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Theory and Practice in Digital Design
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4/30/23

"Adaptive Reuse of Brutalism"

From the moment I saw modernist architecture I was drawn to it. The crisp lines and geometric forms, the intention behind every detail, and most of all the sheer ambition to change the world. But on learning about International Style modernism, I felt disappointed and betrayed by the ideals held dear by the architects and critics of the movement. I found myself asking the question over and over: does modernism's problematic philosophies nullify it as a progressive source of knowledge? Can anything positive be derived from it or is it simply a case study of failures from which to learn? And, more so, why are people like me so drawn to the style if it is so inherently flawed? Studying the reactions to the International Style reveal that many were determined to build upon modernism rather than scrap it altogether. Following the International Style, Brutalism was the intimidating and looming next iteration of modernism, which from the outset appeared far more problematic and unrestrained than the original. With a special focus on the writings of Reyner Banham, this paper will examine the often denigrated and misunderstood movement with the hopes of salvaging its legacy as well as demonstrating its potential value.

My original awareness of Brutalism owes itself primarily to social media posts of trendy, supposedly brutalist buildings, automobiles, and products, ranging from futuristic technology to concrete ruins. Despite being "overpowering" and "cold," there is a niche who finds this style captivating. The popularity of these pages is indicative of the revived interest in Brutalism in recent years. This newfound appreciation also comes at a time when Brutalist buildings all over the world are being demolished. Even on Whitman campus, the Sherwood center was remodeled after widespread complaints that the facade was too aggressive and impersonal, many students on campus referring to it as "the bunker." There are also similar complaints about Olin Hall. This recent polarization of opinions regarding brutalist architecture suggests that it may be a subject of great importance.

My argument here is not merely whether brutalist buildings should be protected. There are already several organizations which seek to document and gain support for the preservation of brutalist buildings at risk of being demolished. In his presentation at Whitman College on Nineteenth-Century industrial buildings in Germany, Peter Christensen advocates for adaptive reuse as a productive compromise to maintain structures and their functionality without losing the history behind them. I would like to broaden this definition of adaptive reuse, considering not just the buildings themselves but the values of the movement. I will analyze and critique two contemporary adaptive reuses of Brutalism (in the broader sense) and ultimately argue that aspects of Brutalism are viable for adaptive reuse, and that these sentiments are of value to the present.

Historiography of Brutalism:

Although Brutalism is often treated as a single cohesive movement, in reality it is convoluted with numerous contributors and perspectives. The query contained within the title of Banham's 1966 book *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic* indicates the uncertainty of the movement. He even admits that his article in the 1955 edition of the architectural review, widely considered to be a manifesto for the movement, was his attempt to dictate the direction of Brutalism.[1] Not only have styles varied within the movement, but the connotations and public perception of Brutalism have shifted dramatically over the decades. While this paper may argue that Brutalism has more to offer than other strains of modernism, it needs to be acknowledged that Brutalism is not free of controversies and contradictions. These shortcomings need to be acknowledged, but it is important that they don't overshadow or invalidate the admirable qualities of the movement. Brutalism is often misconstrued as cold, emotionless, and insensitive to the lives of people, but the initial aspirations of many brutalist architects were quite the opposite.

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[1] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural P, 1968), 134.

The origin of Brutalism is widely agreed to have developed out of 1950s Britain, however the first building described as Brutalist is Villa Goth in Uppsala, Sweden. The term 'nyBrutalism' was first sarcastically used by Hans Asplund to describe the modest two-story house that made no attempt to hide its materials.[2] The term was then adapted to English and embraced by Architects Peter and Alison Smithson to label the similarly raw, utilitarian architectural style to which she and her husband adhered. It was also rumored that Brutalism was in some way related to Peter Smithson's nickname Brutus, and that Brutalism was the fusion of Brutus and Alison.[3] Reyner Banham, a close colleague of the Smithsons, relates this term to the French term "beton brut," used famously by the modernist architect Le Corbusier, meaning raw concrete. Banham also provocatively used this term to parody the picturesque, revivalist architectural style of British post-war reconstruction that he strongly opposed, dubbed "The New Humanism."[4] The first major misconception of Brutalism is the name itself, commonly associated with brutality and violence rather than the Smithson's original intended ethical implications. Banham argues that the name played a large part in shaping the direction of Brutalism, many critics searching to find buildings that more accurately fit these more negative connotations.[5]

Brutalism is unique in comparison to other Avant Garde movements in that it had no formal guiding manifesto, though there were several writings that heavily influenced Brutalist ideologies. Possibly the nearest thing the movement had to a manifesto was Banham's article in the 1955 edition of the architectural review, titled *The New Brutalism*. His book *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic* was also highly influential, providing a detailed delineation of the movements early years. Banham discusses the Smithson's manifesto for the movement with a focus on materiality. Banham and the Smithsons both had a strong sway on the younger generation, but ultimately Banham's contentious manifesto was considered more impactful. Lastly, Banham can't overstate the impact of Le Corbusier on the aesthetic

[2] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?,* 10.
[3] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?,* 10.
[4] Barnabas Calder, *Raw Concrete: The Beauty of Brutalism* (Miejsce nieznane: Penguin Books, 2022).
[5] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?,* 85.

vernacular of the movement, through his architecture and writings such as *Vers une Architecture*, *Modulor*, and *La Ville Radieuse*.

