. 704.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (New York: Dover, 1987), p. 107.

concrete, which Corbusier loved for its purity, plasticity, and strength. It was also a rational adaptation to the post-war steel shortage. The building also speaks a universal architectural language, the visual motif is abstract and the trim and accent colors are predominantly composed of the three primary colors.



Cité Radieuse (1947–1952) by Le Corbusier²²

Maximum use of space is achieved in part by using the flat roof for a communal space that includes a running track and a wading pool. From the rooftop one has 360 degree views of the Mediterranean and Marseille. There are 337 apartments, a bookstore, and a children's art school. Recent additions include a hotel and a restaurant named *Belly of the Architect*. In 2016, the *Cité Radieuse* was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Corbusier intended the building to house the families of workers who were rebuilding the Port of Marseilles after damage from the war. The bu-

²² Cité Radieuse, August 3rd, 2017, photograph, Designing Buildings Wiki, accessed May 21, 2019, <https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk/w/images/1/14/Citeradieuse.jpg>

ilding's concept and design was too cerebral for working class taste but it appealed to left-leaning urban professionals who rapidly acquired apartments in the *Cité Radieuse*. The building remains popular with its residents who are still mostly upper middle-class professionals. It is clear that values and dispositions of this particular class, along with their financial resources which are crucial to maintaining the structure, are the basis of its consistent and enduring popularity. As we shall see, two of the factors affecting the popularity of Brutalism are the values and behaviors of the group who use or inhabit the structures and the resources available for maintenance and upkeep.

To make this point clearer and more precise, we now turn to a description of each historical system of relevance emphasizing the perceptions of Brutalism that each system has engendered. Each of the three following sections contains illustrative examples of Brutalist structures whose popularity, or lack thereof, was affected significantly by the spirit of the age.

Collective mobilization of social life in the service of progress (1941–1970)

If we consider the situation of the two socio-political power blocs, the Soviet Union and its satellites and the United States and its European Allies, the period following WWII was characterized by an attitude of optimism that was initially cautious but growing increasingly competitive by the early 1960s. In this era, overdetermined by two ideologies of progress, capitalism versus communism, the past was understood as a comprehensible and predictable series of problems and mistakes that could be overcome by mobilizing resources and people in the race to develop and expand the best system. It was an age of overcoming the past and conquering the future. The approach to the study of history was to view the past as a repository of lessons that were to be learned in order to prevent the nightmares of history from repeating themselves. The idea, originally attributable to George Santayana²³ that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it, was restated in many ways and used to justify a rational, progressive, neo-enlightenment approach to history and culture.

²³ George Santayana (1905) *Reason in Common Sense*, Volume 1 of *The Life of Reason* (London: Dover, 1980), p. 284.

The mood of this period was a feeling of relief and optimism compared to the Great Depression and WWII years. The momentum and collective energy accumulated during the war had galvanized the populations and taught them what they could do. In the USA, Henry Luce, the publisher of *Life* magazine, had called upon the United States to enter WWII to defend democratic values and launch the first great American Century. “The world of the 20th century, if it is to come to life in any viability of health and vigor, must be to a significant degree an American century.”²⁴

The USA and the USSR saw evidence of their collective ability to transform the world by continuing to expand “the military industrial complex” that President Dwight Eisenhower had cautioned the world about in his 1961 Farewell Address.²⁵ The heedless expansion of these systems led to an emphasis on the development of new theories of social and political life which placed stress on social engineering, scientific management, and the exploration of new frontiers. These new frontiers included the inner space of individual human psychology and consciousness, the new imperial domains of the first, second, and third worlds, as well as the outer space of the solar system.²⁶ In the USSR, the ideal of the “New Soviet Man” was promulgated.²⁷ In his speech to the Communist Party’s Twenty Second Congress in 1961, Nikita Khrushchev outlined the ideal.

The builder of communism was expected to be educated, hardworking, collectivistic, patriotic, and unfailingly loyal to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. During the transition to a fully communist society, as predicted by Khrushchev, such vestiges of past culture as religion, corruption, and drunkenness would be eradicated. The thinking associated with the Party Program of 1961 represented the last burst of revolutionary optimism in the Soviet Union.²⁸

²⁴ Henry R. Luce, “The American Century,” *Life Magazine*, Feb. 17, 1941, pp. 3-9.

²⁵ President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Farewell Address, 1961, *U.S. National Archives & Records Administration*, 700 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=90>

²⁶ Slava Gerovitch, “New Soviet Man: Inside Machine: Human Engineering, Spacecraft Design, and the Construction of Communism,” *Osiris*, (22), (1), (2007), p. 135–157.

²⁷ Maja Soboleva, “The Concept of the ‘New Soviet Man’ and Its Short History,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, vol. 51, no. 1, (2017), pp. 64–85.

²⁸ “Soviet Man,” *Encyclopedia of Russian History*, Encyclopedia.com., accessed December 26 2019, <https://www.encyclopedia.com>.

The two power blocs expanded their depression era and wartime economies, funding and administering the expansion of physical infrastructure and fostering the growth of public works. Specific examples include the Marshall Plan, the rise of Council Housing Estates in England, and Soviet expansion and development in the form of five-year plans, which has the explicit goal of overtaking the U.S. by 1970. The five-year plans are a clear example of the attempt to define and measure progress by controlling time and history. Social activity, collective memory, and hopes were framed by the form and content of the plans, although the plans were unevenly implemented and often ignored. In this epoch Brutalist architecture was admired and promoted in Europe, the USSR, and the USA for its efficiency, reliance on inexpensive and abundant concrete in the steel-scarce postwar environment, and its egalitarian appeal.

