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Modernism on Trial: An Analysis of Historic Preservation Debates in Chicago

Stephen M. Mitchell
Illinois State University, smmitch@ilstu.edu

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MODERNISM ON TRIAL: AN ANALYSIS OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DEBATES IN CHICAGO

Stephen M. Mitchell

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This thesis explores preservation issues regarding modernist architecture in Chicago. As urban and public history research, the project examines the new questions brought to the forefront by recent controversies over the preservation of modernist architecture. Modernism, and an “all concrete” variant known as “Brutalism,” popular in the mid-twentieth century, aimed to remove ornament and historical references common in neoclassical, neo-Gothic, Beaux Arts, and Art Deco architecture and replace them with minimal, clean, glass-and-steel buildings. Modernists who, on principle, did not believe in preservation of past forms are now in the unlikely position of making such an argument for their own buildings. Never widely embraced in the first place, Brutalism’s concrete façades seemed less and less to reflect aesthetic tastes as architects turned back toward historicist styles by the 1980s. As such buildings have grown older, they have become a part of debates within cities across the United States about preservation and the built environment, frequently becoming entangled with city politics and economic interests.

MODERNISM ON TRIAL: AN ANALYSIS OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DEBATES IN CHICAGO

STEPHEN M. MITCHELL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
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2014

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STEPHEN M. MITCHELL

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Alan Lessoff, Chair

Roger Biles

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: MODERNISM AND PRESERVATION IN CHICAGO

A spirited debate occurred on the opinion pages of the *New York Times* in April 2012. The discussion, over the preservation of modernist architecture, occurred as cities across the United States weighed the future of buildings that, unlike Beaux Art or Art Deco structures, more widely embraced, were not as accepted or appreciated. Contributor Anthony M. Daniels wrote, “Preserving stark, modernist buildings denies their crimes against humanity.”¹ Meanwhile, Allison Arieff countered, “Well-cared-for modern buildings have become cultural icons, revenue generators and sites of pilgrimage.”² These comments, however, only scratched the surface of an issue that had become one of the defining cultural issues confronting twenty-first century American cities.

After decades of either rejection or indifference, modernism found its way again into the public domain, as the press covered a series of preservation fights over such buildings in the 2000s and 2010s. Similarly, “Brutalism,” a variant of modernism, and what some saw as the peculiar forms buildings associated with this style took, became a source of media fascination. As a newer collection of buildings, belonging to mid-twentieth century modernism, became eligible for city landmark status and the National Register of Historic Places, preservationists attempted to convince skeptics of their

¹ *New York Times*, April 9, 2012.

² *Ibid.*, April 8, 2012.

worthiness. That architecture is a source of controversy is, of course, not new; buildings, for various reasons, have long aroused both anger and pride.

The debates, however, are not merely about particular buildings, but representative of a larger debate about modernist architecture and its preservation. As awareness increased, organizational structures, often led by non-profit preservation groups, developed on an international, national, and local level to make the case for saving these buildings. An international organization called *docomomo* was established in 1988 to “document” works of modernist architecture. In Chicago, groups such as Landmarks Illinois and Preservation Chicago broadened their caseload to save endangered modernist buildings, a new development in the history of the American preservation movement. In the 1990s, historian Richard Longstreth noted either indifference or hostility among preservationists about modernist buildings. Like much of the public at the time, preservationists often did not view these structures as historic and worthy of saving. For many years, Longstreth was one of the few scholarly figures to draw serious attention to the issue.

American city planners, preservationists, and citizens across the country were engaged in simultaneous debates about these buildings, which one article called “alternatingly loved and despised,” with some of the most high-profile discussions involving Boston’s City Hall, Washington D.C.’s Hoover FBI Building, and the Orange County Government Center in Goshen, New York.³ Since the beginning of the American historic preservation movement, in the latter half of the twentieth century, competing interests have struggled over the adaptability and relevance of historic buildings, as cities

³ Kriston Capps, “A Brutal Week for Brutalism,” *Architect*, August 6, 2012, <http://www.architectmagazine.com/architecture/a-brutal-week-for-brutalism.aspx>

have attempted to define their architectural heritage. Saving buildings forces a negotiation between past and future, forcing preservationists, civic leaders, city officials, and the public to clash over what is worth preserving and why.

Part of the problem stems from the fact that much of the public has typically not viewed modernist architecture as “historic.” Longstreth has written extensively about the need to recognize modernism as an importance period in American architectural history. When he first began writing about the subject in the early 1990s, he notes, the concept was “still somewhat of a novel one.”⁴ However, a renewed interest in modernism benefitted those who hope to save such buildings. Even in a more sympathetic atmosphere, preservationists have, nevertheless, struggled to force the public and city officials to reconsider specific buildings, as well as the larger style, they might not have previously found attractive, important, or worthy of saving. As Chicago architecture Blair Kamin stated, “Modernist buildings are exemplars of art, culture, and technology, but it’s a demanding architecture.”⁵

As modernist architecture came to dominate American building in the post-World War II period, under the auspices of urban redevelopment and renewal, cityscapes were altered in attempts to rejuvenate neighborhoods seen as dilapidated and business districts seen as stagnant. Urban historian David Hamer pointed out that though the term “urban renewal” has developed certain negative associations, the policies actually drew significant support at one time. As Hamer writes, “It [urban renewal] fitted in well with the postwar mood of making a new start and ridding cities of the burdensome legacy of

⁴ Richard Longstreth, “I Can’t See It: I Don’t Understand It; And It Doesn’t Look Old to Me,” *Forum Journal* 27, No. 1 (Fall 2012): 35.

⁵ Blair Kamin, quoted in Carlos Harrison, “Hope for Modernism,” *Preservation* (Winter 2014), 24.

the past—which for most people was primarily identified with the grim depression years.”⁶

Modernism’s arrival in the United States provided civic leaders with a vocabulary and framework to rebuild cities seen as decaying as centers for economic prosperity. These new structures, with sought to remove ornamental features in favor of a sleek, glass-and-steel dominated design, evoked a new ethic in architecture that dominated new construction and city planning in the post-war period. However, while supporters of urban renewal have been long accused of completely rejecting the past and favoring only wide-scale demolition, as early as the 1950s, rehabilitation of existing buildings and neighborhoods, in cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago, began to be incorporated in various renewal programs.⁷

By the 1970s, urban renewal became seen as destroying too much too quickly and lost much of its political support among city, state, and federal leaders. Bankruptcy in several city governments, seen most dramatically in New York City, and nationwide inflation had exhausted much of the funds required for ambitious projects of previous decades. “Everywhere,” historian Jon Teaford writes, “the high hopes of the 1960s seemed naïve by the mid-1970s.”⁸ In addition, the association between renewal and clearance that seemed to target predominantly lower income and African-American populations caused significant unpopularity.

Much of the same hostility directed towards urban renewal and the destruction of older buildings became applied to the buildings meant to replace them. When modernism

⁶ David Hamer, *History in Urban Places: The Historic Districts of the United States* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 13.

⁷ Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 114.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

fell out of favor and post-modern architecture restored decorative ornament to the forefront of design by the 1970s, modernism had become seen as a destructive force in American cities, tied to the legacy of urban redevelopment and renewal. Aesthetic taste and style change often, however, and what was once rejected has returned to relevance.

The forms modernism and Brutalism took forced those who advocated for preservation in the position of defending buildings that have not been widely embraced by the public. Aesthetics, indeed, played a large role, as the exposed concrete exteriors associated with Brutalist buildings were deemed harsh or unattractive and became, to some, visual reminders of the negative aspects of urban renewal. In his keynote lecture to docomomo's twelfth annual International Conference in August 2012, Anthony Vidler called the Brutalist label "undeniably unfortunate."⁹

Indeed, as a constantly evolving city, and despite its rich collection of architecture, Chicago also saw significant amounts of demolition. Redevelopment in Chicago during the 1950s and 1960s, Bluestone writes, "turned out to be the most destructive period in Chicago since the 1871 fire."¹⁰ According to historian Joel Rast, "City planning under the [Richard J.] Daley administration was focused overwhelmingly around one goal—economic growth."¹¹ Much like other cities of its day, however, many citizens did not begin to realize the negative effects of urban renewal until many buildings were lost. What buildings did survive can be attributed to their connection to the "Chicago School." Normally, American buildings that survived urban renewal did so

⁹ Anthony Vidler, "Learning to Love Brutalism," keynote lecture, docomomo International Conference, Espoo, Finland, August 2012.

¹⁰ Daniel Bluestone, "Preservation and Destruction in Chicago: Narrating History While Building a City" in *Buildings, Landscapes and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2011), 159.

¹¹ Joel Rast, *Remaking Chicago: The Political Origins of Urban Industrial Change* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), 33.

because of what Hamer called “the phenomenon of survival,” meaning that buildings that escaped the wrecking ball did so often by accident. In Chicago, however, the survival of particular buildings was the result of a more conscious process.

As Bluestone has written, many city planners, and the modernist architects they hired for new projects, helped further popularize the idea of a Chicago School as boosterism for the city’s architecture and a rationale for new building.¹² During the 1950s and 1960s, allegiance to the “Chicago School” became a tool for both preservationists and modernist architects. City planners in the 1950s invoked the school to “give them a sense of historic mission and even destiny.”¹³ Newer architects working in Chicago, such as Mies van der Rohe, were championed as a continuation of this “school,” while preservationists “staked their claim entirely on the Chicago School canon.”¹⁴ Though this alliance between preservationists, the city, and architects was often tenuous, a great deal of buildings in commercial centers, including John Root’s Monadnock Building, survived in the process, and fragment salvage became a way to support both the legacy of the Chicago School and urban renewal.

Outrage over the speed and breadth of such destruction led to formation of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in 1968 to provide recognition to historic city structures. However, much of the early activity of the commission was dedicated merely to recognition, similarly to the work of the National Register. The buildings most often targeted by preservationists were designed by the architects attributed to the Chicago School. For instance, the proposed demolition of the Garrick Theater in 1960 drew massive protests and picketing precisely because it was designed by Dankmar Adler and

¹² Bluestone, 178.

¹³ Ibid., 167.

¹⁴ Ibid., 177.

Louis Sullivan. In an example of the coalition between preservationists and architects, the campaign to save the Garrick “derived its greatest support from the critical and professional circles supporting Modern architecture.”¹⁵

A similar case involving an Adler and Sullivan building occurred in the early 1970s when developers announced plans to demolish their Chicago Stock Exchange Building, completed in 1894. The building, with tripartite construction and “Chicago style” windows fit within the presumed criteria of Chicago School design. Sullivan’s purposeful use of ornament and progressive ideas about commercial buildings made him one of the innovators in American architecture. Developers Frank M. Whiston & Company announced in early 1970 plans to demolish the building to construct a forty-story office tower.¹⁶ The developers cited the building’s inefficiency for modern needs and costs of alterations as reasons for demolition.¹⁷

Echoing the types of coalitions that would define the preservation movement, the group arguing for saving the building consisted of an organization called the Landmarks Preservation Council, architects, and ordinary citizens. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, although a city report on the feasibility of renovation and reuse of the Stock Exchange was requested but never prepared, Mayor Richard Daley nevertheless granted a demolition permit.¹⁸ Despite significant protest from the public, the building was demolished in early 1972. Such was the case in earlier instances in the history of the preservation movement that city governments and developers did not see a necessity to

¹⁵ Ibid., 176.

¹⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, Feb 12, 1970.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, Oct 5, 1971.

wage public relations battles, nor did they need to provide a counter argument or rationale against preservation.

The Stock Exchange case provided momentum and became a galvanizing force for an already growing preservation within the city and the nation. Preservation activist, photographer, and salvager of Sullivan ornament Richard Nickel became seen as something of a martyr for his cause when an expedition to collect fragments of the Stock Exchange in 1971, then undergoing demolition, ended in his untimely death when the floor of the former trading room collapsed.

Despite the formation of the Chicago Commission on City Landmarks in 1968 to protect buildings of this character, landmark status was not granted to the Stock Exchange, a decision that would have prevented destruction. Proponents of saving the city's modernist architecture often invoked this denial and the building's eventual demolition in the 2000s and 2010s to accuse developers and the city, and, at times, the commission itself, of shortsightedness. Preservationists argued that cases such as the Stock Exchange demonstrated the mistake in destroying buildings before they can be fully evaluated and appreciated by architectural historians and critics.

Demolition of older buildings, houses, and entire neighborhoods, many of which would in retrospect be seen as visual landmarks, became a widely accepted practice. By the 1950s, Beaux Art and Art Deco buildings and homes, which a majority of the American public have come to appreciate, were seen at the time as outdated and unattractive. The preservation movement for modernist architecture in the twenty-first century sought to make similar arguments to those made by mid-century preservationists,

who warned against demolishing buildings for failing to accommodate contemporary preferences.

Despite the destruction of many of Sullivan's nineteenth-century works in Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s, however, preservation, to some degree, has long been part of Chicago's architectural story. Connecting nineteenth-century works to the buildings of modernists such as Mies Van Der Rohe became an effective rationale for new construction. The concept of a Chicago School of architecture has provided a useful narrative through which to focus preservation arguments throughout twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

However, since the late 1980s a variety of historians have questioned the accuracy and usefulness of the term. Although it provided a rallying cry and public relations tool for preservationists and city leaders, the idea that architects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were building under a conscious program in concert with one another is problematic. Architectural historian Robert Bruegmann's pioneering essay "The Myth of the Chicago School" addressed, in his view, the mistaken application of the term by European architectural critics in the 1920s as a polemic to attempt to draw comparisons between the work of European modernist architects such as Walter Gropius and American architects such as Louis Sullivan. According to Bruegmann, "the modernist vision of the 'Chicago school' as a group of architects interested in creating a new historical architectural primarily based on expression of structure is too reductivist."¹⁹

¹⁹ Robert Bruegmann, "The Myth of the Chicago School," in *Chicago Architecture: Histories, Revisions, Alternatives*, ed. Charles Waldheim and Katerina Rüedi Ray (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 28.

It is this same rich architectural legacy, as well as the rapid growth of Chicago, that has often made preservation issues heated and difficult to resolve. As historian Daniel Bluestone, an expert in issues related to historic preservation in Chicago writes, “Phenomenal growth repeatedly and poignantly forced questions of preservation and destruction into public consciousness.”

The cases that encompass this research occurred concurrently with growth of the preservation movement for modernist architecture. Indeed, they reveal the nature of the fights and the issues at stake in debates, at the intersection of city and national movements, over preserving such buildings. Similarly, the renewed interest in modernism helped encourage preservationists and convince some skeptical members of the public. The debate over the University of Illinois at Chicago design, in the early 1990s, occurred prior to the formation of a coherent rationale that would have added greater weight to saving the structures that were altered or demolished. As great appreciation for modernism led to more awareness about those buildings at risk, the Michael Reese Hospital and Prentice Women’s Hospital were demolished nonetheless.

Proposed alterations to the UIC campus in the early 1990s provoked a debate about the design of mid-century structures and their ability to adapt to modern concerns. Walter Netsch’s original design of the campus, long criticized for the atmosphere created by the exposed concrete campus buildings and associated with the legacy of urban renewal, came under intense scrutiny, in a time when modernism had fallen out of favor with the public and architects. When Daniel Coffey was hired by the university to renovate the campus core, a modernist preservation movement had yet to form to save the demolished student forum and upper walkways that connected campus buildings. The

UIC case reveals the dilemmas facing the preservation movement, as a majority of those who used the space on a daily basis appeared to support the changes. Arguments over the type of campus best suited for students and faculty brought questions of the functional and spatial features of mid-twentieth century design to the forefront.

The fight over the Michael Reese Hospital, co-designed by Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius, provides insight into the intra-city politics that accompanies preservation questions. Situated in the Bronzeville neighborhood, on Chicago's South Side, Michael Reese Hospital had provided valuable medical care to residents, many of whom low-income, for over fifty years, but closed after bankruptcy. The quest to secure the 2016 Olympics consumed city politics and overshadowed much of the preservationist effort to save the buildings on the site designated to host the games. Those who hoped to save the structures built a case around the hospital campus's connection to an internationally known architect. Preservationists struggled, as many others across the country, in creating awareness and convincing the public that mid-century structures were worthy of saving. In the process, however, Chicago preservationists formulated a rationale and organizational structure that would prove useful in future cases.

Prentice Women's Hospital, in Chicago's Streeterville neighborhood, became a high-profile preservation battle, with local and national repercussions. Prentice Hospital, designed by Bertrand Goldberg, was one among several buildings across the country that consumed public questions of architecture in the early 2010s. When Northwestern University announced plans to demolish the building in 2011, a lengthy fight ensued that brought the building before the Commission on City Landmarks and, eventually, a city court. The Prentice case revealed a movement with maturity and a relatively more

receptive public but, nevertheless, demonstrated the difficult task of creating a convincing argument on aesthetic grounds for saving concrete-clad modernist buildings. Preservationists instead sought to build a case to save Prentice that emphasized its structural importance as a feat of engineering. The case indicated the difficulties involved in convincing property owners that modernist buildings can be adapted to modern needs.

In each instance, preservationists lost their argument and the buildings were either demolished or significantly altered. However, efforts to save them brought the larger questions at stake for saving modernist architecture into public consciousness. In addition, preservationist debates in Chicago acquire heightened awareness and significance and are often not as easily resolved as they might be in other cities. What buildings are worth saving are fundamental to the history and future of such a city and its architecture.

CHAPTER II

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

Walter Netsch was invited in May 1985 to speak to a group of faculty and students at the University of Illinois at Chicago in conjunction with an exhibition titled “Béton Brut: UIC History and Architecture in Perspective,” hosted by the university’s Art and Architecture Department. Netsch delivered a talk, despite having vowed to “never appear” on the campus,²⁰ to explain the theory and methodology behind his design of the campus in the 1960s. The campus architecture, applying exposed concrete and modernist principles of space, was no longer in vogue by the 1980s. The exhibition aimed to reassess Netsch’s work in a period which saw a shift toward historicism and a return to application of ornament in a “post-modern” fashion. Although the UIC administration’s attitude had turned hostile to the design in the decades since its construction, a small group of professors in the Art and Architecture Department, including architectural historian Robert Bruegmann,²¹ took the opportunity to foster a reevaluation of the campus.

Indeed, by the 1980s, its architecture and the decline of its neighborhood home in Greek Town and Little Italy had garnered UIC a negative reputation in the city. Historian Ross Miller writes, “Seen from the air it has the forbidding look of a desert fortress——

²⁰ Walter Netsch, lecture audiotape, “Béton Brut: UIC History and Architecture in Perspective,” May 1, 1985, University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

granite and hard-cut concrete extend into the grayness of the surrounding area.”²² The campus originally celebrated by architectural publications throughout the 1960s and 1970s and detailed vividly in photographs by architectural photographer Heidrich Blessing, of lively student activity on the upper level walkways or a proud Mayor Richard J. Daley standing in front of the newly constructed student forum, seemed entirely removed from the current appearance and mood of the campus to which Netsch returned for his talk. Stained concrete from decades of rain and poor maintenance contributed to a feeling that the campus was, as described by members of a 1988 focus group, “inhumane, cold, brutal—not a setting which encouraged faculty and students to remain on campus for informal activities.”²³

Rather than mounting an outright defense of the campus against its critics, as he would in the coming decade, Netsch graciously accepted the acknowledgement and took the opportunity to explain his rationale for the campus design. Perhaps because of the sympathetic audience and the circumstances behind his invitation, Netsch’s famous candidness was restrained. However, his comments hinted at the issues that would define the debate over the fate of his design in the early 1990s. Where some students, faculty, and administrators saw dullness, ugliness, and coldness in the campus’s concrete and granite environment, Netsch saw beauty and “continuity in building out of the same stone.”²⁴ Where university maintenance staff saw crumbling buildings and leaky upper level walkways that drained rain water on passersby, Netsch had envisioned a campus that “wouldn’t have as much upkeep” as the traditional college campus.²⁵ Poor

²² Ross Miller, “Chicago Architecture after Mies,” *Critical Inquiry* 6 (Winter 1979): 280.

²³ “UIC Master Plan Meeting Notes,” Jan 1991, University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

²⁴ Walter Netsch, lecture audiotape, May 1, 1985, University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

construction, insufficient funds for upkeep, and negligence by maintenance staff, Netsch would always maintain, were the true causes for the campus's widely criticized condition.