Banham was closely involved in the dialogue surrounding the ethics of Brutalism. Banham was an avid researcher of art historical movements and used many to inform his own ideas. During the emergence of Brutalism, his sensibilities shifted from a functionalist, purist, perspective to one more resemblant of futurism and expressionism, focused on texture, expendability, and technology.[6] Banham was vehemently opposed to monumentalism and preservationism, stating, "No individual building need survive. It is the in-and-out weave of men and communications among the buildings that is essential, not the buildings themselves. No monument is as important to Europe as this texture of its cities."[7] To Banham, the city was a place of experience, one that was being diminished by inefficiency, poor cleanliness, and an unfulfillment of potential. Preservation of monuments was "cultural snobbery": comfortable, fetishizing, and sentimental. He also opposed the nationalism that usually went hand in hand with monuments. Banham believed that these attitudes discouraged progress, originality, and boldness.[8] In many ways, Banham was still a modernist at his core. His fixation on the hygiene of the city is comparable to the ideas of Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos, who considered plumbing to be the metric by which to measure the progress of civilization.[9] Modernists are often characterized by their unwavering optimistic vision for a utopian future, a trait that Banham certainly exemplified. However, he deviated in clear ways, particularly in his views regarding classicism.

At the time, there were many who wanted, unlike modernism, to implement characteristics of antecedent architectural movements and culture. The New Humanism coincided with New Brutalism and instigated many of its core ideals. Modeled after the Swedish style The New Empiricism, the defining features were woodwork detailing, pitched roofs, and pretty paintwork.[10] Banham generalizes that The

[6] Brian Wallis, "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow: The Independent Group and Pop Culture," in *Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 9-17, 14.
[7] Nigel Whiteley, *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2003), 23.
[8] Nigel Whiteley, *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future*, 11.
[9] Paul Overy, "Washing and Watching," in *Light, Air and Openness: Modern Architecture between the Wars* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008), pp. 171-190, 172.
[10] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural P, 1968), 12.

New Humanism represented the attitudes of the older generation of architects. From their perspective, it was native good sense and a lack of extremism, to Banham, it was post-war "elegant despair" and "intellectual self-pity."[11] The revival of ornamentation, as well as an insertion of distinctly English picturesque layouts were naturally rejected by Banham. The younger generation felt that this was a compromise of their treasured modernist ideals, eager for another more resolute visual language. In response, there were those who regarded Beaux Arts classicism and symmetry as "the only antidote to lack of rigor and clear thinking," (referring to New Humanism) and those like Banham and the Smithson's who found other means to challenge the picturesque layouts of the new humanism.[12] Rather than organizing compositions on the basis of aesthetic beauty, they did quite the opposite. The Smithson's Sheffield project was a "deliberate affront to everything that was commonly regarded as architecture."[13] The buildings were laid out in a chaotic and unsymmetric manner, but done so in a way that was intentionally crude in its functionalism. This obstinate attitude was undoubtedly appealing to the frustrated younger generation of architects. In many ways the New Humanism defined the New Brutalism, forcing many to solidify their commitment to Beaux arts classicism or to find creative new solutions to the perceived issues with Modernism.

Le Corbusier was a key contributor to the aesthetic style and discourse of Brutalism. His book *Vers une Architecture* appears frequently throughout Banham's account of Brutalism as the driving force behind Classicism. The younger generation of architects was interested in explaining their own architectural inclinations, searching for an inherent connection between the ancient past and the modern present of architecture.[14] Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture* or 'Towards an Architecture' served as a holy doctrine, and his building Unite de Habitation was said to be the realization of that doctrine. Even though this building is the manifestation of a book written in 1923, Banham is quick to assure that it is a distinctly post-war building. The primary distinguishing factor from pre-war architecture was its

[11] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 13.
[12] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 41.
[13] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 43.
[14] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 15.

abandonment of the "fiction that reinforced concrete was a precise, 'machine-age' material."[15] In lieu of his initial choice steel, Corbusier's usage of concrete served as a catalyst for the concrete trend that later dominated the movement. Even more significant, one of the great masters of pre-war architecture had deserted the machine aesthetic for something more crude and honest while maintaining a sense of the classical tradition. In this way, Brutalism is defined by its relationship to the International Style.