The forward looking optimism of concrete architecture in the United States communicated the social ideals of John F. Kennedy's *New Frontier* and Lyndon B. Johnson's *Great Society* programs, emblems of the collective will to capitalize on growing national wealth to broadly repair and enrich the public realm.²⁹

Our example of the spirit of this age in Brutalist architecture is *Park Hill Estates* in Sheffield, England. *Park Hill Estates* is a Brutalist development whose design, construction, and popularity was shaped by the ideals of progressive social engineering and the mood of optimism regarding the use of public resources and large-scale public projects to improve the quality of human life. Designed by architects Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith and built between 1957 and 1961, it was one of the largest Council Housing Estates in England. For inspiration the Park Hill architects visited the *Cité Radieuse* in Marseilles, motivated by the belief that architecture had the power to solve society's problems. This was a widespread idea, shared by architects, planners, academics, social workers, public health officials and politicians in both parties.

²⁹ Pasknik, Kubo, and Grimsley, *Heroic: Concrete Architecture and the New Boston*, p. 19.



Park Hill Estates, Sheffield England, Undergoing Restoration, 2019³⁰



Park Hill Estates, Sheffield, England³¹

³⁰ Park Hill Estates, Sheffield, England, September 30, 2019, *Xr Stories Website*, accessed February May 21, 2020, <https://xrstories.co.uk/>

³¹ Samantha Haines, BBC News, Yorkshire, Sheffield's Park Hill Flats: Design Icon or Concrete Eyesore? *BBC News Website*, July 19, 2013, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-23358401>.

The thirteen storey giant contained 995 apartments and occupied four hundred acres on a site that had been crowded with poorly designed back-to-back tenement houses. Most of these back-to-backs had no private water supply or central heating. The residents used coal stoves, accessed their water at spigots in the outdoor courtyards, and shared communal toilets, which were major causes of sickness and disease. The neighborhood in Sheffield where *Park Hill Estates* was built had also been plagued by high crime and was aptly nicknamed Little Chicago.

For many of the working-class residents, *Park Hill Estates* was their first opportunity to have private indoor toilets, hot water, and electric lighting. The *Park Hill Estates* was not simply housing, it was a planned community featuring restaurants, shops, pubs, and exercise facilities. It was embraced optimistically by residents who had until recently been living without an indoor water supply, central heating, or private toilets.

By the late 1970s almost a third of English households lived in council housing. However, the cost of maintenance was high, and as the seventies came to a close, the soaring energy costs, inflation, rising unemployment, and labor unrest that typified the era were even more pronounced in the working-class, steel-producing city of Sheffield. The restaurants, shops and pubs closed. The tenants began a slow exodus, and squatters and criminals moved in, creating a vicious cycle of economic decline, lack of maintenance and upkeep, as well as crime. The old ghetto nickname Little Chicago was replaced by a new prison-house epithet, San Quentin. Between 1961 and 1985 Park Hill Estates went from being a mecca for aspiring architects on pilgrimage to a place to avoid at all costs.

However, in 2005 the Estates were acquired by the redevelopment company Urban Splash. The buildings were gutted, preserving the concrete frame, flat roof, and the elevated exterior walkways known as streets in the sky. Those components of the *Park Hill Estates* are listed on the National Register and therefore protected from demolition or substantial modification. The plan, which is well underway, is to revitalize the structures and their environs without deviating from the initial design concept. The first phase of renovation is now complete, and the mixture of spaces dedicated to private apartments, businesses, and public and student housing are full.³² There is a waiting list filled with former tenants who want

³² Park Hill, Sheffield, March 4, 2020, *Urban Splash Website*, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.urbansplash.co.uk/regeneration/projects/park-hill>.

to move back in. A comment in 2016 from a new resident, retiree John Stanworth, describes the phases in the life cycle of the *Park Hill Estates*.

Living in the shadow of tyranny of the state (1970–2001)

When there's no future, how can there be sin.
We're the flowers in the dustbin.
We're the poison in your human machine.
We're the future your future.
– The Sex Pistols, “*God Save the Queen (No Future)*”

In the United States and the United Kingdom, the 1970s ushered in a wave of political apathy in the general populace, and an anti-government attitude from the activist left that failed to garner the support of the population and only intensified its cynicism and malaise. In the United States, the 1970s began with two deadly attacks on American people by the American government, the student anti-war protests at Kent State on May 4, 1970, when the National Guard killed four students and wounded two, and the Attica Prison Riots, on September 9, 1971, when Governor Nelson Rockefeller called in the state police and forty-three people were killed, thirty-three inmates and ten correctional officers.

The economic situation in the United States was characterized by the recession of the seventies, a baffling combination of inflation and high unemployment attributed to the OPEC embargo, which created a crippling and humiliating energy crisis in a nation that had planned to expand and prosper indefinitely. “Inflation approached 20% and unemployment neared 10% – a combination previously thought to be impossible.”³³

As prices of energy skyrocketed, production costs increased, resulting in higher prices for fuel, goods, and services. The pathetic terms “stagflation” or “slumpflation” became a part of the public vocabulary. The United States entered a period of waning self-confidence, compounded by a loss in Vietnam, the scandal of Watergate, and the contracted economy. As violent crime, drug use, and divorce rates increased, the quality of life fell for

³³ “A Time of Malaise,” *U.S. History Online Textbook*, 2008, accessed May 29, 2019, <http://www.ushistory.org/us/58.asp>.

almost everyone. The deposition of the Shah, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and the hostage crisis added insult to injury for the American people.