Debate over the University of Illinois at Chicago campus, designed by Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill architect Walter Netsch over the course of the 1960s, resulted in a dramatic reimagining of its original conception in the early 1990s, most notably the removal of upper level walkways and the student forum. These changes were responding shifts in attitudes about aesthetic taste and urbanism in the 1980s and 1990s. Netsch's design, however, has been part of a twenty-first century revival of interest in mid-twentieth century modernism by academics, critics, and the general public. The argument over the future of the concrete-dominated UIC campus demonstrate the difficulties preservationists have been forced to address in creating a coherent argument for maintaining the architecture of the 1950s through the 1970s. Although many university campuses across the country feature such concrete megastructures, including Posvar Hall at the University of Pittsburgh, Wean Hall at Carnegie Mellon University, four campus buildings at Stonybrook University, and a series of buildings designed by Paul Rudolph at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, UIC stands out in its scale and uniformity, as a single architect was responsible for a majority of the campus.

Furthermore, the buildings that comprise the bulk of the UIC design have been complicated by their association with an architectural style known as Brutalism, from the French "le Béton brut," a variant of modernism characterized by raw, exposed concrete. Summarizing the problem confronting preservationists, Llewellyn Hinkes-Jones writes, "These behemoth structures of Béton brut, most built in the 1960s and '70s, are slowly crumbling from wear and disrepair, ignored by communities that no longer want the

burden of upkeep of a giant, lifeless rock.”²⁶ Rumors even have persisted that Brutalist college campuses, including UIC, were constructed to thwart student riots, that the seemingly complicated floor plans and randomly placed entrances were designed to prevent organizing activity.²⁷ UIC buildings’ changing reception in the eyes of the public, university administration and students, and architecture critics captures the larger historical issues for public historians about what is deemed worthy of preservation, as well as the centrality of aesthetic taste and urban design to the legacy of modernism in America.

While the preservation fight for UIC was small and brief, the scale and mostly consistent design by one architect gave the campus particular notoriety in architectural circles throughout the country. For those who rejected Brutalism, the campus became notorious, a large-scale example of the failures of modernism. As such, the original Netsch design did not have in its defense the weight of the latter-day resurgence of interest in modernism. However, the alterations made to the campus in the 1990s, under Chicago architect Daniel Coffey, occurred without significant public criticism or demonstration, as much of the public had rejected such buildings after the 1970s. *Chicago Tribune* architectural critic Blair Kamin perhaps best reflected the opinion of most of the major media outlets in the city. Following the removal of the upper walkways and forum and various landscaping projects, completed in 1995, Kamin wrote, with journalistic hyperbole, “A river of humanity runs through the renovated campus core,” making it “one of the liveliest public spaces in Chicago.”²⁸

²⁶ Llewellyn Hinkes-Jones, “The Case for Saving Ugly Buildings,” *The Atlantic Cities*, Jan 10, 2012.

²⁷ J. Bryan Lowder, “Were Brutalist Buildings on College Campuses Really Designed to Thwart Student Riots?,” *Slate.com*, Oct 13, 2013.

²⁸ Blair Kamin, *Chicago Tribune*, Oct 29, 1995.

Although UIC now consists of three campuses, the original East Campus, the portion attributed to Walter Netsch, is most closely associated with the university's architectural legacy and, therefore, most useful for this study. The campus is located near the intersection of Harrison and Halstead, a fifteen-minute walk southwest of the downtown Loop. The East Campus was designed in three phases between 1963 and 1968, with further Netsch-designed buildings planned but never built due to budget constraints in the 1970s. Many of the later buildings, including the Art and Architecture Building and the Behavioral Sciences Building bear the mark of Netsch's distinct "field theory" of design, seen in some of its most experimental forms. Part of the first phase of construction, lecture halls, the Richard J. Daley Library and Student Center East, and the towering University Hall comprise the essential functional core of the campus. Unlike the traditional American college campus, Netsch planned the buildings' layout according to function, rather than discipline, within a midcentury modernist framework of city planning principles of zoning.

Understanding the physical and social legacy of urban renewal in the United States is useful in establishing a framework for public and academic reception of projects such as the UIC site. The University of Illinois at Chicago, first known as the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, for its connection to the nearby interchange of highways of the same name, is a public university and branch of the state's flagship university in Urbana-Champaign opened in 1965.²⁹ Acquisition of a University of Illinois campus for the city became one of the primary achievements of Mayor Richard J. Daley's

²⁹ The modern university name, "University of Illinois at Chicago," was established in 1982 when the Circle Campus was consolidated with the College of Medicine.

administration. A process famously detailed in George Rosen's *Decision-Making Chicago-Style*, the university's site selection and construction were intricately connected to the legacy of mid-twentieth century urban renewal programs in Chicago.

The University of Illinois established a temporary facility at Navy Pier in 1946, originally to serve as a two-year institution for recently discharged veterans, with the assumption they would transfer to another institution to complete their education. The desire for a Chicago campus was the product of a larger expansion of public higher education occurring across the country following World War II. As Rosen writes, "Among students and their parents, the motivation was mainly the financial savings to be gained from living at home and working in the city while completing an education."³⁰ As UICC was intended at the outset to be a commuter campus, proximity to downtown became a priority for the city. Mayor Daley was a crucial figure in the university's site selection and the form it eventually took, promising university leaders to provide the funds for land acquisition.³¹ In addition, the Chicago Central Area Committee, a group of city business leaders, dedicated itself to reinvigorating the once thriving Loop portion of downtown and saw the addition of a University of Illinois campus as an essential part of their plans. As they represented the interests of downtown businesses, the CAC argued for its placement in the south Loop.

Several sites were discussed as negotiations progressed between the city and the university, including the south Loop, Garfield Park, and Meigs Field. Harrison-Halstead was seen as the most readily available site for development, as Garfield Park was caught

³⁰ George Rosen, *Decision-Making Chicago-Style: The Genesis of a University of Illinois Campus* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 27.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

in litigation with the city.³² In addition, boosting its desirability, the location had been identified in Daniel Burnham's *1909 Plan of Chicago* as suitable for a future civic center. The university board of trustees approved Harrison-Halstead in February 1961, as protests mounted within the Greek and Italian community.

Clearance of Harrison-Halstead was only one project in a large series of urban redevelopment programs in cities across the country in postwar America, undertaken with financial backing of the federal government under the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954, with additional support from state governments. As they were deemed the most "blighted," containing the most concentrated population of the city's poor and with building stocks in the most deteriorated condition, the South and West Sides were most heavily targeted by Chicago's urban redevelopment programs. Arnold Hirsch's *Making the Second Ghetto*, published in 1983, was instrumental in shaping the historical debate over urban redevelopment, and public housing, in post-war Chicago history. Because of actions taken by the city council, mayors, and private industries in urban redevelopment and renewal, Hirsch argues, "a new, vertical ghetto," in the form of high-rise public housing, "supplemented the old."³³ In addition, the dislocation of residents, primarily poor and African-American, in South Side developments like Hyde Park and Bronzeville expanded the ghetto to the city's West Side.

Indeed, the backlash against urban renewal in American cities in the 1970s reflected widespread community anger at the displacement of residents and destruction of urban villages. At Harrison-Halstead, the seeds of animosity were planted as homes and commercial buildings were cleared to make way for the new university. A sense of

³² Ibid., 92.

³³ Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 10.

distrust between students and faculty and members of its neighboring community remained long after the 1960s. Author Anthony Sorrentino summarized the feelings of alienation among some community members in referring to UIC as “a huge fortress.”³⁴ These feelings, however, seemed mutual. As Rosen writes, “University planners had felt that one disadvantage of the site was its poor environment; and, to better control the campus and manage security within, a masonry wall was built between the campus and the community...”³⁵ The further deterioration of the Greek and Italian neighborhood by the 1980s would converge with animosity towards the condition and aesthetic of the campus, leading the administration to see the Netsch campus “image” as a problem existing beyond the university’s boundaries that discouraged students from enrolling.³⁶

Hostility toward the Netsch campus by the 1980s was, in some ways, as much a product of its time as the design itself. The debates over the campus renovations in the early 1990s occurred at a particularly low point in modernism’s history. According to urban theorist Kevin Lynch, a city’s design represents a particular moment in time. He writes:

Places and events can be designed to enlarge our senses of the present, either by their own vivid characters or as they heighten our perception of the contained activity—setting off the people in a parade, an audience, or a market. Places can be given a particular look at particular times.³⁷

The modernist preservation movement has worked to convince a public that does not see modernist architecture as “historic.” Buildings that were rejected on aesthetic grounds have earned a reappraisal since the 1990s. However, as the clean lines and sleek

³⁴ Anthony Sorrentino, *Organizing against Crime: Redeveloping the Neighborhood* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1977), 225.

³⁵ Rosen, 120-21.

³⁶ Robert Bruegmann, personal conversation with the author, Oct 2013.

³⁷ Kevin Lynch, *What Time Is This Place?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 40.

surfaces of the Miesian style have again gained acceptance, the buildings of the late 1960s and 1970s, of the Brutalist style, have remained a particularly difficult case for preservationists.

Upon completion of the first phase of construction, the campus was hailed for its aesthetic and functional qualities, as a “model urban college.”³⁸ The *Chicago Tribune* described the buildings as “strikingly beautiful.”³⁹ A 1965 review in *Architectural Forum* commended Netsch’s bold designs and organization, calling it “the most ambitious U.S. demonstration to date of the idea of a compact, stratified urban core.”⁴⁰ In addition, the design earned Netsch an honorary award from the local AIA chapter and a design award from the National Society of Interior Designers. University officials similarly spoke of their new campus, and its groundbreaking architecture, with pride. University of Illinois physical plant director Charles S. Havens, in February 1965, described the Circle Campus as “planned as a highly efficient and functional facility—both from the standpoint of academic life and the daily job of operations and maintenance.”⁴¹ Such praise from university personnel, however, would be a distant memory by the 1980s.

Netsch’s UIC design and the environment it created became major sources of contention between the architect and the university. The changes to the original Netsch design were responding to both the physical deterioration of campus and fundamental questions of urban design. Walter Netsch had gained fame in the architecture community for his work at Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, renown for their pioneering work in postwar modernism. Founded in 1936 by Louis Skidmore and Nathaniel Owings, joined

³⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 15, 1963.

³⁹ “University of Illinois Serves Chicago...Serves the State,” *Chicago’s Sunday American* supplement, Sept 26, 1965.

⁴⁰ “Campus City, Chicago,” *Architectural Forum* 123, no. 2 (Sept. 1965): 44.

⁴¹ Charles S. Havens, quoted in *Chicago Tribune*, Feb 15, 1963.

in 1939 by John O. Merrill, SOM's design of the revolutionary glass-and-steel Lever House in New York City garnered worldwide attention. The Lever House, completed in 1952, helped establish many of the features, including a street-level plaza, that would become synonymous with the "International Style" of commercial buildings.⁴²

As architects at SOM, Netsch and Bruce Graham, designed the innovative Inland Steel Building, a sleek high-rise clad in stainless steel, reflecting its corporate occupant, the first building to be constructed in the Chicago Loop since the Great Depression. SOM "had brought European avant-garde design ideas into the mainstream of American architectural practice and made them acceptable to American business."⁴³ Netsch's principal role in the work on SOM's commission for the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, constructed between 1954 and 1958, garnered him national recognition.

Specifically, the Cadet Chapel, Netsch's major contribution to the academy architecture, featured steel tetrahedrons layered to form the church's spires. Unlike the academy's other buildings, the Cadet Chapel, was a product of Netsch's single design, rather than a team project.⁴⁴ Kristen Schaffer notes the evolution of the architect's ideas that would appear in later projects, writing, "The geometric manipulation of the Chapel's tetrahedrons marked the genesis of Netsch's field theory, culminating his design for the Architecture and Art, Behavior Sciences, and Science and Engineering buildings on the Chicago campus of the University of Illinois."⁴⁵

⁴² Sherri Olson, "Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill: Early History," in *Modernism at Midcentury: The Architecture of the United States Air Force Academy*, ed. Robert Bruegmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 28.

⁴³ Robert Bruegmann, "Military Culture, Architectural Culture, Popular Culture," in *Modernism at Mid-Century*, 55.

⁴⁴ Kristen Schaffer, "Creating a National Monument," in *Modernism at Mid-century*, 51.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 166, n. 10.

When SOM, at the height of its postwar fame, was hired to design the new university campus in the late 1950s, Netsch, due to his work on the Cadet Chapel, had established himself as an important figure in the firm. As such, his professional credibility earned him unprecedented control over the design process. According to Bruegmann, “Historically it has been very uncommon for any single architect to have so much influence on such a large commission.”⁴⁶

In the late 1970s, Robert Bruegmann was invited to collaborate on an exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago celebrating three “maverick” architects that challenged the Miesian consensus: Netsch, Harry Weese, and Bertrand Goldberg. Bruegmann’s work on the exhibition called for him to interview Netsch, the beginning of a decades-long friendship and professional relationship between the academic and architect. Labeled the “Second Chicago School of Architecture” by Franz Schulze and the “second great period of architectural expansion” by Ross Miller,⁴⁷ the period from World War II to the 1970s further expanded Chicago’s role as host to some of the most creative possibilities for architecture. During this period, modernist architects such as Mies van der Rohe dramatically altered the Chicago skyline. However, by the 1960s, alternatives to Mies’s famous “glass box” began to appear. Netsch, Weese, and Goldberg were among the first to develop a serious alternative to the Miesian dominance and consensus in Chicago and “challenged the universal applicability of rigid I beams, glass curtain walls, and orthogonal design.”⁴⁸

The form Netsch’s unique design choices took indeed played a significant role in debates about the campus. One of the larger difficulties confronting the movement to

⁴⁶ Robert Bruegmann, personal correspondence with the author, Jan 9, 2014.

⁴⁷ Ross Miller, 274.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 274.

save modernist architecture has been to convince the public and property owners of the value in preserving buildings many Americans have never particularly embraced. As preservationists have struggled to convince skeptics, they have often adopted strategies aimed at emphasizing buildings' structural significance or other defining features. As Llewellyn Hinkes-Jones argues, "Buildings aren't preserved based on relative maintenance costs or aesthetics but on the merits of originality and historic interest."⁴⁹ Similarly, historian Richard Longstreth has argued for the need for preservationists to move beyond basing a rationale for preservation on style, in which "a very complicated and elusive subject is reduced to a series of motifs."⁵⁰ Architecture, such academics and commentators stress, is not just an art and preservation questions should not be decided based upon whims of popular taste.



The Science and Engineering Offices Building features concrete scissor staircases.

⁴⁹ Hinkes-Jones, "The Case for Saving Ugly Buildings."

⁵⁰ Richard Longstreth, "I Can't See It; I Don't Understand It; And It Doesn't Look Old to Me," *Forum Journal* 27 (Fall 2012): 39.

Much of the public's skepticism towards Brutalism derives from its heavy use of concrete, seen most commonly by the average American in government buildings of the period. However, the negative image of such constructions as "cold" or "rough" has obscured the original purposes of concrete as a building material and of this modernist variant as a method. In his study of concrete as a medium, *Concrete and Culture*, historian Adrian Forty writes, "An element of revulsion seems to be a permanent, structural feature of the material."⁵¹ Forty argues that concrete, due to the process by which it is created and its relationship to other materials, is quintessentially modern.

In many postwar government buildings in the United States and England, concrete moved beyond being seen as one among many possible building materials, to being a medium that reflected political goals of creating buildings both modern and historically and politically neutral. The Boston City Hall and the Orange County Government Center in Goshen, New York, both local government buildings, and J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building, in Washington D.C., a federal building, are among the better known American examples of governments' support for concrete as a material worthy of a public building. Concrete's neutrality spoke to its ability to be applied in what was believed to be an absence of style, to "erase evidence of craft and workmanship from the face of the building."⁵² Such a method, as with modernism in general, appealed to post-war governments hoping to construct buildings that appeared free of connections to the past, associated with the Depression and war. As Thomas de Monchaux writes, "The finishes and details had a rawness and roughness that spoke not only to postwar austerity but also

⁵¹ Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History* (London: Reaktion, 2012), 10.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 286.

to a new ideal of social and political transparency in a society that was rebuilding itself.”⁵³

Modernity, however, is not apolitical. In the United States, the material’s association with the complex legacy of urban renewal policies, in the decades after their repudiation, added further negative connotations for the public. The hostility directed at the demolition of numerous homes and neighborhoods under government-led projects was often transferred to the modernist buildings constructed in their place. Forty writes, “At least in the West, as long as concrete remains bound to modernity, with all the tension that carries in its train, concrete cannot easily revert to invisibly.”⁵⁴

Preservationists of the modernist built environment must confront a skeptical public that associate these buildings with what some have seen as a destructive force in cities.

Aside from what it represented to political goals, concrete represented new possibilities for design. Neither is the use of concrete particular to the mid-twentieth century. Reinforced concrete is a defining feature in Otto Wagner’s Austrian Postal Savings Bank in Vienna, constructed between 1904 and 1906.⁵⁵ The later work of Swiss architect Le Corbusier, similarly, showcased his pioneering use of concrete forms, seen, for example, in the Palace of Assembly in Chandigarh, India. Architects and engineers of the mid-twentieth century aimed to prove concrete’s potential to create forms that were not otherwise achievable through wood, brick, or other traditional building materials.⁵⁶

An interest in the *monumentality* of works of heavy concrete by Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn was reflected in much of the civic architecture of the 1960s and 1970s. Concrete

⁵³ Thomas de Monchaux, “The Other Modernism,” *n+1*, July 12, 2012.

⁵⁴ Forty, *Concrete and Culture*, 286.

⁵⁵ Further discussion of Wagner’s work can be found in Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. (New York: Knopf, 1980).

⁵⁶ Forty, *Concrete and Culture*, 287.

buildings were often labeled “Heroic,” for the ways in which they “tried to be rugged and direct...in opposition to the gray-suited slickness of glass-and-steel Modernism.”⁵⁷ In addition, what became known as “megastructures” were towering buildings constructed of reinforced concrete and often contained several interconnected buildings, seen in Rudolph’s Government Center, Boston City Hall, and Netsch’s University Hall at UIC.

Indeed, the UIC campus garnered significant criticism for an environment seen as dominated by concrete. Specifically, a lack of accompanying “green” space, with trees or plants, common in many university quads, was among the university’s chief aesthetic concerns. According to Bruegmann, much of the UIC administration in 1980s and 1990s began their academic careers at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign and were accustomed to the ample trees and grassy spaces provided on campus. When administrators looked out at Chicago campus, “they wanted to see Urbana, not an expressway,”⁵⁸ conflating the nearby Chicago Circle intersection of expressways from which the university originally took its name with an aesthetic judgment of the environment created by the concrete buildings. Netsch, for his part, had hoped to include more green space, including a tree garden that, due to budget constraints, never materialized.⁵⁹

As preservation controversies have developed in the twenty-first century over modernist buildings constructed in exposed concrete, the term Brutalism has often been used as a descriptor, almost as often meant to be derogatory toward the concrete aesthetic. Intended to signify a method and style by media and the public, the definition

⁵⁷ Michael Kubo, Mark Pasnik, and Chris Grimley, “Tough Love: In Defense of Brutalism,” *Architect*, April 6, 2010.

⁵⁸ Bruegmann, personal conversation with the author, Oct. 2013.

⁵⁹ Walter Netsch, “UIC Aesthetics Ad Hoc Task Force,” meeting transcript, Feb. 12, 1987, University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, 8.

has been widely debated among architects and historians. The Brutalist moniker has been commonly attributed to Reyner Banham's 1955 *Architectural Review* article, "The New Brutalism," which described what the author identified as a new ethic for building in the works of British architects Alison and Peterson Smithson. Banham writes, "The New Brutalism ceased to be a label descriptive of a tendency common to most modern architecture, and became instead a programme, a banner, while retaining some-rather restricted-sense as a descriptive label."⁶⁰ As such, "Brutalism," became, according to Robert Bruegmann, an "in-joke among British architects."⁶¹ Architects such as the Smithsons drew inspiration from Le Corbusier's concept of "*le Béton brut*," a French term to describe the rough texture of unfinished concrete. Sean Khorsandi, however, describes the term as "a philosophy too often mistaken as a style."⁶²

Brutalism is more likely to appear in twenty-first century architectural discourse than in the discussions of the 1960s and 1970s. To a significant degree, the term has been applied after the fact, describing a style or method on buildings from the period that architects would most likely have not adopted. In fact, two of the architects most associated with "Brutalism," Paul Rudolph and Louis Kahn, both of whom were attached to the term by Banham, did not identify with the architectural moniker and often expressed doubt as to its existence as a coherent style or method for building.⁶³ As Orange County, New York, Executive Ed Diana attempted, for most of the early twenty-first century, to have the county's Rudolph-designed government building demolished,

⁶⁰ Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism," *Architectural Review*, December 1955, 356.

⁶¹ Bruegmann, personal conversation with the author, Oct 2013.

⁶² Sean Khorsandi, "New, Newer, Newest," in *Brutalism* (Clog, 2013), 65.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 65.

much of media coverage adopted the Brutalist descriptor to describe both the structure and its architect.

