



BRUTAL LEGACY





Brutalist architecture is in crisis. Constructed in the 1960s and 1970s using building systems not durable or advanced enough to support Brutalism's ideological ambitions, a majority of these buildings no longer meet contemporary requirements. Owners of these properties now face a vexing choice: demolish these structures and begin anew or rescue them through extensive rehabilitation.

The Orange County Government Center, located in Goshen, New York, is a harbinger of this predicament. Designed by Paul Rudolph between 1963 and 1971, the building is a Brutalist work of overt materiality and spatial complexity. Three interconnected buildings organized around a central courtyard provide spaces for the County's adult courts, juvenile courts, legislative meeting rooms, and administrative offices. The construction system of split-ribbed concrete block stacked between concrete beams is substantial and uncompromising. Northern and southern facades offer rhythmic compositions of concrete frames that hint at the Government Center's complex inner workings, subdividing its mass to the scale of Goshen's historic downtown. Throughout Rudolph's design, spaces overlap and permeate each other, implying adjacencies without compromising privacy. Public atria are scaled at monumental proportions to honor the government programs contained within.

While its design embodies the civic optimism of a time, the Government Center has been beset by recessions, political reversals, and negligent maintenance. Forty years since its dedication, local politicians, who consider the complex an economic and visual burden, have initiated plans to demolish it. In 2011, after flooding caused by Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee, the County Executive evacuated the building and closed it to the public. The complex remained vacant until funding was approved in 2014 to replace one of its buildings with a new structure and to modify the remaining two buildings with infill. However, months later, these plans were suspended due to complications between the proposed demolition and the Government Center's eligibility to be added to the National Register of Historic Places. Recent appeals to sell the empty building are now gaining momentum.

The debate over the Government Center brings to light essential questions concerning preservation, context, popularity, and the role of architecture in public life. Brutal Legacy is a photographic and scholarly project that documents this particular moment in the building's lifespan. Regardless of the eventual outcome, this archive is a poignant reminder to value a masterwork.

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