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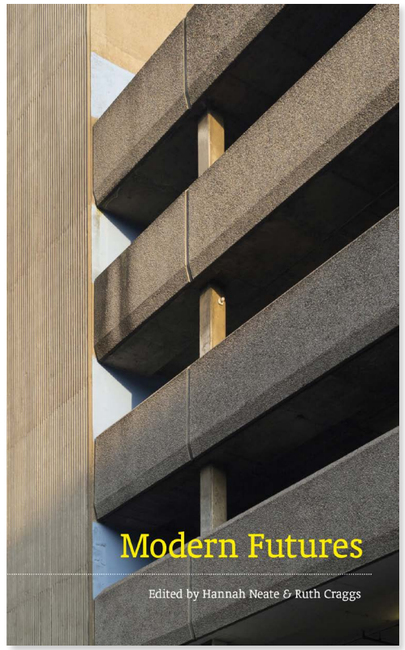
Modern Futures



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Edited by Hannah Neate & Ruth Craggs

There has been a groundswell of interest in modernist architecture in recent years, particularly buildings from the second half of the twentieth century. Individuals and groups are engaging with modernist environments in the form of popular histories, documentaries and community projects, and digital and social media. Alongside this growing popularity however, many of these buildings are under threat from demolition and regeneration.

Modern Futures explores these trends, their connections, and how more popular and creative engagements might be used to inform the uncertain future of modernist architecture.

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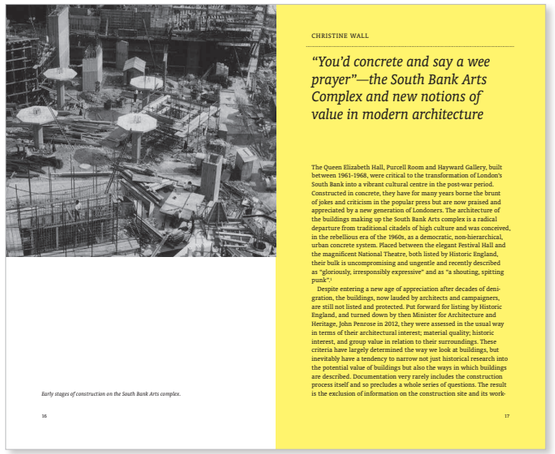
CHRISTINE WALL

"You'd concrete and say a wee prayer"—the South Bank Arts Complex and new notions of value in modern architecture

The Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Gallery, built between 1961-1968, were critical to the transformation of London's South Bank into a vibrant cultural centre in the post-war period. Constructed in concrete, they have for many years borne the brunt of jokes and criticism in the popular press but are now praised and appreciated by a new generation of Londoners. The architecture of the buildings making up the South Bank Arts complex is a radical departure from traditional citadels of high culture and was conceived, in the rebellious era of the 1960s, as a democratic, non-hierarchical, urban concrete system. Placed between the elegant Festival Hall and the magnificent National Theatre, both listed by Historic England, their bulk is uncompromising and ungentle and recently described as "gloriously, irresponsibly expressive" and as "a shouting, spitting punk"[1].

Despite entering a new age of appreciation after decades of denigration, the buildings, now lauded by architects and campaigners, are still not listed and protected. Put forward for listing by Historic England, and turned down by then Minister for Architecture and Heritage, John Penrose in 2012, they were assessed in the usual way in terms of their architectural interest; material quality; historic interest, and group value in relation to their surroundings. These criteria have largely determined the way we look at buildings, but inevitably have a tendency to narrow not just historical research into the potential value of buildings but also the ways in which buildings are described. Documentation very rarely includes the construction process itself and so precludes a whole series of questions. The result is the exclusion of information on the construction site and its work-

Early stages of construction on the South Bank Arts complex.

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especially brutalism. I suspect that soon it won't be fashionable at all and the collection and I will return to a form of niche obscurity in a forgotten corner of the web. Before that happens I have managed to carve out my first virtual identity in a foray into social media as *mainstream_modern* on Instagram (opposite). It has become a portal to my main site, but has somewhat taken over in terms of the hours dedicated. The instant gratification of 200+ 'likes' from 7,500 followers is heady and addictive and it is easy to understand the popularity of the app. I have also found new information and gathered a number of interesting anecdotes from exchanges through the direct messaging function. The sense that many others appreciate the things you do is valuable too—in 1996 I felt like a loner, in itself perversely gratifying, but hard to sustain when one of the motivating factors is a sense of doing something worthwhile.