Whether Netsch thought of the UIC campus as Brutalist is questionable. For critics or those who felt that concrete created an inhospitable environment, Brutalism has been mistakenly interpreted to imply “brutality,” that architects intended the space to be uncomfortable. Netsch’s use of concrete was attributed to its affordability, recommendations from architectural peers in Chicago such as Fazlur Kahn, and its potential to create unique forms, such as the precast concrete “butterfly” columns designed to support Netsch’s slabs of granite that comprised the upper walkways. As Bruegmann recalls, “I doubt whether he [Netsch] would have given any of these terms much thought although he would certainly have acknowledged that Corb [Le Corbusier] was an important influence, as he was on almost all architects of Walter's generation.”⁶⁴

Netsch returned to campus on February 12, 1987 for an “Aesthetics Ad Hoc Task Force” meeting to discuss the campus’s future. Jim Pfister, the university’s space administrator, Stanley Tigerman, director of UIC School of Architecture, and Roberta Feldman, UIC professor of architecture, met with Netsch to specifically address “concern with the campus environment, and design.”⁶⁵ At this point, six campus groups, consisting of subcommittees and task forces, had been assigned the task of addressing the university’s concerns and toward the goal of a new campus master plan. Former

⁶⁴ Robert Bruegmann, personal correspondence with the author, Jan 9, 2014.

⁶⁵ “UIC Aesthetics Ad Hoc Task Force,” meeting transcript, Feb. 12, 1987, University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1.

chancellor Donald Langenberg went as far as to call the campus “a concrete wilderness, an inhuman, uncomfortable campus—grim, gritty, and cold.”⁶⁶



University Hall’s megastructure design made it one of the most disliked buildings on campus. Home to faculty offices, University Hall created an unwanted “ivory tory” effect in the relationship between students and professors.

Netsch’s vow to not return campus following the completion of phase three of his design responded to the dynamic within the Art and Architecture Department. While Bruegmann saw value in the Netsch design, he appeared to be in the minority. Some in the department never approved of the liberal application of concrete and the megastructure forms in buildings such as University Hall, while others’ opinions reflected the national rejection of modernism and shift toward historicism and post-

⁶⁶ Donald Langenberg, quoted in Robert McClory, “The Architect Who’s Rebuilding Chicago,” *Chicago Reader*, Aug 26, 1993, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/the-architect-whos-rebuilding-chicago/Content?oid=882630>

modernism.⁶⁷ Much of the poor relationship between Netsch and the UIC Architecture faculty also stemmed from the fact that, according to Bruegmann, then a senior member of the department, “a lot of the faculty bitterly resented the fact that Walter was dealing with the University central administration and they felt they weren't consulted.”⁶⁸

While much of the opposition to Netsch’s design was professional in nature, either academic or attributed to taste, at times, the interpersonal relationships between Netsch and some members of the architecture faculty descended into bitter feuds. Tension was especially noticeable between Netsch and Stanley Tigerman, a well-known figure in Chicago architecture and Director of the School of Architecture from 1985 to 1993. Both men were known for their temperamental relationship with others as well as one another. Tigerman had previously been a member of the faculty from 1963 to 1971, part of the original faculty. Although the February 1987 meeting was cordial, Tigerman frequently took opportunities elsewhere to speak candidly about his opinions of the UIC design and Netsch. While he could make thoughtful criticisms of the design, his opinions, at times, reflected personal animosity. Recalling the architect in 2003, he stated, “I got to tell you I hated Netsch because he was a manipulator.”⁶⁹ Following Netsch’s death in 2008, Tigerman provided an ambiguous assessment of the architect’s work, writing, “His buildings create wonderment, in the best and worst sense of the word.”⁷⁰

Despite wide praise in city and national architectural publications, questions were raised from the beginning. The mostly celebratory, twenty-five-page *Architectural*

⁶⁷ Bruegmann, personal correspondence with the author, Jan. 9, 2014.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Stanley Tigerman, “Oral History of Stanley Tigerman,” interviewed by Betty J. Blum (2003), Art Institute of Chicago.

⁷⁰ Stanley Tigerman, quoted in Blair Kamin, “Walter Netsch, 88, Leaves Behind a Complex Legacy,” *Architectural Record*, June 26, 2008.

Forum article from 1965 expressed concern that Chicago Circle seemed “to offer little to allay the sense of alienation that is an inherent danger in a large university” and that the “environment is hard, unyielding, vast in scale.”⁷¹ A 1977 *AIA Journal* article, twelve years after the opening of Circle Campus, portrayed faculty and students as dissatisfied with the social space provided and the arrangement of buildings. Students complained that the walkways were often not the shortest distance between buildings, and few admitted to using the walkways regularly.⁷²

Rumors existed as early as 1977 about a university interest in removing the upper walkways.⁷³ Studies conducted by external consulting groups and internal committees, such as the Aesthetics Task Force, addressed the existing conditions of the walkway and forum. The 1990 campus master plan, conducted by the university Buildings and Grounds committee, however, had recommended their retention, as they were seen as “the most important organizing elements on the east side of campus.”⁷⁴ As rumors persisted, the committee’s endorsement came as a surprise to some, as the maintenance staff was long seen as among the most vocal opponents of the Netsch design. Instead, the committee suggested ways in which they could be improved, including the addition of buildings constructed above the walkways to establish a greater need for use by students.

Designed as an organizing element for campus buildings and the primary method for transportation across campus, the walkways were intended to allow for more efficient pedestrian movement. Students could walk freely without movement being obstructed by maintenance and service personnel and have two possible entrances to campus buildings,

⁷¹ “Campus City, Chicago,” *Architectural Forum* 123, no. 2 (1965): 44.

⁷² Nory Miller, “Evaluation: The University of Illinois Circle Campus as Urban Design,” *AIA Journal* 66 (Jan 1977): 28.

⁷³ Director of Physical Plant, quoted in Nory Miller, 28.

⁷⁴ “Master Plan Executive Summary,” Buildings and Grounds Committee Meeting, May 9, 1990, University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

with the desired effect of having less dense pedestrian volume during peak class hours. In addition, the walkways aimed to “provide an opportunity for people to get ‘above’ an intensely used urban environment—to get better access to distant views and enjoy a sense of openness.”⁷⁵

However, the degree to which students used the upper walkways and the forum had become a source of concern for university officials. It had become apparent that students used the walkways less frequently than in previous years. A study completed by landscape architecture firm Johnson, Johnson, and Roy in April 1990 confirmed the decreased usage, but also identified alterations and maintenance, rather than design flaws, as primary causes. The firm further recommended a glass building to be constructed on top of the forum, while the walkways would be covered with canopies to guard against the weather.⁷⁶ Though celebrated by the *Chicago Tribune*, the planned buildings were never constructed.

Throughout the period in which his design was most called into question and subsequently altered, Netsch maintained complaints about the campus, namely the deterioration of the physical structure, resulted from insufficient upkeep by maintenance staff. Despite Netsch’s belief that the materials were “indestructible,” the granite and concrete walkways were crumbling, with debris occasionally falling on those beneath.⁷⁷ The aggregate in the concrete, however, was not intended to have salt applied to its surface.⁷⁸ In Chicago winters, snow clearance is a major concern for maintenance workers, leading Netsch to install transformers in the stairs that led pedestrians from the

⁷⁵ Johnson Johnson and Roy, Inc., “Elevated Walkways: Issues and Options, University of Illinois at Chicago,” April 1990, University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, 3.

⁷⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, June 10, 1990.

⁷⁷ “Campus City, Chicago,” *Architectural Forum* 123, no. 2 (1965): 29.

⁷⁸ Robert Bruegmann, personal conversation with the author, Oct 2013.

walkways to the ground level. As the transformers did not function as planned, UIC maintenance staff were forced to use salt, a key contributing factor to the walkways' deterioration. In the 1987 meeting with Tigerman and Pfister, Netsch offered minimal opposition to altering the walkways as they existed and suggested enclosing portions of the walkway system to better accommodate the cold climate.

Debate over the walkways followed a similar logic for defenders and opponents of the overall campus. While Netsch attributed declined use of the walkways to maintenance issues and the university's subsequent decision to close second-story entrances, Coffey saw fundamental problems in their basic conception. In buildings only accessible through second-story entrances, such as University Hall, a student or faculty member if wanting to enter the first floor of a campus building would have to enter on the second-story and descend to their destination. According to Coffey, "you don't go up to go down."⁷⁹ Furthermore, the buildings that contained first- and second-level entrances, such as the library, saw some entrances used more regularly than others. In studying New York City buildings, urban theorist and sociologist William H. Whyte concluded that an abundance of doors can be redundant, unnecessary, and confusing.⁸⁰ Consolidating entrances, among other changes, to the underground concourse at Rockefeller Plaza was found to lead to more efficient pedestrian flow.⁸¹

As the walkways began to decay and it appeared students were using them less often, university officials closed off some of the second story entrances to some essential

⁷⁹ Daniel Coffey, interview with the author, Nov. 19, 2013.

⁸⁰ William H. Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 174-179.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

buildings, including the library.⁸² Closing these entrances, however, compounded the problem, as students and faculty had less necessity for using the upper level. In addition, the walkway-level entrance to the Behavioral Science Building was often locked.⁸³ Only the portion that connected the Art and Architecture building to University Hall remained consistently used.⁸⁴ In addition, deterioration caused a tendency for rainwater to leak on those walking on the lower level. The drainage and poor maintenance in the form of potholes and broken lights created on the lower level, as a study conducted by the Campus Design Center, a “basement-like quality.” “This type of dark closed-in, outdoor corridor,” the report states, “has an unrelenting and quality and is a majority safety concern.”⁸⁵

Consisting of 11,000 square feet, the student forum served as a focal point of the campus core, as a transition between the upper and lower levels of campus. Debate over its fate highlighted larger debates about how people use space. Netsch believed that though the forum was of a “formal nature,” he envisioned more opportunities for student interaction, stating “it would be more socially responsive if we could devise ways in which students could form their own grouping.”⁸⁶ As an outdoor gathering space for students on break from classes or for professors to conduct class, Netsch drew inspiration from Greek amphitheaters. As Netsch recalled, “My drop of water is really based on an agora: the idea of the Greek center of learning where you came together and talked

⁸² Johnson Johnson and Roy, Inc., “Elevated Walkways: Issues and Options, University of Illinois at Chicago,” April 1990, University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ “UIC East Campus Positive and Negatives,” University of Illinois, Chicago Design Center,” Campus Design Center, August 1992, University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

⁸⁶ Walter Netsch, “University of Illinois at Chicago Circle—Revisited,” in *Architecture and the College: Proceedings of North American Conference to Consider the Critical Issues in Campus Planning College Building Design, April 17-21, 1966* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, Urbana, April, 1966), 84-93.

together.”⁸⁷ However, much of the school term in Chicago occurs in cold, often snowy, weather and faculty rarely used the forum for its intended purpose.⁸⁸

Hostility towards the Netsch campus was as much about changing aesthetic taste as changing planning principles. Although a gathering space, the shape and form of the forum implied a theater. For Coffey, its double-sided arrangement contained an inherent awkwardness for its users. “Everyone had to walk through and [temporarily, but unexpectedly] be on stage,” Coffey stated. The piazza Coffey designed would serve as a more open-ended ground level space, with a stage for university programming, similar to his work on the DePaul campus plaza. To alleviate what some students and faculty saw as formal and uninviting, Netsch recommended adding trees, removing some pavement, and renovating to accommodate more informal activity and handicap accessibility.⁸⁹

As late as the release of the 1991 Master Plan, UIC administration including Chancellor Donald Langenberg, by most public indications, supported the Buildings and Grounds and Design Center’s recommendations. However, soon after its release, the administration and Board of Trustees, still displeased with the negative image of the campus, began to look for alternative solutions. Simultaneously, architect Daniel Coffey had been hired to repair leaking roofs of the four lectures halls beneath the forum. Daniel P. Coffey and Associates had gained recognition in Chicago architectural circles following his firm’s restoration of the Chicago Theater, development of DePaul University’s Loop campus, and renovation of portions of State Street, which included the removal of a pedestrian mall, another design concept popular in the 1960s and 1970s that

⁸⁷ Walter Netsch, interviewed by Fred Beuttler and Robert Remini, Aug 4, 1998, Office of the UIC Historian, University of Illinois at Chicago.

⁸⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, Jan 18, 1993.

⁸⁹ Walter Netsch, “Sunday Walking Tour of the Main Campus of UIC (An Evaluation),” Walter Netsch Papers, Chicago History Museum, 7.

was later rejected. By the early 1990s, Coffey had built a reputation for, in his own words, “remaking things.”⁹⁰

According to Coffey, the repair project was essentially flawed, as the roofing was in poor condition and would likely require his firm to return for repairs in the future. Upon Coffey’s recommendation, workshops were held throughout June and August 1992 to assess what students and faculty thought of campus.⁹¹ For Coffey, key components of Netsch’s design were neither functional nor desirable because there was “no real input from the campus about what it wanted to be.”⁹² He recalled taking his ACT test in one of the lecture halls in 1971 and “had no sense of comfort about anything related to my environment”⁹³

Coffey presented three proposals to the university Board of Trustees, of which the first would restore the campus in its current form, the second called for taking down parts of the walkways, and the third would remove them completely. He brought one model to the presentation, planning to alter it by pulling out more pieces as he progressed toward the third, and most radical, proposal. As he removed the top of the model forum and began pulling out the support columns, the board members left their chairs to help him.⁹⁴ Funded by a \$7.1 million state allotment, Coffey’s plan would include removing the upper level walkways, replacing the forum with a ground-level piazza, and interior improvements to the lecture halls underneath the forum.⁹⁵ At their meeting in Urbana on January 15, 1993, the board voted in favor of Coffey’s plan.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Coffey, interview.

⁹¹ “Farewell, forum,” *UIC News*, Jan 20, 1993.

⁹² Coffey, interview.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *UIC News*, Jan 20, 1993.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

When the plan reached Netsch, he became alarmed and took action by lobbying the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and the Chicago Commission on City Landmarks to declare the campus a landmark.⁹⁷ After being denied by both organizations, Netsch charged that he was never consulted about Coffey's plan. In a sign of good will, though confident in their support for Coffey's plan, university officials encouraged Coffey to listen to Netsch's ideas. According to Coffey, throughout most of the three meetings, occurring on September 17, September 24, and December 23, Netsch mostly told stories and offered "nothing constructive."⁹⁸ Netsch, however, offered to work with Coffey without compensation, including proposing to take down the walkways and place them on the ground level.⁹⁹ The university declined both his proposal and request to be directly involved in the renovations.¹⁰⁰

One particular meeting between Coffey, Netsch, and Bruegmann on December 23, 1992 became especially heated. Their friendship led Netsch to believe that Bruegmann was going to argue on his behalf, while Bruegmann felt that his role as an academic was to stay out of the fight. Netsch's descriptions of the meetings were both angry and melancholy, feeling what he regarded as his most significant contribution to architecture had been rejected. Describing his reaction to the sight of the new model at Coffey's office, Netsch wrote, "I was attending a wake and the emnabalmed [*sic*] was to a great extent unrecognizable."¹⁰¹ Netsch claimed Coffey told him that any butterfly columns or granite slabs from the walkway that could not be reused would be

⁹⁷ Cheryl Kent, "Softening Brutalism: Is Anything Lost?," *Architectural Record* 184, no. 8 (Aug 1996): 21.

⁹⁸ Coffey, interview.

⁹⁹ Bruegmann, personal conversation with the author, Oct. 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Walter Netsch, personal writings, Jan 14, 1993, Walter Netsch Papers, Chicago History Museum.

¹⁰¹ Walter Netsch, personal writings, Dec 24, 1992, Walter Netsch Papers, Chicago History Museum.

discarded.¹⁰² As Bruegmann recalls of the meeting, “It got to be quite embarrassing when Walter became emotional and started raising his voice. I mostly just tried to get him back out with some modicum of decorum.”¹⁰³ As Coffey remembered two decades later, “Walter was not a nice man.”¹⁰⁴

Netsch’s anger and sense of betrayal found their way into the press, including the *Chicago Reader* and *Architectural Record*. Taking offense at the “canonization of Daniel Coffey” in a previous article in the *Reader*, Netsch called the renovations a “destructive act.”¹⁰⁵ The title of his piece, “The Architect Who Built UIC,” directly mocked the *Reader*’s glowing title portrait of Coffey, “The Architect Who’s Rebuilding Chicago.”

As a faculty member, Bruegmann spoke publicly of his disapproval of Coffey’s plan. He appeared in the minority within the Art and Architecture Department, however, as much of the senior faculty, including Tigerman supported Coffey’s alterations. Tigerman told the *Tribune*, “I’m only sorry it wasn’t done 10 years ago.”¹⁰⁶ In a piece in the student newspaper, Bruegmann warned against what he saw a rash decision, writing:

The campus is now at that stage when it is no longer new but not old enough to be historic. The temptation is great to try to make over the campus in a more currently fashionable way—in this case, a poor man’s version of the Urbana campus.¹⁰⁷

Netsch was angered by his not being consulted by the university and what he saw as the needless destruction of essential parts of his design. He demonstrated flexibility in agreeing to alter the walkways and forum, but the Board of Trustees and Coffey saw the two visions for the campus as irreconcilable. On a walking tour of campus, Netsch found

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Bruegmann, Personal correspondence with the author, Nov. 21, 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Coffey, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Walter Netsch, “The Architect Who Built UIC,” *Chicago Reader*, Sept. 23, 1993

¹⁰⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, Sept 13, 1992.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Bruegmann, *UIC News*, Fall 1992.

the concrete and granite in the walkways and forum in good condition, but thought the calking to in need of repair. He charged that the renovations were “another example of Modern architecture at mid-century that is not yet properly recognized.”¹⁰⁸



Only a few minor, smaller walkways survived the Coffey-led renovations.

Much of the debate within the university in the late 1980s and early 1990s focused on the idea of what an “urban” campus should look like. UIC was intended to revolutionize the idea of an American college campus; in fact, commentators frequently emphasized its urban qualities. A 1965 *Time* magazine profile stated that the “quaint Gothic or red brick Georgian buildings adrift on a rolling meadow of greensward” was

¹⁰⁸ Walter Netsch, “Sunday Walking Tour of the Main Campus of UIC (An Evaluation),” Walter Netsch Papers, Chicago History Museum, 8.

incompatible with urban life and that the “exploding college population of the U.S. demands less casual and rustic solutions.”¹⁰⁹ Netsch’s decision to arrange university buildings based upon function rather than discipline reflected a revolutionary re-conception of campus design. According to former UIC Professor of Architecture Sharon Haar, “The architecture and overall plan of what would become a ‘campus city’ ...codified relationships based on educational and urban pragmatics rather than on historic urban precedents such as the University of Chicago.”¹¹⁰

The campus was, indeed, built with city students in mind, for those accustomed to urban ways of living. Proximity to public transportation at the Blue Line stop at Harrison-Halstead was an integral part of both the location decision and in how the campus was designed. A concrete and granite-dominated environment was, presumably, a more familiar, and perhaps comfortable, space. Though he would have most likely rejected the Brutalist label and any claim that he was purposefully creating a harsh or uncomfortable environment, Netsch believed the campus reflected the realities of urban life. According to Bruegmann, “I think it captured the awesome quality of city life, with its contradictions of love and hate, hope, and despair.”¹¹¹ Student Rebecca Dudley, commenting on the proposed changes, wrote, “What is ‘natural’ to this place is not necessarily trees or flowers.”¹¹² Laurent Pernot, a senior at the time of the renovations, argued that the forum “was a symbol of what we were doing: living a large city and

¹⁰⁹ “By the Cloverleaf,” *Time*, Jan 7, 1966.

¹¹⁰ Sharon Haar, *City as Campus: Urbanism and Higher Education in Chicago* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 99.

¹¹¹ Robert Bruegmann, quoted in, Robert McClory, “The Architect Who’s Rebuilding Chicago,” *Chicago Reader*, Aug 26, 1993.

¹¹² Rebecca Dudley, “Rendering of Memories,” 1993, University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

getting a great education.”¹¹³ These students appeared to be the exception, however, as most others saw the changes as an improvement. UIC student trustee Craig Lawless described the pre-Coffey campus as “cold, uninviting, dreary, and dungeonlike.”¹¹⁴ As his plan created a space consistent in principle with other outdoor spaces, including Daley Plaza, Coffey believed his new courtyard would, in fact, be more urban than its predecessor, despite Netsch’s charge that he was building a “kind of suburban mall revision.”¹¹⁵

The university’s failure to accommodate handicapped students in the original design had been of concern but became especially pertinent with new requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Whereas at the Urbana campus, the University of Illinois made efforts to alter to help disabled veterans of World War II, UIC administration purposefully ignored such concerns. Johnson, Johnson, and Roy’s 1990 study highlighted this lack of handicap accessibility provided in the walkway system. For Coffey, it served as further proof of the designer’s lack of concern for the environment’s inhabitants.¹¹⁶ However, Netsch suggested, in his various proposals to the university in 1992 and 1993, re-configuring walkway ramps and placing new elevators in the lecture rooms to make such accommodations.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Laurent Pernot, quoted in “The Last Goodbye,” *UIC News*, April 28, 1993.