The Smithson's architectural approach was both a subversion and a refinement of the modernist tradition, expanding on the work of Modernism's great masters. Their Hunstanton School was closely modeled after the work of Mies van der Rohe, specifically IIT in Chicago. Miesian architecture preached honesty through its iconic glass, steel, and white walls, which the Smithson's sought to improve upon. In his 1955 article in the architectural review, Banham asserted that the 3 main characteristics of Brutalism were: 1) formal legibility of plan, 2) clear exhibition of structure, and 3) valuation of materials for their inherent qualities.[16] These characteristics were evident in the Hunstanton School. Compared to a functional shed, the structure and materials of the Hunstanton School are put on full display in a restrained and understated manner.[17] Although the Smithson's did employ similar methods to the International Style, for example the plumbing was left exposed in the bathrooms, the emphasis of these choices was on true authenticity rather than the synthetic, scientific clarity. International Style modernism displayed pipes to communicate honesty, but the additional white walls and sterile spaces were motivated more so by a desire to boast wealth and cleanliness.[18] The Smithsons also felt that white paint and plaster was not truly honest as it concealed the structure and materials of the building. Hunstanton is informed by their Manifesto, which concentrated on material as a connecting force between man, building, and surrounding context. Taking inspiration from peasant dwellings, they viewed "architecture as the direct result of a way of life."[19] The Smithsons Golden Lane Project sought to develop the social and circulatory

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[15] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural P, 1968), 16.
[16] Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism by Reyner Banham," Architectural Review, December 17, 2021, https://www.architectural-review.com/archive/the-new-Brutalism-by-reyner-banham.
[17] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 19.
[18] Paul Overy, "Washing and Watching," in *Light, Air and Openness: Modern Architecture between the Wars* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008), pp. 171-190, 172.
[19] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 46.

features of the Unite de Habitation. They saw the dark corridor of the Unite as its biggest weak point, expanding it into what they called a 'street deck.'[20] The street deck provided a social space that was more lit and open, considering the health and wellbeing of the inhabitants.

But these stances were not just a reaction to modernism and parallel movements, they were an engagement with the cultural and societal conditions of the time. Highmore refers to Brutalism as an 'aftermath art,' inextricably linked to World War II.[21] The usage of concrete is inspired by Nazi military bunkers, bringing the horrifying imagery of war into the urban setting.[22] The war led to many technological inventions, about which Banham and other New Brutalists had very conflicting feelings. On one hand, new technological advancements in energy, health, and transportation were sources of optimism. However, the nuclear bomb made society apprehensive about the possibilities of technology. Technology was no longer understood as harmless and neutral, it was created and used by thinking, feeling people. The war had revealed the terrifying realities of human nature, causing a keen awareness of social and mental well-being. This led many architects to put an emphasis on "homo ludens" and the importance of play for mental health and culture.[23] The war also left many wondering about the value of nationalism, tradition, and context in regard to architecture. Many argued that the International Style was obsolete in the post-war climate. Early modernism ignored context in its claim to be universal, which no longer felt appropriate. But because modernism represented democratic aspirations in the face of totalitarianism, many believed that it needed to be renewed rather than discarded.[24] The war also resulted in massive economic growth. This wealth led to a boom in consumption right as the United States was growing its political, economic, and cultural influence on the rest of the world. Mass production, consumerism, television, and photography led to a reconsideration of class boundaries, high and low culture, as well as representation.

[20] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 42.
[21] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 247.
[22] Hanly, Francis, and Jonathan Meades. *Bunkers, Brutalism and Bloody-Mindedness. Part 1 : Concrete Poetry with Jonathan Meades*. New York, N.Y: Films Media Group, 2014.
[23] Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Rejean Legault, eds., *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Guide* (Cambridge: Mit Press, 2000), 15.
[24] Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Rejean Legault, eds., *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Guide*, 16.

Many of the core values of The New Brutalism were anchored in pop art and consumerism. This school of thought brought about more ethical and humanitarian practices. Banham was fascinated by contemporary mass culture and applied his art historical knowledge to it. For example, he made the claim that the 54 Cadillac was a new brutalist product.[25] He and the Smithson's were part of a group of young artists, writers, and critics called the Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London. The president of the ICA, Herbert Read, promoted a renewed version of Bauhaus modernism with focus on humanism, technology, and tradition.[26] The Independent Group was naturally averse to these views. Simply incorporating humanism and tradition into the International Style likely felt like an ad hoc solution, antithetical to the movement as a whole. Banham and the rest of the Independent Group advocated for expendability rather than reverting back to tradition. Nothing represented these ideals quite like pop culture, and the Independent Group was fascinated by its possibilities. As they saw it, pop culture was the manifestation of changeability and impermanence and a means through which social change could be realized. This was also a continuation and a modification of modernist ideas. Although technology advanced dramatically during the war, technology was very much a defining characteristic of the international modernist movement of the twenties. Steel, plumbing, and glass were embraced and emphasized in modernist architecture. Banham states that "modernists had mistaken the nature of technology as something permanent, ordered, and stable, when in fact the essence of mechanical production is expendability."[27] The Independent Group was interested in technology for its influences on culture and the consumer, exploring how science and technology were depicted in pop culture. To them, "popular culture was regarded not as a 'false consciousness,' the deliberate manipulation of a passive audience, but as an active agent of social change and individual identity."[28] It was a means by which to take the cultural hegemony from the elite and put it in the hands of the masses and create positive social

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[25] Ben Highmore, *The Art of Brutalism: Rescuing Hope from Catastrophe in 1950s Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 8.

[26] Brian Wallis, "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow: The Independent Group and Pop Culture," in *Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 9-17, 10.

[27] Brian Wallis, "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow: The Independent Group and Pop Culture," in *Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*, pp. 9-17, 17.