On July 15, 1979, President Jimmy Carter addressed the nation in a televised speech that would come to be known as the “crisis of confidence” speech.³⁴ Carter identified the threat as an internal moral crisis. He also pointed out the ways that this crisis had affected the American sense of history and time. He identified a pervasive cynicism about the past, a lack of pride regarding the present, and loss of faith in progress and the future.

The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence... We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation. The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America. Confidence in the future has supported everything else. Confidence has defined our course and has served as a link between generations. We’ve always believed in something called progress... But just as we are losing our confidence in the future, we are also beginning to close the door on our past.³⁵

At the other end of the cultural spectrum, this theme of moral decline had already been picked up by punk rockers. In 1976, Richard Hell and The Voidoids released a seven-inch EP titled *Blank Generation*, which included the fateful songs “Blank Generation,” “Another World,” and “You Gotta Lose.” In 1977, The Sex Pistols released the demo album *Spunk* which included the song “God Save the Queen” and its sneering, refrain, “No Future.” As if providing a coda to this nihilistic mood, the Rock-n-Roll singer John Mellencamp released the album *Nothin’ Matters and What if it Did* in September 1980.

Christian minister Jerry Falwell responded to the widespread perception of nihilism in 1979 by founding the Moral Majority. To counter the mood of despair and hopelessness, as well as the signs of moral decline, Falwell had begun to give “I Love America” speeches at rallies across the USA as early as 1976. Falwell made it clear that the apparent cultural crisis was created by a colorful cast of vocal extremists whose influence the me-

³⁴ President Jimmy Carter, Energy and the National Goals - A Crisis of Confidence, American Rhetoric Website, accessed May 21, 2019, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jimmycartercrisisofconfidence.htm>.

³⁵ Ibid.

dia had blown out of proportion. But he asserted that behind all the noise there remained a silent majority of traditional Christians whose voice was not being heard, hence the term Moral Majority.

The historical consciousness could be characterized as empty presentism. With no great tasks to accomplish for the future and no heroes to idealize in the past, a “Me” generation emerged that cultivated an ethos of abandonment to the hedonism of the moment.

In 1980, newly elected president Ronald Reagan declared that this period of malaise was over and it was time to start over and embrace “Morning in America.” However, this was not to be the case for everyone. The Reagan-Thatcher economic miracle, a risky combination of monetarism and supply-side economics, shifted the burden of recovery onto the average worker. The de-regulation of the financial markets and the largest banks helped financiers become rich but also increased the national debt, and did not provide most households with increased real wages. These policies provided the justification for corporate restructuring, which impacted the working class most negatively but also led to increased competition for lower middle-class service jobs.

The zeitgeist shifted away from an emphasis on creating the ideal society through social engineering and attention to public welfare. The new emphasis was on individual rights and responsibilities. Margaret Thatcher framed the spirit of the age in the following manner:

I think we’ve been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it’s the government’s job to cope with it. ‘I have a problem, I’ll get a grant.’ ‘I’m homeless, the government must house me.’ They’re casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It’s our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour.³⁶

The Reagan-Thatcher philosophy of government may have been intended to revive the Protestant ethic and instill a sense of individual responsibility, but the eventual result was an increasing indifference toward one’s neighbors and a self-centered quest for individual achievement and possession of high-status items.

³⁶ Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Interviewed by *Women’s Own Magazine*, October 31, 1987, pp. 32-36.

This philosophy was put into practice in the British Housing Act of 1980 which gave around 600,000 residents of Council Housing the right to buy their apartments at a substantially discounted rate made possible by subsidies from the conservative government. Nearly one in three of these residents took the government up on its offer. Although the residents achieved their dream of independent home ownership, a significant number of block purchases were made at very low cost through proxy deals by large-scale investors. The effect on the viability of the housing councils was disastrous. As the percentage of private owners increased, the councils received fewer funds from the government for maintaining the residences of their tenants. The councils were also prohibited from reinvesting the money from sales of the older housing units in new housing, thus ensuring their continued viability. Instead, they were required to use all proceeds from the highly discounted sales to pay off all of their outstanding debt, a practice that had been unheard of in real estate development. The result was predictable: publicly held housing stock decreased and the structures that remained suffered due to lack of funds for upkeep. The council housing that did remain under public control was that which couldn't be sold off: poorly designed, steadily deteriorating council estates in the least desirable areas.

The late 1970s were also a period of noticeable decline in the USSR. After an age of prosperity, expansion, and scientific progress during the Khrushchev era, the state-centered economy began to lose its momentum. The Era of Stagnation (Период застоя) was the period in the history of the USSR that began in the late 1960s and continued until 1989. The Soviets were also faced with their own crisis in Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 in the bloody aftermath of the Communist Party coup of 1978 became a long and costly war that ended in defeat in 1989. "In the brutal nine-year conflict, an estimated one million civilians were killed, as well as 90,000 Mujahideen fighters, 18,000 Afghan troops, and 14,500 Soviet soldiers."³⁷ This unpopular war darkened the mood and weakened the economy as the USSR drifted toward eventual collapse due to internal corruption, overexpansion, the arms race, and aggressive trade and tariff policies promoted by the United States.

³⁷ Alan Taylor, "The Soviet War in Afghanistan, 1979 - 1989," *The Atlantic*, August 4, 2014, p. 56.

To speak more directly of the mood of this period, it was apocalyptic and demonic. The terms “devil” and “satan” were ubiquitous in cultural, religious, and political rhetoric. In the United States the leftist communes of the early 1970s gave way to apocalyptic religious cults that served as alternative families which were spawned with deliberate reference to the evils of society.³⁸ The most notorious cult event was the mass suicide of the People’s Temple Agricultural Project in Jonestown, Guyana. On November 18th, 1978, nine hundred and nine people drank the specially prepared cyanide laced kool-aid and died. This was the largest deliberately planned loss of American civilian life until the attacks of September 11, 2001.