¹¹⁴ *Chicago Sun-Times*, Jan 15, 1993.

¹¹⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, Jan 18, 1993.

¹¹⁶ Coffey, interview.

¹¹⁷ Walter Netsch, “Sunday Walking Tour of the Main Campus of UIC (An Evaluation),” Walter Netsch Papers, Chicago History Museum, 7.



The new student plaza, following the removal of Netsch's amphitheater-style forum, resembled more of an open piazza.

Demolition and reconstruction occurred over the summers of 1993 and 1994, as a machine known as a “concrete crusher” tore through the campus central core, permanently altering the Netsch design. Coffey retained the butterfly columns which once supported the walkways as free-standing structures to decorate the piazza to “celebrate the parts that we keep,” believing the columns to be excellent sculpture. Coffey hoped the redesign would represent “both of our time, the 1990s, and the 1960s, and into the future.”¹¹⁸ Coffey agreed that Netsch's design was a “noble experiment,” but that it was purely art and did not address the needs of students and faculty.

To most observers, initial reaction to the project's completion in 1995 seemed near unanimous in support of Coffey's renovations. The architect recalls walking on campus around this time and being approached by a former student who said, “It's

¹¹⁸ Coffey, interview.

incredible how it's changed."¹¹⁹ Much of the local press celebrated the changes, as more humanitarian. *Chicago Tribune* architecture critic Blair Kamin was among those most vocally cheering the new UIC. However, Kamin demonstrated a keen awareness of the larger issues at stake over modernist preservation, that the battle over the UIC campus "pits those who would preserve the powerful abstract forms of modernism against those who would alter those forms to make architecture more user-friendly or commercially appealing,"¹²⁰ For Kamin, it was another step in correcting the aesthetic and functional mistakes of modernism.

It was not clear, however, that the new student plaza was used to any greater degree that the old Forum.¹²¹ *Architectural Record* Chicago correspondent Cheryl Kent worried that the alterations had undermined what had been a unique and ambitious architectural endeavor, arguing:

The pressures on the university are very real, but this solution is very banal. This is not a traditional campus and planting a quadrangle in the middle of it won't make it one. If it once had the proud air of architectural militance, it now seems reduced, shriveled, as though it would like nothing better than for some vines to grow over it."¹²²

A preservation movement to save the Netsch campus was almost non-existent, representing only few dissenting voices.¹²³ Kent observed that, based on the debate at the time about the legacy of modernism at the time, the case had the potential to be "a classic fight of architectural integrity versus accommodation of present-day tastes and uses.

That is, if there had been a fight, but there wasn't."¹²⁴ Bruegmann worried that the

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, Jan 18, 1993.

¹²¹ Sharon Haar, *City as Campus*, 145.

¹²² Kent, "Softening Brutalism: Is Anything Lost?."

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

university-sponsored design and review process was expedited and did not allow for sufficient community, student, and faculty input.¹²⁵ Netsch voiced similar concerns to university chancellor James J. Stukel in November 1992, complaining that public hearings, which drew 180 participants, were not properly publicized.¹²⁶

In the 2000s, a resurgence of interest in modernism led to reevaluation of the original Netsch campus. Decisions that, as represented by the press and university-pollled students and faculty, appeared to have nearly unanimous support in the 1990s have begun to be seen by some as a tragic mistake. Walking into University Hall's ground level entrance today, one can see a series of wall placards celebrating Netsch's work, one featuring an essay by Bruegmann that calls the alterations "inappropriate." The placards, a website, and a booklet were part of an effort by the university provost's wife to celebrate the campus's unique design. Bruegmann attempted throughout the 1980s and 1990s to have the university award Walter Netsch an honorary degree but was consistently overruled by many of the senior Art and Architecture Department faculty members. This did not occur until the mid 2000s, when many of such faculty had retired or left for other positions.

Before leaving her position as professor of architecture in 2013, Sharon Haar had been part of a newer group of art and architecture faculty who arrived at the university after the renovations and took an interest in what they replaced. Some in the architecture faculty today, according to Haar, have dismissed Coffey's redesign as purely cosmetic. Coffey believes such a criticism stems from nostalgia and idealism, as a "pure" design was compromised in the name of accommodation. Furthermore, he attributes the positive

¹²⁵ Bruegmann, Personal conversation with the author, Oct. 2013.

¹²⁶ Walter Netsch to James J. Stukel, Nov 24, 1992, Walter Netsch Papers, Chicago History Museum.

reappraisal of Netsch’s work to “a desire [by the Art and Architecture Department and university] to have a claim to some form of history.”¹²⁷

Lincoln, Douglas, and Grant Halls, three-story classroom buildings south of the student plaza on the East Campus, were renovated over the course of the late 2000s to create an environment more desirable for faculty and students. Most notably, the original Netsch-designed windows, with concrete frames and thin openings, were removed to provide more natural light and greater energy efficiency. Coffey’s reaction to the upgrade was lukewarm, describing the design as “not good enough, but not terrible.”¹²⁸ Netsch’s concrete columns were retained, while a new glass curtain wall exterior was added. Professor of Architecture Dan Wheeler commended the redesign for maintaining such original features in keeping with the Netsch design.¹²⁹ Perhaps reflecting both the contemporary appreciation of Netsch’s vision and a desire for modifications, Dave Taeyaerts, director of the school’s Office of Campus Learning Environments, stressed the university’s strategy to work within the original design framework.

¹²⁷ Coffey, interview.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Micah Maidenberg, “Lighting the Brutalist,” *Chicago Journal*, Dec 16, 2009.



Renovations on lecture hall buildings such as Lincoln Hall in the 2000s attempted to “lighten” some Brutalist qualities, while maintaining the structural integrity of Netsch’s original design.

Meanwhile, scaffolding has seemed to become a permanent fixture of University Hall, as the physical condition of the concrete megastructure has been of concern to campus officials in recent years. At times described as unpopular among the faculty, as it contains a majority of faculty offices, retaining the original functional scheme, the tower’s fate is still uncertain. An English professor once compared the building to a medieval castle that contributed to a sense of detachment from students.¹³⁰ Wheeler seemed to stress the importance of preserving University Hall, perhaps the most iconic and visible building on campus, in its current form and that significant modifications such as those in Lincoln, Douglas, and Grant Halls would be inappropriate.¹³¹

Alterations to the Netsch campus occurred in a period in which modernism had fallen out of favor in popular opinion and appeared to be as antiquarian in the 1980s and 1990s as Beaux Art buildings to those in the post-World War II era. Though certainly

¹³⁰ Unnamed English faculty member, quoted in Nory Miller, 29.

¹³¹ Dan Wheeler, quoted in Maidenberg.

responding to these trends, Daniel Coffey's accommodations were not designed necessarily as an artistic statement or a categorical rejection of modernism in general, but rather than as a response to a specific design that was, according to those who used it most, dysfunctional. However, attempts to "soften," and modify or remove, important features of concrete-based modernist structures risk erasing important pieces of a transformative period in architectural history. While a preservation movement had yet to coalesce to save the UIC walkways and forum, the debate highlighted the battle lines of future struggles. As universities, cities, institutions, preservation groups, and individuals address contemporary concerns over style and function in such buildings they must confront modernism's complex legacy.

CHAPTER III

MICHAEL REESE HOSPITAL

Throughout 2009, a flurry of public fanfare surrounded Mayor Richard M. Daley's quest to secure the 2016 Summer Olympics for the city of Chicago. With support from city leaders and national political allies, Daley traveled to Copenhagen with the Chicago delegation, which included First Lady Michelle Obama, Oprah Winfrey, and President Barack Obama, to make his pitch to the Olympic Committee. Returning in defeat, however, the mayor optimistically declared, "We have a great city. These are great people. We have a future just as bright as anyone else."¹³² Back in Chicago, journalists and pundits speculated on the consequences of the loss for the Daley legacy. The committee's selection of Rio de Janeiro dashed his hopes for what was seen as an assured economic boon for the city and one last major achievement in the mayor's final years in office. However, as international discussion focused on the significance of the Olympic site selection and possible political ramifications for the mayor and the president, a fight mounted for the collection of buildings on the land the mayor's administration had chosen to host the festivities.

Speaking with Chicago architectural journalist Lee Bey, preservationist Graham Balkany appeared despondent, declaring, "Oh, we always lose, we're always getting nowhere."¹³³ In the midst of the Michael Reese Hospital campus's demolition in late

¹³² Richard M. Daley, quoted in *USA Today*, Oct 3, 2009.

¹³³ Graham Balkany, quoted in Lee Bey, "Reese's Pieces," *Chicago Architect* (March-April 2010), 26.

2009 and early 2010, Balkany saw the defeat to save the buildings as yet another disappointment for the modernist preservation movement's agenda. Balkany's role as both a leader in the preservation fight and researcher in attempting to connect the buildings with a famous architect made him a central figure in the battle to save the hospital. While it was long known Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius had served as a consultant to the design team of the Michael Reese Hospital, Balkany was able to find archival evidence that he argued proved the architect's leading role in the design process of eight buildings on the campus.

Balkany's group Gropius in Chicago, along with Landmarks Illinois and Preservation Chicago, regarded Michael Reese as an important part of the larger campaign to save modernist architecture in the city. An online pamphlet on Preservation Chicago's website stated, "The resulting campus is an excellent example of progressive thinking in post-World War II planning and architecture."¹³⁴ In addition, the hospital was listed among Preservation Chicago's 2009 choices for the "Chicago Seven," an annual of the list most-endangered structures in the city.

Michael Reese Hospital's design, its relationship with its neighborhood and connection to urban renewal projects, and the ensuing debate over the course of the late 2000s regarding its future placed the hospital within the larger national discussion over the merits of preserving modernist architecture. The preservation debate over Michael Reese Hospital and, with it, the legacy of Walter Gropius and the modernist built environment became entangled in a struggle for the city's political and economic future. Far from opposing progress, preservationists, for their part, felt that retaining and restoring the buildings by a renowned architect was perfectly suited to showcase the

¹³⁴ "Chicago 7: Michael Reese Modern," PreservationChicago.com.

international nature of Chicago's architecture. As such, preservation groups developed a strategy to save the Michael Reese Hospital focused primarily around its connection to a prominent architect, rather than the history or nature of activities associated with the site.

The debate demonstrates the difficulties the preservation movement for modernist architecture has confronted on a national scale in establishing a rationale for maintaining mid-twentieth century structures that are often misunderstood, unnoticed, or not seen as "historic" by the public. The lack of sufficient public response, as preservationists struggled to convince Chicago citizens or to build significant opposition beyond that of professional organizations, in a period in which the public had only recently begun the process of reevaluating modernism, helped determine the hospital's fate. Prior to Balkany's discoveries, many in the city were not aware of Gropius's role, and, as such, were not as easily convinced of its significance, as they might have been otherwise. In addition to a lack of a single architect to rally behind, the campaign was further complicated by the complex's design by an architect not as well known in Chicago as Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, or Mies Van Der Rohe. The preservation campaign for Michael Reese, nevertheless, helped establish a preservation infrastructure of groups with similar goals that worked in conjunction, an organizational structure that was adopted in future such struggles in the city.

Located at 29th Street and Ellis Avenue in the Bronzeville neighborhood, the Michael Reese Hospital, originally established as a Jewish hospital, served Chicago's South Side from 1885 to its bankruptcy and closure in 2008. The hospital played a prominent role within the neighborhood, both as a provider medical care to many of the

area's mostly low-income residents and an institutional force behind South Side urban redevelopment and renewal.

In July 2009, the city purchased the thirty seven-acre campus site, identified as the most desirable site for an Olympic Village, for \$86 million. As impending demolition became apparent by the summer of 2009, the *Chicago Reader* labeled Michael Reese "The First Sacrificial Lamb" in the city's seemingly Olympic-dominated political atmosphere. With most of the complex now demolished, save the Singer Pavilion, a former administrative office, the future of the vacant lot in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood on the South Side remains a source of contention among residents.

City politics play a large role in such high-profile cases, as concerned parties used the means at their disposal, including political positions and public relations, to achieve a particular goal. However, in the battle over Michael Reese, both the preservationists and the mayor's administration worked toward what they viewed as the most desirable outcome for the South Side neighborhood and the city. For those who tend to favor preservation by default, such battles can become viewed through an overly simplistic heroes-and-villains framework. During the fight to save the hospital, a mayor long identified as an ally to the city's preservationist groups took, in their view, an adversarial role, but maintained that the buildings, in their current condition, were not sellable and was expensive to renovate for modern purposes.¹³⁵ The debate was further affected by a city government that saw the economic potential of the Olympic games as outweighing the benefits of restoring buildings that, though widely seen as historic, were determined by professionals to have deteriorated considerably.

¹³⁵ Daley was recognized on June 4, 2009 by the National Building Museum in Washington DC as one of their "Visionaries in Sustainability."

Located in the Grand and Douglas Boulevard areas, Bronzeville has been historically known as an epicenter of black business and cultural activity. According to St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton's study of the Black Belt, the term *Bronzeville* "seems to have been used originally by an editor of the Chicago *Bee*, who, in 1930, sponsored a contest to elect a 'Mayor of Bronzeville.'"¹³⁶ Residents have taken pride in the area's connection to writers like Richard Wright and musicians like Muddy Waters, as well as popular black publications such as *Jet* and *Ebony*. According to Michelle Boyd, "Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the development of the neighborhood had been shaped by white elites' efforts to contain black residents and black elites' accommodation to those efforts."¹³⁷ Despite black residents' involvement, projects took forms reminiscent of other city redevelopments, mostly controlled by white institutions and city leaders. The bitter memories of redevelopment and renewal programs of the 1940s and 1950s have shaped much of the contemporary community's reactions to new proposals.

Racial transition in urban neighborhoods became a primary concern to city leaders and middle class residents. Cities like Chicago saw a massive influx of African-Americans, who left the American South for industrial jobs in the North in the first half of the twentieth century, as part of what became known as the Great Migration. "During the 1950s," Roger Biles writes of Chicago, "an average of three and a half blocks per week converted from white to black ownership."¹³⁸ While immigrants, primarily those from European countries, were able to establish communities only slightly more easily, rampant racism led to increasingly segregated cities. According to Thomas Philpott,

¹³⁶ St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *The Black Metropolis: A Study Of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945), 383.

¹³⁷ Michelle Boyd, *Jim Crow Nostalgia: Reconstructing Race in Bronzeville* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 35.

¹³⁸ Roger Biles, *Richard J. Daley: Politics, Race, and the Governing of Chicago* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 84.

“Every foreign newcomer to Chicago, no matter how late he arrived or how fast his kinsman were crowding into the city, had the advantage over the black migrant who got there ahead of him.”¹³⁹ In addition, the widespread adoption of racially restrictive covenants, provisions in deeds which stipulated to whom property could or could not be sold or leased, successfully kept black residents confined to certain parts of cities. Part of what Arnold Hirsch described as a “second ghetto,” the South and West Sides became home to the city’s largest concentrations of public housing Michael Reese and the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), the major institutions in Bronzeville, neighbored the Ida B. Wells Homes, the Robert Taylor Homes, and Cabrini Green.

The hospital campus was both a product of urban redevelopment and a neighborhood leader in further projects. The hospital was founded in 1881 by a wealthy real estate developer hoping to construct a new Jewish hospital, as the city’s previous Jewish hospital was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. The original Michael Reese structures were constructed over the course of the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the two first decades of the twentieth century by a variety of firms. The main building, also a source of contention as preservationists and city and community leaders debated the hospital’s modernist buildings, was designed by Richard E. Schmidt and Hugh Garden and completed in 1907.

As housing stock deteriorated and the population gradually shifted to being dominated by low-income residents, the Planning Staff of Michael Reese Hospital was formed to study possibilities for relocation. Gropius was joined by city planner Walter H. Blucher, Professor Louis Wirth of the University of Chicago, former Works Progress

¹³⁹ Thomas Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Neighborhood Deterioration and Middle-Class Reform, Chicago, 1880-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 118.

Administration official Reginald Isaacs, and a variety of Gropius's Harvard graduate students.

As the portions of the campus designed by Gropius's team were part of an expansion in the post-World War II period, the Michael Reese Hospital was inherently connected to the legacy of urban redevelopment and renewal policies, but the efforts, as Balkany argued, did not have the negative reputation attributed to other similar programs in the neighborhood. Remembered among displaced populations as "removal" or "Negro clearance," the devastating effects of urban redevelopment and renewal on cities have overshadowed many of the more positive aspects. Once trumpeted as the way to save urban centers from blight and decentralization "renewal," according to historian Jon Teaford, by the 1960s "was already beginning to lose its appeal; by the early 1970s it had become a dirty word."¹⁴⁰

Surrounded by what were deemed "slum" areas, Bronzeville institutions Michael Reese Hospital and IIT initiated much of the neighborhood's early redevelopment, hoping to expand their physical holdings and create a more attractive environment for workers and clients. The area surrounding the hospital contained seven square miles of "the largest slum in the United States at the time."¹⁴¹ Purchasing surrounding property in a 1940 expansion, extending from seven to 110 acres, IIT argued that "removal of surrounding slums and concomitant development was viewed as the only way to attract and maintain students and faculty."¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 232.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹⁴² Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 116.

Likewise, Michael Reese Hospital engaged in similar activities, realizing they had few alternatives in finding low-cost land for relocation.¹⁴³ Leaders in both institutions spearheaded the creation of the South Side Planning Board (SSPB), along with business leaders, clergymen, and civic leaders, in 1947 to address their deteriorating peripheries, resulting in the publication of *An Opportunity for Private and Public Investment in Rebuilding Chicago*.¹⁴⁴ Emphasizing slum clearance and improved municipal services, the SSPB aimed to rebuild what, they lamented, “once was one of Chicago’s most attractive areas.”¹⁴⁵ Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the SSPB, through the direction of IIT and Michael Reese Hospital, embarked on a dramatic reconfiguration of the Bronzeville neighborhood. However, Balkany argued that the hospital’s urban renewal program, unlike many others in the city and nation, had more progressive goals in redeveloping the low-income area and “was far more nuanced in origin than it is frequently portrayed to be.”¹⁴⁶

Despite the hospital’s history and association with urban renewal, much of the debate within the city focused on the architect and the degree to which Walter Gropius was involved in its construction. Indeed, a building’s identification with a significant architect has tended to increase its chances of survival. Throughout much of its history, the preservation movement in the United States based its case for saving architecture on a connection to a prominent architect. Preservationist and architect Grahm Balkany’s assertion that Gropius played a much larger role than previously served as a rationale for retaining the buildings and an essential part of the preservation movement’s campaign.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 5, 1946.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Grahm Balkany, personal correspondence with the author, March 29, 2014.

However, the uncertainty surrounding the design of Michael Reese often distracted preservationists from being able to discuss the case on the merits of architectural or historical significance.

Gropius served as director of the German Bauhaus school of design in Weimar, Dessau, and Berlin from 1919 to 1928, overseeing the education of many of the twentieth century's well known modernist architects and designers. The creators of the Bauhaus curriculum dedicated themselves to the concept of "total" art, which included architecture, interior design, and landscape design. However, according to Kenneth Frampton, the "relative maturity of the institution, the unremitting attacks on himself and the growth of his practice all convinced him that it was time for a change."¹⁴⁷ The Bauhaus was eventually closed under directive from German Chancellor Adolf Hitler. While colleagues recruited Mies Van Der Rohe to work on American projects and teach at IIT in the 1940s, Gropius became a similar German transplant to the United States. At the time of his involvement with Michael Reese, Gropius was teaching at Harvard University and led the designs of several campus buildings. Gropius arrived in the United States in 1937 as part of a wave of European cultural migration that would reshape American art and architecture, including Igor Stravinsky and visual artists such as Max Ernst and Mies, a fellow Bauhaus-associated architect.

As the hospital's board of trustees consistently rejected architects recommended by the Planning Staff, architect John Harkness approached Gropius with a proposal to create a collaborative practice that was eventually chosen to lead the design. Harkness and Gropius formed The Architects Collaborative (TAC) in 1946 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, joined by fellow architects Norman C. Fletcher, Jean B. Fletcher, Sarah P.

¹⁴⁷ Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 128.

