that resulted in a multivolume work published from 1969 to 1981 (on display in the exhibition) that is still the main point of reference for any study of the Ringstrasse.²

The focus of the Jewish Museum’s exhibition was on the architectural and artistic, economic, social, scholarly, and cultural contributions to the Ringstrasse made by members of the Jewish community. The opening section of this exhibition was both provocative and illuminating: the Catholic Votivkirche, offered by the Habsburg archduke Maximilian to commemorate the attempted assassination of his brother Franz Joseph in 1853, was confronted with the main synagogue in Vienna’s traditionally Jewish Leopoldstadt district. Both buildings’ cornerstones were quarried in Jerusalem and brought to Vienna by the same person, the Jewish writer Ludwig August Frankl. Again, however, visitors who wanted to learn more on the background and significance of this fact had to refer to the catalogue. The broad thematic range of this exhibition gave a good overview of topics related to nineteenth-century Vienna, but what was missing was a sense of how the contributions of the Jewish community, undoubtedly very important, related to the contributions of the several other groups involved in the formation of the Ringstrasse. The exhibition documented anti-Semitism through anti-Semitic caricature, but those who uttered these verdicts could themselves have been portrayed. This would have achieved two aims: presenting the sociopolitical conflicts that characterized Vienna in this period and communicating the competitive situation and the contributions of diverse groups.

Even if all three exhibitions had shortcomings, the catalogues and other books published to accompany them add new, if not groundbreaking, insights, furthering our understanding and interpretation of Vienna’s most important urban project.

RICHARD KURDIOVSKY
Austrian Academy of Sciences

Related Publications
Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz, ed., Ringstraße: Ein jüdischer Boulevard/A Jewish Boulevard (Vienna: Amalthea Signum Verlag, 2015), 341 pp., color illus. £29.95, ISBN 9783850029155

Notes
1. See “Masterplan Glacis,” Vienna City Administration, http://www.wien.gv.at/stadtentwicklung/projekte/glacis (accessed 12 Oct. 2015). Interestingly, in these recent discussions the area is often called Glacis, referring back to the open space in front of the city walls that predated the Ringstrasse. The discussions thus invoke a historical term for a thing that no longer exists and pretend that there is still undeveloped space on which to build.


The New Brutalist Image 1949–55
Tate Britain, London
24 November 2014–4 October 2015

The Brutalist Playground
Royal Institute of British Architects, London
10 June–16 August 2015

Brutalism has never entirely been out of fashion since Reyner Banham published The New Brutalism in 1966, but the term has become trendy again in the past five years as most of the movement’s iconic buildings in Britain have been swept away.¹ When eighteen years ago I began work on my own book Space, Hope and Brutalism (published in September 2015), I did not expect to catch the crest of a wave.²

Yet what does Brutalism actually mean? Banham’s book coincided with the generation of great concrete housing blocks and shopping centers, to which the label stuck. But the initial New Brutalism (the adjective is important) was a more discrete movement of architects and artists who looked at the sources of art in nature, at basic geometries, and believed in expressing building materials and structure as naturally as possible, whether in timber, brick, steel, or concrete. One can see parallels in the work of Aldo van Eyck, himself inspired by artists, and even Louis Kahn, but the term New Brutalism is wholly British—although the movement’s revival has been led largely by historians from abroad.

The Tate exhibition focused on collaborations among sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi, photographer Nigel Henderson, engineer Ronald Jenkins, and architects Alison and Peter Smithson. While much of its content had been picked over since the major exhibition on the Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1991, including a small retrospective on the exhibition Parallel of Life and Art at the ICA on its sixtieth anniversary in 2013, the importance to the movement of the collaboration between artists and architects remains inadequately recognized. So too is the collaboration of both parties with the engineer Ronald Jenkins of Ove Arup and Partners, who contributed to Parallel of Life and Art and who commissioned its begetters to remodel his office in Fitzroy Street.

The Tate’s exhibition was curated by Victoria Walsh of the Royal College of Art with Claire Zimmerman of the University of Michigan, assisted by Helen Little and Elena Crippa of the Tate (Figure 1). The exhibition raised the question of whether the New Brutalism would be familiar to the average Tate visitor, and what its appeal might be for someone without a general grounding in architecture. Was this mixed exhibition a way of making architecture approachable, or (as I suspect) was further explanation needed to bring the New Brutalism to life? The exhibition was based on the Tate’s holdings of Henderson’s work, but it also included, laid out in cases resembling giant drawing boards, student drawings by the Smithsons, placed next to the photographs of found objects and the catalogue for Parallel. Also represented were early collaborations between Paolozzi and Henderson, including the latter’s cast stones for a later collaboration with the Smithsons in the exhibition This Is Tomorrow, held at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1956.

