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Protecting Postmodern Historicism: Identification, Evaluation, and Prescriptions for Preeminent Sites

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Abstract
Just as architectural history traditionally takes the form of a march of styles, so too do preservationists repeatedly campaign to save seminal works of an architectural manner several decades after its period of prominence. This is currently happening with New Brutalism and given its age and current unpopularity will likely soon befall postmodern historicism. In hopes of preventing the loss of any of the manner’s preeminent works, this study provides professionals with a framework for evaluating the significance of postmodern historicist designs in relation to one another. Through this, the limited resources required for large-scale preservation campaigns can be correctly dedicated to the most emblematic sites. Three case studies demonstrate the application of these criteria and an extended look at recent preservation campaigns provides lessons in how to best proactively preserve unpopular sites. It has repeatedly been shown that tastes change, but seminal works of a style or manner are often lost before this occurs. Through creating a model for proactive preservation of postmodern historicism, this study seeks to ensure none of the manner’s most valuable sites are lost.

Keywords
recent past, charles w. moore, robert venturi, proactive preservation, advocacy

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PROTECTING POSTMODERN HISTORICISM: IDENTIFICATION, EVALUATION, AND PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PREEMINENT SITES

Jonathan Vimr

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To my family for all they have done for me (there’s far too much to name) and to all the friends, coaches, and instructors that have helped along the way.
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1 Introduction

On May third, 2012, New York’s Orange County Legislature voted 11-10 against a resolution that would have resulted in the demolition of Paul Rudolph’s Orange County Government Center (1970, Fig. 1).¹ This narrow escape prevented what would have otherwise been the loss of a seminal work of what is often termed New Brutalism (the Orange County Government Center is perhaps better described as expressionist, but is most commonly referred to as Brutalist). Popular from the end of the 1950s through 1975, New Brutalism was largely employed for civic and institutional structures and was often characterized by exposed, rough concrete and stiff geometric patterns.

Like Rudolph’s Government Center, many of the most significant works of the style are, if not already facing demolition, in a precarious position. Despite being landmarked by the D.C Historic Preservation Review Board, Araldo Cossuta’s Third Church of Christ, Scientist (1971, Fig. 2) has been slated for demolition ever since the Mayor’s Agent overturned the designation in 2009.² Northwestern University was given approval to demolish Bertrand Goldberg’s Prentice Women’s Hospital (1974, Fig. 3) two hours after it was locally landmarked and the Minneapolis city council has commissioned a dramatic redesign of M. Paul Friedberg’s Peavy Plaza (1975, Fig. 4).³ The debate over

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Boston’s City Hall (1968, Fig. 5) has existed since its inception, with serious concerns over its destruction beginning in 2006. Then and current Mayor, Thomas Menino, has long expressed his dissatisfaction with the structure and has considered a number of plans to demolish and redevelop the site or simply move the local government elsewhere, thus leaving the building with an uncertain future. Though preservationists have made numerous efforts against this, the fact that City Hall is currently extant is in large part a result of the economic recession.4

The various battles concerning these projects have illuminated several facts: historic rehabilitation tax credits are essential for any party hoping to save the buildings; local designation is the most substantive form of protection but can be easily enough overturned; and though private citizens as well as a growing contingent of prominent architects defend the projects, the general populace—including the ever-important local officials and institutions—tend to abhor them. Stylistic preferences change and Brutalism will likely someday be held in a different light, but the seminal works of the style must remain standing in order to see that day.

While New Brutalism was one of the first cases of high-style American architecture distancing itself from the drab international modernism that had become ubiquitous in urban areas, what would later be termed postmodern architecture began its slow rise to prominence in the 1960s. Practicing an architecture that admitted and expressed its historical influences while

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incorporating communicative signs as a primary feature, Robert Venturi was designing works in a postmodern style well before his transcendent Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture was released in 1966. While he and his associates would never call themselves postmodern architects—as Denise Scott Brown wryly put it in 1983: “Marx never claimed to be a Marxist”—Venturi’s writings and designs in the 60s and early 70s served as a primary influence for other architects that began to embrace and adapt his ideas to their own.⁵ Communicating multiple levels of meaning and representing historical forms in novel expressions, the earliest examples formed what Robert Stern in 1977 described as the historicist trend of postmodern architecture.⁶ Kate Nesbitt’s widely accepted, and that which is used in this thesis, term of “postmodern historicism” (alternatively, and insufficiently, referred to as postmodern classicism or simply postmodernism) for this style stems from this and other observations made in Stern’s article.⁷ Led by luminaries like Stern, Michael Graves, Charles W. Moore, Philip Johnson, and Venturi and Scott Brown, postmodern historicism had become the style in American architecture by the end of the 1970s and would retain this title through most of the 1980s.

Briefly contemporary with and following New Brutalism as the premier high style architecture practiced in the United States, postmodern historicism is similarly unpopular in today’s world (though without even the small support group of prominent architects enjoyed by New Brutalism). Largely due to the

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fact that many of the most significant works of the style are younger than those of New Brutalism, there have not yet been any prominent preservation battles over works of postmodern historicism, but it can safely be viewed as the next category of endangered high style architecture. Just as traditional American architectural history follows a ‘march of styles,’ preservation seems to follow a march of threatened styles some decades following their popularity. This has been seen with Victorian, Art Deco, much of Modernist, and now New Brutalist architecture. Given its current unpopularity there is no reason to believe postmodern historicism will prove an exception.

All too often the field of historic preservation and its practitioners are reactionary. There are a multitude of good reasons why this is the case (chief among these being that those in the field are overworked and underfunded and there is poor collaboration between government officials and community advocates), but it is common knowledge that preservation efforts are not organized until a structure or site is already near its end. As a result of this many prominent works of a given style are lost before preservationists either find adequate means of protection or choose to focus on its protection. In order to prevent the loss of seminal works of postmodern historicism, this thesis seeks to identify and evaluate these sites while to some extent prescribing means of protection through an examination of the battles over New Brutalism. While lessons can be learned from preservation efforts surrounding any style, that of New Brutalism is the most applicable as postmodern historicism was to some extent its contemporary and battles over New Brutalism are occurring now as opposed to ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. These ongoing preservation
campaigns for works of New Brutalism possess the most value as the organizations involved on either side, the arguments being made, and the cultural, economic, and temporal contexts in which they are occurring are the most similar to those that will be faced by those preserving postmodern historicism. Lessons learned from preservation efforts of the 1960s—or for that matter the 1990s—lack the applicability of those occurring over the last several years.

Though this thesis will be grounded in and cover the familiar ground of architectural history, its intent is to represent theory. Theory at least inasmuch as Kate Nesbitt uses it in the introduction to the 1996 compilation *Theorizing A New Agenda For Architecture*: “Theory differs from these activities [architectural history and criticism] in that it *poses alternative solutions* based on observations of the current state of the discipline, or offers new thought paradigms for approaching the issues.”8 This is of course not to say that those in the field have never sought to be proactive as opposed to reactionary, assuming as much would be naïve, but if such efforts have occurred they have been of insufficient scale or effectiveness to be noteworthy (it is essential to note that, while successful, prominent campaigns like that for Mount Vernon were nonetheless reactionary). This statement further operates under the notion that local landmarking as a permanent protection is no guarantee, as has repeatedly been shown through exceptions granted and other legal/political machinations. This thesis seeks to provide readers with an understanding of how to identify postmodern historicism’s most significant sites, to establish criteria for reviewing

8 Nesbitt, Introduction to *Theorizing A New Agenda*, 16.
postmodern historicist architecture moving forward, and give perspective on the best methods of saving sites held in poor regard by the general populace, civic officials, and institutions. The threat faced by a number of these sites is very real; the overarching goal of this text is to insure that none of most significant works of postmodern historicism’s need be lost in order to mobilize preservation professionals.

Further, while it is true that scholars much more learned than myself have been discussing these sites in one form or another for decades, these scholars have been practitioners, historians and the like discussing how postmodern historicism developed, what shape(s) it took, and its impact in the broad scope of American architectural history. While this thesis covers some of this ground, it explicitly comes at these seminal sites from the perspective of preservation. The aims are for more than historical exposition, rather this thesis seeks to establish measured, well thought-out criteria that can be used to evaluate and identify the most important works of the style’s foremost designers. In doing so, the resources that have proven to be so crucial in battles over works of New Brutalism and other styles before it can be correctly applied to preserving the highest priority works of postmodern historicism before they are demolished and/or placed in severely precarious positions. The topic is particularly important now as it falls within a narrow window before these works become threatened and while many of the prominent figures behind postmodern historicism are alive.

This thesis capitalizes on this window as it is informed through discussions with some of these figures, site visits, and the consultation of
secondary, and to a lesser extent primary, sources written at postmodern historicism’s beginning, throughout its heyday and shortly thereafter, and more recent analyses; Chapter 2 discusses these sources in greater detail. While this research helps in the creation of the brief historical survey of postmodern historicism seen in Chapter 3, its primary intent is to inform the evaluative criteria detailed and established in Chapter 4. Though a brief summary of the style’s development is vital for the uninformed and to provide context for the arguments later discussed, this thesis limits its scope as the style’s history has been discussed in great detail in many of the texts forming this thesis’ bibliography. Rote regurgitation is unnecessary and unwarranted. In order to form evaluative criteria, however, it is essential to consult each of these sources as it is through them that one can coalesce the defining characteristics of the style. One can only truly assess what characteristics define postmodern historicism and the most emblematic works of the style through writings from those who first discussed the style, to those in the 1980s and 1990s who sought to better define its attributes and significance, to contemporary authors analyzing the style with some degree of historical perspective.

Developing out of these criteria, Chapters 5 features the identification and evaluation of three of the most seminal works of postmodern historicism. Covering a design from each of the style’s three most important designers: Venturi, Moore, and Graves, each of these sites is in need of immediate attention from those in the field of preservation. Chapter 6 follows these case studies with a discussion of preservation battles over works of New Brutalism and the applicable lessons learned for postmodern historicism.
While mentioned above, it bears restating: there is a pervading notion held by the general public and in the field of preservation that ‘somebody will take care of it;’ that, particularly as it pertains to prominent sites of a given style, some organization or some steward is looking over a site and will prevent its destruction. While this is fortunately true on occasion, the demolition notices and approvals applied to work after work in the last decade have proved this to not be the case far too often. Through the identification and evaluation of postmodern historicism’s most significant sites and prescriptions for proactive protection, this thesis seeks to create a new model for the field by providing the means to ensure that none of the style’s most significant works need be lost in order to mobilize effective preservation efforts.


2 Literature Review

The preeminent high style architecture in America for over a decade, postmodern historicism was widely practiced but never uniformly understood. There were certain characteristics accepted as central to the style, but the origins, intentions, and significance of the style were and have never been codified. As a result of this scholars and practitioners alike have been writing about not just postmodern historicism’s history, but what it all meant since its inception. This literature review considers the nearly fifty-year scope of scholarship on postmodern historicism and divides it into three sections. The Early Texts include those written mostly in the 1970s as postmodern historicism was just beginning to gain prominence; these works largely attempted to assess the key characteristics of style and identify where the trend might be going. The second section, Postmodernism Through The Years, covers writing on the style throughout the 1980s and 90s. Written during the style’s peak and immediately following its fall in popularity, these works discuss the style once it had become established and more widely criticized. The third division concerns the style’s treatment after 2000, particularly in the last five years, as there has been a sudden rise in contemporary analyses of postmodern historicism and its place in architectural history. Grouped with those works specific to a single site or architect and a mix of other resources, these texts provide the foundation from which this thesis seeks to codify the primary characteristics and significance of postmodern historicism.
It is crucial to consider scholarship from every decade as ideas about the style have grown, changed, and developed much since its inception and more contemporary writings possess the valuable attribute of perspective in analyzing postmodern historicism’s defining features and evolution. While some newspaper articles have relevance to the bulk of this thesis, these primarily pertain to the ongoing preservation battles over New Brutalist sites.

**EARLY TEXTS**

Published well before postmodern historicism had become a term, Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* represents his own ideas and preferences for design, but serves as the text that launched wider practice of what would come to be known as postmodern architecture.¹ Calling for an architecture that embraces the complexity and contradiction inherent in the modern world, Venturi decries the ubiquity of international modernism stating that blatant simplification can only lead to bland architecture. The design that Venturi wants and practices is one that deals with the present and with how the past relates to it; architects cannot have one without the other. Hailed by art and architectural historian Vincent Scully as the most important work on architecture since Le Corbusier’s 1923 *Vers une Architecture*, it foreshadowed Venturi, Izenour, and Scott Brown’s *Learning From Las Vegas* and proved deeply influential for other practitioners and scholars alike.²

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Using Venturi’s work as a starting point, Charles Jencks’ 1977 *The Language of Postmodernism* popularized the term in the field of architecture and made an early attempt at defining what postmodern architecture was. Much of Jencks’ book actually concerns the ‘failure’ of modernism and his infamous statement that the style died with the destruction of Minoru Yamasaki’s Pruitt-Igoe urban housing project in 1972-1973. Eventually reaching postmodern architecture, Jencks’ describes it as something that is not yet fully formed, but that it represents a multivalent, pluralistic, and inclusive architecture. Postmodern architecture employs elements from traditional and modern, vernacular and high style; it brings more of the designer’s personality into it and expresses the human environment as sensual, humorous, surprising, and readable on a number of levels.

C. Ray Smith’s *Supermannerism* was released the same year as Jencks’ text and discusses the multiple ways in which architecture began to change in the 1960s and 1970s. Stating that architects were disinterested in architectural legacy in the decades preceding the 1960s, they became increasingly invested in it throughout the following years due to increased awareness of history resulting from the ravages caused by urban renewal, the rising numbers of preservation organizations, landmarks commissions, and historic trusts, reuse allowing young architects to obtain larger scale commissions on smaller budgets, and architectural historians such as Vincent Scully and Jean Labatut gaining influence. Coupled with heightened imagination and invention, the resulting

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architecture suggested or alluded to historical elements while manipulating established principles, altering scale, reordering surface details, and incorporating aspects of everyday life and popular culture.

A final foundational piece of scholarship released in 1977 was Robert Stern’s “New Directions in Modern American Architecture: Postscript at the Edge of the Millennium” published in *Architectural Association Quarterly*. In this article, Stern sought to describe the postmodern historicist trend occurring in American architecture and its various implications. Due to Venturi and Charles Moore’s emphasis on architecture’s expression of meaning and their recognition that the reductive qualities of modernism cannot align with the complexity of human culture, Stern denotes them as the forerunners of the style and asserts that postmodernism has three principles: contextualism, allusionism, and ornamentalism. He goes on to state that this new movement in architecture is not fantastical, rather it embraces realism as it acknowledges “the social, cultural, and political milieu” that called it into being. Stern closes by echoing the inclusivity and pluralism of postmodern architecture and posits that this new trend of embracing the diverse threads and beliefs in culture and architecture will result in a style that is distinctly American.

**POSTMODERNISM THROUGH THE YEARS**

Postmodern historicism rapidly became preeminent in American architecture and by the mid-1980s was already subject to a wealth of histories and analyses. Heinrich Klotz’s *The History of Postmodern Architecture* sees the

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style’s beginnings in 1960 and asserts that the style is not emblematic of
eclecticism, as was generally believed, but rather that it developed out of a
lengthy tradition of modern buildings that established its principles.\(^6\) Though
this assertion is far from verifiable (Klotz argued it with the intent of raising
alternative opinions and discussion), Klotz’s tome is helpful for its length, detail,
and wealth of images used in describing postmodern architecture’s history.
Paolo Portoghesi’s *Postmodern: The Architecture of the Postindustrial Society* more
concerns European architecture, but like Andreas Papadaki’s *Post-Modernism On
Trial* it provides a record of changing viewpoints and ideas of postmodern
architecture during its most popular years.\(^7\)

*Behind The Postmodern Façade*, written by sociologist Magali Sarfatti
Larson, provides another detailing of postmodern architecture’s history but is
particularly useful for its description of the *Progressive Architecture* Awards from
1966-1985.\(^8\) This discussion reveals the sentiments held by many of architecture’s
most prominent figures toward the changes occurring in these years and
postmodern historicism’s growing popularity. With varied opinions of those
supporting and not supporting the style, these Awards depict the tensions that
came with the style and its reception by prominent figures in American
architecture. The Kate Nesbitt edited compilation *Theorizing A New Agenda For
Architecture* concerns many topics unrelated to this thesis, but features a number
of essays and articles key in postmodern historicism’s early development and


\(^7\) Paolo Portoghesi, *Postmodern: The Architecture of the Postindustrial Society* (New York: Rizzoli,
1983).

\(^8\) Magali Sarfatti Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Façade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth-
some of the primary attacks made against the style. Invaluable for the understanding of vital characteristics of the style as identified by several significant scholars, these essays also allow for some idea of what makes postmodern historicism unpopular with academics and the general populace alike.