[28] Brian Wallis, "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow: The Independent Group and Pop Culture," in *Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*, pp. 9-17, 10.

change. In doing so they remove the comfortability of social stasis and acknowledge uncomfortable realities. However, this love for pop culture was at times contradictory. The Independent Group were leftists who simultaneously endorsed pop culture and disputed capitalism and consumerism. They felt that consumerism was a regression into "infantilism" and "helpless dependency."[29] Older masters made more practical responses to consumerism; Corbusier and Gropius believed that boundaries of high and low should be broken down through mass produced furniture.[30] The Smithson's took a more existential perspective. In their prototype House of the Future, the Smithson's displayed plastic in an authentic manner instead of imitating natural materials like wood. They feared that one day our concept of natural and synthetic would blur together, unable to distinguish the two.[31] In this way, Brutalist architecture was a form of empathizing with the consumer rather than patronizing them.

The core values and approaches behind Brutalist architecture shifted drastically in its evolution. Barnabas effectively summarizes the shifts in public opinion surrounding Brutalism in Great Britain from the new brutalists of the fifties into the sixties, seventies and eighties. Unsurprisingly, there were ramifications when it transformed from an artistic ethos and was put into practice in society. After the war, there was a boom of industry and a surge of common purpose. This led to a post-war plan, one in which housing and industrial areas would be sectioned into districts and new schools, facilities, and infrastructure was being developed. They also began housing programs to shelter not only those who had lost their houses in bombings, but also the homeless and other needy demographics. Brutalism was seen as the most progressive, cutting-edge architectural style of the time, deployed by politicians to reflect their ambitious agendas. Likewise, architects wanted to use it to show their own prowess and involvement in intellectual discourse. It was used as the style of the British welfare state to symbolize the vanquishment of human suffering. It turned out that in many cases, politicians used it to feign progressiveness,

[29] Hanly, Francis, and Jonathan Meades. Bunkers, Brutalism and Bloody-Mindedness. Part 1 : Concrete Poetry with Jonathan Meades. New York, N.Y: Films Media Group, 2014.
[30] Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Rejean Legault, eds., *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Guide*, 17.
[31] Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Rejean Legault, eds., *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Guide*, 86.

concealing aristocratic conservatism. Brutalism served their purposes beautifully because it appeared utilitarian as opposed to aesthetic. However, in architectural schools it was an ongoing joke that they might as well have clad the buildings with marble because the building processes were so expensive. This was true in Great Britain as well as the Philippines, where the term "edifice complex" was coined to describe the debt crisis resulting from funds spent on brutalist construction projects.[32] In the United States, the demolition of the Pruitt Igoe public housing, declared the so-called "death of modernism," saw the buildings deteriorate due to a lack of maintenance. The impoverished inhabitants (usually minorities), or the brutalist architects or structures themselves, were then blamed for the widespread crime and violence. Consequently, politicians demolished the buildings and blamed riots on the poor.[33] Meanwhile, the style was being adopted by the Soviet Union for similar means, imposing the progress and glory of the state onto its subjects. In this way, a harsh association between Brutalism, poverty, political corruption, and social ills developed. It came to represent the overly ambitious, deluded utopianism of hubristic megalomaniac architects.

Over the course of Brutalism's life, its buildings took various shapes and forms. The most important material to Brutalism was concrete, but in many cases, brick is used. The possibilities of concrete did allow for many of Brutalism's key attributes. Some brutalist architects took more inspiration from expressionism, creating swirling concrete forms. Concrete's plasticity made it an especially good candidate for this type of sculpture. In the documentary *Bunkers, Brutalism, and Bloodymindedness* Jonathan Meades argues that brutalist architecture is necessarily sublime: "Succession and uniformity of parts, which constitute the artificial infinite, give the effect of sublimity in architecture. Greatness of scale is also a requisite."[34] Brutalist architecture is typically very large and austere to communicate power and severity. Sublimity is closely tied to nature and consequently so was Brutalism. Many different strains of

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[32] Barnabas Calder, *Raw Concrete: The Beauty of Brutalism* (Miejsce nieznane: Penguin Books, 2022).
[33] Freidrichs, Chad, Brian Woodman, Jaime Freidrichs, Jason Henry, Benjamin. Balcom, and Steve Carver. The Pruitt-Igoe Myth. Widescreen. New York: First Run Features, 2012.

[34] Hanly, Francis, and Jonathan Meades. Bunkers, Brutalism and Bloody-Mindedness. Part 2 : Concrete Poetry with Jonathan Meades. New York, N.Y: Films Media Group, 2014.

Modernism use gravity defying features such as cantilevers and Brutalism was no exception to this. Meades connects these structures to a defiance of nature as well as a defiance of god. The stability of steel reinforced concrete afforded such massive, overbearing structures to be built. Lastly, Brutalist spaces were larger than ever before due to contemporary technologies such as the light bulb and central heating.[35] As with all new technologies and materials, some were more interested in the possibilities of pushing concrete to its limits than its social implications and applications.