Henderson had met Paolozzi at the Slade School of Fine Art and was living in Bethnal Green during the period when Paolozzi and Peter Smithson taught together at London’s Central School of Arts and Crafts in 1950–55. At that time Alison and Peter Smithson were building Hunstanton Secondary School with Ronald Jenkins, and Henderson photographed the project as it neared completion;

EXHIBITIONS 117
Paolozzi made handprints on the new windowpanes as a small child might. Henderson’s images show not the modernity of the new school but its organic qualities as it emerged from the primeval swamp of builders’ mud and wheelbarrows—qualities the group would portray more formally as “Patio and Pavilion” in *This Is Tomorrow*. They also orchestrated the refit of Jenkins’s little office in 1951–52, with a ceiling paper collage by Paolozzi and a constructivist drinks cabinet designed by another colleague from the Central School, Victor Pasmore. The cabinet was one of the treats of the exhibition, but it looked archaic against the clean lines and flat abstract patterns of the surrounding work. The value of the show lay in its focus on a short but most productive period for all the protagonists. The exhibition fleshed out ideas presented in Claude Lichtenstein and Thomas Schregenberger’s collection of essays *As Found: The Discovery of the Ordinary*, the catalogue of a much larger exhibition with which Walsh was involved.3

Nigel Henderson, at the time the most widely known of the team and the most closely connected to the ICA, is remembered today for his photographs of Bethnal Green, where his wife, Judith, was a social worker from 1945 to 1952. Henderson recorded the minutiae of the slum houses and shops shortly before their clearance. In particular, he photographed children playing, chronicling patterns of street behavior that the Smithsons juxtaposed with sketches of their unsuccessful competition scheme for Golden Lane in a grid they exhibited at the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne at Aix-en-Provence in 1953. In Golden Lane and Robin Hood Gardens, the Smithsons sought to re-create the grid of by-law streets they had grown up with in the North East as streets in the sky, and they also designed more formal play areas at ground level. Other architects, too, were interested in children’s playgrounds, such as van Eyck in Amsterdam. In London, Ernő Goldfinger designed nursery schools, toys, and children’s play spaces in the 1930s; he went on to create complex playgrounds in the spaces freed up by the building of tall blocks like Balfron and Trellick Towers.

Brutalism and children’s play are in many ways a natural juxtaposition of the humane yet tough in architecture as in life. They came together in another small exhibition in 2015 at the Royal Institute of British Architects. The *Brutalist Playground*, commissioned from Turner Prize winners Assemble and the artist Simon Terrill, explored postwar design for play, re-creating elements of real places on a 1:1 scale. In their original settings, playgrounds at Churchill Gardens by Powell & Moya (developed piecemeal as the estate was completed between 1954 and 1962), the Brownfield Estate by Goldfinger (1967), and the Brunel Estate by the City of Westminster Architect’s Department (1974) were wild, strange gestures with big ideas about making the world anew. Unlike the others, Powell & Moya are not generally considered Brutalists, but their carefully controlled blocks and manicured lawns are offset by fun and bravado in their striking playgrounds; there is a personal sense of childlike fun in Philip Powell’s letters to the builders of Churchill Gardens seeking an old steamroller for one of the playgrounds. Their personal decision to create a playground (it was not a commission) was then a novel attempt to design for children in a manner that allowed them to find themselves, an invitation to move away from normal logic. Concrete is hard and sharp, and the spaces would not be considered safe today, but the architects encouraged children to take risks in their explorations of self-discovery. While the structures were re-created with exactitude for the exhibition, they were made in pink compressed foam, celebrating great spaces in a tightly confined space where the only release was a slippery slide. The result was a theater set, more underwhelming than the thought processes behind it, but redeemed by a beguiling slide show and a handout that provided context. Because these estates are not so regularly explored as the Smithsons’ work, the exhibition offered something intriguing if ephemeral—for nearly all the playgrounds have gone.

