

Gottfried Böhm: A Brutalist all along?

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With a renewed academic and populist interest through various media in Brutalism and its built structures, many of Gottfried Böhm's (1928-present) creations were brought to the fore and hailed as key Brutalist examples. Given Böhm's versatile architectural output throughout his career and Brutalism's eluding definition, this paper defines constancy in both entities and argument for striking parallels between them.

From his early to most recent structures, Böhm's production has been difficult for historians and theoreticians alike to define and categorise. He is surprisingly absent from key books on architectural history, notably Kenneth Frampton's four editions of *Critical History of Modern Architecture* up until 2007, and Charles Jenck's six editions of *The Language of Postmodern Architecture* up until 1991 and his adapted version of 2002. This is despite Böhm's winning of the Pritzker Architecture prize in 1986. Neither a Modernist, Postmodernist nor a Deconstructivist in terms of recognised categories, he is briefly labeled as a Neo-Expressionist in Jenck's 'Evolutionary Tree' of 2011.

If his almost complete absence from discussions outside of Germany is conspicuous, so too is the conflicting, even confusing categorisations applied to his work in the rare instances he is referenced. In the latter, adjectives like 'sculptural', 'expressive', 'individualistic' and 'eccentric' abound, without making progress towards typologising his work.

This is perhaps due to Böhm's dynamic but confident relationship with both the past – through its learnings and structures – as well as with the future – through its technological advances and speculations. This allows him to maintain a constant creative vein throughout his career that surfaces in seemingly different contextual physical incarnations.

Similarly, Brutalism as a movement (ethic) or a style (aesthetic), exemplified in Reyner Banham's writings or Peter and Alison Smithson's works, challenges clear definition.

a set of ethical principles aiming to reconstitute modern architecture ended up derailing in an excessive style focused on a single material (concrete) with competitive manipulations to heroic extents, alienating in the process its users and original progenitors. Academic discussions around Brutalism reignited around the turn of the century, when many of its key structures in the United States and United Kingdom were coming under the threat of demolition. However, these discussions quickly mushroomed from small academic circles into a populist media frenzy over the photogenic structures. This increasingly blurred the already hazy boundaries of Brutalism and allowed for inclusion of a wide array of structures. A subset of Böhm's buildings from the 1960s and 1970s which happened to utilise exposed concrete were included in this populist definition.

Whilst a minority of Böhm's production has thus been included in the Brutalist repertoire based on the arguably superficial criteria of choice of material and massive scale, this paper proposes that features characterising the majority of his production – particularly its genuine architectural inquiry into 'material realism' and a reflection of human life – support its qualification as Brutalist in a deeper way.