**CONTEMPORARY ANALYSES**

By the middle of the 1990s postmodern historicism was essentially finished after being superseded by other styles and distorted to the point of being rendered mute through over-commercialization and poor copies. Thus by the turn of the millennium scholarship on the style served as retrospective. *USDesign: 1975-2000* features two articles useful for this thesis: David G. De Long’s “Points Of View in American Architecture” and Rosemarie Haag Bletter’s “Modernism In Crisis? Architectural Theory Of The Last Three Decades.” Bletter’s piece traces the development of the term ‘postmodern’ in architecture and describes why the changes happened. Prominent among her reasons for the change is the publication of *Complexity and Contradiction*, but more than anything Bletter stresses the economic recession of the 1970s as the key. Architects were among those hurt most by the recession and it led them to rethink their ideas while making them less esoteric in hopes of popular support. Going hand in hand with this was the embrace of traditional forms as they were more easily

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readable by the public. Thus while Bletter identifies postmodern architecture as largely developing out of a quest for popular support and increased commissions during an economic downturn, she also notes that the Beaux-Arts exhibition at the Museum of Metropolitan Art in 1975 helped spur the embrace of historical forms and recognition in architecture. Jencks’ *Critical Modernism: where is post-modernism going?*\(^{12}\) and *The Post-Modern Reader*\(^{13}\) both concern postmodernism more generally in all aspects of culture; the former concerns his more recent ideas on postmodern architecture while the latter features a number of interdisciplinary takes on the style.

In *Architecture’s Historical Turn: Phenomenology and the Rise of the Postmodern* Jorge Otero-Pailos begins with Jean Labatut as one of architecture’s leading contributors in the field of architectural phenomenology.\(^{14}\) For Otero-Pailos phenomenology in architecture, essentially the study of how spaces are experienced and the ways in which scales and materials affect experience, is central in the development of postmodern historicism. Viewing architectural history as a problem needing to be overcome, Otero-Pailos argues that architects in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s viewed experience as a timeless architectural language. It was then through this foundation of phenomenology that the stylistic pluralism central to postmodern historicism developed. Offering yet another entirely different take, Murray Fraser’s “Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970-1990” states that postmodern architecture came out as a reaction against

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\(^{14}\) Jorge Otero-Pailos, *Architecture’s Historical Turn: Phenomenology and the Rise of the Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
modernism and its strong consumerist aspects.\textsuperscript{15} As it quickly became over-commercialized itself, in the end postmodern architecture was essentially no different; as Fraser puts it, the style simply became the emperor’s new cloths. Fraser’s article is also valuable as it features a crucial attack made against the style by Rem Koolhaas in 1994’s \textit{S,M,L,X,L} when he stated that postmodernism was not actually about reintroducing history to modernist art and architecture. Perhaps more than the texts found in the 80s and 90s and certainly more so than those of the 70s, these contemporary analyses offer a vast spread of differing interpretations and opinions on how postmodern architecture, and specifically postmodern historicism, developed and what its significance is in the scope of American architecture. Crucial in this thesis is the negotiation of these works to find common threads and assimilate characteristics of postmodern historicism that are not the opinion of a single scholar trying to add radical interpretations, but rather those attributes that are repeatedly exhibited through scholarship and actual designs.

\textbf{MONOGRAPHS}

Scholarship concerning postmodern architecture broadly is vital, but also key to this thesis are works relating to specific sites and architects. These monographs provide a more focused understanding of postmodern historicism’s most significant designers and provide the greater detail necessary for the three case studies. David Brownlee, David G. De Long, and Kathryn B. Hiesinger’s \textit{Out}

Of The Ordinary: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Associates includes essays on VSBA’s earlier as well as later designs in addition to their decorative arts. As one of the earliest, if not the first, retrospective on VSBA, Out Of The Ordinary offers a vast amount of information on postmodern historicism’s founder and some of the style’s most significant works.

Written by journalist and art critic David Littlejohn, the 1984 Architect: The Life and Work of Charles W. Moore serves as a biography of the architect while offering detailed analyses on most of his project up to 1984. Given that much of his research was conducted through spending time with and interviewing Moore and his associates, Littlejohn’s text is essential as, in contrast to Michael Graves and Venturi, Moore is no longer alive. Representing the first National Register nomination written for a work of postmodern historicism, the nomination for Graves’ Portland Public Service Building provides a discussion of postmodern architecture’s history, an extensive detailing of Graves and his seminal work, and establishes its significance through the lens of National Register criteria. Though the city of Portland has made attempts to make the structure more popular since its completion, it is perhaps the most threatened of the three sites discussed in Chapter 5 and this nomination serves as the first preservation-oriented text concerning the building.

PERIODICALS, NEWSPAPER, AND DIGITAL RESOURCES

Beyond these more clearly categorized works, this thesis draws from a wealth of additional periodical and digital resources. These range from articles concerning the updated states of examined sites, Allen Freeman’s “That ‘70s Show: In New Orleans, the third act begins on a famous outdoor stage” in Landscape Architecture and Laura Manfra’s “Portland Building – 1982” in Metropolis Magazine, to those discussing current events on postmodern historicism, Witold Rybczynski’s “Was Postmodern Architecture Any Good?” on Slate, to those concerning preservation battles over seminal works of New Brutalism, Martin Filler’s “Smash It: Who Cares?” in The New York Review and Michael Kimmelman’s “A Vision to Avoid Demolition for a ‘70s Pioneer” in The New York Times. Additional pieces such as Charles Moore’s “Ten Years Later” in Places, Brian McHale’s “What Was Postmodernism?” in the Electronic Book Review, and Robin Pogrebin’s “Architecture’s Ugly Ducklings May Not Get Time

to Be Swans”²⁶ In *The New York Times* further add to an understanding of postmodern historicism and the current debates over works of New Brutalism.

**CONCLUSION**

Varied though they may be, when taken as a whole these sources and others yet to emerge provide the foundation from which one can best assess postmodern historicism and the many questions surrounding it. The style’s origins, key characteristics, and extensive details on its most significant sites are all covered by the literature here reviewed. In conjunction with the growing documentation of preservation battles over sites of New Brutalism, these sources will allow for accurate identification, evaluation, and preservation recommendations for the greatest works of postmodern historicism.

3 Postmodern Origins

As with most any manner, scholars’ opinions on the specific beginnings of American postmodern architecture and therefore postmodern historicism—its first widely recognized subset—vary. They all, however, agree that the manner has its roots in the 1960s. Amidst a cultural environment of civil rights activism, the growth of the Green Revolution, and the dawning of computerization and the digital age, those high style practitioners rebelling against the dictums of 1950s Modernism had many influences. Though it is inaccurate to state that these influences are wholly confined to a small group of thinkers, texts, and cultural forces, the factors discussed in this chapter can be seen as the most notable, acknowledged, and powerful influences in the development of postmodern historicism. Through these forces and the manner’s most famous practitioners, by 1980 postmodern historicist architecture had usurped Modernism and its various contemporary subsets as the preeminent manner in the United States.

A bastion of the academization and standardization of Modernism from 1928 to 1959, the Congres Internationaux d’Architecture Modernes (CIAM) was home to some of the earliest rejections of Modernist ideals.¹ Younger architects within the organization responsible for organizing the tenth CIAM conference actively rebelled against orthodox Modernism by attempting to do away with the current notions of top-down, abstract planning and the debased, corporate projects that the style had come to reflect. Calling themselves Team Ten, they insisted on humanizing architecture and planning through a focus on the

gathering of people as opposed to technology or failed utopian schemes. Though their ideas did not initiate a rapid diversion from Modernist ideology, they would influence many architects throughout the later 20th century.\(^2\)

Familiar with Team Ten’s ideas and having spoken at the final CIAM conference in 1959, Louis Kahn and a number of his contemporaries would go on to embody these notions and continue the growth out of international, corporate Modernism. Along with architects such as Romaldo Giurgola, Gerhard Kallmann, and Paul Rudolph, Kahn was one of the most prominent practitioners of New Brutalism in the United States. Works exemplifying this include the Richards Medical Research Building in Philadelphia (1957-65) and the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California (1959-1965). Concurrent with these projects were Neo-Expressionist designs by Eero Saarinen, Robert Geddes, and others that further challenged the conventions of orthodox modernism and embodied a search for original, emotive architecture. As postmodern historicism throughout the 1960s was largely confined to paper, i.e. writings and unbuilt designs, it was these two manners that most questioned Modernism in the decade.\(^3\)

The notable exception to postmodern historicism as “paper” architecture in the 1960s was Robert Venturi. Having worked under Kahn in Philadelphia, Venturi also desired a break from the ubiquity of commercial Modernism, but he had different ideas of what this break would look like. By 1966 Venturi—in conjunction with Jon Rauch—had already completed two of the manner’s

\(^2\) Bletter, “Modernism in Crisis?” 38.
foundational works through his Vanna Venturi House (1959-1964, Fig. 6) and the Guild House (1961-1966, Fig. 7), but the publication of Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture best demonstrated his challenges to Modernism and became perhaps the most significant factor in the development of postmodern historicism.4

Hailed by architectural historian Vincent Scully as “the most important writing on the making of architecture since Le Corbusier’s Vers une Architecture” (1923), the text is essentially a discussion of Venturi’s personal preferences and the ideas behind his designs.5 Venturi called for an embrace of the complexities and contradictions inherent in modern culture and an understanding of architecture’s history to serve as the roots of contemporary design. Examining a multitude of past works, Venturi focused on European examples from 1500-1900 and projects from Frank Furness, Louis Sullivan, Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, and Kahn.6 It is through his inclusion of the profession’s past and the chaos of modern society that Venturi formed his “gentle manifesto” against the dictums of Modernism and for a new architectural aesthetic.7 Calling for an ambiguous architecture that communicates meaning on multiple levels, is vibrant and more humanist, and is lacking in unity and clarity, Venturi countered Mies van der Rohe’s dictum ‘less is more’ with the belief that “less is a bore.”8

While the text angered many in the architecture community, including Kahn, it helped to spur and shape the ideas of many younger professionals in the

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6 Larson, Behind the Postmodern Façade, 53.
7 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction, 16.
8 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction, 17.
field. Though built examples of postmodern historicism were lacking by the end of the 1960s—Venturi’s prominent works were constrained to the aforementioned private house and assisted living community, Charles Moore’s co-designed Sea Ranch Condominium One (1964-65, Fig. 8) was more regional vernacular in style than anything else, and Michael Graves had only accomplished a few houses exemplifying ‘pure’ Modernism—the effects of Complexity and Contradiction became obvious in the 1970s with multiple texts and buildings solidifying the manner’s rise.

The first prominent attack against Modernism in the 1970s was Peter Blake’s Form Follows Fiasco: Why Modern Architecture Hasn’t Worked. Building on the criticisms earlier issued by Team Ten through his assertion that the style and its practitioners had become too distanced from the actual users of their structures, Blake repeated the call for greater investment in social issues. 1977 served as a particularly crucial year with the publication of the three texts by C. Ray Smith, Robert A.M. Stern, and Charles Jencks discussed in the previous chapter. Of these, Jencks’ The Language of Post-Modern Architecture had the largest impact. As previously stated, the work was a widely-read discussion of postmodern historicism and the failure of Modernism and is credited as having done more to popularize the term postmodern (which originated in the 1940s) than any other text or design. Though focused more on explaining postmodern historicism than leveling any attacks against Modernism, Smith and Stern’s texts

9 Klotz, Postmodern Architecture, 142.
were important for the fact that they spread awareness and made early attempts at describing the characteristics of the developing manner.

The effects of the increased literature in the 1970s were magnified by many younger architects questioning their ideology and designs as a result of the 1973-75 recession. Affected by the economic downturn more than other art professions, architecture commissions dropped dramatically. As a result, some looked to new modes in hopes that moving away from the esoteric qualities of Modernism would lead to popular support and therefore greater commissions and notoriety. A common choice was to turn back to more traditional forms with the belief that employing such features would allow the public to better understand and appreciate one’s design.13

It was also during the 1970s that Graves made his turn to postmodern historicism. After having designed private residences in the mode of Le Corbusier and early Modernism throughout the 1960s and early 70s, in 1974 Graves started small by employing “classical cornice profiles and frame mouldings as motifs” in murals for the Transammonia Corporation’s New York offices.14 When he remodeled an old warehouse in Princeton as his personal home beginning in 1977, he included all types of historical forms: plinths, columns, fluted pilasters, herms, tympana, and rusticated walls. To distance himself from mere copying Graves distorted these forms. The fluting effect of his pilasters was created through tessellation of round blue tiles and a keystone prominently sitting atop the pilaster replaced the capital. The rusticated wall was cut into squares and combined with a steel moulding profile. As with Venturi in

14 Klotz, Postmodern Architecture, 325.
the Guild House, it represented a combination of historical motifs with the language of Modernism.\textsuperscript{15} A few years later Graves‘ Portland Public Service Building (PPSB, 1980-1983, Fig. 9) was completed and carried this even further. The architect’s first built public structure, it was also one of the first postmodern public buildings.\textsuperscript{16}

Unlike Venturi, Graves, or less prominent practitioners that turned to the manner as a result of economic downturn or the influence of texts, the final forerunner of postmodern historicism embraced its characteristics due to his notions of phenomenology and place making. Decrying the intellectualization of the field, Charles Moore felt a primary way through which humans derived meaning from architecture was through “full corporeal experience” of a given building.\textsuperscript{17} As is argued by Jorge-Otero Pailos, Moore was heavily influenced by Jean Labatut’s teaching while he was at Princeton and was encouraged to “forget the actual shape of historic buildings and to focus on their experiential content.”\textsuperscript{18} Hoping to produce original designs, Moore, like Venturi, understood that creativity could not be separated from historical precedents but that these precedents had to “be simultaneously assimilated and neglected.”\textsuperscript{19} Focusing on the experience of being in a building or at a site and instilling traditional architecture into his own designs without hampering creativity, architectural phenomenologists like Moore and his Donlyn Lyndon quickly obtained

\textsuperscript{15}Klotz, \textit{Postmodern Architecture}, 325.
\textsuperscript{18}Jorge Otero-Pailos, \textit{Architecture’s Historical Turn: Phenomenology and the Rise of the Postmodern} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 104.
\textsuperscript{19}Otero-Pailos, \textit{Architecture’s Historical Turn}, 104.
prominent teaching positions. Through this, Moore and his peers helped produce socially committed practitioners with a renewed appreciation for architecture’s history and a new focus on the user experience of a space. In both his designs and teaching, Moore overturned the aesthetics of Modernism and lead postmodern historicism to the forefront.20

Following its lengthy development, by the 1980s postmodern historicism had established itself both in the architectural community and the public sphere. Prominent works from Moore, Kresge College and the Piazza D’Italia (1976-1979, Figs. 10,11), and Graves, the Plocek House (1977-1983, Fig. 12) and the aforementioned PPSB, and the continued designs of Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown such as the addition to the Allen Memorial Art Museum (1973-1976, Fig. 13) and Tucker house (1974-1975) embodied the manner, giving physical form to those only aware of it through writing. In conjunction with the other influences discussed, the designs of these architects and those that also came to the manner—Robert A.M Stern and Phillip Johnson most notably—resulted in postmodern historicism becoming the mode in high style architecture in the early 1980s.21 After having achieved this, however, the manner was quickly vulgarized. Robbed of its intellectual rigor and populist concerns, used in the very corporate architecture its founders had railed against, postmodern historicism quickly became a public relations sign denoting a building as contemporary.22 Some of the manner’s most prominent practitioners were complicit in this figurative and occasionally literal ‘Disneyfication’ of the

20 Otero-Pailos, Architecture’s Historical Turn, 145.
originally counter-culture aesthetic. Denise Scott Brown succinctly summarized this process in 2006:

Architectural post-modernism started as a sincere attempt to confront... issues regarding popular culture, symbolism and communication, and the auto-mobile city. Yet it was soon hijacked by commercial interests and used by their architecture to create ‘signature architecture’ shorn of social content.23

Despite this, postmodern historicism is significant in the scope of American architectural history for having been the first cohesive manner to popularly supplant post-war Modernism and for visibly returning history to the profession. Also of import are the manner’s prominent architects, designs and the ideas behind it. The following chapter seeks to provide a framework for those in preservation to evaluate the significance of a given postmodern historicist site. Through this, priority and proactive protection can be given to the works that best represent the manner and its principles.


Figure 7. Guild House Façade (southern face). Author. March 6, 2013.
Figure 8. Staff. The Scout. May 21, 2009.
Figure 9. Portland Public Service Building (looking southwest at the northern elevation and western façade). Steve Morgan. August 1982.

Figure 11. Piazza D’Italia. Author. February 22, 2013.

Figure 13. Allen Memorial Art Museum and Addition. John K. Donalds. http://www.greatbuildings.com/cgi-bin/gbi.cgi/Allen_Art_Museum_Addition.html/cid_1170710782_Allen_Art_Museum_add2.html
4 Evaluative Criteria

Prioritizing historic sites is an inherently complicated issue; stating that a building or location is more significant than another immediately raises the question of “for whom?” Given the value any site—no matter how small or unknown—may have in an individual’s heritage and personal experience and the general differences people have in determining what is of utmost importance, any ranking of heritage resources may be dismissed as wholly subjective.