Elain Harwood
Historic England
Saving Place: 50 Years of New York City Landmarks
Museum of the City of New York
24 April 2015–3 January 2016

New York City’s landmarks law is fifty years old, and to celebrate this milestone the Museum of the City of New York mounted an exhibition to tell the story. Using both historic documents and contemporary photographs, the curators (Andrew S. Dolkart and Donald Albrecht, with Seri Worden) told this story well, from the demolition of the 1803 St. John’s Chapel in 1918 through the enactment of the law itself in 1965 to the continuing efforts of preservationists to protect the historic city in the twenty-first century. If I had one quibble it was that they made it all seem so easy, so inevitable. The conflicts and controversies were there—the loss of Pennsylvania Station and the fights to save Grand Central Terminal and the Broadway theaters, the long campaign to protect Greenwich Village, the battle over a tower proposed for St. Bartholomew’s Church on Park Avenue—but they were presented in a rather cool and bloodless fashion. Where were the anger and the passion, of which there had been plenty? The story told by the exhibition ended triumphantly, even though new voices with new arguments seek to undermine the landmarks law today.

New York City today proves that preservation is crucial to a prosperous and livable city. This is a triumphant story, the victory of history and sentiment and aesthetics over commerce and shortsighted interests. The irony, of course, is that the citizens had to fight for the right to protect their city and to have their affection for their city respected.

The exhibition was organized chronologically in four sections: “Prelude to the Law,” “Sparking the Law, 1945–1965,” “Defending the Law, 1965–1978,” and “The Law in Action, 1978–2015.” Each section highlighted how New Yorkers engaged what in 1845 Walt Whitman called the city’s “pull-down-and-build-over-again spirit.” What the exhibition made clear was that there was always a countervailing spirit, a strong public interest in history and historic architecture, and an almost visceral rejection of proposals threatening the historic city, such as Robert Moses’s plan to demolish Castle Clinton at the lower tip of Manhattan to make way for a bridge and the red skyscraper slated to rise where Carnegie Hall stood. One can only marvel at the tone-deaf hubris of those supporting that proposal, but still, the Landmarks Preservation Commission did nothing to block the demolition of the elegant Metropolitan Opera House in 1967. The exhibition highlighted one of the most eloquent preservation stories that took place prior to the enactment of the law, the transformation of the Jefferson Market Courthouse in Greenwich Village into a public library, introducing the new concept of adaptive reuse. Appropriately, two giants of preservation were given their due in that section: Margot Gayle, who pushed to save the courthouse (and later founded Friends of Cast Iron Architecture and advocated for the SoHo Historic District), and architect Giorgio Cavaglieri, whose design remains a landmark of preservation.

The loss of Pennsylvania Station (McKim, Mead & White, 1910) held a central place in the exhibition, complete with a display of the New York Times editorial penned by architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable: “Until the first blow fell no one was convinced that Penn Station really would be demolished or that New York would permit this monumental act of vandalism. . . . We will probably be judged not by the monuments we build but by those we have destroyed.” Tragic as that loss was, the curators made clear that the destruction of Penn Station was not the impetus for the landmarks law; rather, it was the public outcry over the demolition of the Brokaw Mansion on Fifth Avenue that finally pushed a campaign to save the Greenwich Village town house rebuilt in 1978 to a modernist design by Hugh Hardy; the 1845 Greek revival original had been destroyed in 1970 when radicals used it as a bomb factory.

Above all else, the exhibition demonstrated that preservation is not about the past. Rather, it is integral to the living city. All the contemporary color photographs of landmarks showed them not in idealized poses but as they are experienced: automobiles parked in front; angry demonstrators blocking a sidewalk; scaffolding cluttering a façade; pedestrians talking on cell phones, oblivious to their surroundings. The images were heavily weighted toward Manhattan and Brooklyn, however, with Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island represented by only a handful of landmarks. Finally, many of the individuals whose names and faces populated this show are still alive and still fighting for preservation, because the losses continue. If this exhibition offered one message, it was that only the dedication of New Yorkers has prevented the city from destroying itself. And no, it has not been easy.

JEFFREY A. KROESSLER
John Jay College of Criminal Justice,
City University of New York

Notes

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/jsah/article-pdf/75/1/117/186196/jsah_2016_75_1_117.pdf by guest on 28 June 2020