

Simon Phipps Finding Brutalism

A Photographic
Survey of
Post-War British
Architecture

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Concrete Poetry: Art, Architecture and Society in the Work of Simon Phipps

Catherine Ince

My first memorable encounter with an archetypal 'Brutalist' building occurred in my early teens. As an aspiring (but, I hasten to add, completely talentless) musician I was afforded the opportunity to attend extra-curricular music lessons at Pimlico School on Saturday mornings. I had no idea what to expect, but assumed that the building which awaited me on the opposite end of the Victoria Underground line was much like my own bog-standard North London comprehensive school: a nice but fairly dreary example of 'modern' municipal architecture. Pimlico School was anything but (→ fig. 1). It was a forceful behemoth, the like of which I had never seen, and I was immediately enchanted. The school sunk into the ground – quite literally – and yet stood proud, like a cargo ship in dry dock (although critics at the time were less favourable and likened it to a battleship¹); strange angular forms bulged and jutted from the weighty mass, while the weathered concrete gave it the quality of a modern ruin. The spaces inside were just as imposing and captivating; the corridors that ran the length of the building were as wide as a street and bathed in streams of light from the walled glazing; classrooms were similarly generous and bright, and connected to the outside world. The whole place was monumental and charged – a brave new world and a complex city that I explored with trepidation and excitement in equal measure. Pimlico School represented another way of building and making social space, and the seeds of my interest in such progressive ideologies were sown during these weekly visits. Following a long battle to save the school from what was undoubtedly unnecessary demolition, the wrecking ball finally set to work in 2006.² Six years later, at the 2012 Venice

Biennale of Architecture directed by David Chipperfield and titled *Common Ground*, the architect Reinier de Graaf of Dutch practice OMA/AMO presented an installation reflecting on the inventive and experimental contribution made by often little-known civil servant architects in the post-war period who worked for public bodies and shared a strong sense of social purpose with colleagues. For De Graaf, the story of Pimlico School – and other Brutalist projects like it – represents both the 'definitive end of a short-lived, fragile period of naïve optimism' and a fertile starting point, characterised by a renewed commitment to serving the public, from which to build for a new era in the 21st century.³

Simon Phipps's own formative experience of the hypnotic power of modern buildings was shaped in Milton Keynes, the suburban new town where he grew up and where his parents practised as architects. It was among the housing estates, gridded street plans and underpasses of this influential post-war planning experiment that his fascination with rationalist geometries and the textures and expressed forms of concrete structures took hold.⁴ Phipps went on to train as an artist, studying sculpture at the Royal College of Art in London before shifting his focus to (he notes) the more 'agile' medium of photography. The sculptural works produced during his time as a student and in the early period of his career attest to the influence of modern architecture or man-made forms found in the landscape (→ figs. 2+3, and see *Truth Is Concrete* below). This preoccupation with built forms, and specifically the experimental civic architecture predominant in Britain in the decades after the Second World War, is a clear thread that runs through to his entire body of photographic work. Phipps's practice has remained consistent in its exploration of material, surface and form, regardless of his chosen media, but what makes his photography particularly compelling is the complexity and depth of reference and meaning one can draw from his work.

Phipps considers himself a fine art photographer, yet his images speak directly to the realm of commissioned photography that thrived in post-war architectural publications; his photography moves between the dynamic abstract composition one

might associate with early-20th century New Objectivity and a straight documentary style, perhaps as consciously 'as found' as his so-called Brutalist subjects. Phipps no longer works on commission for architecture or design practices and views the body of work assembled here as an ongoing artistic project; some of his photographs were recently presented in the anthology *Brutal London* (2016), which serves as a guidebook to the capital's post-war architecture, organised by geographic area. The main form of dissemination of his photographs is via his website, a blog of sorts that privileges images rather than written commentary. This committed enquiry is no example of the 'counter-culture trendiness' or 'currency of cool' associated with the recent rise of Brutalism's popularity and fashionability;⁵ instead, Phipps's journey through the landscape of an era of building characterised by social purpose and rich material expression is an invitation to look again, and look carefully, at this much-maligned form of architecture. Within Phipps's study we find a multiplicity of references and a richly associative body of work that, while deeply connected to the artistic movements and social ambitions of Brutalism, asks the viewer to reappraise the often contested status of his subjects, find a sublime poetry in this world of concrete expression and, ultimately, raise questions about the way we live and build today.