However, prioritization is necessary in order to best assure the retention of the most significant postmodern historicist sites. As has been repeatedly shown—particularly since the 1950s—the powerful protections given by municipal designation to historic sites, even those that are nationally and internationally known, can be overcome if the opposing party is dedicated enough. The best way to preserve heritage resources, difficult though it may be, is to gain widespread public support for the site. The on-going large-scale advocacy and publicity campaigns employed in battles over New Brutalist sites has shown just how effective this approach can be. Even the most spirited of these campaigns (that for Bertrand Goldberg’s Prentice Women’s Hospital in Chicago comes to mind) are not always successful, but the public support gained through advocacy campaigns such as that for Rudolph’s Orange County Government Center demonstrate the importance of these sites to the government officials responsible for ultimately determining their fate. As these campaigns involve a variety of organizations such as State Historic Preservation Offices, local or state-wide advocacy groups, the National Trust for Historic Preservation,
the World Monuments Fund, etc., in addition to expenditure of limited funds, litigation procedures, and the dedication of already stretched employees, the number of these large-scale campaigns that can be successfully managed at any given time is limited. Thus in order to insure that such efforts are dedicated to the sites of greatest significance, prioritization is necessary.

The criteria laid out in this chapter provide the means for any individual to evaluate the extent to which a given work of postmodern historicism compares to another. They are in no way an attempt to supplant the use of other, already established criteria in the field; rather they are intended as supplemental. They also differ from those such as National Register of Historic Places criteria in that they are not designed to determine if a site is significant in the scope of American history, but only to evaluate the extent to which a work of postmodern historicism represents the manner’s key characteristics. Thus when/if those in the field of preservation begin a more proactive protection of the manner, the limited resources discussed above can be correctly applied to the sites that are most emblematic.

Culled from a number of the most well regarded sources on postmodern architecture over the last five decades, these criteria represent the common characteristics of postmodern historicism that have been identified by scholars writing during its origins, its preeminence, and once it had faded out of fashion. While foundational texts like Complexity and Contradiction and The Language of Post-Modern Architecture play an important role as they largely formalized the key elements of the manner, the implementation of texts in the 80s, 90s, and the 2000s is vital in understanding what characteristics remained fundamental as the
manner became more widely used, adapted, and analyzed. Further, the most recent texts provide an understanding of the manner with the benefit of historical context and separation. Though practicing a similar aesthetic, individual architects and scholars nonetheless had/have varied ideas on what elements constitute postmodern historicist architecture. It is finding those characteristics most commonly seen in treatises on the manner that reveal its defining traits. There are some attributes common in most all postmodern architecture; while they are not exclusive to postmodern historicism they are nonetheless a vital aspect.

1. Historic Allusion

_The work contains historical allusions that, be they abstract or clear, are not copies of the past; rather these allusions are distortions and/or novel interpretations of previous iterations._

The most obvious, and that from which the manner’s name is derived, characteristic of postmodern historicism is an embrace of the profession’s past through the inclusion of new variations on traditional forms. Venturi made subtle but noticeable use of this in his design for the Guild House and in his gentle manifesto at the outset of _Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture_ when he called for the “vestigial as well as innovating.”¹ Throughout the entirety of the text, examples from the profession’s past 500 years are interchangeably employed to demonstrate shared trends in architecture regardless of time or style and to demonstrate the features Venturi wants for his designs. His rationale for

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the inclusion of traditional forms is perhaps best summed up as he comes to the end of his section on ‘The Conventional Element’:

The Pop painter gives uncommon meaning to common elements by changing their context or increasing their scale... old clichés in new settings achieve rich meanings which are ambiguously both old and new, banal and vivid.\(^2\)

Key to this is that Venturi makes clear the idea that if employed, common elements (such as historical forms) are to be changed, adapted, and made novel. Further examples in his gentle manifesto to support this include his call for “distorted rather than straightforward” and “ambiguous rather than articulated.”\(^3\)

In its discussion of the developing new modes of architecture, Jencks’ *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* largely holds to semiotics and multivalency, but does explicit address the inclusion of historical allusion. Arguing that postmodern architecture was a trend that took many forms, for Jencks in 1977 the unifying characteristic was pluralism. Postmodern architects and their designs might have taken quite varied forms, but they all were all clearly influenced by factors largely ignored in post-war modern architecture. Among these is the incorporation of traditional elements, for which Jencks references Venturi and Moore.\(^4\) He also states that postmodern architecture can embrace Greek tradition\(^5\) and that one possible alternative for the new trend is “tradionalesque.”\(^6\)

While Jencks was attempting to coalesce a variety of relatively distinct architectural modes under a common umbrella, Stern’s 1977 essay specifically

\(^2\) Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, 43-44.
\(^3\) Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, 16.
concerns postmodern historicism—as for him it was the first discernable postmodern manner to develop—and is therefore more specific in the discussion of historical reference. For Stern, allusionism is one of three principles characterizing postmodern architecture. Historical precedent could enrich new architecture, thereby making it more accessible and meaningful for users. As an example, Stern mentions Moore’s Piazza d’Italia (not yet completed, but under construction with its design widely circulated in the architecture community), which evoked Italian monuments and the Victor Emmanuel era in Rome as well as the image of the country received by Americans via Hollywood. In order to give name for this developing manner, Stern chose ‘postmodern historicist architecture,’ reflecting the integral role historical allusion played.

C. Ray Smith similarly devotes a section of his work to decoration and historical allusion in the developing modes of architecture. Smith states that architects during the 1960s suggested or alluded to elements of architecture’s past with “newly designed updated versions.” As Supermannerism mostly concerns this period, it is centered on Venturi in its discussion of postmodern historicism. Sixteenth-and-seventeenth-century screens were reiterated and reinterpreted at the Guild House and Fire Station Number 4 in Columbus, Indiana. At the Vanna Venturi House the northern elevation is reminiscent of Blenheim Palace, the Palladian hallmark of an arched window is alluded to through a tacked-on broken arch in wooden trim, and the rectangular plan is

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“spiked with diagonals.” Smith relates that the allusions and manipulations at the Chestnut Hill House were received by many as fresh and vital. Architecture critic Ellen Perry Berkeley remarked that the design had “a serious whimsy, a rational ambiguity, a consistent distortion.” To Venturi, Moore, 1970s Graves, and many others designing allusion-rich architecture, these metaphors were comparable to the mannerist manipulation of Renaissance architecture and its motifs, though on a grander scale.

Writing an analysis once postmodern historicism had become established, Klotz states that postmodern architecture takes the discipline’s history into account in creating fictive designs that want to be an art. His most exemplary renditions include the Vanna Venturi House, the Guild House, and the Piazza d’Italia, all of which make strong, distorted allusions to architecture’s past. Kate Nesbitt’s analysis of postmodern architectural themes in her introductory chapter is similar. Employing history and historicism as her first theme, she notes that postmodern historicist architects used elements of classical or other previous styles in the artistic practice of collage or pastiche. It is the meanings and associations these forms carry that architects value. Sarfatti-Larson uses the “white” and “gray” camps resulting from the Museum of Modern Art’s Five Architects to group Venturi, Moore, Stern, and Alan Greenberg as practicing “an

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9 Smith, *Supermannerism*, 264-265.
10 Ellen Perry Berkeley in Smith, *Supermannerism*, 266.
11 Smith, *Supermannerism*, 269.
architecture of historicist and vernacular inspiration.”¹⁴ She goes on to assert that traditional postmodernism (embodied by Graves’ Portland Public Service Building and Johnson’s AT&T Building) was inspired by classical motifs and composition.¹⁵ One need only look at a single image of these structures to understand the historical allusions in these structures are far from direct copies.

Writing after the turn of the millennium, Bletter employs an alternative term coined by Jencks, postmodern classicism, to describe the core elements of postmodern historicism. She states that postmodern architecture took on a “historicizing guise” and uses Graves’ Plocek House and the Portland Public Service Building to illustrate characteristics of the manner.¹⁶ In her discussion of the sites she mentions allusions to historical elements, differentiation from mere imitation of Neoclassicism, abstracted traditional forms, and that to understand the allusion one must have familiarity with standard architectural forms. Haag-Bletter also notes, in order to make clear that postmodern historicism was not only referential to the classical, that “nearly all architectural movements were now looked at again with renewed interest, except, of course, Modernism.”¹⁷ Though Reinhold Martin’s Utopia’s Ghost (2010) mostly concerns topics outside of stylistic features and characteristics, he states that in what has been termed postmodern the “relation between cultural forms and historical truth was problematized in architecture largely by way of experiments with representation.

¹⁴ Magali Sarfatti Larson, Behind the Postmodern Façade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth-Century America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 60.
¹⁵ Larson, Behind the Postmodern Façade, 62.
This meant citing anachronistic visual codes, such as the classical orders, in a novel manner."\(^{18}\)

Given the various titles attributed to it (postmodern historicism, postmodern classicism, etc.), demonstrating that significance of historical references to the manner perhaps requires the least amount of evidence. Further, later analyses themselves employ earlier texts in their understanding of the manner’s characteristics. But in evaluating the most important aspects of a postmodern historicist work one must be assured that attributes labeled essential in early texts remain so today; that later scholars did not find evidence to assert that a given characteristic faded in significance over time. In regards to historical allusions, literature must be used to demonstrate that postmodern historicism is distinct from pure revivalism, which has existed in architecture for centuries. Revivalism does to an extent consider context, but barring that is little more than direct copying of traditional forms. In this it lacks the distorted or in some way altered use of historical forms in postmodern historicism as well as the import placed on color, multivalency, and creating populist architecture. Architectural historian David De Long summarizes the attitude Venturi and Scott Brown have toward revivalism: “They tend to criticize those such as Stern who seem to replicate the vocabularies of the past without rigorously reconstituting them.”\(^{19}\)

When evaluating works of postmodern historicism, the significance of novel interpretations or distortions of historical forms must be kept in mind in order to


differentiate the manner from bland, cookie-cutter copying of traditional architecture.

2. Signs

The work expresses multiple meanings and serves multiple purposes. It is designed with the intention of appealing to a variety of audiences with meanings that cover multiple levels of knowledge and experience.

When it comes to postmodern architecture in general, perhaps no aspect is as ubiquitous and integral as the conveyance of meanings. Postmodern architecture did not share the New York Five’s belief in the ‘pureness’ of geometry, it moved beyond the idea of a structure and its design only serving functional purposes. The historical allusions discussed in criteria one were part of this signification for works of postmodern historicism, but only a fraction of the whole. From Venturi on, signs—not in the literal sense, though that was an important element of Venturi’s designs—representing a host of meanings were an omnipresent feature in postmodern historicism and works of the period in general.

Venturi makes his attitude toward meaning obvious at the beginning of his work: “I am for richness of meaning rather than clarity of meaning . . . A valid architecture evokes many levels of meaning and combinations of focus: its space and its elements become readable and workable in several ways at once.”

This notion is echoed in his statement that blatant simplification results in bland architecture: “Less is a bore.” Venturi and Scott Brown expanded on this line of

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20 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction, 16.
21 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction, 17.
thinking in *Learning From Las Vegas.* The text described Las Vegas as a perfect model for environmental richness, which was the direct result of it being a communicative environment. As designer and theoretician Tomás Moldonado put it: a “system of signs.” This was tied to the rich number and variety of road and commercial signs in Las Vegas, but Venturi used this not to advocate for a mimicking of the Vegas strip, but to further embrace his idea of a valid architecture as one that communicated meaning to create a better environment for contemporary society.

Made obvious by the title, Jencks’ ideas in *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* concerning the emerging style’s characteristics are almost wholly focused on communicative pluralism, which is to say that postmodern architects should master several styles and codes of meaning, varying them to fit the project into its location. The “radical eclecticism” this architecture represents employs a variety of parts and styles in a new creative synthesis; this new synthesis must find a semantic justification. A number of early examples exhibit what this new “language” looks like: “It is variegated rather than somber, messy rather than clean, picturesque but not necessarily without a classical, geometric order (usually it is made from several orders in contrast.” Jencks further summarizes that the actual messages being sent are equally important as the language (i.e. forms and physical design elements) used:

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Obviously, if an architect has nothing important to say, his facility with communication is just going to advertise this fact... A multivalent architecture, opposed to a univalent building, combines meanings imaginatively so that they fuse and modify each other. A multivalent architecture makes full use of the full arsenal of communicational means, leaving out no area of experience, and suppressing no particular code (although of course any building is inevitably limited in range).26

For Jencks, the pluralistic communication of postmodern architecture was as defining a characteristic as any other. It was also this feature that would allow it to be enduring and vibrant: “A multivalent architecture remains alive because its meanings are so related as to allow new paths to be discovered between them.”27

Writing in the same year, Stern stresses other elements but does state the importance of meaning in his essay. He asserts that works of postmodern architecture are not objects within a vacuum, the designers behind them recognize that should mean something. Their works encourage multiple and simultaneous readings in an attempt to increase the design’s expression. Through borrowing the forms and ideas of both modernism and the architectural movements that preceded it, postmodernism shows the “past-ness” of both.28 Stern adds his own addition to the litany of quips by summarizing the precept of postmodern architecture as “more is more.”29

Klotz sees Venturi as the first architect following the modern movement to use signs not just on the directly informational plane, but on that of association and allusion.30 He uses the Guild House to illustrate this, as it was the first time in which the “intention of bringing architecture back into the context of

26 Jencks, Language of Post-Modern Architecture, 97.
28 Stern, Postscript, 70.
29 Stern, Postscript, 70.
30 Klotz, Postmodern Architecture, 153.
representation and information” was made manifest. The structure’s façade was employed as a vehicle of signs and thereby allowed the reintroduction of architectural ornament. Regarding Venturi’s turn toward signs, Klotz states that the:

anonymization of architecture and its mute aggressiveness—consequences of the faith in the grandeur of pure boxes and crates—lead inevitably to the dehumanization of building, and the self-centeredness of architecture is responsible for this to a large extent.31

This assertion that architecture had to refer to something beyond itself and represent meanings outside of architectonics served as the first serious attack against modern architecture.32 As the pivot point that helped to spur postmodern architecture forward, the importance of communication carried on as a central element in postmodern historicism and other modes.

Nesbitt’s analysis of meaning, specifically in relation to postmodern historicism, relates that postmodern designers ended the reign of abstraction that started with cubism, constructivism, and suprematism through the reintroduction of human figure and recognizable forms. The use of historical patterns or other identifiable typologies served to “create form with associations, even to the extent of constructing a narrative.” The resulting architecture reveals an “eclectic attitude of looking at styles as communicative devices.”34

For Larson, meaning was “an essential ideological justification of postmodern revisionism [postmodern historicism].”35 Led by Venturi, postmodern architects made deliberate use of multiple connotations granted by

31 Klotz, Postmodern Architecture, 154.
32 Klotz, Postmodern Architecture, 154.
34 Nesbitt, “Introduction,” 47.
35 Larson, Behind the Postmodern Façade, 149.
the architectural sign in order to enrich experience. Regardless of which mode of postmodern architecture one was practicing, they were invested in signification: “Even the self-proclaimedly radical ‘deconstructive’ tendency appropriates for architecture the task of communicating the ‘impossibility of meaning.’”

Further, traditional (not Peter Eisenmann) postmodern architects rejected the idea of solely communicating with an elite few. Instead:

with different architectural elements, different measures of eclecticism, and different degrees of reflexive irony or seriousness architects like Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, Michael Graves, Robert Stern . . . rely on traditional or vernacular forms to make their architecture more accessible. In other words, they aspire to a different and possibly a much broader market than Eisenmann.

Postmodern historicist and other architects may include meanings that are only received by architectural cognoscenti, or people from a given city / culture, but they will likely also include signs that can be understood by and will please anyone.

Referring to Jencks and using Graves as her example, Bletter states that Graves “had become increasingly concerned with the legibility of architecture.” While the abstracted pilasters of his Portland Public Service Building were too obscure to be perceived by the public as winking, ironic gestures, Graves and other postmodern historicist architects did “open the design vocabulary to a wide range of historicizing modes.” She further asserts that one of the main elements the manner lost when vulgarized was it ability to communicate with

36 Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Façade*, 151.
37 Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Façade*, 152.
38 Bletter, “Modernism in Crisis?” 50.
the public.40 Laying the groundwork for postmodern architects to follow, De Long states that Venturi and Scott Brown emphasized “applied ornament carrying representational information that could act as signs, or symbols; these largely two-dimensional images would take precedence over space as a primary means of architectural expression.”41

Detailing the main characteristics of postmodern architecture, Reinhold Martin describes the designs as having “signification without end.”42 Just as Klotz did decades earlier, Martin uses the Guild House to explore how postmodern architects used signs in their architecture. Those employed in the Guild House make historical references, but are additionally tied to popular culture. Through contrasting their “decorated shed” against the “ducks” populating modernism:

Venturi and Scott Brown effectively transpose modern architecture’s search for irreducible truths into the realm of ornament and signage . . . what is authentic rather than contrived at the Guild House is its decoration, which includes straightforwardly communicative graphics, appropriate materials used to signify specific meanings, overscaled yet familiar windows, and a heraldic (fake) golden television antenna mounted on the roof like a billboard, intended as an “imitation” abstract sculpture as well as a “symbol for the elderly.”43

Rooted in popular culture, these signs added expression and meaning to what was otherwise a functional, straightforward shell. Though Venturi and his associates may have had a slightly different brand of “communicative, aesthetic populism,” postmodern architecture in general (usually) employed “playful,

40 Bletter, “Modernism in Crisis?” 51.
42 Martin, Utopia’s Ghost, xviii
43 Martin, Utopia’s Ghost, 72, Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenour, Las Vegas, 68.
more or less arbitrary exchange of signifying elements.”44 There can be no
disagreement that communication was an element ubiquitous in most all
postmodern architecture, but as will be seen in Chapter 5 it is a mistake to label
the signs found in postmodern historicism—at least the significant designs—as
“more or less arbitrary.” Nonetheless, Martin’s analyses contained within his
exploration of popular ideas concerning the style do much to demonstrate that
conveying meaning has been perceived as integral in postmodern architecture
from its origins in the mid-1960s through today.