In many corners of the world, the leftist idealism of the 1960s was hardened into left wing terrorism. In Western Europe, notable groups included the Italian Red Brigades, the Belgian Communist Combatant Cells, the Red Army Faction, and French Action Directe. In other regions, terrorists, freedom fighters, and guerillas proliferated as well, including the Japanese Red Army, the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, the Peruvian Shining Path, and the Colombian 19th of April Movement. The Front de libération du Québec was a Marxist–Leninist group responsible for over 160 bombings in the decade of the 1970s.

In the United States, disenchanted members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) formed the Weather Underground in 1969. By the next year, the group had claimed credit for 25 bombings—including the U.S. Capitol, the Pentagon, the California Attorney General’s office, and a New York City police station.³⁹ The Symbionese Liberation Army was active in California from 1973 to 1975, and committed bank robberies, two murders, and numerous acts of violence in the name of leftist unity and “loving harmony and partnership in the best interest of all within the body.”⁴⁰

During the hostage crisis in Iran in late 1979, television broadcasts in the United States were filled with images of angry mobs in Iran burning

³⁸ Elizabeth Yuko, “American Cult: 5 Spiritual Groups That Went Too Far,” *Rolling Stone*, September 12, 2017, accessed May 21, 2019, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-lists/american-cult-5-spiritual-groups-that-went-too-far-202224/the-branch-davidians-1955-1993-202267/>.

³⁹ FBI, History, Famous Cases and Criminals, “The Weather Underground Bombings,” *Federal Bureau of Investigation Famous Cases and Criminals Website*, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/weather-underground-bombings>.

⁴⁰ Straight Dope Science Advisory Board, May 21, 2002, “Who were the Symbionese, and were they ever liberated?” accessed February 16, 2020, <https://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/2004/who-were-the-symbionese-and-were-they-ever-liberated/>.

the American flag and shouting, “Death to America, the Great Satan.” Not to be outdone, Reagan called the Soviet Union the “Evil Empire.” Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority thrived on demonology. Not only had society gone to the devil, a clear sign of the impending apocalypse, but the Antichrist was easy to identify, as a counterfeit Christ, “a Jew who walks among us.”⁴¹

In New York City, a policy of deliberate neglect led to the burning of the Bronx. “City officials suggested a policy of gradually cutting services to the worst neighborhoods. They called it a planned shrinkage.”⁴² The South Bronx and many other blighted neighborhoods were constantly burning. The Bronx lost over 97% of its buildings to fire and abandonment between 1970 and 1980! Other areas lost more than 50%. While the Bronx burned in New York City, the Brutalist buildings in many cities throughout the US and Great Britain that housed the urban poor become urban forts, allowing gangs, prostitution, and drug dealing to flourish in a territory set apart from and defended against the police and mainstream society.

In this darkness, the architecture that one photojournalist and former Bronx resident referred to as “Brutalist concrete learning factories”⁴³ was viewed as menacing forms of concentrated tyrannical power, symbols of the failed welfare state and ghetto anarchy, on the one hand, and Soviet State oppression, on the other. Local governments abandoned and, in notable cases, began to destroy the projects of the future. In frustration and aggression, the US government detonated and destroyed the massive St. Louis public housing project the *Wendell O. Pruitt Homes* and *William Igoe Apartments*, known together as the *Pruitt-Igoe Project*. *Pruitt Igoe*, an example of Brutalism par excellence.⁴⁴ In 1951, this award-winning housing project designed by Minoru Yamasaki had been a harbinger of the future.

In 1951, an Architectural Forum article titled “Slum Surgery in St. Louis” praised Yamasaki’s original proposal as “the best high apartment” of the year. Overall density was set at a moderate level of 50 units per acre (higher than in downtown slums), yet, according to the planning principles

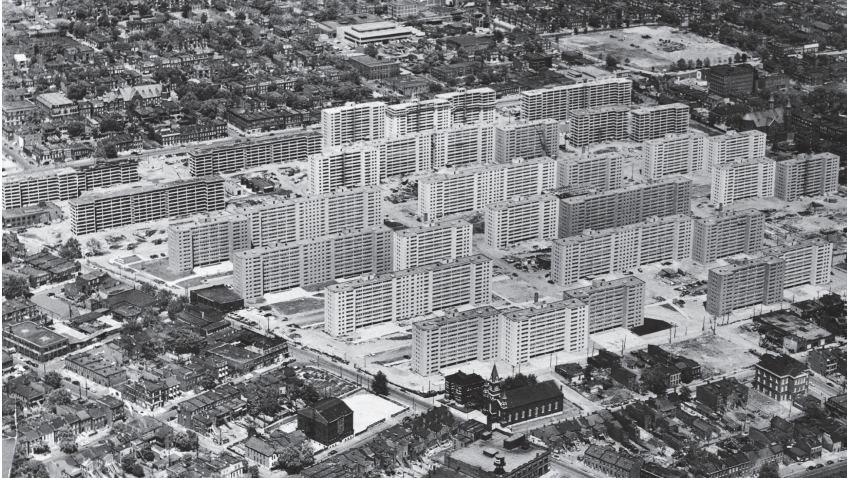
⁴¹ Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Devil and Jerry Falwell,” *Slate*, May 15, 2007, accessed May 27, 2019, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2007/05/did-jerry-falwell-think-i-was-the-antichrist.html>.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ David Gonzalez, “Faces in the Rubble,” *New York Times*, August 21, 2009, p. 24. accessed May 28, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/23/nyregion/23bronx.html>.