Taking Note

Having adopted the role of *flâneur*, peripatetic surveyor of the urban terrain, what is it that snags the eye? The image provided by Brutalism, an architecture of sensual extremes, is often an extraordinary and unfamiliar experience for the city explorer.⁶

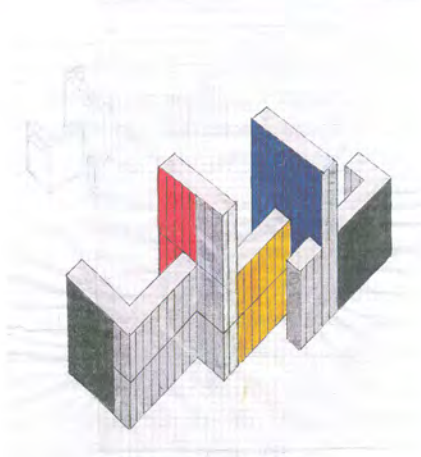
The photographs collected here are the result of a particular type of 'taking note', of close experience of the buildings that surround us in daily life. Phipps walks the city, circling back and forth around the buildings he wants to capture until he finds the framing that 'feels right' or 'makes sense' with the image in his mind.⁷ This seemingly intuitive approach is not only the result of free wandering and looking but also the consequence of Phipps's close study of the varied examples of modern post-war buildings

that have come to represent Brutalist architecture in Britain⁸ – both in built form and as documented in publications since the arrival of Alison and Peter Smithson's Smithdon School in Hunstanton, Norfolk, the 'first' Brutalist building in Britain.⁹ For those familiar with the history of architectural photography, Phipps's work is inextricably linked to British photographers such as John Donat, Sydney Newbery or (to a lesser extent) Tony Ray-Jones (→ fig. 4), whose works were crucial to communicating the idea and image of post-war architecture and 'Neobrutalism'. Phipps is knowledgeable about the work of these figures, and his research into the architecture of this period through archival photography and critical writing has enabled him to develop a sensitive understanding of the genesis, form and context of the structures he documents. Although one can see Phipps's consciousness of these forebears and their inspirational legacy, his images are not slavish replications of a past photography but rather an artistic pursuit to appreciate and capture the true effect of time on the built environment.¹⁰ When comparing images of the same places (his with those taken in the past) there are flashes of extreme familiarity, which, one assumes, is largely the consequence of the 'rightness' of a view. What captivates Phipps are the changes he observes from his initial research to what he discovers on the ground – changes in texture, detailing, ad-hoc refurbishment, maintenance or neglect of a building. Comparing Phipps's photographs of Alton West, a public-authority housing estate in Roehampton, South West London, for example, to those taken by Sydney Newbery at the time of its completion in 1959¹¹ (→ figs. 5+6), one finds a striking overlap of this kind of 'archetypal' view. Initially, the only perceptible difference is notable in the landscape: Cars and vans line up in the streets, and a few trees have grown up in the grassed areas surrounding the slab blocks; people are marked by their absence. The eminent British modernist architect John Winter included an overview of Alton West in his 1969 architectural survey *Modern Buildings*:

When Roehampton was designed, it was assumed that few occupants of council dwellings would be able to afford cars, so little parking space was provided. Yet within ten years of com-



1 Pimlico Secondary School, London, 1964–70, John Bancroft for GLC Department of Architecture & Civic Design, photo: LCC Architects' Department. Photographic Unit



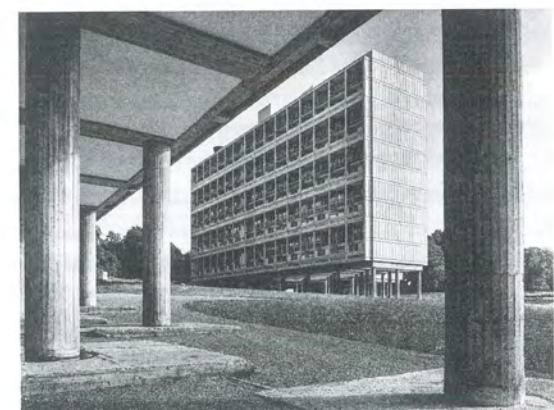
2 Simon Phipps, *Construction*, 1994, watercolour and pen on paper, 33 × 27 cm



3 Simon Phipps, *Flats*, 1992, chipboard



4 Pepys Estate, London, 1966–73. GLC Department of Architecture & Civic Design, photo: Tony Ray Jones



5 Alton West, Roehampton, 1959, LCC Architects' Department, photo: Sydney W. Newbery



6 Alton West, Roehampton, 1959, LCC Architects' Department, photo: Simon Phipps, taken 2015

pletion there were so many cars that the whole elegant landscape is threatened. An architect's preliminary sketch of the shopping street shows one solitary Rolls-Royce on the road; if one visits it today, one will find a sea of Minis and Anglias parked bumper to bumper.¹²

The situation Winter describes hasn't changed much in the intervening years, but the density of vehicles we see dotted around the estate today doesn't quite have the detrimental effect he implies – at least not to the extent that it matters in the overall scheme. Phipps's photograph shows us a building in remarkably good shape: the 'Corbusian' rough-surfaced exposed concrete Ian Nairn found and noted in his guide *Modern Buildings in London* (1964) has fared well, as has much of the lush green landscape. It is, one feels, still a good place to live. And this is the essence Phipps wants to convey.

