



Brutalism embodied a yearning for architecture as formidable as mountains and as malleable as earth. The architects associated with Brutalism envied the primal authority of the ground, even as they admired the power of machines and the fecundity of popular culture. If Brutalism asserted the power of architects and industry to manipulate raw materials, it also insinuated a deep closeness with the earth that furnished those materials. With clay-like plasticity, ferro-concrete buildings posed as landscape elements as well as industrial objects.

Paul Rudolph's Yale School of Art and Architecture presents itself as a sensuously modeled earthwork. The building swells up from somewhere beneath the street like a monumental butte, crevassed but monolithic, as if molded by a surge of geotectonic energy. The exposed aggregate looks fuzzy from afar but sparkles up close. Embedded with colorful bits of shell, the concrete walls reinterpret the baroque *coquillage* grotto. This glittering, richly worked aspect deviates from the Brutalist preference for materials "as-found." From the street, an engulfing slot canyon entrance uncorks into a cavernous concrete interior defined by endlessly stepping terraces. Floating platforms and hidden nooks coalesce around huge double-height courts. These central crit spaces pool social activity like garden amphitheatres, while secret balconies and penthouse suites function like secluded pavilions.

Reyner Banham identified "an intuitive sense of topology"¹ in the Smithsons' work, which was the seed of Brutalism. "Qualities of penetration, circulation,

inside and out,"² he observed, overshadowed compositional geometry. The same could be said of landscape gardens of the eighteenth century, which dispensed with two-dimensional surface geometries in favor of variegated contours and meandering movement. Just as Piranesi and various landscape theorists found that beauty could be trumped by the terrible pleasure of the sublime in encounters with the overpowering forces of nature and time, Brutalism, according to Banham, sought to provoke rather than to please the senses.³

In Banham's London, the intricate piles of concrete known as Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Hayward Gallery at Southbank Centre—designed in part by members of Archigram in the mid-1960s—form a topsy-turvy rock garden. The real purpose of the quirky topology is not the earnest expression of building systems but a playful invitation to romp around, through, over, and under the structures. Multilevel terraces and serpentine paths wrap the buildings like the tortuous promenades of a classical Chinese garden. And the concrete undercroft of QEH, embellished with the cave drawings of our time, is favored by those most attuned to urban topology: skateboarders.

Topological sensibilities in architecture outlived Brutalism by a long shot. Today, innumerable mound-buildings and ramp-crossed atriums evoke both the technological and the terrestrial, like high-tech elaborations of the ground. Architecture is still smitten with landscape envy.

1-Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism," *Architectural Review* 118 (Dec. 1955), 361.

2-*Ibid.*, 361.

3-*Ibid.*, 358.