⁴⁴ Pruitt Igoe, n.d., photograph, United States Geological Survey, Wikipedia, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pruitt%E2%80%93Igoe#/media/File:Pruitt-igoeUSGS02.jpg>.

of Le Corbusier and the International Congresses of Modern Architects, residents were raised up to 11 floors above ground in an attempt to save the grounds and ground floor space for communal activity.⁴⁵



Pruitt Igoe, St. Louis, 1951⁴⁶

However, as the horizon of the future darkened, the destructive impulses held sway at the higher levels of government.

Modern architecture died in St Louis Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3:32pm (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme was given the final coup de grace of dynamite. Previously it had been vandalized, mutilated and defaced...and although millions of dollars were pumped back, trying to keep it alive...it was finally put out of its misery. Boom, boom, boom.⁴⁷

It was a widely televised event, functioning as a catharsis, an occasion for scapegoating the poor, and a signal that large-scale government planning was over.

⁴⁵ "Pruitt Igoe," Wikipedia, last modified March 25, 2019, accessed May 28, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pruitt%E2%80%93Igoe#Design_and_construction.

⁴⁶ Colin Marshall, "Pruitt-Igoe: the troubled high-rise that came to define urban America," April 22, 2015, *The Guardian Website: A history of cities in 50 buildings*, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/apr/22/pruitt-igoe-high-rise-urban-america-history-cities>.

⁴⁷ Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), p. 9.



The Second Stage of Demolition of Pruitt-Igoe in April 1972⁴⁸

Two Brutalist structures that reflect the history and mood of this period were also slated for detonation but have survived. They are *Boston City Hall*, built between 1963 and 1968, and the Soviet, now Russian, *Embassy in Havana* that was begun in 1978 under the Brezhnev regime and completed in 1987 under Gorbachev in a last ditch effort to assert Soviet power in the Western Hemisphere.

Boston City Hall was constructed at the end of a period of political idealism and optimism. It was one component in a larger plan to revive the urban core of the city of Boston and to attract federal dollars to the city. It was a statement against the insularity, parochialism, and corruption that had developed in Boston in the early 20th century. The jury that selected the design wrote:

The building achieves great monumentality, drama, and unity. The play of light and shade, the richness of forms and spaces...and a strong focus for the symbol of a city government. It is a daring yet classical architectural statement.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Lee Balterman, Demolition of Pruitt Igoe, 1972, Photograph, *Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images*, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/apr/22/pruitt-igoe-high-rise-urban-america-history-cities>.

⁴⁹ Pasnik, Kubo, and Grimsley, *Heroic: Concrete Architecture and the New Boston*, p. 98.

The three levels of the building symbolize the structure and function of government. The upper levels house the city's bureaucratic agencies. Spaces dedicated primarily to ceremonial functions, including the Mayor's Suite, are on the second floor. The vast, open, main floor lobby and the publically accessible council chamber represent the architects' desire to create a transparent space where the ideals of participatory democracy would flourish. In this regard, Michael McKinnel commented:

Naive as I was, I made a presentation at one point to the city council and I remarked that the great brick staircase in the entry hall would be a wonderful place for sit-ins and demonstrations. I was met with a very stony silence.⁵⁰

The building rapidly became a prototype for other public buildings around the world. The *Central Library* in Birmingham, England, the *Ministry of Transportation Building* in Istanbul and the unrealized design for the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Building* in Baghdad, are near carbon copies of Boston City Hall.



Boston City Hall, 1963–1968⁵¹

⁵⁰ Panel Discussion, WGBHForum, “Brutalism: A Look at Boston City Hall,” YouTube, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHd5BfDdfFo>.

⁵¹ Chris Christo, Boston City Hall February 7, 2019, Staff Photo By Chris Christo/MediaNews Group/Boston Herald, “Boston’s demographic shift favors minority candidates, Could swing future mayoral race,” *Boston Herald*,

Designed and constructed with a dual vision of small and large government, the populist ideal of participatory democracy on the one hand, and the desire to attract federal funds to the city on the other, the building was soon identified with technocratic tyranny and big government control. During the 1980s those on the left saw the building as an anti-grassroots statement, too much concentrated power and authority under one aggressive-looking roof. For those on the right, the building was just another symbol of the welfare state with its expensive and ineffective bureaucracy.

In its heyday, as an exemplar of efficient urban design, Brutalism was associated with “urban renewal” and “slum clearance,” movements which had support from most sectors of society in the 1950s and 60’s. By the 1970s, however, the lessons of Jane Jacobs’ influential book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, had been absorbed by architects and urban planners as well as a great number of college students and general readers. The message was clear: large-scale, top-down, technocratic urban planning was an assault on humanist conceptions of urban life, an attack on the poor, and a destruction of vital, liveable, ethnically cohesive, dynamic, urban neighborhoods. For example, “Boston City Hall became the symbolic epicenter of a revolt against technocratic monumentality, waged in the name of both populism and the new aesthetics of postmodernism.”⁵²

As noted, many Brutalist buildings have been demolished by the governments that erected them. Boston City Hall was consistently ranked as one of the city’s ugliest buildings in the 1980s and 90’s. As recently as 2007 Boston mayor Thomas M. Menino called for the demolition or sale of the building.⁵³ However, a significant upward shift in its popularity ranking occurred after the Boston Marathon bombing of 2013, an act of terror perpetrated as retribution for the US military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, suggesting a tie to the building’s presence as a safe, durable, monumental, All-American, building. As perceptions change, those who once hated the building have come to love it. “Among those at the forefront of the campaign to save it from demolition is the local preservation community, which, *mutatis mutandis*, once vociferated against it.”⁵⁴ *Boston City*

May 10, 2019, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.bostonherald.com/2019/05/10/bostons-demographic-shift-favors-minority-candidates/>.