One of the most iconic and arresting images of the Alton West estate was taken from the grounds of Downshire House, a Georgian property next to the Alton Estate used by Roehampton University, where artist Lynn Chadwick's trio of standing figures titled *The Watchers* (1960) was installed in 1963.¹³ John Donat's photograph (→ fig. 7) was taken at the time of installation and frames the bronze figures from the rear looking out over the landscape towards the estate's point blocks. Donat's composition places the figures and buildings on the same horizon line, to great dramatic effect; Chadwick's jagged, semi-abstract monumental figures – in reality two metres high – appear to overshadow the towers, taking on a science fiction-like quality, as if the robots so beloved of proto-Pop Independent Group artists such as Eduardo Paolozzi were about to wreak havoc on the city below. Public art of this nature was a common addition to civic architecture in the post-war period, and while sculptures by notable artists such as Chadwick or Henry Moore proved popular, not all stood the test of time with many publicly sited artworks lost to vandalism, theft or neglect over the years. For those charged with rebuilding towns and cities in the aftermath of the Second World War, good-quality art, design and architecture played a central role in revitalizing the built environment

and people's collective experience. This broad definition of how a society expresses its shared values characterises the ambitions of the time:

The layout of a public park, the design of furniture in schools and homes, even the typography of an agenda paper, can demonstrate cultural values. Public buildings especially, whether they are imposing municipal offices, large housing estates, or small utilitarian buildings, can be given the enlivening quality that is a feature of good architecture.¹⁴

Phipps's interest lies precisely in this intersection of art, architecture and life.

Sources and Parallels¹⁵

In a street, I feel like a naturalist in a jungle. There is the spoor of people (Boars Head tobacco wrappers, bus tickets, milk bottle tops like medallions; the tree trunks – battered cylinders of dustbins, the lianas of wall crack, the undergrowth of eroded pavement-slabs slicked with crust lines of cement, blotched with damp). You walk on tiger skin from Devon. You come upon doors annihilated by paper like the mossy encrustations of trees in the bayou, and padded lichenated walls.¹⁶

Nigel Henderson's lyrical account of his explorations of the East End speaks directly of the sensibility towards the tough materiality and palimpsest traces of human inhabitation found in the raw textures of the urban environment that were explored and depicted by the artists and architects associated with Brutalism (→ fig. 8), notably by figures from the Independent Group in Britain or the *Art Autre* tendency in post-war abstract art from the European continent. As the writer Jonathan Meades emphasised in his recent appraisal of Brutalism for BBC television, this was 'architecture as art, which didn't seek to be pretty'.¹⁷

The architectural historian Reyner Banham identified the 'valuation of material "as found"' ¹⁸ as one of three central tenets of 'New Brutalism' (the others being 'memorability as an image' and 'clear exhibition of structure'), and Phipps utilises this defini-

tion as a guiding principle in his practice. He is keenly interested in the unpredictable nature of concrete over time and manages to wrestle a 'rough poetry' out of the surfaces he photographs, heavily marked with the accretions of decades of weather and use (→ fig. 9). Phipps is not alone in his preoccupation with these fundamental elements of the Brutalist aesthetic. In his epic material history of concrete, architectural historian Adrian Forty charts the perception of this 'unnatural' material and unpicks how the changing taste for its use and wear shifts and cycles over the years.¹⁹ The patina of weathering or the natural lichen found on derelict and run-down buildings in London's war-ravaged East End that so absorbed Henderson and his 'Brutalist' contemporaries has once again found favour in architectural circles. Forty cites Swiss architect Jacques Herzog's interest 'in the mosses and lichens that grow on the surface of stones', noting that 'the hazards of weathering ceased to be regarded as a defect and became a positive asset to the architect'.²⁰

In a catalogue produced to accompany the exhibition *As Found: The Discovery of the Ordinary*, held at the Museum für Gestaltung, Zurich in 2001, London-based architects Peter St John and Adam Caruso wrote of the work of Alison and Peter Smithson, Lee Friedlander, Claes Oldenburg and Robert Smithson as possessing a rich, concrete reality: 'This emphasis on experience as being a valid basis for work, is as potent and subversive in the context of today's sanitised, branded identities as it was in the post-abstract expressionist 1950's'.²¹ Phipps's recovery of the 'as found' is not to suggest that his photography is aiming to be, by definition, 'Brutalist', but instead he uses its characteristics as a fertile source; he takes on its methods and ethical thrust by inviting us to see and experience what is around us today in order to reconsider Brutalism's inherent value and potent agenda.