I'm not a preservationist, or a conservationist, I'm definitely a hobbyist and have been fortunate enough to follow a passion into a situation where I have been acknowledged as an expert in a particular field. Photography was my route to this journey, and naïve and unskilled as I was, I have also been lucky enough to count film maker Michael England amongst my friends and his advice about what camera I should purchase next to fulfil my aims has been invaluable. I'm not precious about what I shoot with, but it has been a rare event that I have been without a camera at any turn. I regularly used to carry a Lowe backpack with at least two cameras before the iPhone 5S was released. I now receive invitations to speak, participate in academic networks and to contribute to seminars, and journals. *Mainstream Modern* began as a passion and has evolved to become a project, sometimes peripheral to others, sometimes central to my being, that spans 20 years to date and is unlikely to wain, as my passion for architecture, be it extremely normal or extremely special, remains as it was when I pressed the shutter on the very first shot.

1. There are three people who don't feature by name in the narrative without whom I would have been unable to do what I do—Mum, Dad and Nina. We had about 4 holidays a year when I was young and until I was 12 they were all in the UK. I can't count how many burial mounds, stone circles, Romanesque churches, reservoirs and gillhouses we visited, but the legacy is clear.
2. D. Sharp, *Manchester: City Buildings Series*, London: Studio Vista, 1969.
3. A. Powers, 'Jorg Chermayeff' (Designer, Architect, Teacher, London: A.D.A. Publications, 2000).
Raymond Award reported in 2010 by Richard Brook: *Manchester Modern: the shape of the city*, 2010, 1 volume (200 p): typescript, illus. V.&A. Archive ref: Ashe/Brook.
5. A. Brook & M. Dridge, 'Cold War Concrete: Engineering the Airwaves', *The Modernist*, 14, 2015, pp.30–33; R. Brook, 'Police Brutality', *The Modernist*, 4, 2012, pp.12–15; R. Brook, 'Boldly Gone', *The Modernist*, 1, 2011, pp.30–33.
6. The publication may still happen, I have not quite given it up yet.

Screen shot of mainstream_modern Instagram page.

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The Mobile Museum, icons of place, 2015.

at nature in the city, as a reggae and dub recording studio / outdoor living room on a farm in Glastonbury, to The Mobile Museum. It has been loved, neglected, reborn and loved again. The initial ambition and agenda was to transform the interior of the vehicle into an itinerant museum that tours the borough's twelve remaining purpose built council estates, collecting, making, gathering and responding along the way, and constructing a new natural history collection based on the evolution of the council house. Speculative, playful, rigorous and grounded in natural history modes of display and taxonomies, inside The Mobile Museum, the development of council housing is used as a timeline to order the collection and tour the borough, working with a mixture of residents, council staff members and interested people from further afield.

The Mobile Museum grew out of a desire to celebrate the glorious everyday rhythms of Barking and Dagenham—as a looking glass to reflect wider Outer London—via its housing estates and the people that live in them. What is and can the artist's role and potential(s) within regeneration contexts be? Can we, as artists (and people) do more than provide consultation fodder or tick boxes within a wider development framework? Can we interrogate and question 'value'? What was valued from a commissioner's perspective but more importantly from a resident, shopkeeper or council staff member's perspective? The Mobile Museum as an initial idea, sought to test and interrogate buzzwords that had become synonymous with work delivered in the public realm: regeneration, participation, consultation, collaboration, community, engagement, resilience, authorship and legacy, all buzzwords that get chucked all over the place, on boardings, in funding applications, in artist briefs and in client's desires.

In September 2012 the local authority match funding for The Mobile Museum was cut in the first wave of public sector cuts. This represented a significant sea change in my practice. Politics with a capital p and politics dominated. It represented the need for me to wear many hats and be fundraiser, pitcher, strategist, personal cheerleader and

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VERITY-JANE KEEFE 95


SALLY STONE

Gate 81

Preston Bus Station is an extraordinary building. It was constructed in the same year as the first moon landing, 1969, and exhibits that same sense of confidence and optimism. It is an incredibly long and elegant structure and the architectural language of the building can be described as Brutal, in that it is constructed from raw concrete. The building contains a series of car parks situated on extended floor plates with upturned curving parapets which appear to float over the double-height space of the public concourse. The interior still contains the original rubber flooring, timber benches and white-tiled walls. Building Design Partnership (BDP) architects designed the building and the concept was to emulate an airport; even the different bus stops were referred to as gates.