Harkness, Robert S. McMillan, Louis A. McMillen and Benjamin C. Thompson. In addition to their work on the hospital project, TAC became Gropius's primary vehicle for much of his later work in the twentieth century.

Establishing the connection between the Gropius legacy and the city of Chicago became one of Graham Balkany's primary goals. Indeed, preservationists have often built a case for preservation around the importance of the architect. Additionally, as historian Daniel Bluestone has argued, the narrative of Chicago architectural history has often served as the guiding set of principles for what is worthy of preserving.¹⁴⁸ Balkany was an original co-founder of Preservation Chicago in 2001, along with Steven Robert Gillig, Jonathan Fine, and Michael Moran, and served on its executive committee for six years. Preservation Chicago was founded as a supplement Landmarks Illinois in order to focus more intensely on preservation cases in Chicago proper. To save the hospital, Balkany spearheaded the Gropius in Chicago Coalition and built a collaborative framework among his organization, Preservation Chicago, and Landmarks Illinois.

As rumors circulated about the fate of Michael Reese amid the Olympic campaign in the 2000s, Graham Balkany became the public face of the effort to save Michael Reese Hospital. Balkany's interest in Gropius and the Michael Reese Hospital began in 2001, when he began collecting material with the goal of writing a book about modernism in Chicago. He had compiled information on "thousands" of buildings from 1933 to 1975.¹⁴⁹ In addition, Balkany considered writing a book about architect Paul

¹⁴⁸ Daniel Bluestone, "Preservation and Renewal in Post-World War II," in *Buildings, Landscapes, and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011).

¹⁴⁹ Balkany, interview with the author, Nov 18, 2013.

Schweikher, which, he recalls, led him to look at all of modernism in “an unbiased way.”¹⁵⁰

This search led Balkany, as a graduate student at IIT, to become interested in South Side modernist housing projects of the post-war period, including Lake Meadows and Prairie Shores. According to Balkany, Reese began to stand out to him because it was “an incredible body of work” and had “an unbelievable continuity,” despite its construction having spanned over several decades.¹⁵¹ Through extensive research at the now defunct Michael Reese Archive, Balkany found evidence that, he believed, proved Gropius was not only a consultant, but was involved in the hospital campus master plan, its landscaping, neighborhood master plan, which included planning for Lake Meadows, IIT, and Prairie Shores. In addition, Balkany states, Gropius designed a minimum of eight of the twenty-nine buildings of the Michael Reese complex.¹⁵²

“The nature of who he [Gropius] was and the nature of the project,” according to Balkany became an obstacle. Gropius brought to the Michael Reese planning process the Bauhaus concept of “total design,” which emphasized the importance of design principles in buildings and furniture, but also in seemingly insignificant items such as silverware. Based on his research, Balkany argued Gropius was involved to such a degree as to be involved in fairly minor decisions, such as paint schemes for the hospital. In Chicago, however, the theory was extended to psychology and sociology, as Gropius took an active role in the planning of housing projects built in the same period. According to Richard Brooker, Michael Reese “gave Gropius one of his first opportunities in the United States to become involved in large scale urban planning, an interest that he

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

pursued through his entire life.”¹⁵³ Balkany argued that Michael Reese was the fullest embodiment of Gropius’s belief in ‘total design.’ Gropius’s role in the hospital design and neighborhood development, according to Balkany, was a “heroic effort to solve societal problems through design.”¹⁵⁴

In his biography of the architect, Reginald Isaacs described Gropius’s initial role as providing his “strongest criticism and guidance” in the development of a campus plan.¹⁵⁵ Despite working closely with Gropius as the planning director for the Reese project, Isaacs does not provide significant discussion of the architect’s specific role, describing him vaguely as “consulting architect” to the Planning Staff.¹⁵⁶ In most latter-day accounts and histories of the hospital’s post-1945 buildings, Gropius is cited as a consultant to the design team. The Walter Gropius Archive, a retrospective of his most significant works with the TAC, offers a similar description.

As Gropius saw the architect as coordinator of a team of architects and planners, the fact that the Michael Reese designs were collaborative reinforced Gropius’s presence. As Balkany argues, “Anyone who truly understands him would know that.”¹⁵⁷ Architectural historian Kevin Harrington, a professor at IIT, stated: “What Graham has done is give the city the opportunity to add another jewel to its crown. Having three of the big four here in Chicago would make this the place to see 20th-century architecture.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Richard Brooker, “The Michael Reese Hospital, Chicago, Illinois,” in *The Walter Gropius Archive, Volume Four* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 125.

¹⁵⁴ Balkany, interview with the author.

¹⁵⁵ Letter to Gropius, Chicago, Sep 4, 1945, in *Walter Gropius: An Illustrated Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), 258.

¹⁵⁶ Reginald Isaacs, *Walter Gropius: An Illustrated Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), 258.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Kevin Harrington, quoted in Jennifer Wehunt, “Graham Balkany: Design Detective,” *Chicago Magazine* (January 2010).

Gropius became a significant figure in American architecture in the postwar project of rebuilding American cities. His relationship with the world of Chicago architecture began in 1922, when he and Adolf Myer submitted a design for the famed Chicago Tribune Building competition.¹⁵⁹ By the 1960s, John Gold writes, “Projects associated with Mies and Gropius now rivaled those of Frank Lloyd Wright and the classic skyscrapers of Chicago and New York as fixed points of interest for the architectural tourist.”¹⁶⁰

As Landmarks Illinois, Preservation Chicago, and Gropius in Chicago mounted their campaign to save the hospital, linking its architectural importance to its widely recognized institution neighbor, the Mies Van Der Rohe-designed IIT campus, became of integral part of strategy. For preservationist leaders like Balkany and Lisa DiChiera, saving Michael Reese and IIT served as a both an appeal to the international aspect of the Olympics, having projects by two acclaimed German architects in Chicago, and to the mayor’s desire to promote the city’s architectural prominence.

Receiving the modern-day appreciation that escaped Michael Reese, Mies’s design for IIT’s campus is often highlighted as one of most important collections of modernist architecture in Chicago. According to architectural historian Franz Schulze, Mies “redesigned the entire antiquated IIT campus, replacing numerous bloated old relics with a fleet of hard, clean, carefully interrelated buildings, utterly frank in their structure and fastidious in their proportioning.”¹⁶¹ As the director of the university’s architecture program from 1938 to 1958, Mies imported European theories of design to American

¹⁵⁹ Isaacs, *Walter Gropius: An Illustrated Biography*, 227.

¹⁶⁰ John R. Gold *Practicing Modernism: Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954-1972* (London: Routledge, 2007), 34.

¹⁶¹ Franz Schulze, “The New Chicago Architecture,” *Art in America* (March 1968), 62.

students, employing a variety of Bauhaus methods based on aesthetics and technology. Indeed, Mies was at the forefront of a citywide postwar building project that redeveloped Chicago in the modernist style, which, according to Schulze, encouraged a “boisterous air of confident within the architectural community.”¹⁶²

Mies was recruited to design an expansion of the campus in the early 1940s, a plan that, upon completion, included twenty buildings. His glass-and-steel design of campus buildings such as Crown Hall, which, after more than fifty years after its constructions remains, according to architectural historian Franz Schulze, “magical.”¹⁶³ The American Institute of Architects, in 1976, designated the campus as one of the 200 most important works of American architecture. Crown Hall was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in in 2001, with the entire campus following in 2005. The celebration of Mies’s work at IIT and apparent disinterest or apathy regarding Michael Reese, however, demonstrates the public’s selective embrace of modernist works.

Building public awareness and action has proven demanding as many citizens have only recently started to see modernism as historic. The difficulties confronting Chicago preservation groups reflect the larger task of the modernist preservation movement. The problem, historian Richard Longstreth has argued, partly stems from the fact that that midcentury modernism often remains unnoticed in communities. Similarly, preservationists focused their efforts on saving older structures, such as Beaux Art or “Chicago School” buildings, that have garnered more widely accepted historic significance in the twenty-first century.

¹⁶² Ibid., 61.

¹⁶³ Franz Schulze, *Mies Van Der Rohe: A Critical Biography*, revised ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 312.

Longstreth challenges the public and skeptical preservationists to learn to “see” modern architecture. This skepticism has partly derived from the nature of midcentury planning and architectural principles, as many works of the period were built following concepts of decentralization. According to Longstreth, “those nucleations often lack traditional focal points.”¹⁶⁴ The dilemma has plagued preservationists hoping to save midcentury shopping malls, often sprawling complexes removed from the city center and associated with a period seemingly defined by suburban “sprawl.” As the public and governments turned against large-scale urban redevelopment programs in the 1970s, structures associated with sprawl became seen as anti-urban. “However, the past 50 years have shown us,” Longstreth writes, “that there is a clear new order in recent growth, that is distinctly metropolitan in nature, and that it is an outgrowth of the old, more traditional one.”¹⁶⁵

According to Longstreth, “Work that is a part of our everyday lives is crucial to understanding the past and, equally important, to giving us a yardstick for what we ourselves do.”¹⁶⁶ As it was located in a neighborhood on the South Side, as opposed to the downtown Chicago Loop district, the Michael Reese Hospital presented a case in which the public, outside of the neighborhood that depended on it for medical care, was, in some cases, unaware of its existence or architectural significance. According to Jim Peters, then-president and executive director of Landmarks Illinois, “Many people just didn't know about this. Unless you went there, you never saw it, so it's been very hard

¹⁶⁴ Richard Longstreth, “I Can’t See It; I Don’t Understand It; and It Doesn’t Look Old to Me,” *Forum Journal* 27 (Fall 2012): 38.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Richard Longstreth, “Critique: What to Save? Midcentury Modernism at Risk,” *Architectural Record* 188 (Sept 2000): 60.

getting the public's attention."¹⁶⁷ In addition, for Balkany, the architecture of the Michael Reese Hospital, at times, caused it go unnoticed. Balkany argued that the buildings, like much of Gropius's work, had "extraordinary subtle power" and was not "in your face like Mies or Goldberg."¹⁶⁸ Balkany summarized, "a lot of its qualities worked to its detriment."¹⁶⁹

Balkany saw Gropius in Chicago's role to educate the community on the design's legitimacy and the necessity to save it. However, he voiced frustration that the preservation groups were confronting what they viewed as an "unknown enemy." He charged that, in the few meetings the city held with preservationists, city officials were not acting in earnest.¹⁷⁰ Balkany voiced similar frustration with architecture firm Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, leaders of the proposed Olympic Village project. He recalled a meeting in which he was confronted by an SOM employee, who declared, "So you're the guy who's going to tell us why we should save the Gropius buildings."¹⁷¹ Throughout the process, Balkany maintained that Gropius in Chicago was supportive of the Olympics bid and that preservationists were not attempting to obstruct progress. Instead, preserving Michael Reese, he argued, could enhance the mayor's case. According to Balkany, "Think about how powerful that would have been. We're going to use the Olympics to restore this internationally important piece of architecture."¹⁷²

Despite the number of groups involved in the fight, Balkany, however, regretted the lack of coordination. In his view, the groups did want to defer to Gropius in Chicago.

¹⁶⁷ Jim Peters, quoted in Margaret Foster, "Chicago To Raze 1907 Building on Michael Reese Hospital Campus," *Preservation*, Dec 7, 2010, <http://www.preservationnation.org/magazine/2010/todays-news/chicago-to-raze-1907-building.html>

¹⁶⁸ Grahm Balkany, interview with the author.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

Landmarks Illinois commissioned reuse study, which included mostly site plans. They identified six hospital buildings, four co-designed by Gropius, a power plant designed by Gropius, and the main Prairie-Style building. The study called for the remaining structures to be adapted for Olympic residential and administration use.¹⁷³ A plan for adaptive reuse Baumgarten Pavilion demonstrated how the site could be converted to office space.¹⁷⁴ Landmarks Executive Director Jim Peters believed the plan was an appropriate middle ground between the city's wish to demolish the entire campus and Balkany's call to save all of the buildings associated with Gropius. A competing plan, which emphasized preservation less, was offered by Chicago architects DeStefano Partners, calling for saving only the main hospital building and the Psychosomatic and Psychiatric Institute building.

Balkany did not believe the proposal was sufficiently "scholarly," as it did not call for retaining all of the Gropius-designed buildings. Gropius in Chicago created their own master plan but did not release it because they believed they were confronting "a moving target," as Balkany and his colleagues accused the city, SOM, and the Chicago Olympic Committee of fingerpointing. Believing they offering an enticing compromise, Gropius in Chicago proposed saving the eight buildings most clearly associated with Gropius. They acknowledged that some buildings could be torn down, but Balkany later worried that preservationists had "started from a weakened position."¹⁷⁵

Public policy in the city throughout 2008 and 2009 was dominated by the Olympics quest, overshadowing the fight to save the hospital. As the *Chicago Reader* opined in July 2009, "What Mayor Daley's Olympic planners think is in their best interest

¹⁷³ "Alternative Olympic Village Plan," Landmarks Illinois, Aug 2009.

¹⁷⁴ "Baumgarten Pavilion Re-Use Options," Landmarks Illinois, Aug 2009.

¹⁷⁵ Balkany, interview with the author.

will trump every other concern, no matter how big or small.”¹⁷⁶ For Daley, the decision to build an Olympic Village in the South Side was partially based on the type of land desired. Daley’s vision would have included 7,275 residences and 1,000 hotel rooms in the South Side development, including an Olympic Village that would house approximately 16,000 athletes and coaches.¹⁷⁷ A former truck yard on the Illinois Central Railroad, near McCormick Place, was briefly discussed, but the mayor saw building on land as more cost efficient.¹⁷⁸ He indicated his preference for the Reese as early as late 2008, declaring, "You don't build over rail track because it costs you twice as much money. It's simple as that. You have to build a foundation and things like that. So you assess it. You can build a park over it."¹⁷⁹

In March 2007, the city council approved a \$500-million guarantee to bolster Daley’s pitch to the U.S. Olympic Committee. In addition, the Chicago Park District, additionally, voted to reserve \$15 million.¹⁸⁰ On April 14, 2007, the U.S. Olympic Committee selected Chicago, over previous host Los Angeles. As his poll numbers declined and, for the first time, more Chicagoans disapproved than approved of the mayor’s performance, securing the Olympics for the city became crucial to securing his legacy. A series of scandals plagued the mayor in his final years in office. A federal investigation into hiring and contracts led to thirty indictments, including several senior members of his administration, and his decision to demolish Meigs Field in the middle of the night.¹⁸¹ Many residents were additionally outraged with the mayor’s plan that

¹⁷⁶ *Chicago Reader*, July 30, 2009.

¹⁷⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, June 18, 2008.

¹⁷⁸ *Chicago Reader*, July 30, 2009.

¹⁷⁹ Richard M. Daley, quoted in *Chicago Tribune*, June 18, 2008

¹⁸⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, Oct 4, 2009.

¹⁸¹ Keith Koeneman, *First Son: The Biography of Richard M. Daley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 272.

transferred control of city parking meters to private interests, which led to significantly higher parking rates. While most residents supported the Olympics bid, there were internal divisions over what type of city Chicago should be, either an international city or a Midwestern city with finite resources.¹⁸²

With the Michael Reese site identified to host the Olympic Village, the plans called for Olympic game-related events to be hosted in Grant Park, the South Side's Washington Park, and public space on the West Side. Striking views of downtown became a significant part of Chicago planners' pitch to the International Olympic Committee. In their study of the Olympic campaign, Larry Bennett, Michael Bennett, Stephen Alexander, and Joseph Perskey write, "Near-Loop and near-lakefront locations offered the best opportunities for Chicago to showcase itself via the Olympics and to lure Olympic visitors to attractive locales within the city."¹⁸³ In addition, locating part of the Olympic site in Chicago's South and West Sides stemmed from a desire to include residents of such historically low-income areas in the expected economic benefits.

According to Bennett, Bennett, Alexander, and Perskey:

But interestingly, the siting of these Olympic venues, especially the South and West Side locations, was also an important part of the 2016 Committee's (and the Daley administration's) selling of the Olympic bid to local audiences. For South Side neighborhoods such as Grand Boulevard and Woodlawn, and West Side neighborhoods such as West Garfield Park and North Lawndale, local bid advocates promised a windfall of short-term Olympic tourist visitation and Olympics-derived jobs, infrastructure improvements, and if all went well, continuing streams of private investment.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Ibid., 273.

¹⁸³ Larry Bennett, Michael Bennett, Stephen Alexander, and Joseph Perskey, "The Political and Civic Implications of Chicago's Unsuccessful Bid to Host the 2016 Olympic Games," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 37, No. 4 (2013): 371.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 371.

The South Side's reputation as a low-income area played an important role in the debate over Michael Reese. Despite various redevelopment projects since the 1940s, the *Atlantic Cities* reported in December 2012, "The neighborhood hasn't been able to shake the perception of its previous poverty, which is still visible on some lots."¹⁸⁵ While mostly aesthetic improvements have been noticeable and Bronzeville has been a site of recent gentrification by upper middle class blacks, attempts to transform the neighborhood into a thriving center of business activity had a disproportionately negative effect on poor residents.

Alderman Toni Preckwinkle represented the city's Fourth Ward and opposed saving the site. Balkany accused Preckwinkle of opposing modernism by default and of falling asleep during one of the meetings between the alderman and preservationists. When the hospital signaled plans to close in 2008, however, Preckwinkle worried about its impact on the neighborhood. She declared, "This is a great loss. It is a loss for people who are patients and a loss for the workforce. It is discouraging,"¹⁸⁶ While her comments did not address architecture, the alderman did not appear eager to see the hospital's demise as an institution and a provider of services. Preckwinkle was not the only high-profile figure in the preservation fight to mention the role the hospital served within the neighborhood in the decades after its construction.

Despite attempting to make a preservation argument based on the hospital's connection to the neighborhood as a medical provider or as an institution, as preservationists often build cases around the activities at a site, Balkany decided an architecturally based argument would be most effective. Balkany believed the hospital's

¹⁸⁵ Emily Badger, "How Black Gentrifiers Have Affected the Perception of Chicago's Changing Neighborhoods," *The Atlantic Cities*, Dec. 31, 2012.

¹⁸⁶ Toni Preckwinkle, quoted in *ABC News*, June 5, 2008.

advances in medical research, including the first linear accelerator for cancer research, merited preservation on historic grounds. However, as Balkany recalls, part of the public indifference toward saving the hospital also stemmed from the fact that “the African American community that surrounds Michael Reese was generally sympathetic to our efforts, but did not feel a deep connection to the hospital’s history, despite the numerous advances toward racial cooperation that occurred there,” including a long-standing reputation for non-discrimination.¹⁸⁷

Preckwinkle chaired a community meeting for Prairie Shores residents concerned of the potential impact of an Olympic Village on July 21, 2009 at Olivet Baptist Church, at 31st and King Drive. The alderman and Cassandra Francis, director of Olympic Village development for Chicago 2016, maintained that no plans existed for beginning demolition. While initially cheering at the meeting, preservationists soon worried at the uncertainty in the statement. Realtor and preservation activist Brad Suster worried, “No plans’ means only that there are no plans today. That doesn’t mean that they won’t draw some up tomorrow.”¹⁸⁸ However, the process quickly escalated throughout the rest of the summer. On July 23, the city’s Public Building Commission awarded \$11 million to Brandenburg Industrial Service and Heneghan Wrecking for the beginning stages of interior demolition. The hospital officially closed on August 31 and exterior demolition began the next month.

As they mounted their Olympic campaign, Daley and city officials wanted to demonstrate to the international community that the city would be prepared should the committee decide to choose Chicago. Molly Sullivan, communications director for the

¹⁸⁷ Balkany, personal correspondence with the author, March 29, 2014.

¹⁸⁸ Brad Suster, quoted in Ben Joravsky, Michael Reese Hospital: The First Sacrificial Lamb,” *Chicago Reader*, July 30, 2009.

city's Department of Community Development stated: "There's clearly a difference of opinion on adaptive reuse. The timeline is, we need to be ready when the bid comes in, which means demolishing the Reese site so it is ready for redevelopment. It's a very strict timeline." In response to critics, Sullivan, declared, "This is not a land grab."¹⁸⁹

After Chicago lost its Olympics bid, however, questions resurfaced regarding the hospital's future. Fixtures were already being removed from the buildings, by the owner at the time, Medline Industries, as early as April 2009, but the city ordered the company to cease further activity until the site was purchased.¹⁹⁰ Following the Olympic Committee's announcement, preservationists hoped Michael Reese would be spared, as the site was no longer needed for its intended use. Kamin wrote that because the original purpose of redeveloping the Michael Reese site was no longer needed, "it's a whole new ballgame."¹⁹¹ Kamin became a much more vocal proponent of saving the hospital. Chicago architectural writer Lynn Becker called the planned demolition "cavalier wastefulness."¹⁹² By this time, the debate became international news, as European publications weighed in on the story, with the British *Architects Journal* calling the demolition an "outrage."¹⁹³ John Pardey, a British architect who planned the reuse of Gropius's Denham Film Laboratories in Buckinghamshire in 2008, offered his support to the preservation groups.¹⁹⁴

The city announced, however, on October 21 that demolition would continue, with the goal of developing a South Side mixed-income community on the site. Balkany accused Daley of approving the razing "out of spite" for the loss of the Olympic bid and

¹⁸⁹ Molly Sullivan, quoted in, *The Architects Newspaper*, June 17, 2009.