3. Prominent Integration

The allusions and meanings expressed are a prominent feature throughout the design.
They cannot be held to a select few parts, rather they are an essential aspect of the whole.

This criteria, like that for color, does not share as deep a basis in
scholarship as the others, but it is equally important. Writing in 1990, Jencks
summarized the attacks leveled against postmodern architecture as the result of
its rapid vulgarization and mass-production.45 By 1986, when the world’s largest
firms had adopted it, it had become diluted. Used in a purely stylistic manner
lacking the ideology (if one accepts that word for an architectural mode that
adopts and manipulates the entirety of contemporary culture as well as the
profession’s past) of its earlier years, postmodern historicism was produced in
much greater volume but resulted in fewer and fewer notable designs.

Bletter corroborates this in her discussion of postmodern historicism from
the mid-1980s on. Having reached international popularity and use, it was

45 Charles Jencks, “Death For Rebirth” in *Post-Modernism on Trial*, ed. Andreas C. Papadakis
employed in the most basic speculative buildings with structures receiving “one Postmodern dollop at the entrance and another at the top, just enough to distinguish them from equally pedestrian, late Modernist speculative buildings.”\textsuperscript{46} These fashionable details were not used to communicate with the public, but rather to denote a structure as current. Given this it becomes clear that in works most emblematic of the style and its characteristics, historical allusions and communicative signs should be a defining, prominent feature of the design.

4. Color

The design of the site’s exterior makes ample use of color or colors other than white, black, or grey. These colors can be polychromatic or monochromatic so long as the pigments are a prominent feature of the design.

Color served a variety of purposes for architects designing works of postmodern historicism. It served to humanize the architecture, creating a sharp contrast from monotony of corporate modernism’s all-glass facades and the dull monochrome palate of other modernist works. It could also, as in Venturi, Graves, and Moore designs, create a symbolic tie to Las Vegas, Disney World, or other elements of popular culture. Venturi does call for “hybrid rather than pure” and “compromising rather than clean” in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture.\textsuperscript{47} These relations may refer to color, but the fact that they certainly refer to embracing cultural and historical complexity in general prevents any clear tie to color. Indeed Venturi never explicitly examines the embrace of color in the text, but one need only look to the Vanna Venturi House (contemporary

\textsuperscript{46}Bletter,"Modernism in Crisis?" 51.
\textsuperscript{47}Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction, 16.
with the first edition of the text), “Elevations” from the Eclectic House Series, or
Venturi and Scott Brown’s many furniture designs to understand the import they
placed on color.

Smith does much to detail the return of decorative color in architecture
beginning in the 1960s. With the value of imagination and invention, even if of a
perverse variety, supplanting the distinction between design and decoration,
paint—applied, unnatural decoration— returned to its place as an architectural
standard: “Color was back in favor as a respectable element in architecture.”
Occasionally employing a palate of grey, black and red, Eero Saarinen and other
neo-expressionist architects started a small reintroduction of color, but in the
1960s it was Venturi and Moore that prominently demonstrated a grander use of
vibrant, more varied schemes. One could also suggest supergraphics—a common
feature of Moore designs but widely used by distinctly different architects—as an
eexample of color utilization in postmodern historicism. Supergraphics, however,
must be clearly separated from the manner as they were not decoration nor used
to communicate meaning. Rather supergraphics were a device intended to
produce an optical effect of spatial or volumetric expansion. Given their rich,
varied appearance supergraphics could be decorative, but they were explicitly
part of spatial experimentation. Relevant to the period, important on their own,
but in no way integral to the manner, supergraphics should not be considered as
significant in evaluating works of postmodern historicism.

Following these earlier texts, analyses of postmodern historicist designs
discuss the use and significance of color, but rarely distinguish it as being a

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48 Smith, Supermannerism, 261.
49 Smith, Supermannersim, 270.
feature emblematic of the manner (though it certainly comes through in discussions of postmodern historicism’s populist aesthetic). This is likely because once reintroduced to high style architecture in the 1960s, color was ubiquitous in all manners. While historical allusion and symbolism were such prominent aspects of postmodern historicism and not as stressed in neo-vernacular, regionalism, or deconstructivism, color was employed across the new modes. It may not have taken on the garish palate frequently seen in works of postmodern historicism, but it was omnipresent. Simply glancing at designs throughout the manner’s history demonstrates the significance its practitioners placed on color. A broad survey of projects such as the Vanna Venturi House, Kresge College, The BASCO Showroom (1976) the Piazza d’Italia, any work of Graves through the Clos Pegase Winery (1984-1987), or, abroad in the works of James Stirling, illustrates this.

5. Context

The design embraces contextualism. That is to say that it reflects, accommodates, or is in some way determined by its physical context.

Better understood as a characteristic common to most—though not all—modes of postmodern architecture, contextualism is not as specific to historicism as distorted traditional forms, but it is as frequently used and defining of a design element. Venturi did not employ the term “contextualism” in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture as it did not gain any foothold in architecture until Thomas Schumacher’s 1971 essay “Contextualism: Urban Ideals and Deformations.”

Rather his appreciation for it shows through in his discussion of

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50 Nesbitt, “Introduction,” 54.
inclusion and “The Obligation Toward the Difficult Whole.”\textsuperscript{51} Venturi states that an architecture of complexity and accommodation should seek unity of the whole as art’s truth exists in totality.\textsuperscript{52} When speaking of inclusion and the whole Venturi is of course calling for the accommodation of a multitude of elements, but physical and symbolic (which will be further touched on in the criteria concerning meaning) are among these. The unity he calls for is the difficult variety of inclusion as opposed to the easy unity of exclusion.\textsuperscript{53} Put in terms of building construction, Venturi’s inclusion refers to designs that are influenced or reflect the materials, positioning, use, and/or form of the area in immediate proximity. Contextualism could also be embraced in tying a design to what was once there in the past or representing aspects of current society, among other possibilities.

Jencks’ 1977 text similarly lacks explicit ties to contextualism as it is focused on pluralism, a more all-inclusive term he uses to describe the accommodation of a host of factors including but beyond physical location. He does, however, make mention to a sort of contextualism through his suggestion of “Anthropologism” as another possible term for postmodern architecture.\textsuperscript{54} He further develops this idea when he suggests that to prove successful postmodern architects will have to become “trained as an anthropologist, or at least a good journalist, to learn and be able to use the particular architectural codes that prevail among the subcultures that persist in any large city.”\textsuperscript{55} Again, this

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\textsuperscript{51} Venturi, \textit{Complexity and Contradiction}, 88.  \\
\textsuperscript{52} Venturi, \textit{Complexity and Contradiction}, 88.  \\
\textsuperscript{53} Venturi, \textit{Complexity and Contradiction}, 88.  \\
\textsuperscript{54} Jencks, \textit{Language of Post-Modern Architecture}, 7.  \\
\textsuperscript{55} Jencks, \textit{Language of Post-Modern Architecture}, 97.  
\end{flushleft}
approach is more based on the cultural context within which a building is placed rather than its physical location, but it touches on the latter and Jencks would revise his ideas to more clearly include that meaning of contextualism in his later works.\footnote{Charles Jencks, \textit{What is Post-modernism?}, (Great Britain: Academy Editions, 1986), 39.}

Robert Stern is more clear when it comes contextualism, employing it as one of his three principles of postmodern historicism. He states that postmodern architecture prefers incomplete or compromised geometries such as those seen in the Guild House, Allan Greenberg’s additions to the Hartford Supreme Court building (1970), or Mitchell/Giurgola’s University Museum, which “draws upon the language of Wilson Eyre and his colleagues fifty years later to produce work that seems at once old and new.”\footnote{Stern, \textit{Postscript}, 69.} He continues in saying that a particularly significant aspect of contextualism is the clear recognition of how buildings grow and develop over time. Venturi and Rauch’s Football Hall of Fame project is an illustrative example for this.\footnote{Stern, \textit{Postscript}, 68-69.} Finally, Stern notes that buildings are fragments of a greater whole, each falls into an immediate context as well as that of the city, the past, and the profession.\footnote{Stern, \textit{Postscript}, 69.} Smith gives a concise assessment of how contextualism played into design for most all architects practicing new modes in the 1960s and 1970s: “If the previous design idiom held a fixed vision of pure, clean boxes, the new design attempts to look at the facts for what they are first; it rejects ‘pure form’ and looks at the site for what it is, accepts what it sees—

\footnote{Stern, \textit{Postscript}, 69.}
including mess or chaos—and works with those realities, reinforcing them, doing it harder.”  

Considering the collection of postmodern modes as one whole, Klotz rightly asserts that one says little when claiming the characteristic feature of postmodern architecture is stylistic pluralism. Thus he uses specific examples to express characteristics, the first among these being the Piazza d’Italia. Discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 5, the design featured a fountain in the form of a topographic map of Italy as its central feature as well as screen walls corresponding to the five classical orders. This, among other meanings, tied to the site’s intent of better representing the under-served Italian-American community in New Orleans. This “narrative plane” clearly expresses contextualism, both that of culture and physical location, as a precept of postmodern historicist architecture.  

Klotz continues to demonstrate general characteristics of postmodern architecture through examples such as the Guild House and Sea Ranch Condominium One, both of which embrace contextualism.  

Nesbitt helpfully includes quotes from historians Richard Ingersoll and Thomas Schumacher in her section on contextualism as one of the themes of postmodern architecture. Both concern a diluting of the term’s meaning in relation to how it was used in Schumacher’s 1971 essay and Collage City as well as the more popular, everyday use of contextualism that became ubiquitous by the late 1980s. Ingersoll states that since Schumacher’s early essay the term

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60 Smith, *Supermannerism*, 49.  
came to refer to little more than “‘fitting in with existing condition.’”

Schumacher’s reflections in 1995 echoed this sentiment:

After the so-called Postmodern revolution the term “contextualism” began to attach itself to stylistic manifestations—as do most co-opted ideas in architecture. It referred to red brick buildings being built in red brick neighborhoods and gingerbread matching gingerbread.

Larson give perhaps the best definition of contextualism’s place in postmodern architecture by succinctly describing its more ubiquitous definition as well as that employed by designers. Calling contextualism the “hallmark of postmodernism,” Larson agrees that in the public sphere it tends to exclusively refer to a design conforming to what is already present in its immediate area. For the architect the term denotes that “signification emerges from the insertion of one object within a preexisting system of built objects and from their spatial and temporal relations.” Thus the use of, albeit distorted, historical forms in postmodern historicism was not just to appeal to the public and create and more easily readable architecture, but because these forms have long been part of the built environment. Architecture is placed within the context of its development over millennia. The previous examples is of course only one type of contextualism and its can and was used for many more so long as the projects were making some spatial, temporal, or cultural relation.

Larson continues with a quote from architect William Pedersen on why his firm turned to contextualism and classical elements: “Since most of the contexts we were building in gave off confusing and contradictory signals,

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65 Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Façade*, 154
wasn’t it possible for the building itself to be composed of different pieces, each
drawn in reference to different conditions within the context? . . . We started to
introduce classical compositional techniques, primarily those that were aimed at
encouraging the textual environment and unification of surface.’”67 In discussing
how an architect might accommodate a single structure to its context, Pederson
demonstrated that such work could in and of itself represent architectural craft.
This could only be done when the designer paid sufficient attention to detail and
the creative interpretation of both past and present contexts. Through the
implementation of architectural vocabulary and ornament that satisfied zoning
boards and developers, it could also fit in mass and façade with surrounding
buildings.68 While many works by Kohn Pedersen Fox can be considered
postmodern (333 Wacker Drive, Chicago, 1983 and 1000 Wilshire Boulevard, Los
Angeles, 1987) are not particularly emblematic of postmodern historicism, they
do demonstrate the ways in which classical forms and contextualism came to be
used even in urban core high rises.

As with most analyses of the postmodern historicism and other modes of
the period, Witold Rybczynski’s musings in his summary of a 2011 conference
organized by the Institute of Classical Art and Architecture in New York largely
concern historical allusion, defining what postmodern was or is, and the like. He
does, however, include a valuable summary on the role of contextualism found
across most all manners of postmodern architecture:

67 William Pedersen, “Intentions,” in Kohn Pedersen Fox: Buildings and Projects (New York: Rizzoli,
1987), 302-303 in Larson, Behind the Postmodern Façade, 155.
68 Larson, Behind the Postmodern Façade, 155.
Postmodern architects may have sometimes—too often—designed funny looking buildings, but unlike their International Style predecessors, they made a concerted effort to fit their work into the urban fabric.69

In part a reflection of embracing architecture’s past, in part one of incorporating elements from all periods or pop culture, and in part one of creating more populist, lively environments, contextualism may have been an aspect of most postmodern modes, but its place in postmodern historicism is undeniable.

6. Populism

An architecture that is on some level populist.

Venturi’s ideas regarding the place of populism in his architecture are more fleshed out in Learning From Las Vegas, but he does address this in his seminal 1966 text. While his gentle manifesto calls for elements that are “conventional rather than designed” and he begins the work by advocating for an architecture that is based on the “richness and ambiguity of modern experience” it is not until later in the text that he makes clear his belief in creating a more populist architecture.70 Countering Peter Blake’s dismissal of the commercial main street in God’s Own Junkyard Venturi asks if main street and the commercial strip of Route 66 are not “almost all right?”71 He further asserts that many of the images Blake uses to demonstrate the ‘bad’ are often good and that “The seemingly chaotic juxtapositions of honky-tonk elements express an intriguing kind of vitality and validity, and they produce an unexpected

70 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction, 16.
71 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction, 104.
approach to unity as well.”72 He closes his argument by stating that architects would do better to learn from Pop Art and that “it is perhaps from the everyday landscape, vulgar and disdained, that we can draw the complex and contradictory order that is valid and vital for our architecture as an urbanistic whole.”73 This references consideration of the vernacular as well, but it is a clear embrace for contemporary, popular culture and its bright, loud, commercial chaos.

For Jencks, it was again the communicatory aspects of postmodern architecture that made it populist, that allowed it to reach people in ways that dehumanizing post-war modernism could not:

Finally, then, it is because of its effect on us that such architecture is mandatory—because it will shape us in multiple ways and speak to various groups, to the whole spectrum of society rather than just one of its elites. In the long run we are transformed by what we experience and inhabit; and the quality of architecture affects the quality of our minds at least as much as any other artifact we make.74

There were a variety of ways an architect might go about doing this—all of which Jencks placed within the growing development of postmodern architecture—but one was to incorporate commercial codes. Indeed “architecture and commercial motifs can be combined without compromising either code: in fact their mutual confrontation is a positive gain for both sides.”75

Rather than rejecting the mix of, say, traditional forms with elements of contemporary culture, architects should employ both to create an inclusive

72 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction, 104.
73 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction, 104.
75 Jencks, Language of Post-Modern Architecture, 90.
hybrid that “balances and reconciles opposed meanings.”76 It was through this, Jencks said, that architects could achieve the difficult whole that Venturi called for.

Smith sees the developing trend of postmodern architecture throughout the 1960s and 1970s as a reaction against the overdone purification of the human environment in the previous decades, which resulted in “preventing sensory involvement, extending no invitation to human activity, to the joys of hustle and bustle and interaction.”77 The new architecture seeks to add vitality and liveliness back to the cleanliness of modernism. Practitioners behind it “strive for a new humanism grounded on respect for the individual and for the obvious realities of daily life.”78 Beginning a design through considering what people do as opposed to what the architect thinks they should do, postmodern architects “aim for a straightforward all-embracing view of human behavior, and then for direct expression of that behavior in design. Their aim is to produce something richer, more vital, ever changing, continually rewarding.”79 As Smith notes, this can be done through an embrace of commercial art and strips and/or the acceptance of historical allusion. Decoration, applied pattern and ornament also feature prominently in the design of this new, populist architecture.80

Another crucial text in developing postmodern architecture’s concern for populism was written by preeminent postmodern historicist Charles Moore in 1965. Titled “You Have to Pay for the Public Life,” it was a lengthy article that

77 Smith, *Supermannerism*, 48-49.
78 Smith, *Supermannerism*, 49.
80 Smith, *Supermannerism*, 50.
addressed architecture and urbanistic issues.\textsuperscript{81} Decrying the isolating effects of the ever-growing suburban lifestyle, Moore identifies Disneyland as a model of sorts for public life: one of the last bastions of populist space for those dwelling in southern California. Calling it “the most important single piece of construction in the West in the past several decades,” Moore asserts that Disneyland replaces many elements of the public realm no longer available in the lower half of the state.\textsuperscript{82} These opportunities for responding to a public environment are particularly absent in Los Angeles. Though Disneyland is not ultimately an authentic urban experience due to its lack of political experience (it fails to pass the ‘revolution test’), it should nevertheless be better regarded and considered by the architecture profession.\textsuperscript{83} For at Disneyland:

> From the aerial tramway over the bobsled run on the inside of the plastic mountain, is a vision of a place marked out for the public life, of a kind of rocketing monumentality, more dynamic, bigger, and, who knows? even more useful to people and the public than any the world has seen yet.\textsuperscript{84}

The example of Disneyland itself may not have been omnipresent in the mind’s of most postmodern architects, but the desire for an environment for the people and one that creates interaction of the masses would figure prominently in Moore’s designs and those of postmodern architects in general.