Truth Is Concrete

During his time at the Royal College of Art, Phipps made a study for a large sculptural 'non-supporting beam' intended to be placed in the centre of an empty room; below the schematic drawings he notes the sculpture will be made from a material (unidentified) simulating concrete alongside the words

'Brecht: Truth Is Concrete'²² (→ fig. 10). The drawing is an intriguing surviving fragment of an unrealised work and establishes the wealth of references and ideas circulating in Phipps's practice from the outset. Is Phipps's use of faux materials playing with the meaning of Brecht's well-known phrase or merely a pragmatic way to resolve the fabrication and installation of a large sculptural work? What does it tell us about nature and artifice in relation to Modernism? The question of truth to materials is of course central to the evolution of international Modernism that Brutalism has come to represent, and Phipps's photographs provide a visual lexicon of the myriad forms and textures that make up the 'honest' Brutalist palette, from the bush-hammered exposed aggregate of Chamberlin, Powell and Bon's Barbican Estate (pp. 202, 206–07) to the expressive and complex monumentality of Kate Macintosh's Dawson's Heights brick housing estate (p. 140).

By shooting his subjects in black and white, Phipps underlines the timeless quality of Brutalist architecture and reinforces its weighty presence and dramatic potential. His play with light and shadow draws out the sublime beauty of its surfaces and forms, and provides an important contrast to what he sees as the flimsy 'vinyl-clad Wendy houses that count for much of today's banal and mediocre housing'.²³ His is 'a stripped down aesthetic for a barebones architecture'.²⁴

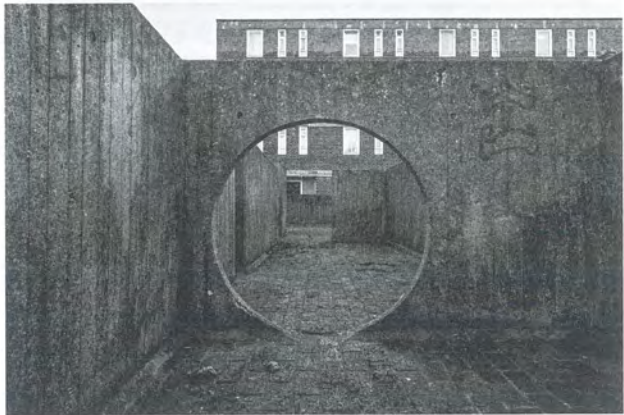
It comes as no surprise then to discover that Paul Virilio's book (and exhibition) *Bunker Archeology*, a study of defence structures built along France's shoreline during the Second World War and documented in black and white, is another source of inspiration and formative influence on Phipps's practice. His maquettes and studies for sculptures from this time (→ figs. 11+12) appear almost directly drawn from the pages of Virilio's now seminal publication (→ fig. 13); Phipps's eye for the bunker typology at the more bloody-minded and bellicose end of the Brutalist scale has not receded. From Phipps's reading of post-war architecture one can cite any number of examples that trace back to the expressive and emotionally loaded structures Virilio first excavated in the 1970s. Phipps's architectural survey of the remains of 20th-century Brutalist architecture



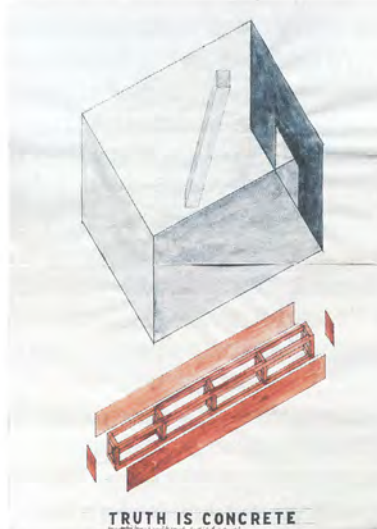
7 Alton West and Lynn Chadwicks, *The Watchers*, photo: John Donat, taken 1963



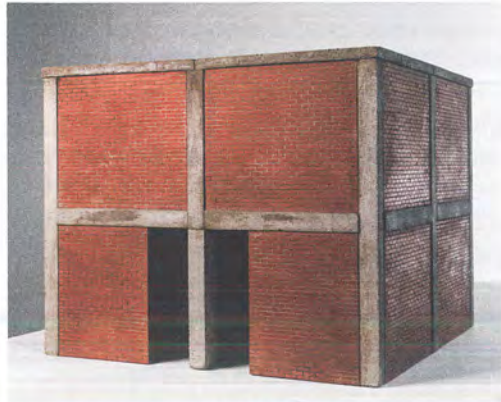
8 Nigel Henderson, *Photograph possibly showing a texture study of a wall*, c. 1949–c. 1956