⁵² Pasnik, Kubo, and Grimsley, *Heroic: Concrete Architecture and the New Boston*, p. 39.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Hall was designed with optimistic, democratic principles in mind and the perception of the building has been largely determined by the political and economic spirit of the times.

Another prime example of this mood of malaise and apocalypse is the Soviet, now Russian, embassy in Havana. Construction began in December 1978 and it was completed in November 1987, an era when Soviet influence and support in Cuba was in decline after the triumphant years of the 1960s and early 1970s.



Soviet (now Russian) Embassy, Havana, 1978–1987⁵⁵

In 1960 Castro had nationalized most of the U.S. industries, established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, and began purchasing weapons from them. In January 1961, the USA severed diplomatic relations with Cuba and drastically reduced the annual quota of sugar purchases. To prevent the Cuban economy from collapsing, the USSR began

⁵⁵ Rob O'Neal, *Russian Embassy in Cuba a 'piece of work'*, accessed February 12, 2020, <https://keysnews.com/article/story/russian-embassy-in-cuba-a-piece-of-work/>.

to purchase the sugar. The Soviets significantly increased their role in surveillance, counterintelligence, and defense of Cuba after the failed ‘Bay of Pigs’ invasion of 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. Soviet power and presence waned in the late 1980s, partly due to the new policies of Glasnost and Perestroika, and partly due to inability to sustain economic commitments. In response to Gorbachev’s deviation from Marxist-Leninist ideology, Fidel Castro openly criticized the policies of glasnost and perestroika in 1988 and then banned the sale of Soviet publications. He also expelled a number of Soviet diplomats from the embassy in 1989.⁵⁶ Seen in this light, the *Soviet Embassy in Havana* appears to have been designed as a statement of power and support, but constructed during a time when that power and support were beginning to seem tyrannical.

Maintaining ontological security in the age of ambiguity and global risk (2001–2019)

May the days be aimless.

Let the senses drift.

Do not advance the aim according to a plan.

– Don DeLillo, *White Noise*

Our contemporary era has been characterized by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht as the broad present, an expanding horizon of digital information that appears to contain all of the past and a wide array of scenarios about the future.⁵⁷ It is an ambiguous and relativistic world in which golden age versions of the past, narratives of historical progress, future utopias and dystopias present themselves as equally real and possible.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Mervyn J. Bain, “Cuba-Soviet Relations in the Gorbachev Era,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 37, (November 2005), p. 4.

⁵⁷ Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich, *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 2014).

⁵⁸ For an illuminating discussion of the effects of contemporary information culture on our perceptions of what is real, what is present, what is absent, and what remains latent, ambiguous, and anxiety-provoking, see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s lecture. Yale University, “The Shulman Lectures, ‘All that Matters is Invisible’: How Latency Dominates our present,” YouTube, August 7, 2014, accessed June 4, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGMKnG2yEc8>.

Without fully realizing it, we now inhabit a new, unnamed space in which the “closed future” and “ever-available past” (a past we have not managed to leave behind) converge to produce an “ever-broadening present of simultaneities.”⁵⁹

Post-human speculations about immortality, apocalyptic scenarios, imaginary histories, revisionary histories, all dispersed in an ocean of instantaneous information. A different sense of time and possibility characterized by distraction and deferral prevails, an effect of the technological medium we are entangled in. For many who have never lived without constant access to the internet, the temporal immediacy of cyberspace replaces the chronology of past, present, and future. The constantly mutating past is a part of the centrifugal force of the ever-expanding present. The future is ambiguously present, as a set of novelties in the expanding present or as a darkening horizon closing in upon us. The problems we thought we might solve, or learn from, are now revealed as more complicated. Increasing amounts of information become harder to sift through and sort out. A very subtle blend of fact and fiction pervades our sense of the future, producing a mood of uncertainty, risk, and ambiguity in the face of wildly varying scenarios about what it all means and how it all ends. The surfeit of information circulating in the digital economy produces a complexity, immensity, and immediacy that undermine our ability to identify structures, causes, patterns, and consequences. The result is that antithetical concepts such as truth and falsehood, fact and myth, and authentic and inauthentic lose their meaning.

The global techno-economic system transforms social relationships, social skills, knowledge, abilities, and human labor into mathematical codes that evolve and mutate. The tangible presence of experience is replaced by abstraction and distance, and we are positioned in a world of information that changes hands without any sense of personal ownership or value, a world of knowledge without consciousness.⁶⁰ Nihilism is the result. The system is immune to transformative criticism because it entertains all positions and allows every voice to be heard. Serious criticisms mix and mingle with absurd conspiracy theories, apocalyptic scenarios, and fake news.

⁵⁹ Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present*, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Franco Berardi, *The Second Coming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), p. 53.

Although the proliferation of possibilities in digital form is a new type of freedom for many, it is just as likely to produce a heightened sense of indifference or “enlightened cynicism,” as a means of protection from cognitive dissonance. Peter Sloterdijk identified this emerging consciousness in 1984, in a time when it was still possible to perceive it in the twilight of the modernist historical consciousness:

The discontent in culture has assumed a new quality: it appears as universal, diffuse cynicism. The traditional critique of ideology stands by helplessly. It cannot find the lever that would enlighten this cynically alert consciousness [...] cynics are not dumb, and every now and then they certainly see the nothingness to which everything leads. Their spiritual make-up has become elastic enough to make the constant doubt about their own pursuits part of their quest for survival.⁶¹

Cynicism is one prevailing attitude toward the future. Unlike the nihilistic presentism that dominated the 1970s and 80’s, cynicism is a different form of presentism, one characterized less by hedonistic abandon than by distraction, deferral, voyeuristic indifference, and bland acceptance.