Given the diversity of the perspectives within Brutalism and its evolution over time, it becomes difficult to determine which aspects are worth retaining. In the final chapter of *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic*, titled "Memoirs of a Survivor," Banham dramatically shares his disappointment over the movement's development. Banham dreamed of an 'other' architecture, as opposed to the timeless architecture of *Vers une Architecture*, an architecture that breaks all the norms of the Beaux Arts tradition in some revolutionary new way.[36] But his criteria of an 'other' architecture can't truly be understood without looking at the Smithsons Sugden House. At first glance, the house appears like any other domestic English house at the time, using very traditional materials like brick and wood. The distinctive quality of the house lies in its radical organization of its spaces. In addition, the windows are placed corresponding with the interior spaces rather than the exterior.[37] Banham argues that while this architecture does come close to an 'other' architecture, it does not yet surpass the final barrier: that architects use structures to make spaces. He writes: "Given a genuinely functional approach such as this, no cultural preconceptions, and the full battery of modern mechanical services, an 'other architecture' might well employ structure merely as a way of holding up other environmental controls."[38] It becomes clear that Banham is not solely interested in removing Beaux arts classicism, he seeks to achieve an architecture without cultural preconceptions. Not only is this an unattainable goal, it goes against many of the core values that motivate brutalist sensibilities: creating environments that respond to cultural issues

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[35] Barnabas Calder, *Raw Concrete: The Beauty of Brutalism* (Miejsce nieznane: Penguin Books, 2022).
[36] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural P, 1968), 69.
[37] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 67.
[38] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 68.

like war, consumerism, and mass culture in the most blunt and honest ways. Banham also frequently identifies technology as the only way to achieve this 'other' architecture. He writes, "The Johnsons, Johansens, and Rudolphs of the American scene were quicker than I was to see that the Brutalists were really their allies, not mine; committed in the last resort to the classical tradition, not the technological."[39] He places technology in opposition to tradition, a concerning assertion that evokes the same connotations as International Style modernism. Abandoning the significance put on convention is not the same as embracing technology. The Sugden house proves that traditional conventions can still be subverted in radical ways using the same materials. The same goes for Corbusier's Jaoul houses which were "an affront to the proposition that Modern Architecture 'marches in the forefront of technology.'"[40] The technological utopia that Banham imagines forsakes these guiding principles. Banham also complains about the limited potential of architecture as a discipline, and that new technical methods are the only vehicle for achieving 'un architecture autre.' In practice, Architecture is a discipline of constraints, and the radical solutions to those problems are what should determine whether it deserves the title of 'other,' not the employment of technology. It is a separation and improvement on International Style and other parallel movements that should be considered when judging the merits of adaptive reuse.

ADAPTIVE REUSE:

In recent years, many are starting to rediscover and appreciate brutalist buildings as they are demolished by the previous generation. Campaigns such as Fuck Yeah Brutalism and SOSBrutalism lobby to protect at-risk Brutalist buildings. But simply protecting them from demolition still leaves several questions unanswered such as how they should be handled.

Christensen advocates for adaptive reuse, where buildings are repurposed for a new function. In his presentation on the material life cycle of steel, Christensen examines the various structures and

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[39] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 135.
[40] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural P, 1968), 86.

environmental impacts at every step of the production of architectural materials.[41] Christensen pushes for a more environmental perspective, urging that designers and architects view every process of building as a part of their spatial and environmental impact, not just the building itself. In his eyes, each building has its own intrinsic value and adaptive reuse has proved to be a successful compromise.

However, many scholars of Brutalism oppose adaptive reuse outright. In Barnabas' epilogue, he discusses the conservation of Brutalist structures. He argues that because concrete is such a polluting material and we don't have the same degree of expendable energy or complex building methods, brutalist buildings could not be reproduced today. He adds that brutalist structures should not be restored or polished because it detracts from the history of the buildings and the aspirations of the architect. He argues that Brutalism is essentially self-conscious high art, and that society's stigmas and stereotypes are due to their misunderstanding of the artistic statement.[42] Pasnik has a very similar perspective, arguing that the connotation of the label "Brutalism" is the issue and 'heroic' should be used in its place. 'Heroic' puts more emphasis on the positive motivations behind brutalist architecture while acknowledging the controversial history of the buildings. The authors refute modification in the case that it insensitively takes away from the intentions of the architect, but unlike Barnabas they don't reject renovation as a whole. "Active neglect" by politicians protecting their reputations and those who don't fully understand the ideals is identified by both sources as the biggest threat to the structures.[43]

The core of both arguments is that the intentions and values of the architects should be preserved first and foremost. If the underlying motivations for the buildings are what really matter, and the politics and logistics of preserving a building are too complex, why not focus efforts on reusing the values? If

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[41] Christensen's argument begins by looking at the production of steel and its effects on the landscape. The two primary structures he examines are mines and factories, more specifically the groundbreaking modular mining method and the smokestack. Irresponsible mining and the felt effects of pollution highlight the precarious nature of progress. Christensen also interrogates the ways society justified and neglected pollution. Unpublished studies and ambiguous legislation were evidence society prioritized the economic benefits of the iron industry and chose to overlook the tangible consequences. While some of this attitude can be attributed to ignorance, they simply had different perspectives on industrialization and the environment. Many thought that pollution was just a normal consequence of industry.

[42] Barnabas Calder, *Raw Concrete: The Beauty of Brutalism* (Miejsce nieznane: Penguin Books, 2022).