¹⁹⁰ *New York Times*, April 20, 2009.

¹⁹¹ *Chicago Tribune*, Oct 8, 2009.

¹⁹² Lynn Becker, "The Rush to Raze," *Chicago Reader*, April 23, 2009.

¹⁹³ *Architects Journal*, Oct 28, 2009.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Sep 30, 2009.

what was viewed as preservationists' obstruction.¹⁹⁵ The city decided to save only Singer Pavilion, an administration building co-designed by Gropius. According to Sullivan, "Its physical layout coupled with a design that allows for natural light to spill into each of its wings are features that make it attractive for reuse."¹⁹⁶

Mayor Daley had originally stated an interest in preserving the original Prairie Style main hospital building. *Chicago Tribune* architecture critic Blair Kamin labeled the gesture "a bone thrown to historic preservationists."¹⁹⁷ Following the demolition of the modernist portion, preservationists did not yet view their mission as a lost cause if the main building would be saved. However, as the city announced plans to demolish the building in November 2010, with structural damage estimated to cost \$13 million, Kamin declared Daley's broken promise "a cynical, self-fulfilling prophecy."¹⁹⁸ An inspection by the Chicago Fire Department deemed the structure "an actual an imminent danger to the public per City of Chicago municipal code."¹⁹⁹ Kamin indicated skepticism that Daley was acting out of good faith in their original agreement, and, furthermore, that the city's claim that the building was beyond repair stemmed from intentionally allowing it to deteriorate to require demolition as the only feasible solution.

On November 5, amidst the ongoing demolition process, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks voted 5-3 to deny the hospital landmark status. Following a previous denial in August, preservationists presented a revised plan to the commission. "The majority," Kamin wrote, "sided with the commission's staff, which argued that

¹⁹⁵ Balkany, interview with the author.

¹⁹⁶ Molly Sullivan, Press Release, Oct 21, 2009, Department of Community Development, Chicago, Illinois.

¹⁹⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, Nov 4, 2010.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Robert S. Hoff, Chicago Fire Department Commissioner to Richard Monocchio, Department of Buildings, Aug 30, 2010, City of Chicago.

Gropius' buildings and vision for the campus have been 'greatly obscured' by subsequent construction."²⁰⁰ Preservationists, however, achieved a small victory in December 2009, as the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency voted unanimously to recommend the site for the National Register of Historic Places. Testimonies before the IHPA included Lisa DiChiera of Landmarks Illinois, Jonathan Fine of Preservation Chicago, and Chris Norris of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Midwest Office. However, the condition of the campus by December assured its fate. Half of the campus buildings had been demolished by the time the nomination form reached the National Park Service.²⁰¹

A political process dominated by the quest for the Olympics seemed to obscure the questions of the case. However, the struggle between preservationists and the city is insightful in revealing how city governments have had to address concerns over such buildings as they approach fifty years old. As Jim Peters remarked, "As someone once told me, it's old enough to depreciate, but it's not old enough to appreciate."²⁰² Aside from its planned Olympic usage, Mayor Daley's administration viewed the hospital as beyond repair, suffering from years of structural neglect, and, therefore, unsalvageable. Furthermore, city officials saw redevelopment of the Michael Reese site as an opportunity to improve the economy of a long-dormant neighborhood.

Despite his evidence, Balkany was never able to create a sufficient case for Gropius's role, which, in his view, prevented the buildings from being discussed on their merits. Nevertheless, for his efforts, *Chicago Magazine* named him "Chicagoan of the Year" in 2009. As wrecking balls tore through the modernist campus, even those who favored preservation, such as Kamin, continued to be indecisive about the hospital's

²⁰⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, Nov 6, 2009.

²⁰¹ *The Architects Newspaper*, Nov 4, 2010

²⁰² *Ibid.*, June 17, 2009.

architectural origins. However, coalition building, in the collaborative efforts of Landmarks Illinois, Preservation Chicago, and Gropius in Chicago, was one of the successes of the Michael Reese debate, a precursor to the organized effort to save Prentice Women's Hospital a few years later.

Michael Reese further reveals the constraints placed upon preservationists as they argue to save buildings that are either disliked, misunderstood, or “unseen” by the public or viewed as difficult to adapt or maintain by property owners. The case for saving modernist architecture has been further complicated by its association with urban renewal. The debate, according to the *Architects Newspaper*, “suggest[ed] a deeper unease in Chicago, and across the nation, about the difficulty of overcoming public indifference to midcentury modern architecture.”²⁰³ Furthermore, modernism has only recently returned to the forefront of popular taste, as a renewed interest has invigorated a preservation movement to save buildings of the mid-twentieth century.

Nevertheless, in many cases, presenting a case for modernist preservation remains a challenge and Michael Reese was demolished despite this newfound appreciation. According to Balkany, Michael Reese was doomed because “the largesse of his work is not fashionable right now.”²⁰⁴ The preservation coalition struggled with convincing the public the Michael Reese Hospital was worth saving. As Kamin wrote, “They [the Michael Reese buildings] do not seduce us with easy-on-the-eyes decoration. Their appeal, like their architecture, is abstract.”²⁰⁵ In addition, Gropius's work in the United States has been a wide source of debate, at times celebrated, in the case of the Harvard Graduate Center, and disliked, in the Pan Am Building in New York City.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Balkany, interview with the author.

²⁰⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, Oct 8, 2009.

The future of the Michael Reese Hospital site remains uncertain, as city officials and the Bronzeville community debate over the proper use of the space. Competing proposals have included a potential Barack Obama Presidential Library and a casino, the latter favored as more economically viable by current mayor Rahm Emanuel.²⁰⁶ Although only Singer Pavilion remains of the campus, the defeat taught the modernist preservation movement in Chicago valuable lessons in organizing for future fights. Building a case for the historic importance of modernist architecture requires not only convincing a skeptical public of the merits of a particular style or architect, but of the purpose modernist architecture will serve in the twenty-first century.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., Nov 19, 2013.

CHAPTER IV

PRENTICE WOMEN'S HOSPITAL

The Commission on Chicago Landmark's six-hour meeting on November 1, 2012 quickly went from initial victory to crushing defeat for preservationists. The commission, hearing arguments from preservationists, Northwestern University officials, city representatives, and members of the Streeterville Organization of Active Residents (SOAR), totaling nearly 120 attendees, voted unanimously in favor of naming the former Prentice Women's Hospital a "preliminary landmark." Such a decision normally meant a separate meeting would be scheduled for a final decision, allowing commission members time to review data provided by all parties involved.

In what *Chicago Tribune* columnist Ron Grossman described as a "fancy bit of parliamentary footwork"²⁰⁷ and Blair Kamin as "overrun by politics"²⁰⁸ the commission voted eight-to-one later that afternoon to rescind their previous decision. The commission's change of heart was attributed to a report from the city's Department of Housing and Economic Development, which indicated significant challenges to reusing the building for new purposes. As Grossman wrote, "Normally, the economic impact report on a proposed landmark is ordered up after a structure is give preliminary landmark designation and can take some time to complete."²⁰⁹ The report, however, was met with suspicion from preservationists, as it was prepared before being requested by

²⁰⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 2, 2012.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, April 11, 2013.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 2012.

the commission and presented on the same day as the decision over preliminary landmark designation.

Providing supporters with regular updates throughout the meeting, the Save Prentice coalition's Facebook page demonstrated noticeable outrage over the unusual sequence of events. The page administrators, after witnessing the effects of the report on the commission, opined: "Tough to tell difference between NU's website and City econ report - talking points all the same."²¹⁰ The Save Prentice coalition claimed that arguments made by the city's report were suspiciously similar to those in the university's report. This led the coalition and other preservationists to label the commission meeting a "show trial."²¹¹ Similarly, coalition members reported dissension within community groups represented at the hearing. According to the Save Prentice Facebook page, posted on the day of the meeting, "Shelley Gorson is a Streeterville resident who says SOAR—the neighborhood org—is split on the Prentice decision. Says Prentice process hasn't been open."²¹² Although SOAR recognized a minority opinion within its ranks, this statement appeared to contradict Mayor Rahm Emanuel's version of the discussions between the city and SOAR as transparent and democratic.

The debate over Prentice Women's Hospital, designed by Bertrand Goldberg, placed those who once argued most forcefully for demolition of older structures in favor of modernism and new construction, in the unique position of supporting preservation. In short, supporters of modernist architecture in the 1950s and 1960s tended to oppose most preservation because it meant a continuation with the past. The history of

²¹⁰ "Save Prentice Facebook page," Nov. 1, 2012, Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Save-Prentice/146981851986833>.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

modernism was further complicated by an association with urban redevelopment and renewal policies that led to widespread demolition of older structures and neighborhoods. According to historian David Hamer, “In the new urban landscape [of the 1950s and 1960s] the past was not only ignored, it was destroyed.”²¹³ Likewise, the preservationist movement was founded partly as a reaction to the modernist and Brutalist buildings of 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

The fight over Prentice became a local iteration of a larger national concern over mid-twentieth century structures. By the time groups such as Landmarks Illinois, Preservation Chicago, the Save Prentice Coalition, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation launched their campaign for Prentice, the preservation movement for modernist architecture had reached a crucial period in its development. Preservationist Michael Allen, a consultant to Landmarks Illinois, predicted the Prentice defeat could be remembered as modernist architecture’s “Penn Station Moment,” referencing the destruction of New York City’s Pennsylvania Station in 1963 that famously galvanized activists and served as a watershed moment for the preservation movement. He writes, “The controversy surrounding the demolition of Prentice, however, injected the preservation movement into an urban design discussion with a presence not seen in a long time.”²¹⁴ Prentice was a reflection of issues confronting cities across the United States, as citizens, governments, and property owners struggle over what buildings are worthy of saving.

Demolition of the building, which began in summer 2013, and the intense debate surrounding it are part of an ongoing national discussion over the merits and future of

²¹³ David Hamer, *History in Urban Places: The Historic Districts of the United States* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 13.

²¹⁴ Michael R. Allen, *Next City*, Oct 15, 2013.

modernist architecture. The discussion over Prentice occurred in conjunction with similar debates about the fate of other buildings of exposed concrete exteriors, including the J. Edgar Hoover Building, the Boston City Hall, and Paul Rudolph's Orange County Government Center. As such, those who hoped to save Prentice benefitted from a recent revival of interest in modernism among the public and architects. At the forefront of the conversation, Prentice reflected the ongoing anxieties in cities about such buildings. Preservationists have struggled to make the case to save buildings that the public has often been hesitant to embrace.

Associated with Brutalist megastructures of the 1970s, Prentice's concrete-clad exterior made it a difficult building to appreciate on aesthetic grounds. The building's clover-shaped structure presented Northwestern University with limited options for adaptability and reuse. The Prentice debate brought the term Brutalist into public architectural discourse, as it had arguably never been, and inspired a national curiosity about these buildings. Furthermore, Prentice's connection to a world renowned architect and its location in a city noted for its architectural prominence drew national attention to what might have otherwise been a local debate.

In Chicago's Streeterville neighborhood, part of Northwestern University's medical campus, the former Prentice Women's Hospital building appeared noticeably distinct relative to its neighboring buildings. The concrete façade and cloverleaf-shape design of the building, in which each "leaf" cantilevered out from a central core, distinguished it as a unique work of engineering and architectural form.²¹⁵ From 1975 to 2007, the Prentice building was the home of a women's hospital, primarily focused on

²¹⁵ Aaron Betsky, "Weirdness for Weirdness's Sake," *Architect*, August 6, 2012, <http://www.architectmagazine.com/historic-preservation/save-the-weirdness-of-prentice-hospital-for-weirdness-sake.aspx>

maternity care, and part of Northwestern University's medical facilities. It stood as a product of Chicago architect Bertrand Goldberg's philosophy about the social possibilities of architecture, applied to his other more famous and often more appreciated Chicago work, Marina City. *Architect* magazine writer Aaron Betsky described Prentice as "a building only an architect could love."²¹⁶

The preservation fight had its origins in 2002, when rumors circulated over Northwestern University's plans regarding a new medical facility. By 2007, the university had opened a new women's hospital, across the street, to replace the old Prentice. At this point, however, the university simply relocated the facilities and vacated the old building. Such plans had been in the works since 2001, when the university announced its desire to expand to a larger facility. At the time, Northwestern executives argued that Prentice, "with its 90 beds and maternity center, is at capacity, with about 7,500 deliveries project this year, nearly double those of a decade ago."²¹⁷ The new building was set to offer 117 obstetric beds and private rooms for new mothers and families. Even then, state health planners questioned the need for a new facility.²¹⁸ Nevertheless, by the time the new building opened six years later, speculation began to rise about the fate of old Prentice.

The inaction ended four years later when Northwestern University announced plans to demolish the old Prentice building and replace it with a new, state-of-the-art biomedical research facility. Though there had been indications about the possibility of a new facility for several years, Northwestern had not released any official position. The *Chicago Tribune* was among the first media outlets to begin reporting Northwestern's

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, Jan 7, 2001.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

demolition plans. This reporting, along with some of the first public comments from Northwestern, emerged in March 2011, two months prior to Mayor Rahm Emanuel's inauguration and, by coincidence, while the Art Institute of Chicago was hosting a major exhibition celebrating Goldberg's work. Northwestern University spokesman Al Cabbage, in an interview conducted that month with the *Chicago Tribune*, stated, "The university has looked at various alternatives including reuse of the facility and actually taking it down, and at this point, the university's plans are to take that building down and use that area for additional research facilities that would be constructed in the future."²¹⁹ At the time, the *Tribune* reported, "He [Cabbage] declined to say when the decision to tear down the building was made."²²⁰

By the time such plans were announced, local preservationists, sensing what was to come, had already begun preparing their strategy. Non-profit historic preservation groups mounted what would become a multi-faceted strategic battle, involving public relations, lobbying the city, and, eventually, legal means. Lisa DiChiera, Director of Advocacy and Jim Peters, then-president of the organization, carried out Landmarks Illinois's strategy. Among their first major steps were the release of a reuse study²²¹ and the placement of the building on their list of the Ten Most Endangered Historic Places.²²² As professional, experienced preservationists, these groups also recognized the role politics would play in such decisions and began meeting with Alderman Brendan Reilly of Chicago's 42nd Ward, which encompasses the downtown Streeterville neighborhood.

While the ultimate decision about whether to grant a demolition permit rested with the

²¹⁹ Al Cabbage, as quoted in Blair Kamin, *Chicago Tribune*, March 2011.

²²⁰ Ibid..

²²¹ "A New Use for a Modern Landmark: A Reuse Study for the Former Prentice Women's Hospital," Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, April 2011.

²²² "Ten Most Endangered Historic Places."

http://www.landmarks.org/ten_most_2012_prentice_womens_hospital.htm

mayor's office, gaining the support of aldermen in Chicago is crucial in any political battle, as they have significant power over their respective wards. While Alderman Reilly seemed initially sympathetic and expressed interest in the possibility of adaptive reuse of Prentice, he largely refrained from making any public statements about the issue.

As debate regarding the building's future occurred in meetings among representatives of the city, the university, preservationists, and the public, the mayor and the Commission on Chicago Landmarks repeatedly declined to publicly address the matter. The Landmarks Commission was originally scheduled to consider Prentice for landmark status during its July 2011 meeting, but ultimately decided to remove the item from their agenda. According to the *Tribune*, the commission explained "its lack of action by citing behind-the-scenes negotiations among the city, the university and interested groups."²²³ Indeed, because of the protections granted by such a decision, Prentice becoming a city landmark was at the core of preservationists' hopes and the essential to the building's survival.

The debate over Prentice reignited discussions in Chicago and the nation about the work of Bertrand Goldberg and other modernist architects of the 1960s and 1970s. River City and Marina City, both apartment complexes, the former in the downtown Loop and the latter directly across from the Loop along the Chicago River, represented departures for modernist architecture in their curvilinear design, as well as in their ambition. Both complexes were designed as "small cities," designed to host living complexes, as well as movie theaters and shopping. By the late 1960s, to some developers, Mies's steel-frame technique no longer seemed economically desirable. However, according to Miller, "Goldberg's curvilinear design—supported not at the

²²³ *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 4, 2012.

periphery but braced by the central core—multiplied the actual usable space without inflating the project’s cost beyond the middle-income range.”²²⁴

Historian Ross Miller identified Harry Weese, Walter Netsch, and Goldberg as among the most significant architects who began working outside of the framework established by Mies Van Der Rohe. Mies’ design of buildings such as the Federal Plaza and 860-880 North Lake Shore Drive dramatically reshaped the Chicago skyline, inspiring Mies-like structures such as Jacques Brownson’s design for Daley Plaza. Despite beginning his professional training under Mies at the German Bauhaus school of design, Goldberg, compared to Weese and Netsch, Miller argues, “made the strongest, most sustained anti-Miesian statement.”²²⁵ His major contributions to architecture, Marina City, completed in 1964, and River City, in 1986, represented obvious rebellions to the Mies order. The form of such buildings held the relationship of its inhabitants to one another as the essential design feature. According to Zoe Ryan, “By layering a variety of living, working, and leisure functions in a single structure, Goldberg hoped to create a new mode of integrated and intensively used urban space.”²²⁶

Much of Goldberg’s designs, including those he later applied to hospitals like Prentice, according to Alison Fisher, “most strongly established a dialogue with a range of utopian theorists and makers during the 1960s...”²²⁷ Although Marina City has become fairly widely embraced by architects, *Chicago Tribune* reporter John Kass, a vocal critic of the Prentice building, described Goldberg’s designs as “sad, like go-go

²²⁴ Ibid., 276.

²²⁵ Ibid., 274.

²²⁶ Zoe Ryan, “Introduction,” in *Bertrand Goldberg: Architecture of Invention*, ed. Zoe Ryan (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 13.

²²⁷ Alison Fisher, “Humanist Structures: Bertrand Goldberg Builds for Health Care,” in *Bertrand Goldberg: Architecture of Invention*, ed. Zoe Ryan (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 131.

boots or leisure suits of another age.”²²⁸ For preservationists, the Prentice fight became a quest to both save an important building and celebrate Goldberg’s legacy.

Marina City provided Goldberg with international fame and significant credibility as a working architect in Chicago, allowing his firm’s office to grow from a staff of ten when Marina City began to 150 by the mid-1970s.²²⁹ Much of his work was routinely discussed in many of the foremost architectural publications of the 1960s and 1970s. However, by the 1980s his reputation and importance faded as his work no longer seemed in vogue with the dominant styles of design, as architects shifted away from modernism to a more historicist, post-modern interest in exterior ornament. According to Elizabeth A. T. Smith:

“Key commissions for cultural and institutional buildings had failed to materialize; his vision for River City—a mixed-use urban plan and series of buildings on which he labored for more than fifteen years—was severely curtailed, and much of his practice was devoted to the design of hospital buildings and health care campuses that received little critical attention.”²³⁰

Goldberg’s work has, until recently, failed to receive significant academic treatment, as historians have revisited and reappraised the works of architects of the period, such as R. Buckminster Fuller, as part of a renewed interest in mid-twentieth century modernism.²³¹ A retrospective of his career at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2011 and the publication of a series of essays, *Bertrand Goldberg: Architect of Invention*, attempted to fill the void of decades of inattention. Smith argues Goldberg should be understood as both an upholder

²²⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, August 30, 2012.