9 Aintree Estate, London, 1962–67, LCC Architects' Department, photo: Simon Phipps, taken 2016



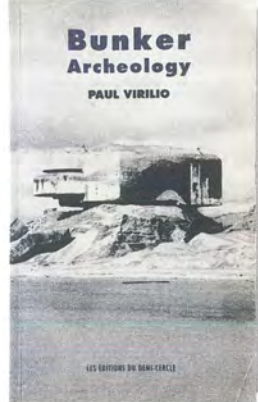
10 Simon Phipps, *Truth Is Concrete*, 1992, watercolour and pen on paper, 59.5 × 42 cm



11 Simon Phipps, *Blockhouse*, 1993, MDF, concrete, styrene, 40 × 50 × 50 cm



12 Simon Phipps, *Bunker*, 1992, concrete, 130 × 25 × 30 cm



13 Cover of Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archeology*, Les Editions du Demi-Cercle, 1994

offers the viewer a studied comparison of the typology, strongly reminiscent of Bernd and Hilla Becher's grids of 'anonymous sculptures' (although less systematically documented and presented). 'The Bechers are interested in the character implicit in a façade, just the way Sander was interested in the character implicit in a face.'²⁵ Phipps's motivation is in his commitment to examining Banham's 'clear exhibition of structure', a defining characteristic of Brutalism. Reinforced concrete allowed architects to reach new levels of structural freedom, and their post-war experiments yielded a dazzling array of sculpturally expressive forms which often exaggerated elements of the building's function – see any number of labyrinthine walkways, lift shafts or dynamic zigzagging staircases in Phipps's archive. For architects designing housing like Kate Macintosh, however, the desire to 'be more sculptural and more expressive' with individual dwellings was bound up in a reaction to the 'bland uniformity of some of the public housing which had come out of London County Council' projects.²⁶ Whatever the ideological starting point, Phipps carefully composed photography demonstrates the sculptural potency of Brutalist forms.

Banham's somewhat awkward term 'memorability as an image' is defined as that which 'affects the emotions', something that is 'visually valuable'.²⁷ In this book, the multiplicity of overlapping references in Phipps's photographic archive are brought alive by the conscious editorial refusal to employ conventional classification systems on the subject – date, geography or building type, for example – to impose a didactic reading of Brutalism. Instead, the result is an intuitive and loose composition of rich but undeclared associations, inviting the reader to discover and determine their own connections across the collection of images. Phipps's ability to capture the ineffable emotional qualities of Brutalist architecture and isolate the 'visually valuable' (which may be perceived differently by each viewer) challenges the long-standing toxic connotations of the 'brutal' and summons a more nuanced legacy that has more to do with the complexities of the 'heroic'.²⁸

Magnificent Ruins

[...] I am not going to engage in long discussions on whether or not a building is Brutalism or not Brutalism, because it doesn't mean anything in that sense. It only means something if it was called Brutalist in order to do something with it, or say something about it.²⁹

For vast numbers of the public, the word 'Brutalism' will never conjure an image other than that of ugly and poorly weathered concrete or brick buildings that signify the hubristic failures of naïve post-war optimism; and the uncompromising and imposing reality of this architectural expression will never pass beyond an aesthetic reading to the ethical frame the leaders of the movement sought for their work.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, the beleaguered handful of admirers who still saw the beauty of 1960s architecture regretted the widespread adoption of such an aggressive term. The Punkish thuggery of the word seemed to emphasise precisely what everyone else disliked about the great concrete buildings that were topping every poll of most hated buildings.³⁰

Phipps's photographs trace the inevitable demise of Brutalist architecture. Over the years post-war modern architecture has proved a fertile battleground for fervent campaigners on a mission to maintain and preserve works of architectural and historic significance, and those ardently opposed to the aggressive, inappropriate and bleak buildings that blight towns and cities around the country. We are far from consensus about the value of this architectural approach today, and the survival of Brutalist structures is uneven. On pages 74, 162 and 211–12 we see the decrepit corners of Trinity Square car park in Gateshead, recorded by Phipps before being demolished in 2010, but forever immortalised in Mike Hodges' influential 1971 film *Get Carter*, which starred Michael Caine as the eponymous gangster Jack Carter. In a filmed interview with Owen Luder, the architect reflected on the tumultuous reception of his work throughout his career:

In the sixties my buildings were awarded, in the seventies they were applauded, in the eighties they were questioned, in the nineties they were ridiculed, and when we get through to 2000 the ones I like most are the ones that have been demolished.³¹