[43] Pasnik, Mark., Michael. Kubo, and Chris. Grimley. Heroic : Concrete Architecture and the New Boston. First American edition. New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2015.

Brutalism is truly a resonator of cultural conditions, it should be applicable to any time period, and possibly any medium. Expanding into a broader definition of adaptive reuse, we can reuse the philosophy of Brutalism as opposed to the structures. In doing so, it is even possible that Brutalist buildings could be saved indirectly through the dissemination of these values. Pasnik speaks of a second stride of Brutalism's legacy, posing the question: can we be heroic again? The fact that there are already adaptive reuses in progress suggests that we can. In analyzing if they are successful adaptations, we need to consider 1.) Are they using it as a self referential symbol of failures or as a retro trend? 2.) Are they superficially copying the aesthetic style of the movement? and 3.) Are they using the medium to engage the mass production society (or modern equivalent)? Excusing the inner disagreements about classicism etc., does it reflect the aspects of Brutalism that set it apart from other movements at the time? Does it leave behind the universalism and technological determinism of the International Style, and does it offend the notions of comfortable prettiness and social stasis represented by the New Humanism? This paper examines two instances of contemporary adaptive reuse and evaluates them on these criteria.

One prominent example of the adaptive reuse of Brutalism already in effect is that of Brutalist web design. Brutalist web design is characterized as prioritizing utility over beauty and stripping the website down to its raw components.[44] Obvious characteristics of Brutalist buildings are texture and scale to create a harsh appearance. Brutalist web design seeks to capture the same essence.[45] Brutalist web design rides the line between being orderly and haphazard. The composition is usually made clear using wireframes and other structural elements while still maintaining a sense of disarray. Typography, modular elements, and rectilinear forms all contribute to a sense of order. Wireframes also add to the sense of rawness and emphasize efficiency. Typography is typically enlarged, monospace, and used as a structural element. On the other hand, distorted graphics and intense texture give a feeling of chaos. The color

[44] Johnny Levanier, "Brutalism in Design: Its History and Evolution in Modern Websites," 99designs, 2021, https://99designs.com/blog/design-history-movements/Brutalism/.
[45] Kate Moran, "Brutalism and Antidesign," Nielsen Norman Group, November 5, 2017, https://www.nngroup.com/articles/Brutalism-antidesign/.

schemes are typically black, white, and grey with one pop of color.[46] The most famous example of this Brutalist style is Craigslist. The site for displaying classified ads has varied very little since it was first built, sticking to barebones html and css. The site features a white background and a page populated with grey frames and blue hyperlink text. The site is the epitome of utility, without any extra style added to the document. Moran makes the claim that Craigslist can't be categorized as Brutalist since it was designed in the 90s when html and css weren't as developed.[47] Therefore, Brutalist web design could be characterized as the intentional omission of css styling.

These aesthetics are derived from several underlying values pertaining to the web. Brutalist design seeks to be the antithesis of what is referred to as 'soft web.' Bollini describes soft web as emotional web design, preaching empathy and ease of use. Soft web is connected to popular, commercial industries that use these friendly aesthetics to seduce their customers.[48] Google's material design and Apple's human interface guidelines are prime examples of this style. Another principle embodied in Brutalist web design is freedom and creativity. With many sites providing templates for web design, several of the same layouts are beginning to turn into convention. Brutalist design instead embraces total freedom in the rejection of formal rules like hierarchy or simplicity.[49] Brutalist design returns to its roots in code and computer science, making it simple, unpretentious, and accessible.

Brutalist web design effectively reflects the architectural movement in several productive ways. First, it seeks to capture Brutalism's tenet of authenticity and honesty. In the same way that Brutalist architects sought materials in their truest form, without hiding or accentuating them, Brutalist web design utilizes barebones html as its foundation. It seeks to be less superficial than its counterpart 'soft' design, just as the Smithson's reacted against The New Humanism's design choices. It also does this with consumerism in mind, communicating with the consumer in a direct way and on equal terms. And, in

[46] Laura Keung, "Rebellious Design: Brutalism Meets 90s Graphic Design," Design & Illustration Envato Tuts+ (Envato Tuts, September 9, 2022), https://design.tutsplus.com/articles/rebellious-design-Brutalism-meets-90s-graphic-design--cms-42086.
[47] Kate Moran, "Brutalism and Antidesign," Nielsen Norman Group, November 5, 2017, https://www.nngroup.com/articles/Brutalism-antidesign/.
[48] Letizia Bollini, "Beautiful interfaces. From user experience to user interface design," The Design Journal, September 6, 2017.
[49] Suárez-Carballo, "The visual language of brutalist web design," Doxa Comunicación, 28, 2019, pp. 111-131.

many ways, it takes on the same spirit as Banham's vehemence for classicism and conventions in its rejection of templates and formal standards.

However, Brutalist web design betrays brutalist sensibilities in that it is rooted in nostalgia. Brage argues that retro trends take inspiration from trends from the web, not from other media. In this sense, it does not refer to the borrowings from Brutalism. Instead, because it derives from older trends in the life of the internet such as 90s style web design, it is rooted in the past.[50] Brutalist architects are typically very earnest in their pursuit to contribute to society in radical new ways. Interacting with the present, accepting and working within the constraints of the current reality was what separated Brutalism from previous versions of Modernism.