Klotz addresses populist aspects of postmodern architecture in stating:

> “Architecture is directly connected to the everyday procedures of human life . . .”

But under the dominance of functionalism the fictional element was banished

\textsuperscript{82} Moore, “Public Life,” 125.
\textsuperscript{83} Moore, “Public Life,” 128.
\textsuperscript{84} Moore, “Public Life,” 141.
Design had to be liberated from the abstraction of pure utility and restored to the creation of invented places that enhance life. Primarily focusing on Moore as a means to explore these ideas, Klotz identifies him as the leader in the “making of places.” That is to say, he practiced an architecture focused on creating exciting human environment combining surprise with familiarity. More than any other figure, Moore sought “to find architectural means of meeting the most marginal human needs as well as the anthropologically constant ones.” His designs did not result from formal compositions so much as they did from a search “for a congruity between basic human needs and architecture.” Rightly viewing him as evolving out of modernism rather than breaking cleanly from it, Klotz closes his discussion of Moore by stating that his work represented an attempt “to give modern architecture a more comprehensive language—to humanize it through the use of fiction—rather than go on observing the dictates of modernist abstraction and of the reduction of content to geometry.” While he identifies Moore as the premier designer of human-oriented architecture from the period, these populist notions were common in most postmodern, particularly historicist, architecture.

Turning back to Venturi, Kate Nesbitt uses *Learning From Las Vegas* and the final pages of *Complexity and Contradiction* to address the populist aspects of postmodern architecture. Revisiting a quote used previously, Nesbitt includes

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85 Klotz, *Postmodern Architecture*, 129.
86 Klotz, *Postmodern Architecture*, 189.
89 Klotz, *Postmodern Architecture* 191.
the famous statement from Philip Johnson (a mentor of Venturi) that recognized the significance of *Complexity and Contradiction*, contextualism, and historical allusion as well as creating a more populist architecture:

> It all came from Bob Venturi’s book. We all felt—Venturi, Stern, Graves and I—that we should be more connected with the city, and with people. And more contextual: that we should relate to older buildings.90

In her discussion of populism’s important place in postmodern architecture, Larson identifies a coherent challenge led by Venturi. While not naïve about consumer culture, the populist challengers sought to “eliminate the barriers between “high” and populist vocabularies and symbols to make a *modern* [new, of the time] architecture.”91 In a reply to Kenneth Frampton, Scott Brown sharply expressed the belief that populist interests and culture need not be removed from architecture:

> Why must architect continue to believe that when ‘the masses’ are ‘educated’ they’ll want what architects want? I distrust the presumption behind the social critique that a society which gives freer rein to its architects and planners will find its life improved.92

Populism’s centrality in postmodern architecture also appears in Larson’s analysis of the *Progressive Architecture* award juries. In this context, “populism emerged in the democratization of both building types and symbolic sources.”93 In 1967, it was Charles Moore who would first argue to the juries that it was the architect’s role to interpret popular culture. Celebrating Venturi’s submissions to the jury, he calls them enormously important as they:

93 Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Façade*, 222.
include a set of allusions to our cultural heritage à la T.S. Eliot and allusions to pop life that would hopefully bring a set of architectural forms into a much deeper meaning for the people who are using them.”

Both leading the growth of the then developing trend, “Architects like Moore and Venturi were pursuing an iconography and a set of associative symbols to which large strata of users could relate immediately and with delight.”

Bletter points to Venturi and Scott Brown for introducing an “unprejudiced interest in high and low art and in Pop art and popular culture.”

More generally, architects turned to a more populist vocabulary in hopes of making a more readable and comprehensible architecture following the economic recession of the early 1970s. De Long identifies Moore and Venturi as embracing popular culture and motifs throughout the 1960s. These popular images that would be carried on through postmodern historicism and other manners “include motifs drawn from ordinary buildings and objects, from commercial sources and vernacular culture. Parallel with the Pop art of the 1960s, these images are not transformed through sophisticated modification, but openly celebrated for what they are.”

Seaside, Florida, planned by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberg (who worked in Venturi and Scott Brown’s office for a time), incorporated traditional planning and architectural elements to form the thoroughly populist New Urbanism community. Similar communities include Celebration, Florida, which was created by the Disney Corporation. Moore would be proud.

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84 Progressive Architecture, January 1967, 144, in Larson, Behind the Postmodern Façade, 222.
85 Larson, Behind the Postmodern Façade, 222-223
86 Bletter, “Modernism in Crisis?” 46.
87 De Long, “Points of View,” 75.
88 De Long, “Points of View,” 75-76.
Martin enters the discussion of architecture under postmodernity by analyzing the “postmodern erasure of distinctions between high art and popular culture. Here architecture threatens essentially to collapse into mass media.”\(^9\) As most scholars do, Martin finds the prime example of this to be the “populism of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.”\(^10\) A specific example he cites is Venturi and Scott Brown’s contribution in the 1978 Rome Interrupted exhibition put on by the American Academy in Rome. An image of the Caesar’s Palace casino from Las Vegas with an electric sign pasted on top of a reproduction of the 1748 Nolli map, it renders ambiguous whether the viewer should think of it as the “popularization of classical iconography” or the “classicizing of popular culture.”\(^11\) There is no Caesar’s Palace without the monuments of Rome. Martin later returns to the “much-cited populism of Venturi and Scott Brown” when he asserts that populism formed the basis of their entire argument laid out in *Learning From Las Vegas.*\(^12\) He further mentions the “postmodernist aesthetic populism” depicted in the earlier discussed “You Have to Pay for the Public Life.”\(^13\) Finally, Martin reinforces postmodern architecture’s attempts to create human places in opposition to the “non-places of modernism” as exhibited by Moore. While his entire project is to essentially problematize and question whether or not postmodern architecture ever actually existed, in describing the primary characteristics of the sites and figures that have come to define it Martin

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\(^12\) Martin, *Utopia’s Ghost*, 4-5.
repeatedly stress the role of populism in contrast to the (at least believed) anti-humanistic elements of modern architecture.
5 Case Studies

This and the following two examples serve as case studies for application of the evaluative criteria established in Chapter 4. While the three works chosen—Robert Venturi’s Guild House, Charles Moore’s Piazza D’Italia, and Michael Grave’s Portland Public Service Building (PPSB)—are among the most widely known and studied examples of postmodern historicism, they were selected for an alternative rationale. Each of the three is located within or in close proximity to an urban center. Thus the projects are not simply part of vibrant public realms, but they seek public appreciation. They are works of architecture that affect and are part of many more peoples’ everyday lives than the many small residences that are also among the manner’s most emblematic designs. Further, given their location in or near urban centers they are under greater threat than homes and suburban sites.\footnote{Additionally, in cases where homes (see Frank Lloyd Wright’s for his son in Phoenix) are threatened the solution is much simpler than with large, public sites. While it took a good deal of effort and all involved should be greatly commended, it is easier to find an individual willing to buy a famous home for 2-3 million dollars than raise the massive funds sufficient to acquire and derive use from a large portion (or the entirety) of a city block. As such, in these cases preservationists must employ various other means to convince property owners to preserve or reuse the site—a significantly more difficult proposal than the exchange of money.} Regardless of any imminent danger, whether or not the current owners themselves are working to preserve and/or improve the site, these three examples are all inherently faced with significant development pressure by virtue of their location. This pressure may not manifest for years, but it is ever-present.

The analyses themselves begin and are interspersed with cursory (as the focus is on evaluation) background and descriptive information on the appearance, materials, orientation, and other elements of the work. This provides some context for the immediate origins of each project as well as an understanding of their current realities. As the forms and decoration of these projects often incorporated aspects of multiple criteria...
simultaneously, the evaluation is not made criteria by criteria but through a single
analysis that weaves them together. Because preservation policy and the evaluation of
heritage resources’ significance is generally held to, or at least centered around, the
exterior of buildings, this discussion will focus on the outside of the Guild House and
PPSB. Interiors are slowly beginning to be incorporated within even the realm of
powerful municipal regulations, but these changes are a ways off and the interiors of the
Guild House and PPSB are not particularly significant aspects of the designs’ expression.
This, by extension, is often true of postmodern historicism in general. Finally, as these
Chapters focus on the evaluation of significance there is little consideration of whether or
not people ‘like’ the sites. Personal taste should be held irrelevant when determining a
design’s historical importance. However, the way individuals feel about a work of
architecture is relevant to garnering broad public support. As such, this topic will be
discussed in Chapter 6—more so in regards to New Brutalism, but concerning the
following case studies as well.
By 1960 Venturi had completed one major commission, the North Penn Visiting Nurses’ Association headquarters (1960, with William Short, Fig. 14), and had started two of his most famous projects. One was a private residence for his mother while the other was for a somewhat large Quaker home for the elderly located on east Spring Garden Street, Philadelphia. Designed with John Rauch, Mather Lippincott and Paul Cope, the program called for a total of 91 apartments varying in type and a common recreational space. The parcel’s zoning at the time limited the structure’s height to six stories, and Venturi would concentrate apartments in the south, southeast, and southwest-facing areas of the building for lighting purposes. Economic considerations dictated simpler architectural elements, but this played into Venturi’s ideas. The north, east, and west building faces all appear conventional or—as he might prefer it—banal, as they are plain red brick walls topped by a flat roof with a not-quite uniform fenestration of aluminum double-hung sash windows (Fig. 15). A slim belt course of white glazed bricks begins on the western and eastern elevations and continues along the irregularly shaped, south facing façade until it culminates at the monumental entrance face (Fig. 16).

The southern façade (Fig. 17) features a variety of window types, including narrow strips and differently scaled squares, but Venturi concentrated

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2 Author conducted a site visit and some photographic documentation of the site on March 6, 2013. Contemporary fencing and other elements made some elevations difficult/impractical to photograph. Repeated attempts were made to schedule an interview with Denise Scott Brown, but these proved impossible due to scheduling conflicts amidst a busy time period for her.

his play of architectural elements on the central section of the this building face (Fig. 18). The ground floor of this section is fully composed of the white bricks seen in the belt course and is put in extreme contrast to the thick, polished black granite column at the center (Fig. 19). Directly above the column is a commercial-like sign bearing the building’s title in intentionally clumsy oversized letters. A series of four balconies extend up from the ground floor, all four with railings of perforated steel (that atop the ground floor was painted white to provide continuity). A vertical line of concrete, which was originally exposed but was recently covered in an off-white stucco (Fig. 20), runs up the middle of the balconies and visually continues on a smaller scale through the top story’s large arched window. This window lights the common room behind it while also increasing the building’s scale on the street and at the entrance below. An oversized, gold-anodized decorative television antenna (Fig. 21) originally capped the structure, stretching well above the uniform roofline, but it is no longer extant.

**Evaluation**

While the Guild House’s design marked a clear distinction from the strictures of post-war modernism, its postmodern historicist aspects were more reserved than later examples of the manner as well as Venturi’s contemporary Vanna Venturi House. With the historical allusions largely confined to the entrance façade, the most obvious is the decorative, nonstructural polished black granite column. The balconies above and the large arched window reference the visual code of monumental gateways to palatial residences of the past (Venturi

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himself notes a tie to the Château d’Anet) and the window itself is an oversized reference to Palladian or Roman thermal windows. Finally, the overall composition of this entryway, the base of glazed brick, shaft of balconies, and the capital of the monumental window give the impression of a single, colossal order.

Relating both historically and contextually, the one-over-one sash windows recall those of traditional row houses of, for example, Philadelphia, while the square double-hung windows make allusion to forms used in public housing. These window types not only reflect the program of the building, but also the fact that it was one of the first projects in America to receive federal funding under Section 202 of the Housing Act of 1959. In both types the windows are scaled differently—usually exaggerated in size—across the building. Thus while they are readily understood as familiar in form, their traditional appearance is distorted. Speaking more specifically in regards to context, as the apartments were to be largely populated by long time residents of the surrounding neighborhood, Venturi and his partners created a design that related to nearby buildings—those that its residents would have lived in in the earlier periods of their lives. The conventional, boring appearance of the northern elevation was made so in part to better relate to neighboring apartment houses and to “avoid overwhelming the modest housing to the north.”

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5 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction, 116.
9 Von Moos, 282.
Venturi’s most (in)famous instance of contextual communication at the Guild House was the sculptural television antenna, which doubled as a winking variation on the décor atop classical pediments. Prominently placed above the façade’s center, it was a “symbol of the aged, who spend so much time looking at T.V.”10 Though Venturi was well-meaning when incorporating it near his completion of the building, the antenna was immediately met with disfavor by Francis Bosworth of the Friends Neighborhood—an otherwise supportive client. Generally perceived as a parodying joke made at the expense of the structure’s occupants as opposed to the statement of cultural reality that it was, the antenna was taken down soon after completion.11 Venturi has explicitly expressed that belittling the Guild House’s residents was never intended: “We didn’t mean it that way. It’s not for us to tell people that television is bad, and that they should read books,” Scott Brown seconded this in explaining that the antenna was thought up “not hatefully, but lovingly; with tears maybe.”12 The post that once held the sculpture still remains atop the entrance face and as it was part of the original design, it should be considered in evaluating the site’s significance.

Populist ideas behind the design include the orientation of most apartments along Spring Garden to allow the elderly to engage, at least visually, with street life. The monumental windows of the entryway and in front of the common room also serves this function. Engagement with popular culture was made obvious through the billboard-like sign of the ground floor, which was not just a banal representation of the structure’s title but reflected Venturi’s affinity

10 Venturi, 116.
11 Brownlee, Out of the Ordinary, 24.
for billboards in general. As Smith relates, while the Federal Government was removing 500,000 signs through the Highway Beautification Act of 1965 Venturi was lecturing across the country and advocating for even bigger billboards, as he felt they were a virtue to be used for both public and commercial purposes.\textsuperscript{13} Clearly stating the structure’s title this sign is a means of communication much more straightforward than others in the design.

Thus it can be seen that the forms used in the Guild House expressed most all characteristics identified as integral in postmodern historicism. The variety of oversized, warped windows serve both communicative, historical, and contextual purposes with purely decorative features like the antenna accomplishing the same. The orientation of the structure allows the monumental, columnar entry façade to address the street while also accomplishing the task of keeping the elderly engaged with street life. Blatant aspects of popular culture are implemented sparingly, but noticeably. While the references made through the windows are the only feature of allusion or communication common across the entirety of the building’s exterior, a wealth of these elements is found in the entrance façade. Given that this is far and away the most noticeable and discussed aspect of the design, it is safe to say these references are an essential aspect of the whole.

A characteristic lacking in the Guild House is that of color. As demonstrated by the Vanna Venturi House and Dixwell Fire Station (1967-1974, Fig. 22), Venturi was not averse to color even at this early stage. But except for the red letters of the entrance sign, which may simply represent a connection to

the building’s brick construction as opposed to being any attempt at conspicuousness, there is virtually no applied color to be found in the design. This was in part a result of maintaining a modest design to better fit in the neighborhood and avoid a garish color palette clashing with what was otherwise a simple home for the aged. It was also, however, representative of the structure being a public project of reasonably large scale in the early 1960s. One could be upset with the pervasive color of the Vanna Venturi House, but the Guild House was not a private suburban residence. Rather it was contained within a dense urban city and was inhabited by nearly 100 individuals. Though Venturi was writing it throughout the early 1960s, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* had yet to be published and any challenges yet made to modernism had had little impact. In this light, the various design elements of the Guild House discussed above were revolutionary, but were nonetheless reserved in comparison to what would later come. A strong embrace of color throughout the design would have been both uncalled for programmatically (though this consideration would later become irrelevant for postmodern historicists) and would have proved too dramatic—even for Venturi.

Lacking in one characteristic and not incorporating other elements to the same degree seen in some later works of postmodern historicism, the significance of the Guild House is nonetheless preeminent. To understand this one need not even supplement the postmodern historicism focused evaluation with one employing broader criteria such as those of the National Register. The Guild House was not just the first large building of postmodern historicism (and postmodern architecture in general), it was designed by Robert Venturi who
through the writing of *Complexity and Contradiction* and his early designs such as the Guild and Chestnut Hill houses can accurately be called the “father” of postmodern architecture. The effects of Venturi’s paper architecture and actual built designs played an integral part in the style’s evolution out of orthodox modernism. Without his and his collaborators’ written arguments and their buildings embodying these ideas throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, postmodern historicism and postmodern architecture may have still developed, but it would not have appeared the same and would have lacked the large, lasting impact it had. Despite only excelling in a few postmodern historicist categories and lacking in one, when considered in the context of its time and importance in the development of the manner, the paramount significance of the Guild House cannot be discounted.