In more recent years, structures reviled by the community for which they were intended, such as Victor Pasmore's Apollo Pavilion (pp. 119, 160–61), a public artwork made by the artist in 1969 for the new town Peterlee in County Durham, north-east England, have lasted through years of neglect and lack of public support enabling heritage listing, to be later rescued at the hands of cultural organisations and campaigners dedicated to landmarks of the built environment. Elsewhere, fate of a different kind has ensured the survival of sorts of a few of Brutalism's most cherished projects. The Park Hill estate in Sheffield (1958–61, pp. 187, 218) and Ernő Goldfinger's Balfron Tower in East London (1965–67, pp. 3, 204) were both listed in the 1990s and have been transferred into the ownership of a private developer and heritage organisation, and a housing association working with a development company, respectively. Both are in the long process of renovation with much surrounding debate. Park Hill has been partly refurbished, but many of the formerly occupied blocks still stand empty – a partial ruin waiting for economic recovery to kick in so that the renewal can be finished. Although the developer will eventually provide 200 new flats that will be available for social rent, the majority (around 600) will be sold on the open market.³² After years of speculation, the social sector status of Goldfinger's Balfron Tower in Poplar, a sister building to his Trellick Tower in West London, was recently decided by the local housing association to whom Tower Hamlets had passed ownership in 2007. To allow extensive refurbishment of the block to take place in 2010, Balfron's social-tenant residents were initially moved out ('de-canted' is now the preferred term) for reasons of safety and expected to return once the work was completed. They never did. Following a long and convoluted – some argue predetermined – process, residents were rehoused elsewhere and Balfron was sold to a private company who are currently renovating the building and converting 120 family

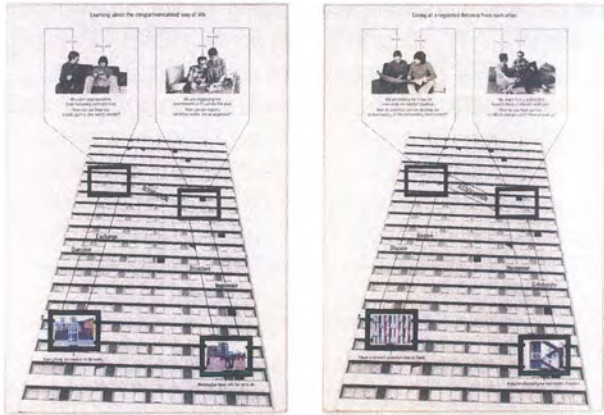
homes, formerly solely available for council and then housing association tenants, into luxury flats for purchase on the open market.³³ This is not an unusual story, and Phipps's photographs remind us of the dichotomy bound up with such 'Brutalist icons' – simultaneously celebrated in the design press or fetishised on any number of household consumer goods, while standing as the emblem of a democratic dream gone sour: '[...] social housing in the 20th century was created with a social purpose in mind, for which it is still in demand. Today, the very existence of social housing is under threat from government policy and listed buildings are especially vulnerable. If we determine that social purpose must also be conserved, we must look beyond physical conservation and commit to keeping these homes in the social sector.'³⁴

The powerful impact of Phipps's photography renders this architecture as sculpture, but it is a mistake to overemphasise this interpretation; the houses and other buildings he photographs are not art. What has greater power is the way in which these images remind us of the social project of the post-war period that – while not always successful because of poor design, construction, maintenance or deliberate neglect – created modern and decent places for people from all backgrounds and means to live comfortably and with dignity.

Vision and Reality³⁵

Any discussion of Brutalism will miss the point if it does not take into account Brutalism's attempt to be objective about 'reality' – the cultural objectives of society, its urges, and so on. Brutalism tries to face up to a mass-production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work.³⁶

While the subjects of Phipps's study of post-war British architecture cover the full gamut of modern civic building, from libraries and schools to local-authority built offices or infrastructure, his abiding interest is in the council housing of the period. Harsh stereotypes and casual vilification of council housing tenants has disconcertingly become the norm in recent years. In his successful debut book *Chavs: The Demonization*



14 Stephen Willats, *Compartmentalised Cliff*, 1976, photographic prints, letaset text, ink, on card. Framed with perspex, two panels, each: 110.3 × 76.3 cm



15 George Shaw, *Scenes from the Passion: The Shortest Day of the Year*, 2003, Humbrol enamel on board, 91 × 121 cm



16 Old Groveway, Milton Keynes, 1974, Phippen Randall & Parkes, photo: Simon Phipps, taken 2008



17 Laura Oldfield Ford, *Ferrier Estate*, 2010, ball-point pen and acrylic on watercolour paper, 84 × 119 cm

of the Working Class (2011), writer and commentator Owen Jones revives a debate about class divisions in British society and interrogates the ease with which such language is used with contempt towards the working class, and specifically those stereotypes perpetuated about people living in council-owned property or housing estates. What is relevant in this context is that, although the word has been in use for some time and is usually associated with adolescent behaviour, its pejorative definition today is widely understood to stand for 'Council-Housed and Violent'.