However, segments of the intelligentsia and the professional classes who feel obligated to try to be less cynical and more optimistic, have also created a culture of survival and survivors. It is a culture where coping, recovery, and resilience have become an important part of everyday conversation.⁶² Unlike during the period after World War II, when economic and human resources were optimistically mobilized in service of large-scale public projects, human agency is now increasingly constrained and enabled by practices of risk management and damage control. We are spending and expending more on insurance against the future. To paraphrase the central idea in Ulrich Beck’s analysis of the modern culture of risk and risk avoidance, whether making decisions about our health, reputation, or finances, the future is defined as an attempt to avoid what is bad rather than to attain the good:

⁶¹ Peter Sloterdijk, Michael Eldred, and Leslie A. Adelson, “Cynicism: The Twilight of False Consciousness,” *New German Critique*, vol. 33, (Autumn 1984), p. 201.

⁶² Consider this example of a contemporary artist’s perception of the uncertain future. Bryan Rindfuss, “San Antonio Artist Leigh Anne Lester Investigates an Uncertain Future with Exhibition of ‘Evolutionary Novelities,’” *San Antonio Current*, March 15, 2019, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://www.sacurrent.com/ArtSlut/archives/2019/03/15/san-antonio-artist-leigh-anne-lester-investigates-an-uncertain-future-with-exhibition-of-evolutionary-novelities>.

The language of threat is infectious and transforms social inequality; social need is hierarchical, the new threat, by contrast, is democratic...It affects even the rich and powerful...The shocks are felt in all areas of society. Markets collapse, legal systems fail to register offences, governments become the targets of accusations...Fear determines the attitude toward life. Security is displacing freedom and equality from the highest position on the scale of values. The result is a tightening of laws, a seemingly rational 'totalitarianism of defence against threats.'⁶³

Specifically, in the United States a new form of Social Justice Movement has emerged, emphasizing safety and security, the protection of identity from harm and insult, the prevention of bullying, and the proliferation of safe spaces and sanctuaries, many of which seem to violate the freedoms of expression and association guaranteed by the First Amendment of the US Constitution, lending support to Beck's assertion that the values of security, risk avoidance, and safety are displacing the values of freedom and liberty.

Globalization has generated a complex and multi-layered spatio-temporal structure. The transformations of place and the intrusion of distance into local activities, combined with the permeation of hypermediated experience, as well as the perception of risk and threat emerging from the interstitial spaces of the globe have radically changed what the world is becoming. The temporal rhythm of global commerce places consumers in an anxious eternal present in which time is virtually the same everywhere and everything has to happen in an instant. Space is compressed and redefined by electronic media and communication systems, global positioning systems, jet transport, and surveillance drones.

For some, perhaps, this omnipresent surveillance provides a sense of comfort. For others, it is a threatening intrusion. The same technologies have enabled a global jihadist movement which intensifies the present by positing a future which is a paradise for some and a nightmare for others.

How does the experience of trauma produce ruptures in the unity of consciousness and culture that is required for the continuity of identity? Trauma cuts into what has been lived and remembered because the people, places, and material things that anchor human memories are destroyed or transformed, creating a rift between the future as it was conceived of and the way it appears in traumatic existence. Our ontological security is un-

⁶³ Ulrich Beck, *World at Risk* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 8-9.

dermined and the way that we attach ourselves to time, history, and existence, as we go on from day to day reveals itself in all of its complexity.

If an entire, global, society experiences a traumatic event, or repeated, unpredictable traumatic events, such as the global terrorist attacks whose number began to rise significantly in 2001, one response, among others, will be the desire to regain a sense of ontological security.

The global death toll from terrorism over the past decade ranged from 8,000 in 2010 to a high of 44,000 in 2014. Public concern about terrorism is high – in many countries more than half say they are concerned about being a victim.⁶⁴

Terrorism creates a mood in which all plans and projects are conceived in the shadow of contingency. It is effective because it generates a sense of perpetual risk along with a mixture of anxiety, fear, and paranoia. As an ‘ever present danger’ terrorist attacks and the threat of attack change the structure of the historical consciousness. Those who experience the attacks feel the high intensity trauma, and become acutely aware of the precarious nature of human existence. On the other hand, those who feel the lower intensity, pervasive, threat of attack dwell in a world of vulnerability and risk. This is one important reason why Brutalism, with its reassuring monumentality, its fortress-like strength, and its undeniable tangible presence is back in style.