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14 Klotz, *Postmodern Architecture*, 150.
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Table 1: Extent to which the Guild House meets the Evaluative Criteria.
Figure 15. Western (near) and Northern (far) Elevations looking east. Author. March 6, 2013.
Figure 16. The western half and center of the façade (southern building face), looking northeast. Author. March 6, 2013.
Figure 17. Northern Elevation. Author. March 6, 2013.
Figure 18. Center of the façade. Author. March 6, 2013.
Figure 19. Sign and black column. Author. March 6, 2013.
Figure 20. Stucco over the originally exposed concrete. Author. March 6, 2013.

Figure 21. Antenna can be seen in the center of the image. From Brownlee, *Out of the Ordinary*, 23.
PIAZZA D’ITALIA

No “salvation” is any longer to be found within it [architectural design]: neither wandering restlessly in labyrinths of images so multivalent they end in muteness, nor enclosed in the stubborn silence of geometry content with its own perfection.15

- Manfredo Tafuri (emphasis mine)

I find the concept of double-coded architecture—of private jokes or allusions in manifestly public works—to be questionable, even offensive. One may well and wisely mine the whole of the architectural past for ideas in a contemporary building. But to make the game of spotting those ideas a major part of one’s design intentions strikes me as decadent and trivial . . . If the Piazza d’Italia had to depend for its success on clever twisting of the tails of past masters, then I would declare it not only a public failure but a patronizing insult.16

- David Littlejohn

Background and Design

The development of the Piazza d’Italia (Fig. 23) in New Orleans resulted from the confluence of two factors. In 1973 then mayor Moon Landrieu asked Joe Maselli Sr., a longtime friend and advocate for the Italian-American community, what he might do to serve that constituency before leaving office. Landrieu had a statue in mind, but Maselli insisted upon a “living monument.”17 Maselli and his partners were tasked with obtaining the necessary funds and Landrieu selected the site: a section of city-owned land bordered by Poydras and Tchopitoulas street. Its selection reflected growing concerns over the failure of the warehouse district in New Orleans, the government envisioned the Piazza as part of a revitalization scheme that followed the demolition of nearly 100 structures over a

14 Author conducted a site visit and some photographic documentation of the site on February 21 to 23rd, 2013. The site visit also included an interview with Cindy Connick, Executive Director of Downtown Public Benefit Corporation, and Jeanette Delery, Deputy Director on the 21st. Repeated attempts were made to interview Kevin Keim, Director of the Charles Moore Foundation, as well as Allen Eskew, but these proved unsuccessful.
17 Joe Maselli, Sr. in Littlejohn, Architect, 253.
four-month period in the area. A public space adjacent to the recently completed Lykes Brothers Shipping Company (1972) and intended to be surrounded with commercial infill, the Piazza would not only serve the underrepresented Italian-American community concentrated in the warehouse district, it was to also anchor the socio-economic turnaround of the area.

Charles Moore’s place as the main figure behind this space resulted from somewhat unusual circumstances. With the design determined by competition, Moore’s submission actually lost out to that of local firm Perez Associates. Headed by Allen Eskew and Malcolm Heard, the Perez submission incorporated a large, central circle surrounded by supergraphics complete with an Italianate awning and French Quarter characteristics. However, Moore’s runner-up entry, while not the winner, was the most notable, and Mayor Landrieu immediately gave him a position as lead consultant. Along with his assistant Ron Filson and Richard Peters and Tina Beebe as his consultants, Moore was not listed as the principal designer, but is credited as such by scholars. Indeed, while all figures mentioned played important roles, Moore was central in devising the design that was actually built.

The Piazza’s location in the city block (Fig. 24) was tucked away from Poydras and Tchopitoulos and adjacent to several unseemly spaces: an alleyway leading deeper into the unrestored warehouse district, the back of the 22-story, black-and-white vertically striped Lykes Shipping Tower, and a parking lot

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19 Littlejohn, Architect, 254.
20 Littlejohn, Architect, 255.
21 Littlejohn, Architect, 255.
occupying the entirety of the block’s western half. Reaching out into the surrounding streets to indicate to passers-by that something lay hidden within the block, the ‘floor’ of the Piazza was composed of a series of black and white concentric rings of dark slate and pale granite (Fig. 23). A large colored archway featuring a clock at its rear (Fig. 25) was placed at the southern end of the site to act as a formal entrance to the Piazza itself. The northern side contained a pergola resembling a small classical temple (Fig. 26) serving the same purpose as the arch, and an 84-foot tall stucco-on-steel Italianate campanile near the Pergola completed the architectural forms designed to attract visitors (it, unlike most-every other element of the Piazza, is no longer extant).

An open, designed public space rather than an actual building, the main feature of the Piazza is a large relief of Italy composed of alternating black and white platforms (Figs. 23, 27). These platforms are raised to different heights and collectively form an 80-foot long fountain. Water gently flows over every contour of the relief and three particular streams represent Italy’s three main rivers: the Arno, Po, and Tiber. These streams empty into the larger basins on either side of the relief, which represent the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic seas. This fountain is the focal point of the entire site, and a particularly essential aspect of the Piazza as Moore found the interplay between water and architecture vital.

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22 Allen Freeman, “That ‘70s Show: In New Orleans, the third act begins on a famous outdoor stage”, Landscape Architecture (May 2004): 102-107, 104.
24 Charles W. Moore, Water and Architecture (United States of America: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994). Moore’s doctoral dissertation while at Princeton shared the same title and was later expanded into this book. It details the wonder of water and ways in which it shapes one’s experience of a space. There are many passages that clearly reflect the fountain employed in the Piazza, but two in particular do so while showing why Moore chose *nappes* (thin sheets of water that gently run over surfaces and contours) for the public space: “The key to making successful
The black and white of the fountain, the metaphorical heart of the Piazza, is contrasted by the portico and numerous brightly colored screen walls that rest behind and on either side of the relief. These steel-frame and stucco walls consist of the five classical orders with the Tuscan at the front followed by the Doric and a bit further back a screen of Ionic columns (Figs. 28-30). The Corinthian (Fig.31) rests a touch behind the Ionic colonnade and on the other side of the relief is the screen of the traditionally final classical order, Composite (Fig. 32). The colonnades extend higher and higher as they recede from the viewer, and they are rendered in a variety of colors. The columns themselves are made of stainless steel or, in the case of the Tuscan order, water streaming down from showerheads within the screen wall. A final set of columns and arches forming a portico (Fig. 33) lie behind the fountain’s figurative Alps.

Though every element aside from the campanile and marble sheets covering the plaster pedestals of certain columns remains, the site has been poorly maintained and under-utilized for much of its existence. The commercial infill envisioned in the original design that was to replace the parking lot and enclose the Piazza never materialized. An economic downturn scared away private developers, always intended as the initiators of that stage of the design, and the city lacked the necessary resources to step in itself.25 Sparsely used and falling into disrepair throughout the 1980s, 90s and early 2000s, green algae quickly formed along the waterless pools, some of the water features clogged, and captivating fountains is to control the way water moves to produce whatever effect is desired without losing control of the water or ruining the fountain with tangles of pipes, wires, or gizmos” (43) and “People are fascinated with water that is trained into the thinnest possible sheet. They love to feel the edge with their fingers and break the stream with their hands” (45).

25 Ron Filson in Freeman, “That ‘70s Show,” 106.
paint peeled, and the green marble that the columns rested on was stripped away by vandals. Moore described visiting the Piazza in August, 1983, and reported that much of the neon was broken, many jets did not work, and that the site was apparently ignored by the city’s maintenance department. He further stated that a few vagrants were “the place’s only regular inhabitants.” The problems facing the Piazza grew dramatically worse when those in the government responsible for overseeing the Piazza soon after switched their energies to the Riverwalk along the Mississippi, causing the site to become even more neglected and, as shown, “a haunt for the city’s homeless.” Making a play on the Piazza’s resemblance to classical ruins, Brian McHale remarked that after this shift in the city’s redevelopment energies the Piazza was “reduced to a real ruin.” In 2004, Martin Freeman reported that “neither a veteran New Orleans taxi driver nor a savvy desk clerk in a hotel just four blocks away had heard of the place [the Piazza].” While its physical condition has since been stabilized, the stucco screen walls, the stone and grouting of the concentric rings, the tile of the fountain, and the water features in general are all in disrepair.

Of course, the perceived failure of the site was not due to the Piazza itself being a poorly designed nor because it was too clever or kitsch, but rather because of its location, stalled development, and lack of maintenance. It was hoped that having the Piazza tucked away off the street and adjacent to the

26 Freeman "That ’70s Show," 104.
30 McHale, "What Was Postmodernism?"
31 Freeman, “That ’70s Show,” 104.
32 Current conditions were documented through a site visit conducted on February 21-23, 2013.
Lykes Tower would result in the effect of almost stumbling upon a beautiful architectural wonderland amidst an urban setting, but instead this caused the Piazza to lose the benefit of being seen from the busy streets around it. The previously mentioned entrance pieces were visible from the street and could be deemed failures for not attracting visitors, but the main portion of the Piazza (the fountain, portico, and screen walls) itself was hidden away. The concentric rings reaching out toward the street were meant to lead people into the Piazza, but anyone driving a car would never notice such a thing on the ground. Further, the Piazza’s location away from the eyes of the street and between an alley, a run-down parking lot (the condition of which has since been improved), and the back of the Lykes building made it an unattractive location, especially at night: “In a city plagued by street crime, the place was made for muggers.”

Another serious failure, not of the site but of those trusted to maintain it, is that the Piazza was not witnessed in its real form. Other than the few times a year the Italian-Americans used the Piazza, it was almost impossible to see the site with its water running and neon lights on. As the discussion of the fountain shows and as one can imagine, these are essential elements to the Piazza. Had the shops, restaurants, offices, and cafés originally part of the design been constructed the Piazza would have become an inherently visited locale. As Freeman puts it: “Had this [the commercial buildup] occurred, the Piazza would have formed a welcome and colorful open space in a lively area between downtown and the waterfront, filled day and night with workers, shoppers, and

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33 Freeman, “That ‘70s Show,” 104.
34 Littlejohn, Places, 8.
tourists either passing through or relaxing, and restaurant patrons sitting at
tables around its perimeter.”

Playing off the Piazza’s aesthetic and replacing the parking lot, the failure
to establish this commercial buildup around the Piazza robbed the site of an
essential trait of any successful public square. In Water and Architecture Moore
refers to Bernini’s Fountain of the Four Rivers in the Piazza Navona in Rome as a
brilliant definer of space (its influence on the design of the Piazza is also clear):

One enters the piazza [Navona] from one of the narrow streets to see the
distant blur of the spiny mountain rising in the center. As one gets closer
and closer to the fountain, its astonishing detail comes into focus . . . The
fountain provides endless fascination in the play of its water against the
stone.

To relate this example to the topic at hand, the Piazza Navona was originally a
Roman circus and only became considered a public space after the city market of
the Campidoglio was transferred there at the end of the 15th century. Similarly,
the Piazza d’Italia was not lacking in visitors because it turned guests away, but
because the site could almost never be seen as it was intended to and never
actually became a piazza due to developmental failure. While there were major
flaws in the overall planning and execution of the Piazza, the evidence does not
point to an actual dislike for the work itself as having caused its deterioration
and lack of visitors.

Regardless of why it experienced such difficulty throughout the later
decades of the 1900s, the Piazza has fortunately undergone a revival since 2000.
In 2002 the vacant Lykes Tower was converted into the upscale Loews Hotel.

35 Littlejohn, Places, 8.
1994), 40.
Hoping to beautify the area surrounding the hotel, Loews spent roughly $2 million to restore the Piazza (the city has since repaid this sum in full), repainting its surfaces, fixing the lights, and substituting new materials for those like the oft-vandalized green marble, which was replaced with a much more durable greenish granite resembling the original material. While the city retains ownership of the land, Loews also gained control of its maintenance and lighting and is allowed to host exclusive parties there approximately 50 nights a year.

The local Italian-American community still uses it on St. Joseph’s Day and several other festivals, and the Piazza is part of a now vastly improved region of the city.

The municipal organization now responsible for overseeing the Piazza, the Downtown Public Benefits Corporation (a recent merger of the Piazza D’Italia Development Corporation and those for two other locations) has dedicated itself to caring for the Piazza and has recently finalized the first of two stages in the upkeep and fulfillment of its original design. Through, in large part, the revenue gained from operating the adjacent parking lot, Connick and her organization have raised sufficient funds to replace the erroneous holly trees that occupy the site, conduct a variety of other landscaping improvements, refurbish the bathrooms found in the clock arch, repair broken stone and depleted grouting (Fig. 34), completely clean and repair the fountain (Figs. 35, 36), and bring the site up to ADA compliance. Though this initial two-phase process will

37 Freeman, “That ‘70s Show,” 107.
38 Interview with Cindy Connick, Executive Director of Downtown Public Benefit Corporation, and Jeanette Delery, Deputy Director, February 21, 2013.
39 Interview with Connick, Delery. The holly trees currently on site were not part of the original design, but were installed approximately ten years ago.
understandably take time, Ms. Connick and the city someday hope to carry out the Piazza’s original design and surround the intended public space with commercial infill.40 While visitors to the Piazza are still largely composed of tourists and passers-by dropping in for a few minutes as opposed to the lingering, everyday public masses envisioned, the site has a local government organization invested in its existence and role as a potential economic and cultural driver for years to come. Given that its complete design has yet to be achieved and that the Piazza remains unable to serve as a true public space, it cannot fairly be dismissed as a failed site. It retains significant urbanistic value and, while continued development pressure in the core of New Orleans inherently threatens Moore’s opus, it is fortunate to now have a well-meaning municipal organization overseeing it.

Evaluation

The dominant feature of the Piazza, and indeed that which most obviously conforms to postmodern historicism, is the composition of multiple colonnades and portico. While most of the columns are heavily distorted versions of their classical selves and are made of steel, those of the Tuscan order are represented through circular streams of water forming the outline of fluted columns. Water runs through the hollow Doric columns to empty out at the bottom while the screen wall itself features two oval, three-dimensional faces of Moore spitting water out in the direction of the fountain’s Sicily (Fig. 37). More sprinkling water is found on the Ionic and Composite walls, while the acanthus leaves of the Corinthian columns are formed from curling jets. Water spreads

40 Interview with Connick, Delery.
over the metopes of the Tuscan and Ionic screen walls, and it would be from this that Moore coined the term “wetopes.” \[41\] Finally, the large, arched portico that was intended to frame a German restaurant contains a sixth order that Moore—in the manner of Benjamin Latrobe— invented himself. He dubbed it his Delicatessen, or “Deli Order” (Fig. 38), in reference to the idea that the columns would be competing with the sausages that were to hang in the restaurant’s windows. \[42\] These are found at the ends of the portico; those four columns within are traditional Ionic. Moore strayed slightly from playing with the classical through his use of the flying buttresses of gothic cathedrals (Fig. 39) to connect the screen walls. As if this was not enough, Moore added pop features such as the neon lights forming necklaces below the capitals of the portico columns as well as along the entablature and other perimeters of the space (Fig. 40).

The vibrant colors of the screen walls served the double function of pop appeal as well as historical allusion. Mediterranean themed and composed of colors that became increasingly warm as they approach the viewer, the scheme (all designations used are Beebe’s) began with an ocher shade for the portico before transitioning to curry and terra cotta for the Composite and Corinthian. The remaining three screen walls—Ionic, Doric, and Tuscan—all possess the coloring of saturated brick, while that of the Tuscan order is noticeably brighter. \[43\] From its novel representations of the classical orders, to the relief of Italy as fountain, to the color scheme, the assemblage of the Piazza makes warped allusions to foundations of architecture while also reflecting the site’s program as

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\[41\] Littlejohn, 257.
\[43\] Littlejohn, 257.
a space made in part for the Italian-American community. As the majority of this population had Sicilian origins, that section of the fountain was placed in the center of the entire design and had an elevated platform to act as a podium for speeches (Fig. 41). This podium itself referenced the Roman *rostra* and the Piazza on the whole made obvious reference to those of Italy in name, architectural language, and program.  

44 From its completion to today, members of the Italian-American community have gathered in the Piazza to celebrate St. Joseph’s Day (Joseph is the patron saint of many such communities, including that in New Orleans). The site’s link to this festival, Italian-American heritage, and the public in general is made obvious through the Latin script atop the Composite and Corinthian screen walls. This translated script, respectively, reads “Saint Joseph’s Fountain” and “This fountain is dedicated as a gift to all the people of New Orleans.”

The site’s allusory, communicative, and contextual characteristics continue outside of its most prominent elements. The black and white rings made explicit reference to the adjacent Lykes Tower (the exterior of which was thoroughly altered when it was converted to a hotel) while also referencing a Baroque urban form.  