While distinctly different in conceptual and aesthetic expression, I view Phipps's body of work as inherently connected to a seam of recent artistic enquiry that seeks to explore architecture and landscape in terms of the urban and suburban lived experience, and ultimately challenge such widespread perceptions. Conceptual artist Stephen Willats instigated his ongoing cycle of projects made with council housing residents in the 1970s and has pioneered a form of socially engaged practice that sought to situate art firmly within the context of society and audiences' real lives (→ fig. 14). Willats interviews and photographs residents in their homes and talks to them about daily life experiences; his questions are straightforward and 'the responses he collects are considered and varied, each adding a layer of perspective to a communal experience that has, in media and political discourse, often been reduced to a single tale of social dysfunction'.³⁷ The portrait he has built up over the years of his enquiry paints a nuanced image of the day-to-day living in the experiments of post-war architects and planners and confronts this reality, for better or worse. In a series of early paintings that helped establish his career, artist George Shaw depicts the landscapes of his childhood suburban upbringing in Tile Hill, Coventry. Phipps's photographs are reminiscent of the quotidian nature of these small paintings: both present empty street scenes, vernacular details of council estate architecture, or the overlooked passages, corners and vistas that shape ones experiences of the built environment, yielding a strongly emotive 'memorability as an image' (→ figs. 15+16). Artist Laura Oldfield Ford is interested in marginalised landscapes, contested urban sites and areas undergoing gentrification, and uses

a form of psychogeography to inhabit urban spaces, to create an emotional mapping realised in her drawings and paintings (→ fig. 17). Her lens is critical and challenging, a necessary voice for a timely reappraisal of today's societal values and their expression in the forms of contemporary architecture and housebuilding. In an interview conducted in 2009, Oldfield Ford states:

My obsession with modernist architecture, or Brutalist estates in particular, is not cosy or nostalgic. I want to say that this idea of a forward looking, egalitarian society has been lost and in making drawings as historical documents, I'm attempting to reactivate certain currents. I have made drawings of Brutalist estates that have been demolished to make way for cul-de-sacs of faux Georgiana [...].³⁸

Phipps shares this attitude, and the latent political commentary at work in his photographs becomes ever more apparent as we look back on this epic period of housebuilding from today's point of view. It is nearly impossible to consider these images as cosy or nostalgic when viewed with a distance of decades of upheaval in terms of economic and political policy. Swingeing cuts to local authority housing budgets, long-term harmful policies such as the Conservative Party-instigated 'Right To Buy' scheme introduced in the UK in 1980, and an increasing neo-liberal attitude to property ownership and profiteering have resulted in a return to the stark gaps between rich and poor, not seen since the century before last.³⁹ We are back in the midst of a housing crisis akin to the problems Britain faced in the middle of the 20th century but borne of very different circumstances. What does Simon Phipps's work tell us about this situation? And how might the presence of the past he documents offer a starting point for a different way forward? We might go back to Reyner Banham's original question: The New Brutalism: ethic or aesthetic? The answer is, of course, one of ethics, and the challenge we face for the future is how we drag a (rough) poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work.

2 2
3 3
4 5

1 See Reinier de Graaf, 'Bloody Fools: The Story of Pimlico School 1970–2010', in *Common Ground*, Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2012, p. 174.
2 See Stephen Parnell in conversation with Kate Mackintosh for more detail on Pimlico School by John Bancroft, Department of Architecture and Civic Design, GLC (Greater London Council), and its demolition, pp. 243–53 in this book.
3 De Graaf, 'Bloody Fools: The Story of Pimlico School 1970–2010', p. 178.
4 See Simon Phipps, *Brutal London*, London: September Publishing, 2016, p. 5.
5 See Owen Hopkins, 'Ambition and Ideals: The Changing Fortunes of Post-War British Architecture, 1945–2017', in idem, *Lost Futures: The Disappearing Architecture of Post-War Britain*, London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2017), p. 22.
6 Simon Phipps, *Brutal London*, 2016, p. 6.
7 Simon Phipps in conversation with the author, June 2016.
8 Whether all buildings photographed by Phipps are 'Brutalist' or not could be of endless debate; my interest here is concerned with the ways in which he looks and records his own view and definition of Brutalism within a broad scope of post-war modern architecture.
9 See Reyner Banham, 'The New Brutalism', *Architectural Review* 118 (December 1955).
10 Simon Phipps in conversation with the author, June 2016.
11 See Sydney Newbery in the Architectural Press Archive, Royal Institute of British Architects Collection: <https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix/image-information/poster/alton-west-estate-roehampton-london-an-elevenstorey-maisonette-slab-seen-from-the-facing-slab/posterid/RIBA28672.html> (accessed 26 June 2017).
12 John Winter, 'Housing at Roehampton, London', in *Modern Buildings*, Middlesex: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd, 1969, p. 163.
13 One of the figures was stolen in 2006 and Roehampton University stored the remaining pair. Permission was sought from the Chadwick estate to make a new cast from the original mould, and in 2016 *The Watchers* was returned to the grounds of Downshire House.