This design movement also falls into many of the same traps that both Brutalism and the International Style did; it focuses more on aesthetics than it does ethics. Discussing graphic design without the context it is used for, being a visual medium, is difficult to separate from aesthetics. Web design, on the other hand, can be critiqued in many of the same ways that architecture can. In his study of Brutalist web design, Suarez Carballo finds that there is no homogenous aesthetic, that the only common thread is its methods of provocation.[51] How can it be then that Brutalist web design is over-focused on aesthetics? Curtis states that, "The International Style had some adherents who only partly understood the underlying principles, and who adopted the forms as a new external dress. In such cases, modern forms became a sort of packaging, a cosmetic application, rather than the expression of deeper meanings, or the disciplined result of attention to the functional discipline suggested by a task."[52] Banham shares the same concerns in his account of Brutalism: "The danger was that, with the origins of style deprived of their protective myths, the disenchanted young men were free to build cynically for the fashion of the hour, and not for the future."[53] While Brutalist web design does find deeper meanings, it misses the functional side

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[50] Ellen Brage (2019), pp. 1-67, 9.

[51] Suárez-Carballo, "The visual language of brutalist web design," Doxa Comunicación, 28, 2019, pp. 111-131.

[52] Curtis, "The International Style and the Myth of Functionalism," William J. R. Modern Architecture Since 1900. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1983, pp. 174-185, 180.

[53] Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural P, 1968), 86.

of authenticity. Reducing web design to raw CSS is no better than reducing architecture to concrete. The simple CSS may give a sense of "rawness," but it is not truly honest. Not unlike International Style modernism, the Google beta uses a minimalist white page to obscure the inner workings of its algorithm. It presents itself as impartial and honest in its deployment of a simple page with a very basic interface, when in fact its algorithm contains heavy cultural biases. Google favors sites that have more resources (and by extension money) and discriminates against certain races. Because Google favors sites by large companies with more financial resources, pornographic sites skew search results and produce porn images when searching for something as simple as "black girls."[54] Brutalist web design's use of basic CSS could be seen as a call to action for more transparency on the web, but it doesn't implement it directly. If Brutalist design was employed in the Google web page, it would be up front about the algorithmic bias it contains. Although raw CSS is a fascinating interpretation of raw concrete in the digital form, it doesn't learn from the mistakes of International Style modernism.

ACW is another adaptive reuse of Brutalism already in practice.[55] ACW is an acronym for A Cold Wall, a direct reference to the concrete walls of Brutalism. The founder and creative director of ACW is Samuel Ross. Ross went to school for graphic design and contemporary illustration, then went into product design and advertising. He started his own label at 19, became Virgil Abloh's first assistant, then worked helping brands such as Donda, Hood by Air, Been Trill, APC Kanye, Yeezy, Off-White, and Pyrex Vision.[56] As a graphic and product designer, his skill set suits this type of work. His brand is informed by his mentor Virgil Abloh, the founder of Off-White, an immensely successful fashion brand. The goal of Off-White was to bring more recognition to street culture in the realms of art and fashion.[57]

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[54] Safiya Umoja Noble and Sarah T. Roberts, "Engine Failure: Safiya Umoja Noble and Sarah T. Roberts on the Problems of Platform Capitalism," Logic Magazine, July 24, 2019, https://logicmag.io/justice/safiya-umoja-noble-and-sarah-t-roberts/.

[55] Samuel Ross, "Cold-Wall* Official Online Flagship," A, accessed April 30, 2023, https://a-cold-wall.com/.

[56] Jack Self, "Indefinite Optimism: A-Cold-Wall*'s Samuel Ross," 032c (032c, May 1, 2022), https://032c.com/magazine/a-cold-wall-samuel-ross-by-jack-self.

[57] Xavier Spurlock, "Why off-White Is More than Just a Fashion Brand | Grailed," Grailed, July 25, 2017, https://www.grailed.com/drycleanonly/off-white-more-than-fashion.

Ross states that he found product design limiting, unexciting, and overly cynical, finding more creative possibilities in the realm of fashion. Fashion was full of hypocrites, yet optimistic about self-expression.[58]

With his knowledge of design and the fashion industry, he set off to create a brand that reflected his own background: growing up in rural Wellingborough, U.K. then moving to Brixton in London. Two major shifts occurred that informed his ACW narrative. One was the realization that education in marginalized areas like Wellingborough was trade/skill oriented, leading to a high support rate of Brexit. The other was the shift in social attitudes towards clothing. In Wellingborough uniforms were expected, in London fashion was used as an expression of identity.[59] Surrounded by Brutalist architecture in London, he grew an appreciation for it, but more so that the materials represent the experiences living in those infrastructures.[60] Not so dissimilar from the housing at Pruitt Igoe, Brutalism in London was subject to urban decay in areas neglected by politicians. Samuel Ross uses ACW to reflect his working-class England upbringing and the social dissonance he experienced.