45 Resembling the framework of a small classical temple, the pergola at the northern end continues this trend while the green, white, and red pigments decorating the southern face of the clock tower at the Piazza’s south entrance reflect the flag of Italy (Fig. 42). Other works in the architectural cannon that have clear influence on the Piazza include the gateways of famed Prussian architect Karl Schinkel, and the Italian/Roman Trevi Fountain, and Hadrian’s

44 Sutherland Lyall, *Designing the New Landscape* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1991), 1.3.  
In the event that they were not already evident, the design’s populist ends were sought through the design of an inviting, pleasant public space that would serve to provide a prominent architectural work for the Italian-Americans, dwarfed in number by the French, Hispanic, and African-American communities of New Orleans. While Martin Filler may have missed the boat slightly (the Piazza certainly has aspects of both being trendy and clever), he did concisely describe some of the Piazza’s populist aspects in stating that Moore:

> Employed the classical vocabulary with deep feeling, and the sincerity of his approach shines through with touching directness. Moore’s selection of design elements does not stem from a desire to be trendy or clever, but rather is at once meant to celebrate the contribution of one people in particular, and to affirm its effect on all our lives in general.47

Moore’s own words from a 1983 article strengthen the design’s populist motives while also addressing historical allusion, symbolism, and communication. In regards to the screen walls, he asked:

> What could be a more Italian shape than Italy? And what direct, and therefore effective cultural reference in a piazza dedicated to the Italian community could there be than the architectural orders—Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite—which the Italian civilization had developed after heavy assistance from the Greeks?48

Thus Moore plainly states that the site was designed for the Italian community and its various features were geared around this idea. Forming the columns out of water and steel was not intended as irreverence but done as an “adequate abstraction to keep us [Moore and his colleagues] out of the lifeless blind alley of ‘correct’ copying.”49 Moore further asserts that he never wanted nor wants to be condescending or pretentious with the five orders and appreciates the fact that

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46 Lyall, 1.3.
47 Filler, 87.
they are a more well-known, easily distinguishable architectural reference: “Surely the orders give pleasure to more than just architects, even as someone who is not a musician might enjoy noting the difference between a sonata and a tone poem.”

Coming about in the later 1970s in all its complexity and vitality, the Piazza may just be the epitome of postmodern historicism. It not only displays every criteria, it does so with great variety and volume. Reflecting its immediate physical context, that of its program as a public space, and the special interest group it was in part designed to serve, the work’s embrace of contextualism is rich. Filled with historical allusions in virtually every facet of the design, the entire Piazza is itself a reference to the past. From an attempt to invite passers-by into the site through the expanding concentric rings, to symbolizing any number of historical forms and models, to the faces of its most influential designer, to the inclusion of a dedication as a prominent element, messages are everywhere communicated. An array of vibrant colors and neon lights have faded over time but still stand out today, while the entire project is geared around improving the everyday experience of the public. Not just Italian-Americans, but the many people that were to walk through, relax, eat, and otherwise inhabit the public plaza once the surrounding infill was completed. Though this never materialized and the Piazza today mostly serves as an architectural oddity for tourists to visit, snap photos of, and promptly move on, this was not the design’s intent and there are positive indications that the infill will come sooner rather than later (or never). At the very least the restoration work that is slated to begin in the

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summer of 2013 will return the appearance to its original glory. While its current inability to serve rich urbanistic use may diminish the Piazza’s qualifications in the populist criteria, it in no way negates them.

To return to the passages at the outset of this chapter, both quotes are representative of general attacks leveled against the site since its completion in 1979. Indeed while Tafuri would have been unaware of the Piazza when writing in 1973, it more than any other work of architecture approaches the idea he is expressing. The same holds true for Martin. Though the complex, unequaled multivalency of the Piazza is representative of so many different symbols, signs, and meanings that it can make it difficult to fully grasp the design, attempting to do so is only one option. One could instead choose to revel in the simple pleasures offered through the warm hues, trickling water, and—albeit warped—classical orders. As with any good work of postmodern historicism, one can put forth the effort to investigate and understand the multitude of clashing, simultaneous meanings conveyed, but enjoying the work on a basic level of physical appearance and experience of the space is a viable option. Tafuri (or anyone attempting to apply the passage to the site) missed the point; the design’s expression has the potential to be diluted by this overwhelming of the individual, but one need not work so hard—just take it at face value.
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Table 2: The extent to which the Piazza D'Italia meets the Evaluative Criteria.

Figure 25. The clock tower from within the Piazza. Looking southeast. Author. February 22, 2013.
Figure 26. Classical pergola at the northern entrance. Author. February 22, 2013.
Figure 27. The relief fountain (absent the Sicily and ‘boot’ portion of Italy) receding back to the ‘Apls’ and portico. Author. February 22, 2013.
Figure 30. Ionic Order. Author. February 22, 2013.

Figure 31. Corinthian Order. Author. February 22, 2013.
Figure 32. Composite Order is seen above the entablature of the Doric. Author. February 22, 2013.
Figure 33. Portico. Author. February 22, 2013.
Figure 34. Example of the current condition of the slate and granite. Author. February 22, 2013.

Figure 35. Missing tiles, poor condition of those existing. Author. February 22, 2013.
Figure 36. Growth breaking through the fountain. Author. February 22, 2013.

Figure 37. Detail of the “spitting” Charles Moore fountain. Author. February 22, 2013.
Figure 38. Delicatessen Order. Author. February 22, 2013.

Figure 39. Flying buttresses connecting the Tuscan to Doric and the Doric to Composite. Author. February 22, 2013.
Figure 40. The Piazza at night with lights on. Author. February 22, 2013.

Figure 41. The podium protruding from Sicily. Author. February 22, 2013.
Figure 42. Southern face of the clock tower featuring Italian flags. Author. February 22, 2013.
PORTLAND PUBLIC SERVICE BUILDING

Background and Design

In April 1979, the City of Portland initiated a national design competition for a new, 360,000 square foot office building that was to occupy a full city block (200 by 200 feet) located across from a park and adjacent to City Hall. Despite the fact that the budget for the project was listed at $22.4 million, quite low for a project of that size and prominence, the competition received a number of notable submissions (including designs from Mitchell Guirgola and Arthur Erickson in addition to Graves) and the City brought Philip Johnson on as a consultant. At this point in his career Michael Graves was becoming an increasingly well-known figure in the architectural world but had not yet completed a major project in the public realm. The Plocek house had been completed, his involvement in the New York Five was widely discussed, and his art was displayed at a 1979 exhibition at the Max Protetch Gallery in New York, but winning the competition for the Portland Public Service Building offered him a wonderful opportunity.

Graves was among three finalists, but public arguments over each of the designs and an inability by these submissions to meet programmatic requirements on a minute budget resulted in a second competition held to the three designers. Graves’ initial submission had been for a fourteen story box-like building about 200 feet in height and occupying the entire city block. While this

52 National Register Nomination, 5.
carried over into the second round, he chose to remove a “primal village” (Fig. 47) intended for the rooftop as well as the projecting ribbons on the sides of the building (they were flattened). These and other cost-reducing measures as well as the support of Philip Johnson and then mayor Frank Ivancie allowed Graves to unanimously land the commission in 1980. The building was completed by August 1982 at a cost of $28.9 million with the Portlandia statue, designed by sculptor Raymond Kaskey, added three years later.

The structure has a reinforced-concrete frame and a tripartite exterior composition. Clad in square green ceramic tiles, the base of the building’s west-facing façade consists of a full story arcade-like form topped by two successively shorter steps above it (Fig. 43). A massive copper sculpture of a kneeling woman in classical garb, Portlandia was placed on a two-story, two-step pedestal just above the base in 1985 (Fig. 44). Multistory, over-scaled terracotta tile strips stretch above the base until reaching large, projecting capitals. Superimposed over blue reflective glass, these strips are one of the most noticeable architectural elements of the design. Directly above these is the building’s nonfunctioning ‘keystone’, a triangular form of alternating horizontal bands of dark strip windows and painted stucco matching the terra cotta strips in appearance (Fig. 45).

The remainder of the façade’s middle section is composed of off-white stucco and a regular fenestration of 4-by-4 feet mirrored glass windows. A centered, inset blue-painted balcony begins at the fourteenth floor and acts as the building’s capital. Another inset level of pale blue stucco tops the building.

53 National Register Nomination, 16.
centrally located mechanical enclosure protrudes from the roof, which since 2006 has served as a green roof with a planting bed, irrigation, and drought-resistant plants. The eastern face is largely a mirror of the principal façade, but is without the pedestal and statue (Fig. 45). Instead, a three-story wall is found at the center of the elevation’s base with a recessed opening to the below-grade garage. A stucco panel reading “Parking” lines the top of this wall and three vertical stucco panels extend the height of the wall on either side, the central panel of each set having a recessed entrance door.

The southern elevation (Fig. 46) is similar to the western and eastern faces, but its vertical strips lack capitals and are set against a large span of dark reflective glass between floors four and ten. And rather than a massive, abstracted keystone, the upper décor of the southern elevation consists of giant circular concrete escutcheons that hold a flattened concrete ribbons. The top four floors lack any decoration. Other than possessing only one entrance, the northern elevation is identical to the southern.

Other than the installation of the aforementioned green roof is 2006, there have been few significant alterations made to the structure’s exterior since 1985. In or near 1990 the entirety of the green-tile base and tile pilaster areas were re-grouted while railings were added and storefront changes made to the southern face in 1999-2000. In 2003 rooftop mechanical units were updated. The city, which still owns and uses the structure, has conducted a variety of maintenance

55 National Register Nomination, 5-7.
56 National Register Nomination, 5.
and retrofit measures to bring the inside spaces up to date.\textsuperscript{57} While generally well received outside of Portland, particularly in the architectural community, issues ranging from a lack of lighting and overly small windows, unwelcoming, noisy interiors, and a dysfunctional interior were and still are serious problems.\textsuperscript{58} Given the national attention the building has received, its established significance, and the work the city has already put into maintaining the structure it is not likely that it will be threatened in the near future. But given the value of the building’s lot and continued discontent held by those working within the structure and others, it is imperative that preservationists do all they can to promote sensitive alterations or reuse and prevent any demolition threats that may come.

**Evaluation**

As specific historical allusions are somewhat obscure, the postmodern historicist element that most stands out is color. The green tile dominates from street level while the terra cotta and other surfaces painted the same shade are prominent across each elevation. While the green base was in part meant to clearly establish the structure’s tripartite division, it also related to the earth, tying the building to the ground. The light blue of the top section is pleasant in appearance but also relates to the sky. Indeed, Graves intentionally avoided primary colors as they were not pigments seen in nature.\textsuperscript{59} Seen in the relation between color and nature, Graves’ implementation of contextualism continues

\textsuperscript{57} See Meredith Clausen and Kim Christiansen, “Michael Graves’s Portland Building and its Problems,” *Architronic* vol. 6, no. 1, 1979 for a comprehensive listing of significant alterations.  
with the arcade, or loggia, form running along three sides of the first floor. Coupled with shopping along the fourth side of that level, these forms reinforced the “importance of the street as an essential urban form.” The small, uniformly placed square windows located all across the middle section allude to the small city blocks of Portland’s grid while the ribbons found on the northern and southern elevations are intended to represent the garlands of antiquity, which were a classical gesture of welcoming. These garlands were further tied to the wreath carried by Portlandia, who herself—with classical garb, wreath, and relation to the decorative sculptural work on buildings of old—is a reinterpretation of the Lady of Commerce found on the city seal. Finally, the city service offices are located in part behind large reflective glass, which brings the city in while also mirroring it out and symbolizes “the collective, public nature of the activities held within.”

The historical allusions seen in the classical three-part division of the building, the Portlandia sculpture, and the flattened, over-scaled garlands are continued through the vertical terra cotta strips acting as abstracted, monumental pilasters. The gigantic keystone form on the principal façade completes the structure’s historical references, though the ‘small town’ Graves stripped from the design in the second round of competition would have added another.

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62 Graves, 295.
63 Graves, 295.
While Graves does an exemplary job of using shapes, colors, and forms that communicate meanings to tie the structure to its physical location and allude to tradition, the symbolism across the entirety of the structure is obscure. The Piazza d’Italia had some elements that required expertise to comprehend, but its most dominant feature was the colonnades and columns. These were distorted in a radical way, but were still fairly clear and representative. The keystone and pilasters are abstracted to a point beyond average understanding, and few would be able to recognize the windows as a reference to city blocks. The ribbons appear as just that rather than classical garlands and few know garlands were a symbol of welcoming in the ancient world. The massive Portlandia statue is not often recognized as a tie to tradition or Portland’s city seal, but rather as a large, ugly copper sculpture. Indeed, from the outset critics within the field believed the design to be overly intellectual and felt that it failed to express Graves’ intent. This was a common criticism of his earlier, smaller works as well.  

Rather than an attack against the design this discussion is meant to acknowledge that its signs, symbols, and architectural elements are on the whole more involved than those of many works of postmodern historicism. In part, this is the result of the structure’s general utilitarian form. Elaborate games of communication, allusion, and color cannot be as overly blatant as they are in the works of Moore when one is attempting to mask them on the exterior of a large, functional box.

It does, however, show the design’s weakness in regards to populist aspects. Absent the social concerns of Venturi (even Graves’ reference to street

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life is merely representative of it as an important feature of urban form as opposed to an effort to actually activate and promote it for the people), the building must achieve populism through the expression of its forms. Lacking any that are readily comprehensible to the average person, they fail to achieve this. As architectural historian Philip Cooke put it:

Sometimes the ironic playfulness of postmodern architecture tips over in the other direction, back to a new kind of elitism. This is a danger with which Michael Graves seems to have flirted unsuccessfully... This seems to be an example of the architect’s wish to display his learning to the profession, and also to out-perform his later masterpieces (as at Portland, Oregon, in the chocolate-box of a public facilities building, decorated with a bronze bust of ‘Portlandia,’ second only in scale to the Statue of Liberty), rather than to speak democratically to the local citizenry.65

Moore and Venturi both have elements of this, but as previously discussed their populism ultimately prevailed. Graves’ purely populist work with Disney Corporation was antithetical to the approach Cooke lays out, but the Portland Public Service Building’s signs and symbols throughout the design are too intellectualized and involved to be deemed populist. And though the structure relates to Portland, the design failed to connect to or embrace the neighboring public park in any way. While not relevant to its significance, its generally negative public reception did confirm the design’s failure to achieve populist ends.

Having said that, the Portland Public Service Building excels in every other category. One of the manner’s first major public works, having launched the career of a preeminent practitioner, and demonstrating a brilliant, if somewhat elitist, display of architectural elements meeting the other criteria, it is

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a preeminent work not just of postmodern historicism, but architecture in general.

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Table 3: The extent to which the Portland Public Service Building satisfies the Evaluative Criteria.
Figure 44. Detail of Portlandia. Mike. March 5, 2011.
Figure 45. Improved view of the keystone and the western façade (southern elevation is to the right). Looking southeast. Steve Morgan. August 1982.
6 Prescriptions in the Form of a Conclusion

Through employing evaluative criteria as outlined in the previous chapter, one can identify significant works of postmodern historicism, but the issue of effective, proactive preservation efforts remains. Those in the field have won or lost battles over heritage resources for decades using a variety of methods, but the profession’s increasing presence on the internet—particularly in social media—has helped create a novel approach. In studying large-scale preservation campaigns it is best to turn to those for works of New Brutalism as their contemporariness allows for the examination of efforts working with current political and cultural realities, the rise of the digital in these campaigns being the most significant difference from those of the preceding decades. Having said this, these preservation efforts should not be looked at as science. There are a multitude of meaningful differences in each situation ranging from the site’s local economic/cultural climate, the condition/reuse feasibility of the structure, state/municipal policies, and the value placed on the site before the preservation campaign began. Thus these campaigns cannot be looked at in a vacuum and examined as uniform to one another. Rather, the efforts made by preservationists in these campaigns can provide some idea of what general tools may work best in the soon to be battles over works of postmodern historicism.

A valuable starting point is with the successful (at the moment) effort to save Paul Rudolph’s Orange County Government Center (1963-1971, OCGC) in Goshen, New York. While County Executive Ed Diana had openly spoken about
demolishing the building since taking office in 2001, formal plans were not released until August of 2010. Detailing the teardown of the OCGC and construction of two bland revivalist buildings as replacements, the total development costs of the new design proposal were $114.4 million. This was in contrast to the estimate at the time of $72.5 million for the OCGC’s complete rehabilitation and that of several other structures needed to supply the government sufficient space. This rehabilitation estimate was immediately disputed by several local officials and building contractor Holt Construction.

Little movement happened in either direction for the remainder of 2010 and early 2011. Lawmakers sat on Diana’s $114.4 million plan and instead voted to hire a consultant to explore various options. Diana continued to promote his idea, but by April 2011 the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Preservation League of New York State, and a local community group, The Taxpayers of Orange County, had all taken notice and begun advocacy campaigns. With development plans stagnating and water/mold problems resulting from Hurricane Irene, Diana had the OCGC closed in September 2011 and continued to push for his plans on new construction. Preservation efforts, however, had continued to swell. Just days before Irene hit, the New York State Historic

Preservation Office sent a letter that the OCGC was eligible for both the State and National Historic Register. Additionally, DOCOMOMO, the Paul Rudolph Foundation and the Preservation League of New York State also cast their support. The New York City-based World Monuments Fund joined these various groups through listing the OCGC on their bi-annual Watch List in October and created a support page on Change.org.

