

Brutalist Architecture: A Case Study

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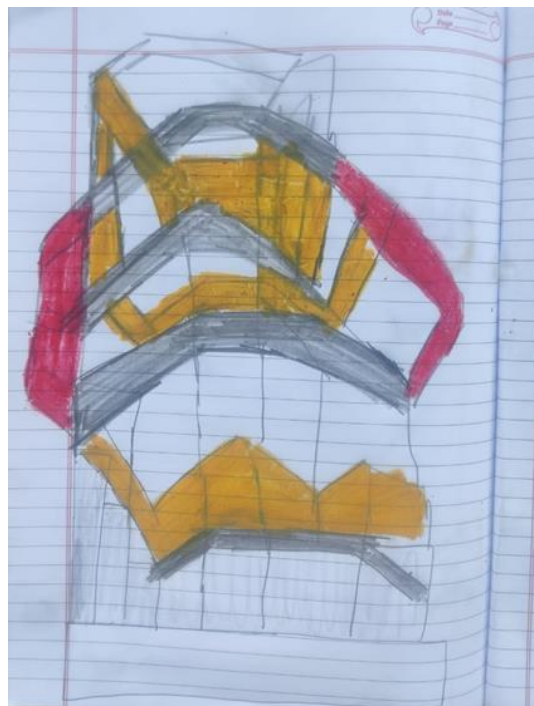
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Abstract

The paper talks about the origin of Brutalism, the mixed reaction of people to this unique form of building. It also provides future insights into the same – wherein its getting more common to see a combination of Brutalism and Sustainable architecture.

INTRODUCTION

- The origin of the term Brutalism traces back to that of the French word ‘Beton brut’ meaning raw concrete. It is a post-war construction style., emerging in the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe in the 1950’s, known for its abstract layout and the use of raw concrete.
- The concept is generally associated with rough unfinished surfaces, unusual shapes, heavy-looking materials, straight lines, and small windows.
- In simpler terms, the concept is somewhat bragging about usually the exteriors of a structure. Columns, beams, and slabs are not hidden, joined by an unusual geometric pattern
- Through the use of different colors the rough diagram attached below, is a perfect illustration of repeating patterns, a heavy and unusual structure based on principles of brutalist architecture. A building that is viewed as beautiful and disturbing at the same time.



THESIS

The agenda of the research paper is to highlight how and why this new style of architecture emerged, and the impact of brutalist structures on the modern landscape and the people of Europe. It's an analysis of how citizens responded to this new style of building and how relevant it is to culture.

WHY AND HOW DID BRUTALIST ARCHITECTURE BECOME DOMINANT AND HOW WAS IT VIEWED?

- World War Two had drained the financial resources of Europe. The damage to infrastructure was also substantial, thus in the 1950's the government (particularly in European countries) stressed rebuilding the remains of what had once been called buildings. However, due to the lack of finance, the goal had to be achieved as economically as possible hence architects turned to this new style of construction wherein raw concrete was the dominant element - a material relatively cheaper than high-strength concrete or steel. Further concrete was readily available at the time.
- Further it was a symbol of anguish and frustration against the government, the war, and the economic crisis. This is what the so-called 'depressing brutalist buildings' represented – a sense of fury among the Europeans. Architects being rebellious designed such structures, it was seen as a message to the government that all was not well and the country is in shambles
- In the Soviet Union, things were very different. It would be fair to say that Russia's definition of democracy may be distinct, in Siberia brutalist buildings were constructed differently, they mainly consisted of rectangular buildings with a basic geometric pattern that was recurring in nature. These buildings were rather a reminder from the government to its people that there was nothing to look up to, and there is no need to do things differently. Service to the state was very important and people should refrain from having their own perspective - something which completely opposes the idea of brutalist construction. The style was thus misused in Russia.



THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND BRUTALIST ARCHITECTURE

- The philosophy behind Brutalist architecture is rooted in the belief that architectural design should be based on ideas like functionality, honesty, and socio-political and cultural purpose.
- The style is often associated with socialist utopian ideas, which were regularly promoted by the buildings' architects. Many early Brutalist buildings were affordable housing projects that sought to reimagine architecture to address modern needs. The style often seeks to showcase the raw beauty of materials, such as concrete, while emphasizing structural elements.
- “The perceived ‘darkness’ or ‘coldness’ of Brutalist buildings is often a result of the honest expression of materials- which act as a figure of speech for the social-political scenario at the time- the post-war era(1950’s) which came with financial and several other troubles.
- In some parts of Europe, the effect of Nazism was still visible - the trauma and sense of awe that created amongst the minds of some tens of million victims- a considerable part of the European population back then. These somewhat disturbing yet unique buildings represent these emotions and that is why the style is called ‘brutalist architecture’ as the buildings are brutally honest as said by some famous architects

HOW DID ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNERS RESPOND TO BRUTALIST ARCHITECTURE?

Architects have had mixed feelings about Brutalist buildings, and their responses have evolved over time, reflecting a wide range of emotions and ideas.

Love and Inspiration:

- Some architects fell in love with Brutalism. They admired its raw, unpretentious style and its emphasis on effectivity and utility. For these architects, Brutalism's use of rough concrete and bold, geometric shapes was a powerful statement.
- As mentioned initially they saw it as an honest expression of a building's purpose and structure, stripping away unnecessary decoration to reveal the true nature of the materials and construction. This is because they could understand the philosophy of the style at a deeper level

Criticism and Discomfort:

- However, other's had different views on this matter. Many architects and critics found Brutalist buildings to be harsh and unwelcoming. They argued that the heavy, rough concrete and imposing designs often felt oppressive.
- These critics felt that Brutalism ignored the human aspect of architecture, creating environments that could feel alienating and uncomfortable for people who lived or worked in them.
- Thus professionals who were not a big fan of abstract art and preferred pleasant structures for living purposes – as a medium of escape from harsh reality strongly disliked these buildings. They failed to see it as a reminder of our past mistakes during the war and the catastrophic consequences it had on the European population and how through these buildings the government could sense the feelings of its citizens. They could be used as motivation to improve the political economic and social condition of the country.

Adapting and Evolving:

- In response to these critiques, some architects sought to adapt Brutalist principles rather than discard them completely.
- They aimed to keep the movement's focus on material honesty and structural clarity but at the same time, give a less intimidating appearance to the structures. These architects incorporated other

materials such as wood brick and glass, more inviting designs improving natural light by critically working on shadow analysis improving accessibility by incorporating elevators and other technologies as time passed, further, there was a focus on better air circulation and the creation of open spaces like gardens etc.

Hence, they found ways to incorporate the strengths of Brutalism with a more human-friendly approach. In recent years there has been more stress on incorporating sustainable principles into brutalist structures giving rise to a new style of construction known as 'eco brutalism'. The characteristics of these structures, is as follows:

- **Green Roofs and Vertical Gardens:** These not only reduce heat island effects but also promote biodiversity.
- **Natural Ventilation Systems:** Leveraging architectural design to minimize energy use for heating and cooling.
- **Solar Panels and Renewable Energy Sources:** Embedded in the architecture, these features ensure buildings generate a portion of their own energy.
- **Sustainable Bus Stop**- a sketch of the same is attached below which clearly shows how eco-friendly a brutalist design can be. Firstly, it has been made using wood and bamboo, the greenish color represents bamboo. It incorporates the principle of green roofing, to be specific in this design the green roofs act as beams used alongside wooden beams.
- **Rainwater Harvesting** – The sketch also shows the age-old principle of rainwater harvesting, rainwater slides down the pathway created using bamboo columns and ultimately used as a groundwater reserve



CONCLUSION

- To conclude, it's imperative to note that Brutalist architecture, once criticized for its disturbing and imposing designs, has evolved to include more 'aesthetic friendly' materials, human-centric designs, and sustainable practices.
- This adaptation has preserved its bold, functional aesthetic while addressing criticisms of its layout. Today, Brutalist buildings are valued for their historical significance, innovative design principles, and contributions to sustainable architecture. The principle has spread from Europe to all across the globe