²²⁹ Elizabeth A. T. Smith, “Space, Structure, Society: The Architecture of Bertrand Goldberg,” in *Bertrand Goldberg: Architecture of Invention*, ed. Zoe Ryan (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 39.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

of Miesian and Bauhaus principles, but also as an “expressionist” for his unique sculptural designs, placing him alongside Weese and Netsch.²³²

Bertrand Goldberg and Associates was chosen to design the hospital on July 3, 1969 and set to further develop ideas fostered in the architect’s earlier hospital commissions, including his first, the Elgin State Psychiatric Hospital in 1967. Completed in 1975, the twelve-story Prentice building is a clover-shaped, cantilevered building atop a more traditionally Miesian modernist glass-and-steel base. Goldberg’s design for Prentice was part of an international phase of what were called “megastructures,” which, according to Alison Fisher, “quickly became shorthand for any and all experimental or utopian vision of the future city including floating cities, plug-in cities, suspended cities, and walking cities.”²³³ In a 1971 *Chicago Tribune* review, the unveiled building plans, while called “convoluted,” were mostly praised for the innovative approach to healthcare.²³⁴

In designing Prentice, Goldberg attempted to create a truly functional space for patients and hospital staff. A 1976 issue of *Architectural Review* termed his unique approach “The Goldberg Effect,” highlighting the importance of Goldberg’s design of Prentice and other hospitals such as St. Joseph Hospital in Tacoma, Washington and St. Mary’s Hospital in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Goldberg, as demonstrated in his work, was interested in the relationship between “functional patterns and those of human interaction.”²³⁵ As such, Prentice was designed with the nurses’ station at the core of the structure and patients’ beds at the outlying region of the building, a plan formed by four

²³² Ibid., 19.

²³³ Fisher, 134.

²³⁴ *Chicago Tribune*, Jun 13, 1971.

²³⁵ “The Goldberg Effect: The Architect of Marina City Casts a Spell on Concrete to Enclose Health-Care Concepts,” *Architectural Review* (July 1976), 110.

intersecting circles that created the image of a four-leaf clover.²³⁶ Goldberg declared in 1973, “The whole form was designed to make kind of interesting counterpoint of vertical developments where it emerges from the shafts out into the shell form.”²³⁷

Part of Goldberg’s “utopian” vision for hospitals, as is apparent in the pods of the intersecting circles, aimed to create a more intimate relationship between nurses and patients. In addition, the relatively open floor plan of “the shell allows much more flexibility than would the typical post-and-beam structure” an aspect that has not been lost on preservationists.²³⁸ As a work of structural engineering, among the first to use computer programming, Prentice was declared “ingenious” by *Architectural Record*²³⁹ The building represented the work of a visionary architect who expanded the possibilities of hospital design.

Prentice’s aesthetic, however, often dominated conversations in the neighborhood and city. Although frequently used in the architecture of the 1960s and 1970s as an inexpensive building material, in many cases, the *Béton brut* concrete did age particularly well. In addition, as Llewellyn Hinkes-Jones writes, many were “slowly crumbling from wear and disrepair, ignored by communities that no longer want the burden of upkeep of a giant, lifeless rock.”²⁴⁰ Years of environmental effects, mostly caused by rain, caused these facades to stain. As such, they became unattractive relics of the 1960s and 1970s, a period which occupies a difficult time in American urban history.

²³⁶ Ibid., 112.

²³⁷ Goldberg interview.

²³⁸ “The Goldberg Effect,” 112.

²³⁹ Ibid., 112.

²⁴⁰ Hinkes-Jones, “The Case for Saving Ugly Buildings.”



Prentice Hospital's concrete exterior often made it a difficult building to appreciate on aesthetic grounds.

Indeed, much discussion, especially in some of the comments and letters to the *Chicago Tribune* from the public, surrounding Prentice has tended to focus on how Prentice looks. Even architectural critic Paul Goldberger of *Vanity Fair*, an advocate of preserving Prentice, called such buildings “not easy to love.”²⁴¹ The *Tribune* attempted to provide a voice for many of those who live in the Streeterville neighborhood, allowing community members to contribute to the newspaper's editorial pages. One resident called Prentice “an ugly old eyesore” and “not attractive from Day One,” while another called it “atrocious” and “unsightly.”²⁴² This latter resident's argument as particularly relevant, as he argued the building “might be an architecturally ‘significant’ building, that

²⁴¹ Paul Goldberger, “Paul Goldberger on the Fight to Save Chicago's Prentice Hospital,” *Vanity Fair*, August 2012.

²⁴² *Chicago Tribune*, September 10, 2012.

can't one simple fact: The building is ugly."²⁴³ Although praising Prentice, or at least recognizing it as "significant," he then argued for demolition purely on aesthetic grounds.

However, one should consider why architects, cities, and the public once supported modernist and Brutalist architecture. According to Hinkes-Jones, "After the Great Depression, a new building made of long, sleek slabs of bright concrete was a grand improvement over the crumbling wood and brick shacks of old houses."²⁴⁴ Indeed, styles and trends change often, and numerous buildings have been destroyed for failing to accommodate current tastes.

Preservationists, for much of the twentieth century, have centered much of their case on the building's representation of a particular type of architectural style and form of engineering or its association with an important architect. Preservationists and architects have argued that Brutalist buildings satisfy Criteria C for the National Register of Historic Places, specifically qualifying as having "distinctive design/construction techniques."²⁴⁵ Hinkes-Jones writes, "Even horrendously ugly and soulless abominations are part of our architectural heritage."²⁴⁶ Others argue that Brutalist buildings stand as examples of a particular era's urban ideals, "authoritatively civic" in their day, and as important parts of our built heritage, that "cities should be layered with the intentions of different eras."²⁴⁷ While historian Reyner Banham celebrated what he termed "New Brutalists" in the 1950s, referring to the work of British architects Peter and Alison Smithson, architectural historians of recent years, such as Robert Brueggemann, have

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Hinkes-Jones.

²⁴⁵ "How To Identify The Type Of Significance Of A Property," National Park Service.

²⁴⁶ Hinkes-Jones.

²⁴⁷ Michael Kubo, "Tough Love: In Defense of Brutalism," *Architect*, Aug 6, 2010, <http://www.architectmagazine.com/concrete-construction/tough-love-in-defense-of-brutalism.aspx>

questioned the usefulness of the Brutalist moniker.²⁴⁸ Rather, this descriptor has been prescribed by recent commentators upon buildings of the 1960s and 1970s with concrete exteriors, despite the fact that, in most cases, architects such as Goldberg did not refer to themselves as Brutalist and made no such effort to build within this definitive style.

Brutalist buildings carry the legacy of urban renewal policies in their form, scale, and association with projects of the 1960s and 1970s that resulted in the demolition of many older city neighborhoods. Large-scale urban renewal was increasingly rejected by federal, state, and municipal governments by the late 1970s and began to take on negative connotations. However, the process of rejecting modernism was gradual, as many architects still adhered to its principals. As John Gold writes, “The process of reappraisal established in the late 1960s and early 1970s would prove pervasive, much as many architects would have preferred to re-establish business as usual.”²⁴⁹ As such, the public seemed to turn against the established principles that guided architecture and planning in the post-war period before the rejection gained traction in architectural circles.

Chicago Magazine writer Whet Moser commented on the discrepancy between architecture that is appreciated by architects and by the public. In describing Prentice, he writes, “It’s beautiful, but it’s a beauty that’s hidden within the building itself. It’s a monument to engineering, in a form that’s seen as a monument to social engineering. ‘Ugly’ probably isn’t the right word for Prentice. It’s ‘weighted,’ for better or worse, as so much of that depends on who you are.”²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Robert Bruegmann, personal correspondence with the author, Jan 9, 2014.

²⁴⁹ John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954-1972* (London: Routledge, 2007), 288.

²⁵⁰ *Chicago Magazine*, Oct 12, 2012.

Architectural historian David Monteyne explored this issue by using Boston City Hall as a case study, a building famously praised by architects, but despised by much of the Boston public. Rather than the public simply “misunderstanding” concrete-based modernist buildings and failing to appreciate it, Monteyne borrows reception theory from cultural studies to argue “those outside of professional discourse interpret architecture in fundamentally different ways, through different lenses.”²⁵¹ Professional architects, he writes, view the building as a “monumental democratic space,” while the public tends to “take its view from political symbolism and the spatial sensibilities of quotidian use.”²⁵² Though his analysis focuses specifically on a building constructed for civic purposes, his insight is useful in understanding public opinions of architecture. Furthermore, that many residents of Streeterville, those who interact with it on a daily basis, disliked the building should be not dismissed.

Indeed, discussions of the aesthetic of concrete modernist buildings in the national press often centered on whether such buildings were attractive. Amidst the Prentice controversy, Llewellyn Hinkes-Jones published an article in the *Atlantic Cities* provocatively titled “The Case for Saving Ugly Buildings.” Hinkes-Jones worried of the haste at which buildings associated with Brutalism were dismissed or, in some cases, demolished because they did not appeal to current tastes in the twenty-first century. He writes of the “standard of *irreplaceability*” as the basis for much of preservation law, and warns against erasing an important period in architectural history. Furthermore, Hinkes-Jones writes, “Buildings aren't preserved based on relative maintenance costs or

²⁵¹ David Monteyne, “Boston City Hall and a History of Reception,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 65 (Nov 2011): 45.

²⁵² Ibid.

aesthetics but on the merits of originality and historic interest.”²⁵³ According to Hinkes-Jones, the fact that Prentice might have been considered “ugly” should be one of many considerations in discussing a building’s merits.



Preservationists argued Prentice’s cantilevered shell was among the many features that spoke to its structural importance.

The Landmarks Illinois Staff met some resistance from citizens who recognized Goldberg’s importance, but did not find Prentice to be of the same quality as his other work in this city. As DiChiera recalls, some asked her, “You have Marina City; why do need Prentice?”²⁵⁴ She and other colleagues quickly rejected the argument, citing the importance of having a large collection of Chicago’s native son’s contribution to modernism, citing Goldberg and Weese as the most noteworthy modernist architecture to hail from the city. DiChiera flippantly asked, “If you have two Van Goghs, you’re gonna

²⁵³ Hinkes-Jones.

²⁵⁴ Lisa DiChiera, interview with the author, Oct. 25, 2013.

throw one away?.”²⁵⁵ Rather, preservationists believed Goldberg’s connection to Chicago made it all the more important to save Prentice. In addition, as Goldberg became increasingly known in the 1970s for his innovative hospital design, DiChiera spoke of the necessity to have the only example of this work in Chicago.

In the notes for an interview conducted by Linda Legner for *Inland Architect* in October 1973, Bertrand Goldberg recalled, “Most of us who grew up in the early thirties took certain words out of our vocabulary which had been in the Beaux Arts system: ‘aesthetics,’ ‘beauty,’ all the great words.”²⁵⁶ He dismissed self-conscious aesthetics, but maintained “It isn’t that we are insensitive to proportion or contrast of material, or texture, and I suppose that in a philosophical schema for design you would call this broader field, aesthetics.”²⁵⁷ Rather, for Goldberg, concrete was a means to create particular form. When asked whether he would continue to build in concrete, Goldberg responded, “Yes. We have not found a way yet to use steel except very artificially in these forms.”²⁵⁸

DiChiera and the Landmarks Illinois staff believed the most effective strategy to save the building would be to avoid an aesthetically based argument, never using the term Brutalist to describe the building, preferring “modernist” instead.²⁵⁹ Rather, they focused on Prentice’s structural significance. According to DiChiera, the staff did not believe they could convince those who were already skeptics with a term that has tended to evoke

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Bertrand Goldberg, quoted in Linda Legner, “Transcript of interview with Bertrand Goldberg in preparation for *Inland Architect* article,” Transcript notes, Oct 21, 1973, Bertrand Goldberg Archive, Art Institute of Chicago.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ DiChiera, interview.

a negative response among much of the public since the 1980s.²⁶⁰ As the term has been mistakenly interpreted to mean “brutality,” the concrete forms are believed to be purposefully “harsh” and uninviting by their critics. According to DiChiera, “People are always going to be of the opinion that aesthetically the building is ugly.”²⁶¹ DiChiera reported talking to mothers who had given birth in the Old Prentice Hospital and hated their experience, thinking it was “dingy” and “not a nice setting.”²⁶²

Concrete as a building material has presented a unique set of problems for preservationists. Concrete was cost-efficient, evoked a “monumentality” desirable to civic institutions of the mid-twentieth century, and allowed architects like Goldberg to create expressive structural forms not as easily achieved with other materials. Hinkes-Jones writes, “That concrete could be poorly insulated, leak, and crack, eventually turning a sickly grey pallor, was a mere construction detail.”²⁶³ Indeed, the staining of concrete, often from decades of rain, further contributed to the view of Brutalist buildings as contributing to an aggressive and unattractive environment.

Nevertheless, a renewed interest in concrete as a building material in the early twenty-first century has benefited the case for saving these older structures. While some buildings, such as Rudolph’s Government Center have been less favorably received by the public, others, such as Louis Kahn’s Kimball Art Museum, have fared more favorably and have served as a reminder of the innovative possibilities for building in concrete.

Northwestern University, however, maintained as rationale for demolition the economic necessity of a new structure in place of the old Prentice. They argued that the

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² DiChiera, interview.

²⁶³ Hinkes-Jones, “The Case for Saving Ugly Buildings.”

old Prentice was no longer feasible for twenty-first century research needs. To expand their ever-growing medical research, the university intended to build a new state-of-the-art facility for their Feinberg School of Medicine, allowing proper space for their researchers to develop new advances in healthcare and provide over two thousand new full time jobs.²⁶⁴ According to Northwestern's official study, conducted by Jacobs Consultancy, Inc., Thornton-Tomasetti and Affiliated Engineers, renovation of the old Prentice building would have cost \$992 per net square feet, while new construction would cost \$888 per net square feet.

As he was designing a building with a specific function in mind, Goldberg felt, to some degree, limited. At the time of Prentice's completion, the architect complained of being "compelled to make excessive accommodation to the nursing functions in each bed room in our bedtower planning...this automatically determines room dimension which may or may not be related clearly to a visual form or structure."²⁶⁵ Goldberg, however, believed his floor plans were designed to allow sufficient space and reuse possibilities for future purposes. In a speech given at the newly completed hospital on May 23, 1974, he declared that his cantilevered concrete shells, "constructed for the first time in the world, provide immense space and flexibility unrestricted by conventional columns, to accommodate future changes in medical care without structural interference."²⁶⁶

Goldberg did not necessarily foresee the university wanting to use the building for non-hospital related functions. In *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America*, William Murtagh writes of the common difficulty of preserving buildings,

²⁶⁴ "Prentice – Stone Pavilion Evaluation," Northwestern University, May 2011.

²⁶⁵ Goldberg interview.

²⁶⁶ Speech by Bertrand Goldberg, Prentice Women's Hospital and Maternity Center, Northwestern University, May 23, 1974, Bertrand Goldberg Archive, Art Institute of Chicago.

such as churches or theaters, designed for particular purposes.²⁶⁷ While this problem is certainly not limited to modernist works, Prentice's cantilevered shells and floor plan limited its possibilities for reuse.

As they attempted to deemphasize aesthetics, DiChiera and Peters built their case around the building's structural significance, and how it could be beneficial for programming and economic needs. They often cited Goldberg's pioneering use of computers to achieve the desired clover shape. Preservationists believed it was a waste to throw it away, as reuse was economically feasible and the building was historically important.²⁶⁸ Landmarks Illinois emphasized a variety of options for repurposing Prentice, including using the building for the university's stated research needs, office space, classroom space, and one-two bedroom residences for nurses and doctors, as the cost of living in Streeterville was notably high. For DiChiera, converting Prentice to office space for medical personal, a core facility that would support the functions of the hospital and research center around it, would have been the ideal use of the space.²⁶⁹ Landmarks Illinois consulted three architectural firms to create reuse studies, including Vinci Hamp, Loebel Schlossman Hackl, and a third that remained anonymous, each with expertise that complimented the various reuse options favored by the organization. DiChiera and the architectural consultants believed the building's column-free interior would allow flexibility.

In a counter study conducted by the preservation group Landmarks Illinois, new construction would cost \$350-450 per gross square feet, compared to \$185-250 per gross

²⁶⁷ William Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 120.

²⁶⁸ DiChiera, interview.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

square feet for new lab renovation. The Landmarks Illinois study further laid out how renovations could be made for Northwestern's research needs and demonstrated how Prentice could be converted into office or retail space.²⁷⁰ Northwestern officials said that such additional space was not needed.

However, other economic concerns, aside from Northwestern and Landmarks Illinois's disputes over costs, were involved in deciding the future of the site. The debate over Prentice touched on some of the key dilemmas the preservation movement has confronted throughout its existence. Primarily, preserving pieces of the built environment in urban areas, at times, directly confronted the idea of a city as a center for economic growth. Cities, after all, must grow, and architecture is an art form that is supposed to be used by its inhabitants. Therefore, whether Prentice could be adapted became paramount to all sides.

Others have argued that because Prentice was designed specifically as a hospital, a function it no longer serves, the building has no further use. As one reporter wrote, "Nostalgia doesn't go far in hospitals, nor when you're setting out to construct a state-of-the-art medical research facility."²⁷¹ Once hospitals have served their purpose, people have a harder time understanding how they can be repurposed. According to DiChiera, "Hospitals innately, whether modernist or not, are vulnerable buildings."²⁷² Landmarks Illinois worked on preserving Cook County Hospital for fifteen years. DiChiera, however, repeatedly assured skeptics that the purpose of reuse was not to use the building as a hospital.

²⁷⁰ "A New Use for a Modern Landmark," Landmarks Illinois, April 2011.

²⁷¹ *Chicago Sun-Times*, Sept. 23, 2012.

²⁷² DiChiera, interview.

According to Northwestern’s website, the old Prentice did not have adequate space for the requirements of a modern research facility. In addition, according to the university’s assessment, the floors did not have the adequate height and, therefore, only every other floor could be used in a renovated building.²⁷³ Northwestern insisted that only a new building would provide the required floor room and height, as well as well as the opportunity for connection to surrounding buildings by bridge or tunnel. Indeed, floor-by-floor matching of a new structure with the surrounding buildings was deemed essential. Northwestern already has several buildings connected in this manner, which, as their website declares, would “improve the synergy among the researchers.”²⁷⁴

A “Preliminary Summary of Information” on Prentice was conducted by the staff of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and submitted at the commission’s November 1st meeting. The report noted that Prentice was “if not unique, exceptional in the history of structural engineering,” noted the “the special preservation concerns for buildings of this era.”²⁷⁵ Furthermore, the report highlighted similar arguments made by Northwestern regarding the difficulties in renovating the Prentice building. Because many modernist buildings of reinforced concrete were often constructed with “industrially produced materials,” which as described in the report, they “often have limited lifespans or require ongoing repair and replacement.” However, the report contended that the extent of restoration necessary for Prentice cannot be fully known at this time.

²⁷³ “Prentice – Stone Pavilion Evaluation.”

²⁷⁴ “Old Prentice Reuse Analysis,” Northwestern University, <http://www.northwestern.edu/fm/about/news-and-announcements/prenticereuse.html>

²⁷⁵ “Preliminary Summary of Information,” Commission on Chicago Landmarks, Nov 2012.

In an attempt to address such adaptive reuse concerns, Chicago-based architect Jeanne Gang, one of eighty architects, along with Frank Gehry and Tod Williams, to sign the petition to save Prentice, released a plan in October 2012, which she believed would make Prentice adaptable for twenty-first century research needs as well as preserve the building's structural integrity.²⁷⁶ Up to this point, preservationists had struggled with making a serious case for adaptive reuse of the building that met Northwestern's criteria.

The Landmarks Illinois study had suggested reuse as office or retail space, not as a research facility, a notion the university quickly rejected. Gang's solution was to build a space for research above the old Prentice building. *New York Times* reporter Michael Kimmelman praised Gang's proposal as a "third way that may not always get its due in preservation battles."²⁷⁷ According to the *Times* article, this plan would call for "600,000 square feet of new space inside a scalloped tower, rising to 680 feet."²⁷⁸ As expected, the plan received a lukewarm reception from Northwestern officials, who were intent on demolition as the only feasible solution. Gang's proposal received some support from preservationist groups like the National Trust and, as Kimmelman pointed out, an unnamed structural engineer, reportedly called it "practical and even economical."²⁷⁹

Proponents of preserving Prentice long rested their hopes on designating the building a Chicago landmark, a decision, which, if granted by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, would protect against demolition. Preservationists repeatedly pointed to the commission's established criteria for landmark designation as proof that

²⁷⁶ *New York Times*, Oct. 17, 2012.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Prentice qualified. They argued the first criterion: “Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States,” and the fourth: “Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship” applied most directly to Prentice.²⁸⁰ In the aforementioned letter, signed by eighty architects and sent to Mayor Rahm Emanuel in July 2012, Chicago architect Joe Antunovich argued that Prentice “exceeds the criteria for Chicago landmark designation.”²⁸¹ Antunovich cited Prentice’s contributions to the development of architecture and engineering as meeting landmark criteria.²⁸² Similarly, *Chicago Tribune* reporter Cheryl Kent argued that Prentice “meets three—arguable four—of the city’s seven criteria.”²⁸³

The decision over whether to grant Northwestern a demolition permit ultimately rested with Mayor Emanuel, long silent on the issue. The new mayor was placed in a difficult position, being keenly aware of Chicago’s architectural heritage and wanting to promote the city as a home of economic growth. Emanuel refused to take a public position as Northwestern and preservationists waged a large-scale public relations battle to sway citizens. In August 2012, Northwestern conducted a poll of 507 Chicago residents identified as likely voters, stating that seventy-two percent supported the university’s decision to demolish Prentice, a poll whose method and accuracy were quickly disputed by preservationists.²⁸⁴ The university also unleashed radio and alumni email campaigns to bolster support. However, the fact that the university was forced to

²⁸⁰ “Landmarks Ordinance,” Chicago Commission on City Landmarks.