In late 2012, the City Council proposed its demolition and replacement with a surface car park. They considered that the prohibitively high conservation costs combined with the prime location of the site meant that the destruction of the building could act as a prime factor in the regeneration of a quite depressed city.

This provocative act galvanized various groups that were already campaigning to save the building and proved to be the impetus for a number of different types of projects. Gate 81, one of foremost of these groups, was a collaboration between an academic, an architect and an arts organisation. They curated a collection of events based in and around the bus station with the intention of raising the profile of the building. There had been a considerable amount of negativity surrounding the future of the bus station, and Gate 81 intended to bring some optimism to the situation. The aims of the group were to be deliberately non-antagonistic; that is, provocative but not confrontational. It was not about demands, demonstration and protest, rather Gate 81 wanted to celebrate and appreciate the building; indeed,

Left: *View from the underpass looking towards the floating parapets of the car park. The curving concrete upstands were cast using an innovative system of fibreglass moulds; this was a significant factor in the listing of the structure.*

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IAN WAITES

'Spontaneous Estate Evolution' Research/Practice interventions on a 1960s council estate

What do we do with the post-World War Two council estate? With those environments of the modernist era that are routinely and stereotypically viewed as grim, outdated, rundown and almost worthless? Even a Guardian article seems to perpetuate the same old tired tropes:

> "The grey, pebble dashed frontages of 1950s council houses are not improved by rain. … the mistakes of the post-war planners of public housing have long been derided—from the materials they used (too much concrete) to the scale they built on (too monolithic) and the places where they chose to build (too far from the middle of town)."[1]

In 1964, when I was three years old, my family moved to a brand new house on a brand new council estate in a town called Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. The Middlefield Lane estate was a typical product of post-war local and central government policy intended to provide new, modern, rented housing for families of all kinds, and it was full of those 'mistakes' that post-war planners and architects apparently made. Our house had a pebble-dashed frontage, the centrepiece of the estate was a fairly monolithic, modernist complex of shops, 'link-maisonettes', underpasses and flats. The estate was built on the edge of the town, looking out onto open countryside, and it was planned as an open-plan pedestrianized environment where the car was restricted to only two access roads in favour of short terraces of houses that were grouped around communal green areas and public footpaths.

Left: *Back to the Future 1965–2015–2016 on Aisby Walk, August 2015.*

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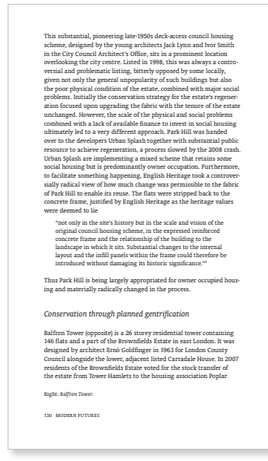

This substantial, pioneering late-1950s deck-access council housing scheme, designed by the young architects Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith in the City Council Architect's Office, sits in a prominent location overlooking the city centre. Listed in 1998, this was always a controversial and problematic listing, bitterly opposed by some locally, given not only the general unpopularity of such buildings but also the poor physical condition of the estate, combined with major social problems. Initially the conservation strategy for the estate's regeneration focused upon upgrading the fabric with the tenure of the estate unchanged. However, the scale of the physical and social problems combined with a lack of available finance to invest in social housing ultimately led to a very different approach. Park Hill was handed over to the developers Urban Splash together with substantial public resource to achieve regeneration, a process slowed by the 2008 crash. Urban Splash are implementing a mixed scheme that retains some social housing but is predominantly owner occupation. Furthermore, to facilitate something happening, English Heritage took a controversially radical view of how much change was permissible to the fabric of Park Hill to enable its reuse. The flats were stripped back to the concrete frame, justified by English Heritage as the heritage values were deemed to lie

> "not only in the site's history but in the scale and vision of the original council housing scheme, in the expressed reinforced concrete frame and the relationship of the building to the landscape in which it sits. Substantial changes to the internal layout and the infill panels within the frame could therefore be introduced without damaging its historic significance."[2]

Thus Park Hill is being largely appropriated for owner occupied housing and materially radically changed in the process.

Conservation through planned gentrification

Balfron Tower (opposite) is a 26 storey residential tower containing 146 flats and a part of the Brownfields Estate in east London. It was designed by architect Ernö Goldfinger in 1963 for London County Council alongside the lower, adjacent listed Carradale House. In 2007 residents of the Brownfields Estate voted for the stock transfer of the estate from Tower Hamlets to the housing association Poplar

Right: *Balfron Tower.*

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