While the entire brand is inspired by Brutalism, the pre-fall 2022 line titled "Brutalist Graphic" seems the most appropriate for analysis. The line is composed of four pieces, two t-shirts, a sweatshirt, and a pair of sweatpants. They are all made with heavyweight cotton. The colorways are minimal, three of the items are white with a tint of greenish blue with the only exception being a white t-shirt. The two t-shirts contain a vibrant blue screen print on the back. The screen print is an arrangement of many textured rectangles overlaid on one another. Each has its own texture with varying degrees of opacity, combining to create new textures. The organization of the rectangles is seemingly random, but none are rotated, creating a sense of ordered chaos. The ACW logo is placed in the center of the graphic and small on the front of the shirt. The sweatshirt and sweatpants use the same graphic on a raised three-dimensional puff print. The raised print takes the texture to another level, making it more rough and

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[58] Jack Self, "Indefinite Optimism: A-Cold-Wall*'s Samuel Ross,"
https://032c.com/magazine/a-cold-wall-samuel-ross-by-jack-self.
[59] Arthur Bray, "An Interview with ACW's Samuel Ross," Slam Jam, May 10, 2018,
https://us.slamjam.com/blogs/editorial/an-interview-with-acw-s-samuel-ross.
[60] Next Generation Fashion (Ross, A-Cold-Wall, Obrist, Serpentine Galleries) | DLD 19, YouTube (YouTube, 2019),
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5-YAmEjB-Q.

appear like the real texture of a plaster or concrete wall. The description reads: "layered grid and block graphics nod to strong architectural lines."[61]

These graphics use the visual language of Brutalism and concrete. Sturdy materials, tactile textures, and rectangular shapes all convey a sense of seriousness. To Ross, concrete represents a tension and coarseness of the urban environment. In his 'installation runways,' he uses all senses to give the feeling of concrete. The rooms are lowered in temperature, sounds are used to evoke emotional responses, and concrete imagery and sculptures are used throughout.[62] Here Ross has redeployed Brutalism as a visual language of urban social tension. The usage of concrete has a dual dynamic. For one, he uses it in the same manner as the original Brutalist sensibility, as a specific color palette and material that is perceived as more objective about harsh reality. On the other hand, he uses it to reflect direct relationships and interactions with the buildings themselves in society. Both are ineffective as an adaptive reuse of Brutalism. Using the lines and forms of Brutalist architecture, the concrete, and mimicking the feel of concrete in various ways is simply a reference to Brutalism: a superficial likeness. Making clothes appear like concrete can be used as a symbol of honesty, but it will never be honest. Concrete was honest because it was exposing the material properties of the very ingredients of architecture. The equivalent logical move would be to embrace the fabric and textiles in a blunt and obvious way. Next, he also uses it to highlight social tensions. While this usage is still admirable, bringing light to the realities of inner city London, it looks back on Brutalism retrospectively as something that happened rather than using it actively. Just as Brutalism is often used in media such as *A Clockwork Orange* and *High-Rise*, it could be interpreted in a dystopian way, as a symbol for failure of government and a critique of the architecture. Or it could be interpreted as looking back on it in a nostalgic light. In either case, it remains anchored in the past as opposed to putting Brutalist ideas to use in the present.

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[61] Samuel Ross, "Brutalist Ss T-Shirt," A, accessed April 30, 2023, https://a-cold-wall.com/products/brutalist-ss-t-shirt.

[62] *Next Generation Fashion (Ross, A-Cold-Wall, Obrist, Serpentine Galleries) | DLD 19*, *YouTube* (YouTube, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5-YAmEjB-Q.

The SS22 collection, on the other hand, is a major departure from previous approaches. Rather than the typical 'ready to wear' clothing ACW is used to producing, this collection experiments with more conceptual forms.[63] The collection features a combination of draping garments, knits, synthetic nylon, thermal leggings, balaclavas, and utilitarian, almost militaristic puffers. There is no imitation of architectural materials; every material is clear in its properties. The variety in materials and forms shows that Ross is finally using the elements of fashion in radically new ways, not architecture. The line is also distinguished by a rare optimistic color palette. Unlike the pre-fall 22 line, this variety is far more compelling. It is immediately apparent that the pieces are operating through the silhouette rather than symbolism. Ross captures the collection nicely: "There's been this attempt to create a sense of buoyancy between a deep expression and saturation of colour, which conveys a very definite optimism, and the idea of concealing the body, which has typically carried more negative connotations – protecting the wearer from war, injury or disease."[64] In this case, Ross is even deploying his garments to engage with cultural realities, especially recent sobering events such as the pandemic. This collection suggests that ACW is evolving into an effective adaptive reuse of Brutalist values. In doing so it builds from Brutalism, without repeating the mistakes of past modernisms.

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[63] Mahoro Seward, "Samuel Ross on A-Cold-Wall*'s New Conceptual Era for SS22," i, June 22, 2021, https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/m7e3w4/samuel-ross-a-cold-wall-ss22-interview.
[64] Mahoro Seward, "Samuel Ross on A-Cold-Wall*'s New Conceptual Era for SS22," i, June 22, 2021, https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/m7e3w4/samuel-ross-a-cold-wall-ss22-interview.