While many of these organizations had a presence in the state, the true driver behind support for the OCGC—and that which these larger organizations lent support to—was the Taxpayers of Orange County. A grassroots organization cobbled together from local architects, engineers, historians, financial analysts, and other assorted individuals, the group formed for the sole purpose of saving the OCGC. As they note in their mission statement, the members have different reasons for saving the structure, but they all wish to prevent its demolition. The Taxpayers have been instrumental throughout the campaign as they sponsored community forums, disseminated petitions to local lawmakers, educated other community members/groups, and held demonstrations across the county. They supported preservation based on grounds that demolition and replacement was significantly more expensive, that it is not the building that is at fault but rather a lack of maintenance, that the OCGC is a “vital piece of Orange County

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architectural history,” that rehabilitation would create more jobs for locals, and that replacing the structure would have serious negative environmental impacts.\(^8\)

As word spread and more preservation-oriented organizations stated their support for rehabilitation, the OCGC gained increased national attention from a variety of news outlets including Bloomberg, Treehugger, and The New York Times, to name a few.\(^9\) As the New York Times piece details, this groundswell failed to capture the support of all community members, but the Taxpayers of Orange County were able to gain over 250 signatures on their local petition while that of the World Monuments Fund garnered thousands of international signees.

With a vote on whether or not to approve Diana’s plan approaching, designLAB architects in Boston leant further support to preserving the structure. The firm oversaw the renovation of Claire T. Carney Library in Dartmouth (1972), a very similar Rudolph building, which included extensive rehabilitation of the building itself with a focus on leaks, and a 22,000 square foot expansion (the same size as that in the preservation plan for the OCGC).\(^10\) Diana had reduced the size of his project to bring its cost down to $75 million, the hope being that this would make it more financially competitive with the renovation

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option, which a consultant estimated at $67 million. While many had already disputed this figure, the evidence from designLAB was particularly convincing, as it concerned an almost identical project completed at $43 million. Thus on May 3rd when the County Legislature voted down Diana’s plan 11-10 it was not particularly surprising.

While this saved the OCGC from demolition, its renovation has yet to be achieved. Another study to estimate rehabilitation costs was commissioned in December 2012, and the seemingly never-ending battle was effectively won in February 2013 when the legislature voted 15-6 for a $10 million bond to pay for the renovation’s design. Business advocates and Goshen officials—who remained neutral throughout the debate—cheered the decision. Bids from various architecture and engineering firms are soon to be submitted, meaning that the effort to save Rudolph’s masterwork is not finished, but is almost there.

Unlike that of the OCGC, the campaign to save Bertrand Goldberg’s Prentice Women’s Hospital (1975) in Chicago—one that was waged longer and saw even more effort from preservationists—ultimately proved unsuccessful. Immediacy was not a hugely important factor in Prentice’s eventual demolition, but as usual preservationists did not begin work to save the structure until its

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11 McKenna, “Orange County solid,” *Times Herald Record.*
14 McKenna, “Orange County set to begin study,” *Times Herald Record.*
potential demise was announced. As Landmarks Illinois (Landmarks), one of the primary organizations behind the campaign, noted, when Northwestern Memorial Hospital first announced its plans to build a new Prentice Women’s Hospital, preservation organizations immediately began voicing concern about the future of the Goldberg-designed building. Landmarks listed the structure on its Chicagoland Watch List as early as 2005 and repeatedly posted it on the state-wide endangered list as well. Preservation Chicago joined later, but placed the structure on their Chicago 7 list two years in a row while the National Trust put it on their national 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in 2011 and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (the state’s SHPO) determined the site’s National Register eligibility in 2010. As with the OCGC, DOCOMOMO and the local AIA chapter also stated support for Prentice’s Preservation.

While Prentice had been listed on various state and local lists in the later 2000s, it was not until 2011 that the site’s situation became truly precarious and the preservation campaign correspondingly gained more attention and public concern. The New York Times first reported on Prentice in April 2011, highlighting Landmarks’ plan to issue a reuse study as well as the enlistment of three architects to imagine the structure reused for either research laboratories,
medical offices, or student housing. In the article Landmarks president Jim Peters recognized the value of public appreciation: “All we can do is demonstrate how this building can be economically reusable, take it out to see if folks like this idea and see if public pressure can develop.” Continued growth in the public sphere in 2011 can be seen in pieces on Prentice from the Chicago Sun Times, the Chicago Tribune, Skyline, Curbed Chicago, and The Chicago Architecture Blog. In addition to spreading the word and attempting to garner public support for the site, preservationists also took more formal protective measures at this stage. By the end of May 2011 Landmarks had asked the Commission on Chicago Landmarks (the city’s municipal preservation department) to start an expedited review of Prentice’s landmark status. While there were and are numerous ways around such designation (as was seen in the structure’s eventual fate), this would provide a legal means of protection. Chicago architects Helmut Jahn and Jeanne Gang were among the earliest prominent figures to voice their support, both issuing formal statements in May.

When Landmarks placed Prentice on the state-wide 10 most endangered sites list in 2012, the outlets mentioned above, in addition to local FOX, ABC, and CBS affiliates, reported on it and by the end of the summer Mayor Rahm

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20 There is no need to document what each source states as they are largely the same message from different outlets, but each can be found at the bottom of ‘Press Coverage’ at Landmarks Illinois, “Save Prentice!,” http://www.landmarks.org/ten_most_2012_prentice_womens_hospital.htm.

Emmanuel had been brought into the conflict.22 A letter of over 60 (expanded to 80 in September 2012) signatures from prominent local architects as well as many of contemporary architecture’s most significant international figures including Pritzker Prize winners Tadao Ando, Frank Gehry, Jacques Herzog, Pierre de Meuron, Renzo Piano, Robert Venturi, and Eduardo Suoto de Moura went to Emmanuel’s office urging him to preserve and reuse one of Chicago’s “most important achievements.”23 Additional letters of support had been sent from the Society of Architectural Historians, Neil Levine, David De Long, and The Landmark Conservancy, all of which expressed that Prentice easily qualified for Landmark status, should by no means be demolished, and could be host to a variety of creative reuse options. At this stage in time Emmanuel was still “‘hearing from all sides’” and preservationists were growing increasingly anxious about disseminating their message to the broader public.24

By November 2012 Northwestern had yet to apply for a demolition permit, Emmanuel had released no formal statement on the issue, and the numerous concerned parties continued to get their word out in great volume. Architecture critic Michael Kimmelman wrote a piece for the New York Times in October discussing the battle and detailing Jeanne Gang’s freshly made concept for the addition of a research tower atop Prentice, while the various news outlets

continued to report on Prentice leading up to the Commission’s November 1<sup>st</sup> vote. The campaign was dealt a blow just before the date of the Commission’s meeting when Emmanuel penned a letter supporting Northwestern’s plans for demolition. Undaunted, some 80 or so individuals attended the meeting specially held in City Council chambers to state their praise for Prentice. However, in an unprecedented action, two hours after Prentice was unanimously granted landmark status this designation was rescinded based on a pre-made economic impact report. The Chicago Architectural Club and the Chicago Chapter of the AIA put on a 71-entry design competition for the hospital’s reuse days after this with some hope that Northwestern might consider the proposals, but failed to have any effect.

Shocked by the scripted designation, Landmarks and the National Trust filed a lawsuit against the City of Chicago on grounds that the Commission violated Chicago’s Landmarks Ordinance. While this was dismissed in January 2013, it did grant a stay of demolition for Prentice and, with Landmarks having maintained the campaign’s public attention, resulted in another Commission vote on the structure’s final fate in February. Between the initial vote of

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November 2012 and the second in February 2013, healthcare planning and
design experts came together to develop a variety of reuse options, each of which
met Northwestern’s stated needs, created over 1,500 new jobs, and generated
$1.1 million in annual tax revenue. Despite this the Commission again rescinded
Prentice’s Landmark status (this is perhaps unsurprising given how these cases
normally go following an initial decision). Following this the National Trust and
Landmarks dismissed their complaint in Cook County citing the fact that the
legal course had run its due and that all options had been exhausted. Thus ended
a lengthy, thorough campaign to save Goldberg’s unique work.29

There are many other other recent preservation campaigns dealing with
works of New Brutalism (or those that are associated with “big, ugly concrete”
structures). For example, the Third Church of Christ, Scientist in Washington,
D.C., the various times that Boston City Hall has been threatened, Michael Reese
Hospital in Chicago, and the ongoing effort to save the Philadelphia Police
Headquarters (the Roundhouse, Fig. 48). Each of these campaigns have
differences, some being driven more by legal means and others by advocacy, but
they ultimately follow similar processes to those detailed above. Examining them
to the same extent as above is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the basic
details of each corroborate lessons learned from Prentice and the OCGC and lend
further credence to ideas drawn from those campaigns.

Not that it is particularly new, but the first of these lessons is to appeal to
local historical relevance. The national—or international—significance of the
works in question (Prentice, OCGC, Guild House, Piazza D’Italia, PPSB) is made

29 Landmarks Illinois, “Updates,” Save Prentice!, accessed March 20, 2013,
obvious enough through national media outlets; to gain the support of a local populace it is valuable to stress the relevance of the site to their immediate heritage. When addressing the historical significance of the OCGC, the Taxpayers of Orange County did so almost exclusively through the lens of its importance to Goshen and Orange County, not to American architecture on the whole. While some members may have found the structure distasteful, it was nonetheless a defining aspect of Orange County’s history and development, the embodiment of change over time. Indeed, the Taxpayer’s feature an article stating that the OCGC, while perhaps jarring, is Orange County’s Eiffel Tower; rare and beautiful, one cannot imagine Orange County without it.30

Landmarks Illinois and other Chicago-based preservation advocates followed a similar approach. Whenever a representative of these organizations commented, they stressed Prentice as an integral part of Chicago. National significance was an aspect of the campaign, but the structure’s relevance to its locality was emphasized foremost. In a Chicago Tribune article published in July 2012, Landmarks president Bonnie McDonald and AIA Chicago Vice President Zurich Esposito detailed how modern architecture had already defined Chicago by 1970, and that Goldberg, born and raised in the city, returned from his time in Germany to put “his own Chicago stamp on modernism.”31 They close the piece by remarking that Prentice “represents a critical part of our city’s history.”32 The letter of support sent to Mayor Emmanuel reiterated these points, stating that of

Goldberg’s eight major hospitals Prentice is the only one in Chicago and further that the building “stands as a testament to the Chicago-led architectural innovation that sets this city apart. Chicago’s global reputation as a nurturer of bold and innovative architecture will wither if the city cannot preserve its most important achievements.”33 Tying a work’s relevance to the locality in which it is located is partly done in order to satisfy municipal landmark criteria, but is a valuable way to simultaneously tie a local populace to it. While these individuals may be aware of a site’s national significance through The New York Times, Vanity Fair, and other national media outlets, it is crucial to gain additional investment through establishing the site as an integral part of the city it inhabits.

Most all other means pursued in these campaigns were also valuable. In recommending the most viable way to protect generally unpopular works of architecture, none of these attempts should be done away with, rather they should simply begin even earlier. In all cases serious campaigning did not start until imminent threat loomed. While Landmarks Illinois made multiple requests to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks upon being made aware of Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s intent to vacate Prentice in 2003, it was not until 2011, after years of silence from the City and Northwestern, that Landmarks took things into their own hands and began the “Save Prentice!” campaign.34 Rather than waiting until a given SHPO states a building’s eligibility for the National Register months or a year before it might be demolished, preservation

33 Landmarks Illinois and others, Architects Letter of Support.
advocates should request such information long before a site is threatened. This holds true for local register nominations as well. Landmarks Illinois finally got the Commission to have a hearing over Prentice’s designation after beginning their campaign in 2011 and drumming up significant local and national attention. Had they done so earlier, before the structure was near its end, the Commission’s decision may have been different. At the very least, preservationists would have had more time in the aftermath of the hearing to make other attempts. Local register designation often provides an impediment to demolition while that of the National Register allows for valuable tax incentives; they should be pursued as a matter of fact for significant structures rather than as an attempt to save a building once it has been threatened. Further, by beginning campaigns earlier preservation advocates can educate the public on the significance of a site and possible threats made to it well in advance of actual demolition. It takes a substantial amount of time to instill a spirit of support in an initially uninterested or antagonistic public.

Though the “Save The Roundhouse” campaign did not begin until rumors—now confirmed—of the Roundhouse’s future sale had circulated, it nevertheless began in 2012 before this was made official and has already gained much attention in national and local outlets.35 This represents an attempt to gain

35 Ashley Hahn, “New Police headquarters in West Philly means sale for Roundhouse, Health Department buildings,” PlanPhilly, March 19, 2013, accessed March 25, 2013, http://planphilly.com/eyesonthestreet/2013/03/19/new-police-headquarters-in-west-philly-means-sale-for-roundhouse-health-department-buildings; reporting on the campaign to save the Roundhouse including comments from the individuals behind it can be found from Architects Newspaper, DOCOMOMO, the Recent Past Preservation Network, and local NBC and CBS affiliates. Local outlets such as PlanPhilly, the Philadelphia Tribune, Hidden City Philadelphia, the Daily Pennsylvanian, and others have also reported on the campaign. Links for all of these articles can be found on the campaign’s homepage: https://www.facebook.com/SaveTheRoundhouse?ref=ts&fref=ts.
the attention that the OCGC and Prentice received, but to do so much earlier and therefore have an increased likelihood of preservation or more time to respond to potential defeats. As Allee Berger, one of the campaign’s founder’s, states:

“Preservationists are notorious for acting in the 11th hour. We do not want to wait until the last minute . . . We’re getting out in front of it and making noise now.”36 No firm date has been set for the Roundhouse’s sale, but it is thought to be a few years off. By raising attention to its significance and potential demolition now, those behind “Save The Roundhouse” have put themselves ahead of the curve in advocacy while having already submitted a local register nomination.

While this may sound somewhat critical of past preservation campaigns, particularly that for Prentice, this is not the intent. Although unsuccessful in the end, the attempt to save Prentice was an exemplary effort in which every conceivable option—design competitions, register nominations, numerous letters of support from notable figures, public awareness and support, etc.—was pursued, and one in which preservationists gained the attention necessary to force legislators to act. Instead this discussion hopes to show that as developed as preservation campaigns have become in today’s world, they can still be better. This is particularly true when it comes to beginning campaigns for American architecture’s most significant works before they came under threat. While it is impossible to say, had Landmarks Illinois and others begun serious preservation efforts for Prentice, given its immense significance not just in Chicago but

American architecture, around 2000 (regardless of whether or not danger was knowingly posed to the site) its unfortunate fate may have been averted.

Beyond starting the methods seen in contemporary campaigns earlier, those in the field striving to save individual works of immense significance should also begin to put more emphasis on planning. Planning not so much in the sense of regulations and zoning, but rather in the sense of predicting future market forces and their possible effects on heritage resources. This too is no guarantee, but predicting how given neighborhoods might grow and develop based on market trends, socio-economic shifts, and development patterns can allow professionals to identify when and what types of threats might face these sites. Such information can lend credence to a campaign initiated years before threat of demolition as well as provide ideas for preservation plans. Through identifying these forces, preservationists can proactively mobilize and strategize for the ways in which changes years in the future might affect our most important historic sites.

Given all this, what should preservationists do to proactively protect the most valuable works of postmodern historicism? The first step is to identify postmodern historicist projects that one believes may be of utmost significance in the history of postmodern historicism. Those examined in this thesis are straightforward, but there are a number others by Graves, Venturi, and Moore as well as other practitioners. Upon selecting a design, one can apply the evaluative criteria to determine which are most emblematic of the manner. Once done, this will create a priority list of sorts, which will then allow preservationists to dedicate themselves to lengthy, costly (at least in terms of time) campaigns
dealing only with those sites that are truly preeminent in postmodern historicism. With this established, professionals can immediately begin the process of spreading the word on a site’s historical significance, particularly within its locality, and developing economically viable, practical preservation plans. It may be more difficult to get media outlets to report on a site when it is not immediately threatened, but for works of this significance it is certainly possible. This is especially true given that national organizations focused on the recent past will soon begin to more greatly consider postmodern architecture as it approaches thirty, forty, and in some cases fifty years of age.

Going hand in hand with this general advocacy, preservationists should also seek to immediately begin register nominations for both the National and the given local register. Many local register designations do not bear the protective strength of those in Boston, New York, or Washington D.C., but they almost always guarantee at least a period of demolition prevention and allow for another point of emphasis on local significance. As with media attention, it will be difficult to initially garner support from prominent figures in the way this was done for Prentice. Postmodern historicism lacks both the age and popularity as New Brutalism has in the architecture community, but this will likely change over time, particularly when its most prominent examples are dramatically threatened. If possible, organizing or inspiring design competitions, as done with Prentice, is another valuable tool. Doing so not only provides increased attention to the site in question, it results in a multitude of reuse proposals and alternatives to demolition. Some of these proposals may prove too adverse to the historical
integrity of a design, but most in the competition for Prentice were not, and such proposals can always be mitigated.

These recommendations intentionally leave out discussion of rumored or imminent threat. As stated, predicting future market forces and their effects should be a prominent part of proactive preservation, but responding to announced sale or demolition as is generally done does not figure into this model as it seeks to preempt such happenings. The model here discussed incorporates innovative ideas for preservation campaigns seen in most recent examples while retaining traditional practices that have proved useful. It foresees these efforts being applied not as a preventive measure to stop imminent demise, however, but as a means of preserving and planning for the future based on a site’s recognized significance rather than its approaching end. Coupled with early advocacy, this approach is carried out with the end-goal of preventing demolition or radically adverse changes. Despite one’s personal tastes toward postmodern historicism, as a brief but impactful architectural manner employed by some of America’s most prominent recent architects, it certainly deserves it.
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