14 W. E. Jackson, *Achievement: A Short History of the London County Council*, p. 218; quoted in *Rosamund West, Art in the Neighbourhood*, 2017: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/news-learning-department/lansbury-micro-museum-art-of-the-neighbourhood> (accessed 1 June 2017).
15 The influential Independent Group exhibition *Parallel of Life and Art*, held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1953, was originally titled 'Sources'. See the catalogue *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. David Robbins, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, p. 125.
16 Nigel Henderson quoted in *Nigel Henderson's Streets: Photographs of London's East End 1949–53*, ed. Clive Coward, London: Tate Publishing, 2017, p. 20.
17 Jonathan Meades, *Bunkers, Brutalism and Bloodymindedness: Concrete Poetry*, BBC Four Television, 2014.
18 Reyner Banham, 'The New Brutalism' *Architectural Review* 118 (December 1955).
19 Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History*, London: Reaktion Books, 2012, p. 52.
20 Jaques Herzog in *El Croquis* 84, 1997, p. 15; cited in Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History*, p. 57.
21 Adam Caruso and Peter St John, 'As Found Today', in *As Found: The Discovery of the Ordinary*, Baden: Lars Müller, 2001, p. 137.
22 Berthold Brecht reportedly hung a large sign bearing the words 'Truth Is Concrete' above his desk.
23 Simon Phipps, *Brutal London*, 2016, p. 8.
24 Simon Phipps, *Brutal London*, 2016, p. 7.
25 Quoted in Blake Stimson, 'The Photographic Comportment of Bernd and Hilla Becher', *Tate Papers* 1 (spring 2004): <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/01/photographic-comportment-of-bernd-and-hilla-becher> (accessed 1 June 2017).
26 Kate Macintosh in conversation with Stephen Parnell, pp. 243–53 in this book.
27 Reyner Banham, 'The New Brutalism' *Architectural Review* 118 (December 1955).
28 See Michael Kuo, Chris Grimley and Mark Pasnik, 'Brutal/Heroic', *Clog: Brutalism* (June 2013), pp. 166–67.
29 Anthony Vidler, *Fulcrum* 58 (5 December 2012), quoted in *Clog: Brutalism* (June 2013), p. 25.

30 Dr Barnabas Calder, *Style: In Defence of Brutalism*, London: Machine Books, 2017.
31 Owen Luder in the film *Get Luder*, directed by Jonathan Carr, Plainview Films, 2010.
32 Paul Dobraszczyk, 'Sheffield's Park Hill: The Tangled Reality of an Extraordinary Brutalist Dream', *The Guardian*, 14 August 2015.
33 Considerable debate surrounds the residential 'decanting' and sale of Balfon Tower, see <http://www.eastendreview.co.uk/2015/03/24/balfon-tower-poplar-harca/> (accessed 1 June 2017).
34 Emma Dent Goad, 'Conserving Living Buildings', *Urban Pamphleteer #2 Regeneration Realities*, UCL Urban Laboratory (December 2013): <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/urbanlab/research/urban-pamphleteer> (accessed 1 June 2017).
35 Taken from the title of Stephen Willats' publication *Visions and Reality* (2016), an anthology of photographs and interviews from his collaborations with residents of the housing estates in the south of England about which he has made projects since the 1970s.
36 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Thoughts in Progress', *Architectural Design* 27 (April 1957), p. 113.
37 Lynsey Hanley, 'Estates of the Nation', *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 October 2016: <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/private/estates-of-the-nation-2/> (accessed 1 June 2017).
38 Laura Oldfield Ford interviewed by Josephine Berry Slater and Anthony Iles, 25 November 2009, *Mute*: <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/interview-laura-oldfield-ford> (accessed 26 June 2017).
39 See James Meek's 'Where Will We Live', *London Review of Books* 36, 1 (9 January 2014) for a thorough assessment of the housing situation in the four decades since Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party introduced the 'Right to Buy' housing policy.