

silvia groaz

new brutalism

the invention
of a style

EPFL Press

TREATISE ON CONCRETE

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Treatise on Concrete

Directed by Roberto Gargiani

The volumes of the *Treatise on Concrete* intend to offer a new and documented vision of the evolution of construction techniques and of the creative potential and formal expressions of concrete, from antiquity to the present time. Each book in the series is based on specific archival research; the analysis of scientific, technical and iconographic original sources; and the investigation into documents made available by companies, engineers, architects and artists. The full spectrum of the use of concrete is covered, including the building of foundations, ports, moles, bridges, vaults, domes, fortresses, bunkers, houses and monuments, as well as the manufacture of artificial stones and sculptures. In addition, the volumes will address the theoretical issues of *béton brut*, Brutalism and the true nature of matter. All volumes focus on the techniques and materials for the manufacture of formwork, from wood to fabric; on the meaning of the imprint; on the surface processing of concrete by hand or with machine; and on the composition of the mixture. The series of books aims to provide the scientific community with an unique and updated reference on the historical and contemporary uses of concrete, which will open a new chapter in the knowledge of this crucial material for architectural construction, as well as for masterpieces of engineering and art.

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Concrete, From Archeology to Invention, 1700-1769

Louis I. Kahn, Exposed Concrete and Hollow Stones, 1949-1959

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The Rhetoric of Pier Luigi Nervi, Concrete and Ferrocement Forms

German Concrete, The Science of Cement from Trass to Portland, 1819-1877

A New Era of American Architectural Concrete: From Wright to SOM

Aux 'messieurs de la plume'

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Treatise on Concrete

Directed by Roberto Gargiani

New Brutalism

The Invention of a Style

The concept of New Brutalism has fallen victim to a series of misunderstandings, myths and aporias. The original definition was manipulated, diluted, and finally fragmented. Even today, discussions on New Brutalism are pervaded by ambiguity, confirming the need for a thorough reconstruction of its trajectory. By challenging its current categorization, this book recounts the critical debate around New Brutalism through its many actors, philological incongruities and heroic visions.

New Brutalism emerged in the 1950s as a rebellious response by the younger generation of architects, who infused architecture with popular culture, multidisciplinary influences and a call for reality based on “truth to materials”. It reflected the post-war period’s aspirations and anxieties, revealing the uncertainties of a rapidly changing society. War, reconstruction, mass consumer goods and the ‘atomic age’ became episodes that were translated into several perspectives, radically renewing the notion of architecture. At the heart of this renewal was the debate on New Brutalism, fuelled by the works of architects but above all by the aspirations of critics.

The central core of the book follows the ways New Brutalism was conceptualized – and exploited – by various international protagonists. Its trajectory is double-sided, not only because of the dual identity of New Brutalism and Brutalism, but also because it simultaneously encompasses both the affirmation of ethical and universal values and the pursuit of an aesthetic ideal. Of the exposed-concrete phenomenon of the 1960s, New Brutalism is both the promoter and the victim, caught between the verification of ethical principles and a repetitive obsession with surface finish.

What can we take from the trajectory of New Brutalism and from Reyner Banham’s dilemma between ethics and aesthetics that would accompany it until its ‘sad end’? Ironic, polemical, revolutionary and at times even Dadaist, New Brutalism opened a debate to renew the cultural trajectory of the Modern Movement. Its critical revision steered architecture onto a new course, admitting notions of ‘process’, ‘as found’ and ‘relations’ into the design project. Amongst the intricacies of the debate, we can glimpse the proposal for generative principles integrating a new awareness of flows and technology, intercepting the aspirations of a democratic society, against the backdrop of the search for a visionary synthesis of art, architecture, and urban design.

Silvia Groaz is an architectural historian and curator. She obtained her PhD from EPFL in 2021 and her MA in Architectural History from the Bartlett School of Architecture (UCL). Her research was granted by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), The Getty Research Institute, the Swiss Institute in Milan, and the Université Catholique de Louvain. She has been a Visiting Scholar at Columbia University and is currently a SNSF postdoctoral fellow between the Université Catholique de Louvain and Yale University.

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