²⁸¹ “Save Prentice Open Letter to Mayor Emanuel,” Joe Antunovich to Rahm Emanuel, July 25, 2012.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 24, 2012.

²⁸⁴ Northwestern University poll. Sept. 6, 2012.

<http://www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2012/08/poll-supports-research-center.html>

defend its decision and make a case for demolition is a relative sign of success for the modernist preservation movement.

What originated as a local debate quickly became a national concern. The preservationists, likewise, developed a multi-faceted public relations campaign in support of its cause, including a Save Prentice coalition Facebook page and various advertisements, online and in the print edition of national newspapers such as the *New York Times*. Christina Morris, the senior field officer in the National Trust's Chicago office, remarked, "This is definitely the most involved we have been in a Chicago site to my knowledge."²⁸⁵ Deeming it a site of national importance, the National Trust devoted significant time and energy to the debate. In highlighting their challenge, Morris said, "Prentice represents a larger threat to modern architecture, not just in Chicago but across the country."²⁸⁶ The National Trust saw saving Prentice as an essential component in establishing legitimacy for the case of preserving modernist architecture nationally.

Ownership and property rights, however, placed all parties in a difficult position. As a real estate debate, the Prentice case was placed at the center of a university's vision for the future and the degree to which it would be allowed to carry out such a plan. Northwestern repeatedly insisted Prentice's demolition was necessary to expand facilities to better serve as a leader in medical research innovation and an important Chicago economic institution. In arguing Northwestern's case, William Osborn, chairman of the university's board of trustees, said, "This is our property. We're trying to do the right thing for Chicago."²⁸⁷ "We're wanting to be a great corporate citizen," Osborn further

²⁸⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, Sep. 16, 2012.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

explained, “and it seems ironic that we’re getting push-back on that, particularly in these economic times.”²⁸⁸

Cheryl Kent, however, countered, “Northwestern is quick to list what it does for the city. But it overlooks what Chicago does for the university. Part of the reason Chicago is a desirable, beautiful place to live is because of its varied architecture.”²⁸⁹

Antunovich similarly wrote, in an allusion to the “Chicago School” of architecture, that Prentice “stands as a testament to the Chicago-led architectural innovation that set this city apart.”²⁹⁰ The city’s architectural heritage made the debate more contentious, to be sure, and such preservationist arguments were able to gain more traction in Chicago than in almost any other American city.

The mayor, Alderman Reilly, and the commission’s inaction ended, unsurprisingly, only days apart. In mid October, Alderman Brendan Reilly announced that, while “open to suggestions,” he would support Northwestern.²⁹¹ In addition, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks purposefully kept the building off of its agenda for more than a year. As Ron Grossman reported, “A [Save Prentice] coalition representative who attempted to speak at the last [August 2012] meeting was ruled out of order.”²⁹² With Prentice finally on the agenda for the next day’s commission meeting, Mayor Emanuel published an opinion piece in the October 31 *Chicago Tribune* arguing in favor of granting Northwestern a demolition permit. While Emanuel’s position did not surprise many closely following the case, the article was seen as a crucial setback for

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ *Chicago Tribune*, Aug 24, 2012.

²⁹⁰ Joe Antunovich to Rahm Emanuel, July 25, 2012.

²⁹¹ *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 16, 2012.

²⁹² Ibid., Sep. 4, 2012.

preservationists. As an NPR reporter opined, “In Chicago, that [support or lack thereof from the mayor] usually means the debate is over.”²⁹³

The mayor’s article highlighted his attempts to include the interests of all parties in his decision, noticeably mentioning the role of community members and neighborhood groups. Furthermore, Emanuel mentioned the development of the neighborhood to be among his primary concerns, citing his pushing Northwestern to preserve its other historic properties, including the Montgomery Ward, Levy Mayer, and Wieboldt buildings. Although it was not clear in the letter which groups in particular he was referencing, the Streeterville Organization of Active Residents (SOAR), formed in 1975 to represent the interests of the neighborhood’s residents, played the most active community role in discussions over Prentice.

As Northwestern is embedded in the Streeterville community, the relationship between SOAR and the university has often rested on mutual interests and cooperation. In their official public statement, released on May 31, 2011, SOAR declared its support for the university’s demolition plans, on the condition that Northwestern “work cooperatively with Alderman Brendan Reilly and SOAR to design an acceptable, temporary use for the cleared site that will provide interim benefits to the neighborhood.”²⁹⁴ However, divisions within their organization were noted regarding their position, recognizing “a minority opinion among SOAR’s leadership and membership at large for preserving the structure.”²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Edward Lifson, “A Gem Cast Off Chicago’s Architectural Crown,” *NPR*, Nov. 25, 2012.

²⁹⁴ “SOAR Statement on Former Prentice Hospital,” Streeterville Organization of Active Residents, May 31, 2011.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

The position statement referenced SOAR's "Streeterville Neighborhood Plan" of 2005, in which the organization decided not to include Prentice among the neighborhood buildings it would support for landmark designation. According to then-Vice President of SOAR Brian Hopkins, discussions between the university and SOAR over which buildings would be included on the list became a "bare knuckles policy fight."²⁹⁶ The alderman commissioned the plan, raising money and hiring urban planners. Northwestern had supported SOAR's involvement in preserving the River East Art Center, 4th Presbyterian Church, and Lake Shore Athletic Club. However, according to Hopkins, Northwestern "tipped their hand" when talking about historic structures, and Prentice was mentioned early in the negotiations. As early as 2005, if one were "reading between the lines," Hopkins stated, the university was considering demolition. Toward the end, Hopkins remembers, Northwestern was a "little heavy-handed" and threatened to revoke final consent of the plan unless Prentice was removed.²⁹⁷ Since only one opportunity to vote was scheduled for the final document, some SOAR members were upset and, according to Hopkins, "never forgot" this decision.²⁹⁸

When Northwestern made public and commenced with plans to demolish Prentice in early 2011, SOAR returned to the discussion, with Hopkins as the group's president. According to Hopkins, the university, despite having shown a willingness to compromise or mitigate with SOAR in the past, "played hardball" where Prentice was concerned.²⁹⁹ In early 2011, SOAR tried more subtly with senior leadership to save Prentice, but "came

²⁹⁶ Brian Hopkins, interview with the author, Nov 18, 2013.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

away satisfied” that the university was not interested in alternatives.³⁰⁰ For Hopkins, Northwestern’s role in the community was a major source of consideration in his personal vote.

Although Hopkins believed Prentice was a significant building and could see the argument for historic preservation, he did not think it was among the better examples of Goldberg’s work. Hopkins stated, “Not everything this man did is brilliant.”³⁰¹ In addition, the aesthetics “didn’t inspire that kind of ‘chain myself to the bulldozer’ thing” as other preservation fights in which he had been involved. The “tie breaker” for Hopkins was the university’s strong feelings on the subject. Although Prentice “wasn’t the type of building that I personally felt that type of affinity for,” he said, Hopkins would have supported the decision if the majority of SOAR members had advocated saving Prentice. Despite suspicion to the controversy among some board members, Hopkins maintains he was not “burning with desire to demolish.”³⁰²

At their monthly meeting in May 2011, the SOAR Board of Directors voted in favor of supporting the university’s demolition plans. Nine voted to oppose landmark status for Prentice; five voted in favor of landmark status; three voted to take a neutral position; and two abstained from voting. Hopkins did not release the names of voters’ positions, to show unity to the public. The debate process involved presentations to SOAR’s Real Estate Committee in September, by preservationists and a university representative. Landmarks Illinois presented their reuse studies and Ronald Naylor, associate vice president of facilities management at Northwestern, presented the university’s study. No representative from the alderman’s office, however, was

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

present.³⁰³ Hopkins also recalls two open forums that were open to the neighborhood, not just SOAR members.

Despite Hopkins' assertion that "everybody was heard, multiple times,"³⁰⁴ SOAR member Shelley Gorson became critical of the process led by Northwestern and SOAR. Gorson was upset at what she saw a disingenuous process. While the board voted, Gorson complained that SOAR leadership did not act impartially. "Everybody knew they were on Northwestern's side," she stated.³⁰⁵ She believed SOAR's efforts to educate the community were inadequate. Gorson would have preferred that SOAR neutral, as an "impartial advocate for our community," as several community members wanted to save Prentice.³⁰⁶

Instead, she believed, SOAR took an advocacy role against saving Prentice. In her letter to the *Skyline* newspaper on January 4, 2012, Gorson voiced her displeasure, declaring, "In order to be a true community leader, SOAR should at least acknowledge that Prentice is a building of enormous architectural importance; and that, controversial as it may be, there are many who live in Streeterville who wish to save it."³⁰⁷ At one point, Gorson threatened not to renew her membership with the community group over her concerns. Gorson decided against leaving SOAR and was asked to be part of a new Preservation Task Force, part of SOAR's Real Estate Committee, choosing, in her words, to be "part of solution."³⁰⁸ Since its conception, the task force has submitted landmark designation for three neo-Gothic buildings owned by the university, those Emanuel referenced in his op-ed as a concession to preservationists.

³⁰³ Shelley Gorson, interview with the author, Nov 18, 2013.

³⁰⁴ Hopkins, interview.

³⁰⁵ Gorson, interview.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Shelley Gorson, *Skyline*, Jan 4, 2012.

³⁰⁸ Gorson, interview.

When the Commission on City Landmarks finally voted on Prentice on November 1, the process was intensely scrutinized by preservationists and members of the press. The only commissioner to cast the dissenting vote was Christopher Reed, a professor emeritus of American history at Roosevelt University, who told the *Tribune*, “I was disgusted. The process was hijacked by City Hall.”³⁰⁹ Two weeks later, however, Circuit Judge Neil Cohen granted a temporary stay on the commission’s second decision, restoring Prentice’s preliminary landmark status. The decision came as a result of a lawsuit filed by the National Trust and Landmarks Illinois, charging the commission with presiding over “an unprecedented process with a predetermined outcome.”³¹⁰ According to DiChiera, Landmarks Illinois’s goal was not necessarily to obtain landmark status for the building, but to demonstrate that it could be reused and, that in order to, she said, “get some teeth into the game,” the organization felt they had to go through the lawsuit process.³¹¹

Judge Cohen, however, according to Grossman, “emphasized he was not rendering judgment on the larger issue of whether proper procedure was followed but simply giving the court time to hear argument from both sides,” with arguments scheduled for January 2013.³¹² Under a ruling by the Illinois Supreme Court, Judge Cohen could not overrule the commission’s decision entirely and grant permanent protection of the building. Mayor Emanuel dismissed the judge’s decision and reiterated the transparency of the landmarking process.

³⁰⁹ Christopher Reed, in *Chicago Tribune*, April 11, 2013.

³¹⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 15, 2012.

³¹¹ DiChiera, interview.

³¹² *Ibid.*

At the court hearing, Cohen gave preservationists thirty days to amend their lawsuit. The commission reconvened on February 7 to dispel criticism of what was deemed a flawed process, but a unanimous vote again, after three hours of testimony, denied the building landmark status. On February 11, the National Trust and Landmarks Illinois submitted their revised suit to call for a new commission hearing and for the commission to only consider Prentice's landmark eligibility on grounds of its meeting the city's landmark criteria, and not address economic issues. Just days later, on February 14, aware that they had exhausted their options following the second fatal commission vote, preservationists reluctantly dropped their lawsuit, clearing the way for demolition.

Meanwhile, the Chicago Architecture Foundation hosted a design competition, entitled "Reconsidering an Icon: Creative Conversations about Prentice Women's Hospital," seeking adaptive reuse proposals from architects across the country. While labeling Prentice "an iconic work of modernism," CAF offered no public position on the debate, as the organization serves primarily as a public forum for architectural issues, rather than as a preservation group.³¹³ Instead, the organization hosted panel discussions on Prentice that featured a variety of prominent architects and historians, as well as an exhibition on Goldberg and his design for the hospital, in the hopes of raising awareness about the role of modernism in the makeup of the built environment.

The design competition, co-sponsored by the Chicago Architectural Club, received seventy-one international entries. The winning entry, titled "The buildings are sleeping, you should go and wake them up, she says" and designed by Cyril Marsollier and Wallo Villacorta, featured a new building with a glass curtain wall that would

³¹³ "Reconsidering an Icon Competition Winners," Chicago Architecture Foundation, Aug 2012, www.architecture.org/reconsidering-an-icon-competition-winners

consume half of the old Prentice building, which would become a museum.³¹⁴ The reflection from the old building would create the illusion of the full, original building. However, the mayor's decision and the Landmarks Commission's votes rendered the competition moot, and complicated legal developments meant Chicago courts would ultimately decide Prentice's fate.

In the wake of defeat, Christina Morris told the *Tribune* on February 14, "Even though we're disappointed the building wasn't granted landmark status, we think some good things have come of it. Press coverage has raised awareness of Bertrand Goldberg's legacy and it started an incredible discussion of the importance of modern architecture across the country."³¹⁵ While the fight had ended, preservationists were encouraged by the organized effort and public response as they looked forward to future efforts.

As it followed a high-profile preservation fight, the design selection for what would replace the old Prentice was treated with significant scrutiny by city and national press. Indeed, the stakes were high, as the university had built their case for demolition on the promise of a piece of architecture that could rival Goldberg's. Northwestern announced three finalists for the new facility that would replace the old Prentice in November 2013. Plans for the new site at 303 E. Superior St. drew entries from Goettsch Partners in Chicago and Ballinger in Philadelphia; Perkins & Will in Chicago; and Adrian Smith & Gordon Gill Architecture in Chicago and Payette in Boston.

During the weekend of November 7 through November 12, the Streeterville community hosted an Artisan Market in the neighborhood. According to Northwestern

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Christina Morris, quoted in *Chicago Tribune*, Feb 14, 2013.

spokesman Al Cabbage, visitors were provided the opportunity to fill out forms to make “comments” on their design choice.³¹⁶ As one of the city’s concessions to Northwestern for allowing demolition, Alderman Reilly convinced the university to display the finalists for community members to fill out ballots to vote on their favorite. Gorson attended the market, but believed it was “beneath” her to fill out a form, as she did not believe the university was genuinely concerned about community input.³¹⁷ As she declared “I don’t really care which one they pick.”³¹⁸



Scaffolding was placed at Prentice’s Miesian base as demolition began in mid-2013.

When Perkins & Will were announced as the competition winners in December 2013, Chicago architecture critic Lee Bey wrote, with the base of their plan to be built in phase one and a sleek tower in phase two, “The glassy, angular facade in the first phase

³¹⁶ *Chicago* magazine, Nov. 7, 2013.

³¹⁷ Gorson, interview.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

holds a lot of promise — far as one can tell with renderings, at least. It looks like a building the city could live with if the second phase winds up not getting built.”³¹⁹ Ralph Johnson, design director at Perkins and Will, was noticeably absent from the letter signed by eighty architects to save the old Prentice. According to Johnson, "The reason I didn't sign it is it's a very complicated issue. It's a very landlocked site that the university wanted to build a lab space on, and there really weren't any alternative sites. It really couldn't be modified because of its shape."³²⁰

As demolition proceeded in early 2014, it was too early to predict the full impact of the struggle over Prentice Hospital on the modernist preservation movement's larger cause. While the building's fate was assured, preservationists took comfort in the fact that such a long, publicized fight provided the opportunity for their arguments to reach a larger audience. As DiChiera stated, "It stood longer than anyone ever thought it would stand."³²¹ Prentice was one among several modernist, or "Brutalist," buildings that captured the public's attention in the early 2010s, providing the preservation movement to save these midcentury structures momentum on a national scale. The Prentice Hospital case reveals the ongoing tension within cities over the future of modernist architecture, as discussions attempt familiar mediations between progress and preservation. In addition, Chicago's rich architectural heritage have assured that such dilemmas would be all the more difficult to resolve. As future cases unfold, the debate over modernist architecture, aided by a preservation rationale more clearly developed in recent years, has moved to the forefront of public discourse about the future of cities.

³¹⁹ Lee Bey, *WBEZ.org*, Dec 9, 2013.

³²⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, Dec 7, 2013.

³²¹ DiChiera, interview.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The threat to modernist buildings increasingly dominated the caseloads of preservation groups in the twenty-first century. The UIC campus, the Michael Reese Hospital, and Prentice Women's Hospital serve to demonstrate the complex series of issues involved in arguing for preserving modernist architecture. Indeed, many other cases began to appear in the Chicago and national press in the 2010s, as the problem seemed to garner more public attention than in previous years. Preservation Chicago's "Chicago Seven" list and Landmarks Illinois's "Ten Most Endangered" list were more frequently comprised of modernist architecture the organization hoped to save.

The modernist preservation movement developed in a period in which the public began to reevaluate modernist buildings. Such buildings, for much of the 1980s and 1990s, were often rejected as outdated, not aesthetically pleasing, or associated with the negative aspects of urban renewal. Indeed, modernist works' association with urban renewal often added a politicized element. Preservation groups in Chicago, reflecting similar ideas and impulses within the national movement, aimed to build a rationale for modernism's historic significance as representing a unique period for architecture and design. Such groups warned against demolishing modernist and Brutalist buildings for failing to accommodate twenty-first century tastes.

In addition, the structural forms modernist buildings took made reuse a difficult prospect for property owners. Buildings such as hospitals, theaters, and churches, constructed for specific original purposes, required imaginative, but not always convincing, proposals from preservationists. Unique floor plans and sculptural interior and exterior features made adaptation options for contemporary needs limited. Cracks, leaks, and weather-related staining also made these buildings expensive to maintain. Preservationists, however, argued reuse was more realistic than property owners were willing to admit.

Some modernist buildings in Chicago were easier to make the case for and save. Those associated with Mies Van Der Rohe, and architects of what Franz Schulze called the “Second School of Chicago Architecture,” are recognized as important pieces of the city’s built environment. Mies’ Federal Plaza and 860-880 North Lake Shore Drive were preserved relatively unaltered from their original design. Goldberg’s Marina City also survived as a complex of condominiums and was often celebrated in ways Prentice was not. Likewise, Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill’s Inland Steel Building was renovated for modern needs as an office complex.

Other buildings of the 1950s and 1960s often filled the pages of Chicago publications, demonstrating the extent of the concerns facing cities in the coming years. South Shore High School opened 1969, “once visionary, now obsolete,” was demolished in late 2011 to make way for a new school.³²² The Purple Hotel, built in 1960 and deteriorating significantly since its 2007 closure, in the near north Chicago suburb of Lincolnwood, was to be demolished to make way for a new central business district for area. The case demonstrated the growth of preservation issues extending from Chicago

³²² *WBEZ.org*, Jan 3, 2011.

proper to the suburbs. The State Bank of Clearing, completed in 1967, on West 63rd Street, marked another instance when the work of a famous architect from Chicago, Harry Weese, came within the purview of preservation groups, appearing on Preservation Chicago's "Chicago Seven" list in 2013.

The challenges to saving buildings of the recent past also began expanding to post-modern architecture. In January 2014, the Portland Building, designed by Michael Graves in 1982, became one of the first post-modern buildings to become the subject of national preservation discussions. The title of an *Atlantic Cities* article asked, "Should Portland save a building it really, really hates?" The article highlighted the larger dilemma facing cities and the public about buildings that are no longer desirable to the public that use or live among them. As Mark Byrnes wrote, while "the Portland Building's incredibly playful, attention-demanding facade represents what 1980s America wanted out of its architecture...like every other style that came before it, it too lost favor with time."³²³

The fate of modernist, and, eventually, post-modernist, buildings became an important source of debate among city leaders and preservationists in the twenty-first century. Through the battles over buildings such as the UIC campus, Michael Reese Hospital, and Prentice Hospital, preservationist organizations in Chicago, for their part, built substantial networks of non-profit groups and concerned citizens dedicated to the task of saving such buildings. As urban areas such as Chicago grew and the demand for new construction continued, addressing the role of aging twentieth-century structures,

³²³ Mark Byrnes, "Should Portland Save a Building it Really, Really Hates?," *The Atlantic Cities*, Jan 8, 2014.

which were once intended to be the symbols of modernity and progress, was part a on-going dialogue about purpose of architecture in cities.

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