Consider this in light of the events of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, a major catastrophe, which, although it occurred on US territory, also became an immediate viral event which has been analyzed, memorialized, and refigured as justification for the international wars that have claimed many lives since it occurred. As Ulrich Beck noted in *World at Risk*,

[o]ne of the most massive structures erected by human beings collapsed within 14 seconds in a monstrous cloud of whirling and swirling dust – a hundred floor giant was transformed into smoke and dust. The resulting fireball consumed everything around it, including thousands of human lives. It exploded everywhere, in every living room, on mobile phone screens, on every screen and monitor in every public place, in bars, restaurants, gyms, etc. The images of the twin cathedrals of global capitalism collapsing

⁶⁴ Hannah Ritchie, Joe Hasell, Cameron Appel and Max Roser (2019) - “Terrorism”. Published online at OurWorldInData.org. accessed February 21, 2020, <https://ourworldindata.org/terrorism>.

suddenly in a giant cloud of dust exerted such a fascination because of their traumatic obscenity. The belief in the invulnerability of the greatest military power on earth was executed before a live audience.⁶⁵

In this climate of fear, ambiguity, risk, and security, Brutalist structures are like sanctuaries, signifying strength, security, and permanence. Brutalist durability, material presence, and monumentality serve as a bulwark against the evanescence of everyday life and the disembedding of temporal and spatial experience. The buildings are not appealing, high-profile targets like the twin towers of the *World Trade Center* and the central business districts of nearly all globally significant cities. In contrast to the slick, ephemeral, glass towers with fragile, opaque, cladding and ultralight skeletal walls, the rough concrete surface, horizontal orientation, and sheer bulk of Brutalist buildings connect them to the ground in a tangible manner. In doing so they may symbolize a ground of existence in a world that has become precarious and terrifying.

One of the better examples of a popular Brutalist building with monumental presence is the *Royal National Theater* in London.



The Royal National Theater, South Bank, London, Denys Ladsun, 1976⁶⁶

There are mixed responses to the *Royal National Theater*: it has been ranked both as one of the city's most iconic buildings and one of the ugliest.

⁶⁵ Beck, *World at Risk*, p. 68.

⁶⁶ Timothy Passmore, Photo, Shutterstock.com, *Encyclopedia Britannica Entry: The Royal National Theatre*, The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed on May 21, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Royal-National-Theatre>.

Prince Charles described it as a clever way of building a nuclear power station in the middle of London without anyone objecting and a Radio Times poll found it to be in the top five of both the most hated and the most loved British buildings.⁶⁷

The enduring success of the structure may be due to its uncompromising modernism in a postmodern age. In an age of global terrorism it may also seem bombproof and impregnable in its bunker-like horizontal orientation. Or perhaps the ziggurat shape signifies a deeper historicity, a tangible spirituality grounded in ancient rites, a properly heroic immortality project in an age of impermanence, ambiguity, and threat.

Conclusion

We have argued that in different epochs, and under different circumstances, the popularity of Brutalist buildings waxes and wanes as a symptom of a collective psychological need for collective identity, ontological security, and monumental presence. We have also stressed the ways that human perceptions and human agency are affected by the structure of opportunity and possibility in a given historical epoch. Our ability to perceive and imagine possibilities, and to act upon them, is affected by a number of features of human existence which are beyond our control. Catastrophes of history, those events that not only happen *in* history but that happen to history, change the very structure of the historical consciousness. The relationship between the past, present, and future, as well as the salience of the past, or the present, or the future, is reconfigured. This includes changes in our sense of history's direction and speed, collective moods of optimism, malaise, or pessimism, and a feeling of momentum or stagnation. These historical and temporal transformations are made manifest in the perceptions of the material culture of the impacted individuals and groups; and this is how, and why, Brutalism is back in style. In the mid twentieth century, the brightest examples of Brutalist Buildings conveyed a message of optimism regarding government power, progress, efficiency,

⁶⁷ Staff, Reuters, "Top 10 "ugly" buildings to visit," May 7, 2012, *Reuters Website*, accessed on May 21, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-top-10-ugly-buildings-to-visit/top-10-ugly-buildings-to-visit-idUSLNE84600N20120507>; Georgina Wilson-Powell, June 25, 2019, "London's Top 10 Iconic Buildings," *The Culture Trip Website*, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/england/london/articles/london-s-top-five-iconic-buildings/>.

and monumental significance. When those ideas and values faltered, or fell out of fashion, the same buildings served as a grim reminder of government tyranny, bureaucracy, inefficiency, and urban blight. Most recently, in an age of heightened consciousness about incalculable global risks and unpredictable incidents of terror, brutalist buildings constitute one form of terror management. certainty in an era of instability,

The revival of Brutalism is not mere nostalgia. It is related to deeper features of human existence, such as the need for ontological security and permanence, the desire to see something endure, and the need for monumental anchors in a period of temporal flux, something real in a world where all that is solid melts into the air.

Anthony Lack and Jackson Korynta

Changes in the structure of historical consciousness and the perception of architectural style: A case study in the popular perception of Brutalism from 1945 to 2019

This study investigates changes in the popularity of Brutalist buildings from the 1940's to present. Our methodological framework is derived from three sources: (1) Reinhardt Koselleck's work on historical consciousness in the field of conceptual history; (2) Martin Heidegger's phenomenological approach to temporality, mood, and perception, and: (3) Ernst Becker's work on the denial of death and the quest for immortality. Our thesis is that changing perceptions of Brutalist architecture, in many cases radically different evaluations of the same buildings, are the effects of historically specific cultural, political, and social structures. In phenomenological terms, these structures form fairly discrete systems of relevance. That which is held to be profoundly interesting, or exciting, or progressive in one system of relevance can appear dull, menacing, or foolish in another. The systems that we identify, describe, and explain, are: (1) Collective mobilization in the service of progress (1941–1978); (2) In the Shadow of the Tyranny of the State 1978–2001; and (3) Seeking Certainty and Security in the Ambiguity of Global Risk: 2001 to 2019. We show how each system has produced a distinct perspective on brutalist architecture which influences the popularity of the style, or lack thereof.

Keywords: Historical consciousness, conceptual history, temporality, mood, aesthetic perception, Brutalism

Słowa kluczowe: świadomość historyczna, historia konceptualna, czasowość, narracja, postrzeganie estetyczne, brutalizm